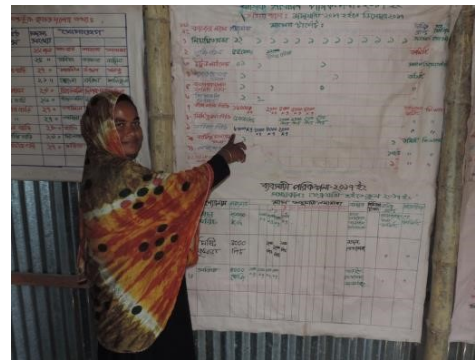


BUILDING COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES OF SMALLHOLDERS IN BANGLADESH AND NEPAL

END OF PROJECT EVALUATION



FINAL REPORT TO WELTHUNGERHILFE



Environmental Partnerships for Resilient Communities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The “*Building Community Enterprises of Smallholders in Bangladesh and Nepal*” Project was designed to combat poverty and food insecurity of some of the most vulnerable parts of society in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Haor region of Bangladesh, in addition to Chitwan and Salyan districts in Nepal.

This project deliberately focused on some of the poorest and most disadvantaged communities, including many ethnic minorities. Particular emphasis was given to include women in project activities. Anticipated outcomes from the project were that 50 per cent or those families supported could show an increase of at least 30 per cent in their household income, in addition to increased and diversified food production that would see 70 per cent of families experiencing a lean period of food shortage of no more than two months.

The overall objective of this end-of-project evaluation was to assess what has been accomplished by Welthungerhilfe and its partners, in enabling some 10,000 households to increase their income and improve their food security in the two countries. This independent evaluation was undertaken by Proaction Consulting, at the request of Welthungerhilfe. Terms of Reference for this evaluation are presented in **Annex I**.

Following an initial desk review of project materials, the evaluation was conducted in a highly participatory fashion using key informant interviews, focus group discussions and on-site visits to verify findings. Due to a short timeframe, site visits were only possible in the Haor region, Bangladesh, and Salyan District, Nepal. This report presents findings based on these site visits plus review of additional desk materials where available at the time.

SOME CHALLENGES

The four areas selected for this project were all quite different in terms of environment, geography and accessibility. A number of challenges were experienced by Welthungerhilfe and its partners Centre for Environmental and Agricultural Policy Research and Development (CEAPRED), and Forum for Rural Welfare and Agricultural Reform for Development (FORWARD) in Nepal, and Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB), and Anando in Bangladesh, including

- being able to access markets and obtain fair prices for goods was one of the greatest challenges addressed in this project.
- farmers were used to using chemical fertilizers and pesticides – though realizing that these might not always have been of good quality, and not necessarily knowing when and how to correctly apply these – which took time to address and overcome.
- access and quality inputs such as local variety seed collection is not available for certified organic produce, which is a limitation to uptake by more people.
- given that both Collection Centres (CCs) and Community Enterprises (CEs) provide advice on certain agriculture-related issues, there is a risk of duplication – or contradiction – with information provided by trained Community Resource Persons (CRPs).
- market price fluctuations make it challenging for CCs and CEs to conduct business as usual according to their respective business plans.
- climate risks – flash floods and seasonal drought/water shortages – remain a high risk for many vulnerable households.

Despite these, and other challenges, the evaluation found that this has been a very well-conceived project – largely due to its relevance and the closely integrated series of activities that were implemented making this an exemplary project in many ways.

RELEVANCE

This project is seen as having been totally relevant to priority needs of the target groups, addressing peoples' livelihoods, food security, nutrition and income generation, amongst others. Many of the people participating in this activity were some of the poorest and most disadvantaged in their communities: their new-found knowledge, confidence and skill have allowed to practice better and more diversified agricultural systems, with significant changes seen in terms of crop and vegetable production. Essential links have been established in all four projects with external traders and the private sector.

EFFECTIVENESS

One of the most effective achievements of this project has been the active mobilisation of smallholder farmers and their organisation into different groups. This has been the first time that most project participants have actually come together to work together, which has been a very positive undertaking. Project support was delivered through experienced implementing partners and all of the intended components and approaches in the two projects seen as part of this evaluation have either been reached or surpassed. A concern remains, however, as to whether newly established structures such as CCs and CEs will be able to maintain their momentum and business expansion in the future.

EFFICIENCY

Considering the overall budget and the short timeframe, the efficiency with which this project has been implemented – in challenging situations – and the overall impacts seen are quite high. A deliberate focus placed on supporting active women (e.g., Resource Farmers) was a contributing factor here. Overall, the project had a good balance between hardware provisioning, such as agricultural inputs, and software in the form of technical training, management skills and social organisation. Given the poor levels of awareness before this project, this combination was imperative, and the time invested by field staff in mobilising people and helping them compose and run self-help groups is a major achievement which will likely last and continue to benefit communities.

IMPACT

One of the main impacts of this project has been a positive shift of behaviour and attitude to reflect appreciation of what many female beneficiaries, in particular, have achieved. There is also a steadily growing reduced dependency on external resources, while many farmers have been able to expand the area they cultivate to now include former fallow lands. A high proportion of households surveyed reported having seen a significant – positive – change to their average household income in the past three years. Reasons given for this include savings, increased food security (seeds and vegetables), new assets such as livestock and, importantly, confidence. Household incomes though have not only improved, but have also diversified.

SUSTAINABILITY

This initiative has made significant progress in helping people move to more secure and sustainably-based activities. Key to this has been the closely integrated nature of project design and delivery, which has effectively resulted in new business ventures such as CCs and CEs that are now being run fully by community members, combined with comprehensive training packages. Had individual farmer training been the main activity – as is often seen in projects such as this – there would have been nothing like the impact that is seen today. The breakthrough here, as mentioned already, was the creation groups, with associated technical support and training.

SOME LESSONS LEARNED

Selected highlight lessons are noted below: please refer to Section 5 for additional lessons and explanatory narratives.

1. Employment is provided through improved agricultural systems.
2. Learning from this project plays directly to national agendas..
3. Farmer Field Schools are an appropriate and effective way to inform smallholder farmers.
4. Group organisation leads to better collaboration with government services.
5. Avoid creating dependencies amongst farmers.
6. People from within the community – other farmers and housekeepers – are prepared to purchase and pay more for quality, organic produce.
7. Transformation is not only about economic gains.
8. Planned phase out is important.

TOPLINE RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that this project has now closed, recommendations (please see Section 6 for more details) are intended to form part of the learning process for consideration and refinement for future similar projects, in similar contexts.

1. WHH and BMZ to examine possible extension to embed learning and management skills for some structures, such as Community Enterprises.
2. Provide more comprehensive accounting training to group treasurers.
3. Use project achievements to develop an advocacy strategy with government authorities and the private sector, centred on economic and socially responsible business development for food security.
4. WHH to consider how it can provide greater support to monitoring and results measurement to partners.
5. Opportunities for complaint mechanisms need to be provided – and explained – in all projects from the outset.
6. Community participation should feature in project design.
7. Future projects should place greater emphasis on nutritional value of crops.
8. Link food security production with knowledge on how to prepare food to maximise nutritional intake.
9. Donors should be prepared to allow the lead agency with project budget to encourage and enable innovation.
10. Involve government technical counterparts in all training events.
11. Community Enterprises need to diversify products and value chains to better cope with lean seasons and other shocks.
12. Contingency planning: be prepared for government personnel changes and be proactive in drawing them into project activities.