

Evaluation Report of the Project

Improved food and nutrition security and strengthened resilience against external shocks of vulnerable rural households in Northern Bahr el Ghazal (SSD 1041-16)

Presented to

Welthungerhilfe

by

Beate Scherrer

JIGSAW – Services for Development



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The project at a glance

Country:	South Sudan
Project Reduction	Improved food and nutrition security and strengthened resilience against external shocks of vulnerable rural households in Northern Bahr el Ghazal
Project No.:	SSD 1041-16
Project holder:	Welthungerhilfe
Approved budget:	2,462,086 Euro
Committed funds:	2,300,000 Euro
Institutional donor:	BMZ 2016.0121.0
Project period:	35 months (06/2016 - 11/2018, extended to 04/2019)

I. Summary

1 Brief description of the project and framework conditions

The Project on “*Improved food and nutrition security and strengthened resilience against external shocks of vulnerable rural households in Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG, A.d.V.)*” (hereafter: the project) was implemented over a 35-months period from 1 June 2016 to 30 November 2018, with the majority of activities being completed by the end of 2018 followed by a five-month extension period to finalise implementation, end-line survey and evaluation until 30 April 2019.

following years of emergencies and food crisis and given the fragile situation of the northern region of South Sudan, the project has rightly taken an approach of transitional assistance. The approach to bridging the months of food insecurity by cash/voucher transfers via community reconstruction activities has obviously worked well, as beneficiaries appreciated the generated employment and income opportunities that enabled them to survive during the non-agricultural seasons over recent years.

The intervention’s overall objective was to improve the livelihoods of 5,200 households through improved food production and enhanced resilience to external shocks/disasters. Expected Results define three areas:

- 1) The availability of and access to food as well as nutrition knowledge of the target group are improved;
- 2) The target group’s resilience against external shocks has been strengthened;
- 3) Basic social infrastructure in the project area has been (re-)constructed.

The project was implemented in 10 payams (grouped local communities) of 2 counties, namely Aweil North and Aweil West, now belonging to the newly created Lol State of NBeG, South Sudan. Over the project period, a broad set of Activities was carried out including the support to agricultural production, vegetable gardens, animal health, trainings & capacity building on natural resource management, nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Fuel-

Efficient stoves (FES), the drilling and rehabilitation of borewells, as well as the construction of community feeder roads and protection dykes on field sites.

2 Relevance

With its precarious socio-economic situation, the project was adequate and highly relevant to the local population in an unstable food security environment.

The concept of establishing vegetable gardens near water sources has obviously met a dire need for additional food intake during dry seasons. Linked to nutrition trainings, health & hygiene sessions, better food availability at households, especially for child feeding, has been achieved; surplus vegetables serve as an additional source of income from local markets.

The enhancement of agricultural production on basic food crops was essential, comprising three main components:

- Extending the acreage of cultivation for main staple crops;
- Increasing access to quality seeds via organisation of seed-fairs; and thus
- Increasing yields of major food crops, e.g. sorghum, groundnuts, and sesame.

While agricultural subsistence formed the most relevant project component, other elements such as cash transfers, WASH, and fuel-efficient stoves were also contributing to increasing food availability for vulnerable households and reducing expenses on basic food consumption in the family.

3 Effectiveness

Major achievements of the project outputs included:

- 1) The establishing of 10 school vegetable gardens; these gardens appear to be productive and women confirmed two cultivation cycles for each year that have helped them to obtain additional healthy food for their families during off-season and providing daily meals by marketing vegetables and buying food grains;
- 2) Extensive Trainings were conducted among women, youth and teachers regarding the value of nutritious food intake along with sessions on health and hygiene awareness.
- 3) Two annual rounds of construction activities have been successfully carried out involving approx. 1,800 households each. Earnings/payments were linked to work finished and accepted by the public works department;
- 4) The 15 newly drilled boreholes and 20 existing boreholes rehabilitated in 35 locations serving a minimum of 2,000 households;
- 5) 5 solar drying grounds were completed with an intention of reducing post-harvest losses due to polluted grains during the drying process;
- 6) Trainings were conducted for 600 women to introduce the technology and production of fuel-efficient stoves (FES) for cooking and reduced expenses for firewood;
- 7) 10 Animal Health Workers (CAHW) were trained in basic veterinary services and provided with starter kits containing basic medicines as most households keep cows and goats for milk and meat consumption;
- 8) 10 EcoSan toilets to be installed in primary schools were delayed in their implementation and could not be reviewed by the evaluation.

Overall, the project managed to implement the planned activities timely and adequate to standards within the extended project period. Despite several delays and staff turn-over in the remote project area, the project appears to have been effectively implemented.

