

Evaluation Report

PROJECT TITLE:

Improvement of household food
security in Zeravshan Valley, Tajikistan

PROJECT HOLDER:
WELTHUNGERHILFE

Co-FINANCING BODY:
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

WELTHUNGERHILFE PROJECT NUMBER: AS 1080 / TJK 1046 - 05
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PROJECT PERIOD:

01.01.2006 – 30.06.2008

Evaluator:
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I. SUMMARY

Brief description of the project and framework conditions

The project was initiated by Welthungerhilfe in January 2006, with a foreseen duration of 30 months (01.01.2006 - 30.06.2008), and with the objective referring to the improvement of the nutritional status and purchasing capacity of vulnerable, food insecure rural households in 22 selected villages of Ayni and Gorno Matcha district, Zeravshan Valley, Tajikistan. In order to reach this objective, three main components were carried out:

- Improvement of drinking water supply systems and hygienic conditions
- Provision of inputs and know-how for improved sustainable production, storage and processing of agricultural and horticultural products
- Establishment of marketing structures for cash-crops

During the ongoing period of project implementation, the overall political and social conditions allowed an undisturbed implementation of the project. Over the winter season 2007-2008, extremely low temperatures caused heavy losses of stored agricultural products, thus drastically affecting the food security of the rural population and the availability of seeds. As a consequence of this the number of men migrating to Russia was considerably higher than in previous years. During the second half of the implementation period, an increasing inflation rate produced a rise in prices for food, fuel, building materials and other items, thus restraining construction / rehabilitation activities of rural infrastructures like drinking water supply systems and storage facilities.

Outcomes and impacts

The construction and rehabilitation of 14 drinking water supply systems has produced a very positive and significant outcome with regard to the improved availability of drinking water in the target villages. In combination with campaigns for safe water use, this project activity has helped to improve of the health situation of the population and to lessen the workload of women and children. Due to solid technical design of constructed systems and the growing self-help capacity of created Water User Association it can be expected that the produced results and benefits will continue after the project has come to an end.

The distribution of vegetable seeds to a significant number of households, combined with complementary project components (greenhouses, conserving jars, training on processing, Initiative Groups to optimize the usage of resources, etc.), has generated an immediate result relative to the production of additional and high quality foodstuff. Although to relatively small extent, the availability of conserving jars for fruits and vegetables permits to benefited families alleviate nutritional deficiencies during some critical winter or spring-days.

Given the fact that there are no financial and / or institutional means to guarantee a follow-up strategy, the distribution of grain-seeds and fertilizers turns out to be a one-time relieve-measure, with no perspective to produce sustainable effects on the aimed-for improvement of agricultural production.

The construction of small greenhouses gives an opportunity for earlier and more intensive cultivation of vegetables within the kitchen gardens, thus contributing to the expected improvement of food security. The very promising replication rate of this newly introduced innovation can be understood as an indicator for the interest and self-help capacity of the target group.

The distribution of high-quality fodder crop seeds has produced a direct effect on the availability of fodder and consequently on the improvement of animal production (milk, meat). The initiated fodder cultivation fits adequately in the local crop rotation pattern, thus contributing to the maintenance and improvement of soil fertility. However, it is to fear that sustainability of this result will be jeopardized by the lack of knowledge and technical settings for the continued home-production and storage of seed.

The distribution of high-quality potato seeds has so far only produced a very limited effect on the improvement of local seed system mechanisms (conservation, multiplication and distribution), and consequently a low contribution to the achievement of the aimed-for project purpose.

The offered training events were relevant to the most pressing problems of local farmers. Acquired knowledge and skills are actively applied by the targeted men and women in their daily field activities. In this regard it can be expected that this benefit will continue after the project has come to an end.

The storage of dried fruit and conserved vegetables constitutes as a feasible way to tackle the crucial problem of food shortage and nutritional deficiencies during the critical time of the year.

The promoted innovations and strategies for quality improvement, processing and marketing of local fruits can be seen as very promising. With regard to the foreseen improvement of income generation, the activity has succeeded in showing the existing potential and perspective. The installation of butchery shops is helping to improve the access to fresh meat within the benefited villages, thus reducing expenses on purchase of meat.

The socio-cultural effects and impacts so far achieved relate to the acceptance of new methods for cultivation and transformation of agricultural products. The introduced innovations obviously have encountered a very open auditorium and acceptance among the local target group, so that their sustained usage after the project pull-out seems to be very probable.

A further socio-cultural result refers to the acceptance of created village level organisations (village development committees, water user associations,

interest groups for processing and marketing of local products) which can be understood as a valuable means to foster the self-help potential and institutional build up of the local population. Furthermore, the project intervention has generated a positive result in form of increased participation of women in community activities.

