“One Village – One Voice”
Empowering citizen representation and participation
in the District of Vavuniya, Sri Lanka

(Project No.: AS 1358 / LKA 1070 - 08, EIDHR/2008/ 169-415)

Evaluation Report

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I. Summary

1 Brief description of the project and framework conditions

The overall objective of the project was to foster a culture of democracy at the local level of the Vavuniya District in order to promote social harmony and sustainable development processes. More specifically, the project aimed at improving mechanisms in 10 communities to

- Citizen representation and participation in local level planning and decision making processes
- The resolution of local level conflicts and the protection of rights

To this end, the project focused on capacity development through trainings, exchange visits and link programmes of village stakeholders (People’s Forums) and conflict mitigation groups and the participative elaboration of village development plans.

The project was implemented by Welthungerhilfe in cooperation with Sewalanka Foundation. The total budget of the project was Euro 185’000 with co-financing (75%) provided by the European Commission (EC) under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

The duration of the project was planned to be two years, from February 2009 to January 2011, and later extended until February 2011.

Sri Lanka has been suffering from the impact of a long and bitter civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE in the northeast. After more than 25 years of violence, the conflict appeared to be at an end - at least militarily - in May 2009, when government forces seized the last area controlled by Tamil Tiger rebels.

The final stages of the violent conflict resulted in nearly 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), initially detained at camps, primarily in Vavuniya area. Since December 2009, IDPs have been permitted freedom of movement and many have returned to their home districts, with less than 21’000 people in IDP camps by the end of 2010.

Until today, the Presidential Task Force for Resettlement Development and Security in the Northern Province (PTF) keeps a strict control of access to the resettlement areas for a limited number of aid organisations. Welthungerhilfe and Sewalanka are among the few agencies allowed to operate in the resettlement districts.

2 Outcomes and impacts

Although the Project does not have explicit economic development objectives and activities, some direct and indirect economic impact has occurred through improved access to poverty alleviation programme of the government. There is ample evidence of tangible benefits of these schemes, in terms of increased family income, improved food security and quality of the diet and non-farm employment opportunities generated. Moreover, the assistance to provide legal documentations may have resulted in some kind of indirect economic impact such as improved access to employment outside the communities.

The strengthening of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) has brought about positive changes in the social behaviour and attitudes of the community. The changed behaviour and attitudes have further helped in developing social cohesiveness, collective action and collective decision making among the villagers to act in an organized way for individual development as well as the development of the community as a whole.

The People’s Forums formed in each village provide an institutional platform for the rural people to come together, nurture social capital, build awareness and initiate productive and community development activities. There is increased awareness and knowledge about ways and procedures to access the government and non-government services. As a result, there is better interaction with the government officials and access to government services and the political system has improved, at times, in exchange for electoral support.
Women are prominently represented in the People’s Forums (more than 60% are women) and in the Conflict Resolution Committees. There is a general feeling among the participants that in the People’s Forum women have a bigger say, their social status and participation in decision making has been improved.

In the perception of the government officers there has been an improvement in the provision of public services because of the project mainly, because they can use the People Forums as a focal point to collect information and to channel their development programmes. In addition, motivation and coordination among the government officials have improved as a result of trainings and exposure visits. However, the improved motivation may also be partly due to fact that the project assisted them with different allowances and paid for their services as resource persons in trainings.

3  Sustainability

At this stage of the project, it is too early to assess whether the changes in behaviour and attitudes will be sustained. Moreover, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect a project of 2 years duration to achieve any lasting improvements in this regard. However, factors like the increased knowledge base generated within the community and the perceived benefits of behavioural changes could enhance the chances of sustaining behavioural changes.

The project has effectively set up village-based mechanisms and linked them to government services. However, these institutions have not yet reached a stage that guarantees sustainability in the long run. Possibilities to enhance the chances of sustainability have been discussed during the project implementation but not followed up with concrete actions.

Given the number of open questions and unresolved issues the chances of organisational and institutional sustainability are looked to be rather bleak.

4  Relevance

The project is very relevant to the core problems of the target groups:

Lack of people’s participation in local planning and decision-making, in-transparent resource distribution, political patronage, lack of responsiveness and recognition of people’s needs are root causes of existing ethno-political conflicts.

Moreover, there is a lack of coordination and understanding between the communities and the local administration. The distribution of tasks and responsibilities among the different institutions is partly unclear and not transparent to the population. Government officers often lack knowledge of the needs and problems of the different sections of the population, hampering the quality of their service.

Ineffective access to official documentation and legal aid and absence of effective and accountable conflict resolution mechanism at grass roots level is another key problem. Many people do not have sufficient legal awareness and knowledge, regarding the law, rights, obligations and how to resolve grievances.

The project is also relevant to the Welthungerhilfe’s Country Program – Sri Lanka (January 2010 to December 2013), with a strategic focus on civil society development, aiming at higher citizen participation, creating meaningful links and institutionalization of the same to authorities and building civil society networks and strengthening critical cross-cutting issues such as peace & reconciliation work as well as psychosocial support.