4 Efficiency

Administration and financial management by the CO are detailed and transparently organised with internal controlling and lines of communication with the project staff clearly and effectively organised. Project documentation of individual measures in Nyamlel sufficiently reflects the distribution of materials and handouts, logistics, and trainings.

However, no cost-benefit calculations exist relating to individual project activities or overall cost-effectiveness of programme components. Therefore, it is not possible to assess the efficiency of implementation.

A major weakness lies in the insufficient monitoring system. Welthungerhilfe has missed out on establishing a transparent project steering mechanism based on indicators for evidence-based progress in implementation. For this reason, agricultural outcomes, productivity, enlargement of cultivation areas, or food security information were not periodically analysed and outcomes only surfaced with the end-line survey. This management deficit has compromised the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation.

5 Impact

Remarkable improvements can be noted from the fact, that distress sales during food shortage months were reduced by 20%, and almost 50% of the households interviewed by the end-line survey reported additional earnings from selling livestock products, vegetables, or fish. At the same time, there are considerable reductions in expenses for example from purchasing firewood/charcoal indicating that the household economy of vulnerable households has stabilised over time by strengthening the resilience against food insecurity.

The end-line survey for the project reflects that the results are modest in terms of dietary diversity (plus 5%) and little improvement of food security (hunger scales) over the year. Interestingly, the enlarged area under cultivation showing a 12% increase of farmers cultivating from below 1 fedan to 1-2 fedans and 4% increase on 2-3 fedans respectively, also indicates an improved food production. Since there was no indicator developed for this activity, it also slipped the notice of the LogFrame. However, the rather low overall values shown may be due to the damages from floods and drought in 2018 carried forward to the survey responses.

For a more realistic picture of successes and failures of Welthungerhilfe's agricultural efforts in the area, it will be necessary to conduct a relevant (needs) assessment in the agricultural sector that includes, land, labour, capital and other basic cultivation indicators which are followed through in documentation and monitoring during project implementation. The know-how is available in the organisation; unfortunately, it has not been applied and harnessed for this project.

Vegetable gardens appear to be productive and women confirmed two cultivation cycles for each year that have helped them to obtain additional healthy food for their families during off-season and providing daily meals by marketing vegetables and buying food grains.

The water situation has been improved for those approx. 2,000 households from 35 locations who have better access to safe drinking water. Nevertheless, the daily consumption of the scarce resource remains far below the (SPHERE) standard of 15 litres/person and probably does not reach more than 5 litre/person.

6 Sustainability

Particularly important measures for ensuring more sustainable interventions would include the conditions of environmental protection and water resource management while intensifying agricultural production, linking food production to health and nutrition and population growth; and creating off-farm employment and income opportunities.

The end-line survey has summarised its conclusions relating to the successful contributions and concerns on the project. These conclusions will guide Welthungerhilfe's programme and project staff to critically reflect on the past implementation and draw lessons for the continuation project (SSD 1058) under the same budget mechanism to stabilise the transition phase for the local population.

A few indications show that the vegetable gardens might be a success story by replication already taking place along the riverside. Like-wise the end-line survey also conveys a message that the trainings on hygiene, FES, and post-harvest management are bearing fruit. Welthungerhilfe should ensure some post-intervention-monitoring or refresher trainings integrated to other projects in order to encourage sustainability.

7 Most important recommendations

Recommendations regarding Relevance: Should the project area remain stable and peaceful over the next few years, this evaluation recommends to Welthungerhilfe HQ and CO to progress from transitional assistance (ÜH) towards more development-oriented programme concepts and project activities which would allow mobilising and supporting the local population in more comprehensive, inclusive ways of self-help and self-governance by community development efforts.

Recommendations from the end-line survey pointed in particular to the future necessity to conduct local needs assessment to gather more evidence on envisioned project components before designing and selecting activities that would enable planned changes. The evaluation clearly supports this recommendation as the gaps of situational analysis of the local populations were evident. Moreover, the focus on vulnerable households ignores the “not so vulnerable” broader population which might also be deserving and having some capabilities/resources to mobilise for long-term sustainable developments in the area.

Recommendations regarding Effectiveness & Sustainability: As no situational analysis about the economic structures and conditions was undertaken during the project period identifying the gaps in markets and consumption patterns, a market study is highly recommendable to the CO for future interventions in the economic sphere; it should take several aspects into account: a) availability of food from local production; b) imported food from traditional merchants and trade routes e.g. from Sudan; and c) food aid delivered by the UN and international assistance (FAO, WFP etc).

