



## Evaluation Report

Disaster preparedness and reactivation of  
agricultural production and trade in Ebola-affected Districts of  
Southern and Eastern Sierra Leone (DiPAT)

P047 SLE 1033-14



Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development

Developing and Structure-  
forming Transitional Aid

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on behalf of  
Welthungerhilfe Bonn

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Photo: Women threshing rice straw (author's own image)

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DISCLAIMER

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The team of Welthungerhilfe in Bo for organising the assessment and meetings, field trips and community visits so well, for their willingness to discuss and openly share information and to take the assessment as a learning event and mutual competence development; the officials of line ministries and district councils, who were available for discussions, answered questions candidly and were equally forthcoming when contributing to this report.

I would like to express my special gratitude to the project team, who tirelessly facilitated communication and for cross-cultural explanations.

The results of the evaluation and the report are the sole responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of Welthungerhilfe. Of any factual errors or of ill-judged conclusions, which undoubtedly exist in assessing such a complex project in a short time frame, the consultant apologises in advance and welcomes corrections.

Hendrik Hempel

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## PROJECT BASIC INFORMATION

**Table 1: Project basic information**

<b>Country:</b> Bo, Pujehun, Kailahun and Kenema Districts in Sierra Leone	<b>Name of project:</b>  Disaster preparedness and reactivation of agricultural production and trade in Ebola-affected Districts of Southern and Eastern Sierra Leone (DiPAT)
<b>Project number:</b> SLE 1033 (P.Nr.: 4714), BMZ Nummer	
<b>Project priorities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective crisis management in the districts</li> <li>• Support for Ebola-affected households and survivors</li> <li>• Promotion of agricultural production for affected communities</li> <li>• Strengthening agricultural trade and local economy</li> </ul>	
<b>Project holder and implementer:</b> Welthungerhilfe, Friedrich-Ebert-Straße 1, 53173 Bonn, Germany	

<b>Overall objective:</b>	Peasant households have resumed agricultural production and gained access to basic commodities and marketing opportunities for their produce while the Ebola prevention- and crisis management of the local authorities contributes to falling case numbers
<b>Expected results</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Crisis management in the districts is coordinated effectively and ensures proper timely implementation of Ebola mitigation measures, monitoring and post-Ebola preparation at district level.</li> <li>2. Households with Ebola-affected household members and survivors have again taken up their livelihood and are reintegrated in their home communities.</li> <li>3. Small-scale agricultural production is back on pre-Ebola production level.</li> <li>4. The trade with agricultural commodities and other trade items is reactivated respectively re-established and small-scale farmers are participating in the local economy</li> </ol>
<b>Target group and final beneficiaries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ebola-affected communities, households and survivors in the rural areas of Bo, Pujehun, Kailahun and Kenema districts</li> <li>• Members of the Ebola response structure in the district and in the communities</li> </ul>

<b>Project phase duration:</b> (16 months)		<b>Reporting period:</b> Dec 2014 – March 2016	
<b>Total eligible cost of the action:</b> €1,853,965	<b>Amount from the Contracting authority:</b> €1,822,100	<b>Amount from project holder:</b> €41,475	<b>Others:</b> New Apostolic Church €31,865
<b>Co-financer:</b> BMZ-ESÜH			

## I Summary

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa rapidly became the deadliest occurrence of the disease since its discovery in 1976. In fact, the epidemic killed five times more than all other known Ebola outbreaks combined. In Sierra Leone, the outbreak began slowly and quietly, gradually building up to a burst of cases in late May and early June 2014. Cases then increased exponentially in the last quarter of the year 2014, with November seeing the most dramatic jump.

The Ebola epidemic was a very special experience for Welthungerhilfe in Sierra Leone. Even though health is not a key competence of the organisation, the consequences of the crisis for the rural areas of the country were so severe and dramatic, that Welthungerhilfe felt challenged to use its potentials

and act. The entire Welthungerhilfe Ebola response consisted of 13 different projects. Without doubt, these have effectively contributed to containing the virus in the project regions. This outcome was recognised by the Government of Sierra Leone through the “Ebola Award 2015”.