As a product of village development activities, the local Village Development Committees by now constitute the local implementing partner for project-activities (identification of beneficiaries; organization of training sessions; distribution of inputs, etc.). In some target villages the created Water User Associations have developed the ability to take over responsibility for use and maintenance of installed drinking water systems.

The project has been actively supporting the creation of Interest Groups (IGs), aiming at the mutual usage of resources for processing and marketing of agricultural and horticultural products. Some of these IGs already show the potential and capacities for future business development. However, due to the specific character of these groups (ad hoc; informal; offer-driven), for the bigger part of them a sustained continuation can hardly be expected to happen.

As a means for the development of a specialized network for production and distribution of high-quality potato seed material, a local Seed Potato Association has been founded and is now developing its capacities. The association has already produced very promising revenues, and with this it could be assumed that its members are highly interested to continue and further sustain this venture.

Sustainability

As for implemented drinking water supply systems it can be expected that produced results will continue after project phase-out, due to solid technical design and take-over of responsibility by created Water User Associations.

With respect to the provision of agricultural inputs it can be stated that sustainability has not been a major concern in the conceptual planning of this project component. Given the fact that there are no financial and / or institutional means to guarantee a follow-up strategy, the distribution of production inputs results to be a one-time relieve-measure, which will not be able to produce a sustainable effect on the aimed-for improvement of agricultural production. However, in the case of the introduced green-houses, by reason of a very satisfactory replication rate it can be expected that this innovation will be continued after project pull-out.

The offered training events were relevant to the most pressing problems of local farmers. Acquired knowledge and skills are actively applied by the targeted men and women in their daily field activities. In this regard it can be expected that this benefit of the project will continue after the project has come to an end.

Although the institutional development of Village Development Committees should be understood as a crucial means for the sustainable improvement of local livelihoods, the project concept did not provide for any specific strategy, thus jeopardizing the potential sustainability of existing committees. In case of the created market association for seed potatoes it can be assumed that its members are highly interested to continue and further sustain this venture. With regard to the created Interest Groups (IGs) a sustained continuation can hardly be expected to happen for the bigger part.

In the course of the project only some minor activities have been carried out with regard to the conservation of natural resources. In some villages trees were planted alongside the newly constructed sewage channels, in order to avoid erosion problems, and to exploit the humidity for a practical purpose. The promotion of a new fodder crop allows for an improvement of the local crop-rotation pattern, with positive effects on soil fertility and environmental stability.

Relevance

The project is relevant to some of the most pressing problems and requirements of the local target group, as well as to the institutional objectives and orientations of Welthungerhilfe. Furthermore, it can be confirmed that the implemented project activities are in line with the goals set by the Government of Tajikistan to eliminate poverty until the year 2015.

Effectiveness

In the framework of the evaluation, families benefited through drinking water systems, distribution of vegetable seeds, construction and use of greenhouses, distribution of conserving jars, etc. gave positive feedback on the effectiveness of the project relative to improved nutrition and health of small children. However, the project monitoring still lacks a systematically processed information on anthropometric data relative to malnutrition of children to confirm this opinion.

Efficiency

With regard to the established drinking water supply systems, the building outlay and incurred expenses should be considered as completely justified. The relatively costly distribution of potato seeds and related provision of fertilizers has so far produced a very limited effect on the achievement of the aimed-to project purpose. A favourable cost-benefit ratio will only be created if a sustained improvement of productivity can be achieved by a significant number of local potato growers.

With regard to gardening and fruit growing activities, the project intervention has successfully demonstrated means and perspectives for improvement of production and productivity. Against this background, the incurred spending to this end can be seen as justified. As for the training and field-advisory activities

the applied concept allowed for carrying out project interventions at relatively low cost.

Annual cross cutting theme

The project aimed at the empowerment and encouragement of the target group, in order to use their self-help potentials and initiative power for the development of self-managed coping strategies. In this regard the project has been actively enhancing people's knowledge and skills through a wide range of training programs. Different activities were carried out at village level through interest groups, village development committees and water user associations, thus strengthening the village development process.

Most important recommendations

The distribution of high-quality seed material to a selected and reduced group of experienced farmers and the creation of a specific association can be seen as a feasible step to solve one problem (i.e. improved availability of high-quality seed for renovation of degenerated varieties) within the universe of problems of local potato production. Considering that the outrunning work-period of the project will not allow for giving further assistance to this effort, it is recommended to seek for ways and means to guarantee the continuation of specific help to this initiative. In this connection, more comprehensive steps should be undertaken, with special emphasis to the particular situation, problems and potentials of the "classical" seed-supply system of local smallholders (i.e. home-saved seed).