The transitional assistance approach should be developed further to more development-oriented interventions to stabilise the socio-economic situation in the region and protect resources as IDPs and refugees may return and put pressure on the environmental and administrative systems. Welthungerhilfe CO and Nyamlel Field Team should reflect particularly on measures ensuring more sustainable conditions in terms of:

- a) Environmental protection (curbing slash-and-burn agricultural practice that destroys vast areas of bushland, flood protection);
- b) Water resource management for preserving water resources in soils (dams, reservoirs, rainwater collection, drainages), and simultaneously protecting potable water levels (bore-wells, household storage, WASH in schools);
- c) Intensifying agricultural production as partly foreseen in the next project (SSD 1058) and improving productivity of lands and yields rather expanding acreage via slash-and-burn cultivation;
- d) Focussing further on linking food production to health and nutrition in order to increase survival rates of infants and bringing down population growth;
- e) Creating agricultural-based off-farm employment and income opportunities, e.g. processing of agricultural products, post-harvest management, mills, marketing etc. to strengthen the local economy.

The project initiated a number of innovative processes which will show their outcomes and impacts only in the mid-term. It is recommended to set-up a budgeted follow-up monitoring mechanism, e.g. including some results and impact indicators on food security, nutrition, and employment generation, for at least 2-3 years with a final impact study. The follow up should also include the quality of EcoSan related activities like training in hygiene and sanitation

targeting teachers and pupils of the schools which may need time for acceptance and correct management. It will be necessary to link these activities to other projects for proper follow up and monitoring. The evaluation recommends to the Nyamlel Field Team to include this process to the next project funded by ÜH / BMZ that has just been sanctioned (SSD 1058).

Welthungerhilfe CO and Nyamlel Field Team will find it useful to strengthen its coordination and strategy for the development in the project area with other actors and cluster developments as well as with the local authorities; further on it should also communicate its plans to the target groups and consult with PDCs on their needs and responses for better visibility and documented development improvements.

Recommendations regarding Efficiency: At project level no cost/performance related calculations were established for individual measures, such as construction works and agricultural cultivation in terms of inputs vs outputs, yields or earnings. As the main purpose was to enhance the availability of quality seeds at the right time and to improve sowing practices on extended cultivated areas, it is recommended to CO and Nyamlel Field Team to conduct appropriate cost-benefit ratio and unit costs in figures for expected results and beneficiaries. These calculations can also serve to formulate adequate indicators for results measurement and monitoring.

As the MEAL unit at HQ is currently systemizing and defining its basic standards of the enlarged MEAL approach that includes M&E standards, it appears urgent in the light of this evaluation that a coherent and transparent system of its overall monitoring system at various levels of intervention is established with priority. Project and programme monitoring need to reflect the quality assurance and compliance of the organisation's worldwide activities. It is positive to note that the CO has already started to integrate more adequate monitoring instruments to its future project planning.

The CO MEAL unit should look into coherence of this process either by ensuring annual reviews of the project's results achievement matching the desired outcome, or by conducting a joint internal or external Mid-term Review. Such interim reviews exercises should be integrated to the work plans and project design as they would also allow for timely corrections, if necessary.

For the projects in South Sudan/Nyamlel this means that LogFrames and Planning Matrices need to reflect basic standards and consistent instruments of the intervention logic applied - or quoting from the recommendations of the end-line survey: *"Similarly, all project indicators need to have clear definitions and measurement criteria that allows for provision of conclusive evidenced based change as a result of project interventions."* (p.26)

8 General conclusions and "lessons learnt"

Overall, the project successfully implemented its planned activities in order to stabilise the livelihoods of vulnerable households and families in the project area of two counties in Lol State. Subsistence agricultural production during the rainy season and cash transfers via construction employment over the non-agricultural season have been complementing WFP food assistance and distress sales during the so-called hunger months for improved food security to approx. 5,200 households in the area.

In a short-term perspective the expectations were certainly met. Over the next few years and provided that no further economic and political distortions occur, maintenance will depend on more active support to communities for sustainable management structures and extended public services, e.g. agricultural extension, water department, health and education facilities. Economic viability is still fragile at current stage.

Vegetable gardening and combined nutrition trainings have obviously been a successful trigger for improved household food consumption under precarious economic conditions. This

improvement is reflected in committed women working in vegetable gardening, a replication from neighbourhoods, and healthier school going children.

However, due to the immediate needs, the environmental impacts of increasing populations (through natural growth and reintegration of IDPs) were mostly overlooked by the project. These threats materialise in the fact that the project tried to enlarge cultivation areas for agricultural production in order to feed the small-farming target group. While there is no doubt that food production needs to be enhanced considerably to cover food shortages and reduce household hunger scales, in future it may be important to look into intensifying production techniques for yield increases, e.g. ploughing & mulching instead of broad sowing, soil improvements, or protection of soil humidity etc. Technical measures should combat the slash-and-burn practice to prevent more environmental destruction.

A creation of off-farm employment, e.g. in agricultural processing and marketing, services in transport and market sectors have potential for long-term development and may be further explored to create sustainable economic developments.