The overall objective of the project was post-Ebola oriented. It aimed at containing the Ebola epidemic, improving food and nutrition security and enhancing the resilience of the population. Peasant households were to resume agricultural production and regain access to basic commodities and marketing opportunities for their produce. Meanwhile, the Ebola prevention and crisis management of the local authorities were to contribute to a decrease in case numbers.

The primary aim of this independent evaluation is to assess the project outcomes, to conduct a preliminary assessment of the entire Ebola response intervention of Welthungerhilfe, as well as to identify necessary follow-up steps and opportunities to consolidate the project’s overall achievements.

### **Relevance**

The Ebola pandemic is first and foremost a health problem. Therefore, supporting the health sector was originally not foreseen in Welthungerhilfe’s country strategy for Sierra Leone. However, Welthungerhilfe has considerable experience with emergency aid, also in complex crisis. This is particularly true if a crisis occurs in areas where the organisation has already implemented other projects; so a relationship of trust has already been developed and facilitates access to the affected population. The existing knowledge about people and the country, general challenges and potentials, sociocultural conditions, as well as administrative structures allowed for well-targeted and carefully tailored emergency aid.

The purpose of the DiPAT project, as part of the Ebola response programme, can be regarded as very relevant and realistic regarding the core problems of the region and target group, the objectives of Welthungerhilfe and its donor, the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the objectives of the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL).

However, achievements have to be looked at as the joint result of project measures and interventions, particularly by the other Welthungerhilfe projects SLE 1032 and 1039. There was an urgent need for support and a holistic approach to facilitate the general post-Ebola recovery of the affected areas.

The strict quarantine measures, which severely restricted mobility, kept peasant farmers from cultivating their fields and marketing their produce. The project aimed at facilitating and encouraging agricultural production, processing and marketing to speed up the recovery phase and improve peoples’ living conditions as quickly as possible.

The project aimed at strengthening the public markets and at reactivating the disrupted local economy, especially for small-scale farming households, and thus supported indirectly up to 250,000 people.

The project focused its support for crisis management and district prevention development on 4 districts and 12 chiefdoms. All relevant stakeholders from district councils, paramount chiefs, community representatives and community-based organisations were involved, empowered and enabled and to contribute to an effective Ebola eradication response. District councils were supported in the revision of their district development plans to include the required Ebola response measures into it.

In order to strengthen the resilience of EVD-affected households (EaHH), at least 700 families and 150 survivors in 60 villages and 12 chiefdoms were targeted and a minimum of 1,600 peasant farmers were to be supported in their agricultural production and food security.

When the project started, case numbers were already decreasing in the project region. The holistic approach supported the Ebola-affected households (victims) and the entire community, as well as aimed to promote Ebola prevention and crisis management of the local authorities. But also that peasant farmer could resume their agricultural production and commercialisation. The intervention supported the self-induced disaster mitigation process at district level and strengthened the required coordination skills among the line ministries by supporting and organising the regular coordination meetings. As a consequence, affected communities felt supported and not deserted, so that government regulations and restrictions were well understood and obeyed.

### **Effectiveness**

Welthungerhilfe international and national staff engaged with great courage and much dedication in their response to Ebola. The project management team (PMT) consists of the Welthungerhilfe project manager with the project execution responsibility, a non-permanent part-time financial accountant, field officers and logistic support staff. Welthungerhilfe has a functional administration system in Freetown, based on clear rules and regulations, which partly did the backstopping for the Bo office.

The project started on time and without major problems. The procurement of vehicles and other equipment was fast and supported time bound implementation. The entire project communication was well established and project equipment was appropriate and in place. All in all, it can be summarised that all Welthungerhilfe projects involved in the Ebola response generally used their equipment and resources in a complementing manner. The PMT planned its activities through monthly work plans and ensured the cooperation with other stakeholders through quarterly coordination workshops. The cooperation with other NGOs involved in the Ebola response was very collaborative and some synergies were used in the sense of mutual complementation.