Likewise, the project is relevant to the Sewalanka’s policy for the north, focused on building the capacity of community organizations to take collective decisions and develop and implement their own programs for self-reliance. However, generally Sewalanka promotes good governance as a cross-cutting theme in its developmental projects and not as stand-alone project.
Finally there is also a high degree of compatibility and convergence with the objectives of the Government; the reintegration of the rural communities in the development process is one of the priorities of the government.

5 **Effectiveness**

The project planning matrix (PPM) prepared for the project shows a coherent logic and gives a good summary of the project design, but is mainly activity and output oriented and does not provide measurable impact and outcome indicators at goal and purpose level. Moreover, factors ensuring sustainability are not adequately addressed.

The staff recruited for the project did not have in-depth experience and specific knowledge in the field of good governance and related issues. Hence, in spite of intensive capacity building efforts, they did not reach a level of competence adequate for this type of project.

6 **Efficiency**

The overall efficiency of the project in terms of repartition of costs corresponds to the norms for a project, which is centred on training and capacity building. Although it is difficult to quantify the benefits in terms of social capital generated, it is most likely that the project has a high cost-benefit ratio in this regard.

7 **Most important recommendations**

**Overall approach**

1. Promote good governance as a cross-cutting theme in Sewalanka developmental projects and not as a stand-alone project.

2. Work through existing institutions such as Rural Development Societies (RDS), or another strong community based organisation, and promote need-based networking with other Community Based Organisations (CBO) through a village development planning mechanism.

3. Assess, while formulating a new project, whether or not, the policies and priorities of the implementing organisation and the level of institutional and staff capacities are commensurate with the requirements of the project. Build internal capacities and, if required, bring in external expertise.

**Sustainability**

4. Address sustainability aspects right from the inception of the project. As part of an exit strategy include sustainability indicators and milestones in the log frame and in the operational plans (e.g. registration of People’s Forums, collection of own funds, ranking system of People’s Forums, etc.).

5. Sewalanka should include follow-up measures in their annual District Development Plan (e.g. updating of village development plans, People’s Forums raising own funds, preparing People’s Forums for possible registration, etc.).

**Training and exposure visit**

6. Provide a limited number of need-based trainings with emphasis on a few practical and relevant topics. Explore alternative tools like performing arts and street drama for awareness creation.

7. Systematically monitor the outcome of these trainings (e.g. the use and application of the new skills and knowledge and behavioural changes) and the usefulness of training outputs (e.g. monitoring plans), as part of the regular field monitoring, and use the findings to improve future trainings.
8. Exposure visits should only include the staff and the primary stakeholders (representatives from the community), government officers and others who are directly engaged with the project. These visits must be relevant and meaningful for their work and close to their reality. Preference should be given to local visits.

Village Development Plan (VDP)

9. Make regular updating an integral part of the VDP preparation, and/or
10. Revisit the present way of preparing VDPs and explore more dynamic alternative instruments.
11. Include also economic activities in the plan. Supplement local knowledge with technical expertise (providing ideas, undertaking studies and guidance on technological possibilities and alternatives).

People’s Federation

12. Organise meetings of the People’s Federation (umbrella organisation of People’s Forum) at divisional level to facilitate the continued support and efficient and timely decision making by the Divisional Secretary.

Impact-oriented monitoring

13. Improve the quality of the log frame mainly by defining representative, reliable and feasible indicators.
14. Do not leave outcome and impact evaluations to external consultants only. Make monitoring of outcome and impact part of project monitoring. Monitor against indicators rather than physical targets and activities only.
15. In addition to routine data gathering, carry out surveys at reasonable intervals (e.g. in-depth assessment of the status/performance of the village institutions, and/or outcome of trainings such as use and application of new skills, adoption rates of technologies, etc.) Analyse and use this information to adjust implementation strategies.
16. Coordinate and share experience with other actors (projects, institutions) and consolidate and adjust implementation modalities based on lessons learnt and best practices. Organise peer reviews and regular exchange visits among Welthungerhilfe/Sewalanka projects.

8 General conclusions

Despite the difficult political and economical environment the project has gone a long way in reaching its objective, to improve mechanisms to strengthen citizens’ representation and participation in local level planning and to improve access to services from government and other service providers. There has been a high degree of social empowerment of the primary stakeholders in the 10 villages covered under the project.

However, the institutions (People’s Forum and People’s Federation) formed by the project are still weak and sustainability is still a serious challenge. There is also a risk that the improved service and enhanced response from government service providers to community needs will not sustain because of the incentives attached to it. The acid test for sustainability will be, when these incentives and the intensive support to the stakeholders at community level will be phased out.

Moreover, such a resource-intensive approach cannot be replicated on a larger scale. The general policy of Sewalanka, i.e. to promote good governance as a cross-cutting theme, rather than through a stand-alone project, appears to be a more viable strategic approach.

In summary conclusion, it can be said that if sustainability issues are not adequately addressed, there is a danger that the impact of such a one-off intervention will be short-lived “like a rain shower on desert land”.