The EVD mitigation strategies and the community ownership were promoted through technical and financial support for 12 chiefdom tasks forces in three districts. The project technically and financially supported the elaboration and revision of the district development plans. This was to guarantee the inclusion of the Government's Recovery and Transition Plan (GRTP) for 2016 in local planning.

The project also cooperated with staff members of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS) and the Ministry of Health at district level. Local authorities and community representatives were regularly involved in field monitoring visits and further planning exercises.

Four district Ebola Response committees were supported in planning for the epidemic response in general and for the implementation of social mobilisation and EVD surveillance activities in the districts. More than 900,000 people were reached by social mobilisation. In this context, 10 theatre groups were trained and supported in addressing the Ebola epidemic through their performances, providing information on its challenges, threats and handling instructions.

The EVD-affected households, as well as the survivors and their families, had suffered significant losses due to the disaster. The verification and registration of finally 684 EVD-affected households including 158 EVD survivors in the rural areas of Bo, Pujehun, Kenema and Kailahun districts were supported. A single conditional cash transfer was provided for each of the affected households to support it in resuming business or agricultural activities.

A Post-Ebola Care Centre (PECC) in Bo was set up and equipped with beds in different sleeping rooms, several rooms for treatment, a kitchen and a dining room. EVD survivors were provided with tailored physical and psycho-social health care support. The centre offered free health care to the survivors, as well as psycho-social care.

In 68 EVD-affected communities with a predominance of peasant agricultural production and severe negative effects of quarantine measures, community seed banks were established by buying the seeds from the farmers. This was to prevent the households from consuming the seeds during times of food shortages. In addition, more quality seeds and tools were purchased and distributed. In total, 1,639 households in 75 EVD-affected communities benefited from the measure.

A total of 64 EVD-affected communities prioritised their recovery plans for 2015/16 and were supported with a starter capital to construct seed stores with drying floors, community meeting places and toilets, as well as to set up business enterprises.

Furthermore, rice processing centres were established and the management teams trained for the operation, as well as the repairs of processing equipment for agricultural products of 20 “Agricultural Business Centres” (ABC) were supported. Also village trade enterprises were supported with a starter capital in 62 rural villages to promote economic recovery. Two trading platforms in Bo and Kenema were established promoting linkages between peasant farmers, ABC processing centres and private traders. This encourages farmers to return to producing for sale. Beyond that village saving & loan associations (VS&LAs) were established in 39 EVD-affected communities and 15 Agriculture Business Centres.

Target groups were involved in the campaigning, organisation of logistics and other project measures. Key persons in the districts and the communities were easy to mobilise. In principle, the seriousness of the situation ensured high interest and commitment and required comprehensive district, community and target group involvement. In addition, it contributed to a general acceptance even of strict measures.

Gender issues were considered at different levels. Women were targeted with specially tailored relief items, training and sensitisation workshops.

The Ebola response of Welthungerhilfe was not so much based on a comprehensive strategy, but reacted to opportunities arising through available donor funding. Partly, this has led to projects implementing in parallel instead of collaboratively. More synergies could have been created, and some tasks could have been realised jointly (e.g. visibility measures, social mobilisation) and thus been more effective and efficient.

### **Efficiency**

Complementing the overall evaluation of the project execution it has to be mentioned that the Ebola crisis affected all Welthungerhilfe project sites in Sierra Leone. While other NGOs evacuated all their international staff, Welthungerhilfe took the courageous step to leave the decision about leaving or staying to the staff themselves. Only a few of the international staff decided to leave the country, mainly those with an accompanying family. Most of the staff decided to stay and support the country in its Ebola response. Also most of the national staff felt a responsibility to provide support to contain Ebola: “Why not help our country and our people and take this risk, if other people come from abroad to help and risk their life?” At that time nobody really could estimate the risks for helpers involved in the direct aid. Fortunately it went well and no team members were infected.

The project was professionally planned, designed and equipped appropriately, apart from the fact that projects with a considerable budget and complex procurements should definitely be equipped with a qualified full-time project administrator. An internal audit confirmed that, in principle, the project keeps its accounts correctly, and financial administration is executed according to the rules and regulations of Welthungerhilfe and in line with the donor requirements.

The analysis of project efficiency is based on the assessment of how economically (in terms of quality, quantity and time) financial inputs were converted to outputs. The budget reflects very well the nature of the intervention, which is a mixture of relief and development approaches. Almost 60% of the budget was allocated to aid goods and direct target group support. No major over- or under-spending are reported. In principle, the PMT followed the budget and all expenditures were planned and booked accordingly.

The cost/benefit ratio for this project is difficult to determine, because the project has different target groups benefiting from various interventions. Monitoring concentrates on outputs achieved and, to a certain extent, on the use of outputs and outcomes. The outcomes and effects of the economic and agricultural support were only partly assessed.

Shortcomings, which limited project efficiency and Welthungerhilfe's Ebola response as a whole to a certain extent, are described as gaps in communication and coordination in general, coordination challenges of the different projects and funding sources, insufficient visibility and external presentation, as well as unsatisfying coordination and collaboration with other actors. These challenges are typical for emergency and disaster response interventions.

In this context, the support provided by the Welthungerhilfe HQ Emergency Response Team (ERT) was described as less effective and efficient finally, because a clear strategic focus of its support was missing. A clearly strategically oriented advice, addressing appropriate countermeasures regarding the typical management pitfalls in terms of emergency aid, as well as a comprehensive and anticipatory emergency strategy for this specific relief programme, would have been more supportive. Last but not least, the project was obviously insufficiently supported regarding its administration requirements. Frequent changes and part-time staff made its management more difficult than necessary.

### **Impact**

A systematic outcome-oriented monitoring system is not a top priority for emergency aid projects. Impact per se has to be considered differently in this type of short-term project and cannot be compared to the long-term perspectives of development-oriented projects. Nevertheless, as a result of the evaluation, the project is currently carrying out a comprehensive endline study.

However, it is quite likely that project interventions contributed to a further reduction of case numbers, due to the support of the Ebola response management by the district task forces. Those task forces regularly conducted coordination workshops, continuously analysed gaps and challenges and promoted the identification and execution of problem solutions. As a consequence, crisis management in the districts was coordinated effectively and generally ensured timely implementation of Ebola mitigation measures.

The support to Ebola-affected households and survivors and the reactivation of agricultural production and economic activities contributed also to the containment of the epidemic and the improvement of food and nutrition security. No noteworthy famines in the project region could be observed nor were they reported.

The promotion and assistance provided for ABCs as well as for the local markets helped to bring commercialisation and trade back on track

During the Ebola crisis, the district task forces and the paramount chiefs (the traditional authorities) had to cooperate closely. Through the Ebola response, management, districts and authorities came to understand how important and essential district development planning is. As a result, an

approximation of both political systems has occurred and this contributed to a less biased relationship. This can be regarded as the most noteworthy socio-political change.

A paramount impact of the comprehensive Welthungerhilfe support is that the affected households and the communities followed the strict GoSL quarantine regulations. This was key for the containment of the disease. The districts where Welthungerhilfe was involved in the Ebola response were the first in the country to become Ebola-free. The social mobilisation and community sensitisation contributed visibly to the communities feeling well informed about the epidemic. This also contributed to influencing common beliefs and superstitions about the disease, as villagers started to trust in the official messages. People realised to a certain extent that Ebola and sickness in general is not a consequence of personal misbehaviour, sin or instrumentalized spirits of ancestors – as is still very common in the country's rural areas. The connectedness between health preparedness, hygiene, food and nutrition, as well as education especially became very clear and tangible for the people.

Another important outcome of the intervention is the growing awareness for highly traumatised people in society. The necessity of psycho-social care for those affected by the virus became evident for the people, including the authorities. And apparently, people increasingly realise that not only Ebola survivors are traumatised; abused children, gender based violence victims and severely malnourished children are also in dire need of psycho-social care.

### **Sustainability**

The claim for sustainability is the biggest challenge for relief and development project implementation with such a short-term duration, particularly under the circumstances prevailing with such an aggressive and deadly virus epidemic. It was evident that the measures which the project launched to support peasant farmers in their production and productivity (seed banks, access to tools, refurbishment and rehabilitation of processing centres and their equipment, support for ABCs, etc.) already require a certain level of management skills which are essential to function sustainably and independently.

In the context of reactivating the rural economy, people were linked to markets and trained on financial market mechanisms. Access to cash is facilitated through the established VS&LA and community trade enterprises. Although funds in bank accounts are still relatively small, they are likely to increase in the future, allowing financial viability for equipment purchase.

The sustainability of measures to advise district administrations, particularly in terms of district development planning with a specific focus on disaster preparedness and prevention, depends inter alia on their resources and their access to means. Moreover, the frequent change of personnel in these institutions represents a threat to any continuity and sustainability.

Nevertheless, the support given to the DERCs to better coordinate the implementation of the relevant measures in a timely manner for the control of the Ebola epidemic was effective and appreciated by the district administrations. At the same time, the experience became an eye opener for the districts. They understood how relevant the assistance was and how it prepared them for the time after the crisis. However, the districts would need further encouragement to consolidate the acquired management and coordination skills.

It is difficult to estimate how sustainable sociocultural changes are. The changes regarding consciousness are likely to fade, as soon as the threat and memory of Ebola fall into oblivion. It is therefore regarded as very important that successor projects considerably invest in further social

mobilisation, community awareness raising and sensitisation to keeping communities and authorities aware of the EVD.

### **Lessons learnt**

Some important lessons learnt could be relevant for the organisational learning and competence development. The Welthungerhilfe Emergency Response Team (ERT) has provided valuable support to the country office during the initial organisation of emergency interventions. Afterwards it turned out that there had been less need for hands on support in the districts, but that the country office would rather have required strategic advice on the typical challenges of emergency interventions. It would be interesting for the organisation to explore, how the ERT team could be used more effectively within the emergency portfolio in order to qualify country offices more quickly for emergency response.

Secondly, the visibility of Welthungerhilfe, particularly at national level (Freetown) was insufficient. Visibility in this context is about perception and awareness at the national level. Thus, many other stakeholders were not aware of the Welthungerhilfe engagement. As a consequence, good and successful ideas and measures were not disseminated and donors did not look at Welthungerhilfe as a major and particularly competent actor. Welthungerhilfe at the national level should be stronger perceived as a professional, competent and powerful organisation, particularly by international donors.

### **Main recommendations**

An outcome-oriented post-distribution monitoring is recommended with a conclusion workshop to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of Welthungerhilfe emergency performance, as well as the lessons learnt during the Ebola response.

Strengthen and intensify community sensitisation and awareness raising. The country programmes should be intensively supported to establish competences and measures regarding social mobilisation, communities awareness raising and sensitisation. This could be a very useful tool for any further education programmes, which should accompany any project of food security, nutrition, WASH, relief or general rural development. The post Ebola care centre (PECC) could become more strongly involved in social mobilisation and psycho-social care, institutionally and in implementation, by spotting on traumatised people in the communities. Therefore PECC should be supported in linking with potential professional partners.

Generally, capacity development for staff should be intensified and considered at an early stage, especially in case of operations involving risks.

ERT experiences as well as experiences from other crises should be analysed and assessed to find out how overall relief management could be improved; particularly with regard to coordination, strategies and concepts, project and programme planning, measures and activities, as well as post emergency strategies.