

Geographically based Programme India

**(DWHH/GAA Proj. No.: AS 1183 / IND 1096-03)
(EU Proj. No. ONG/PVD/PG/2003/011-613/IN)**

**Mid-term Evaluation Report for
Deutsche Welthungerhilfe / German Agro Action**

submitted by

**Rekha Pappu
Raghavan Suresh
Beate Scherrer**

August 2007

Summary of findings and recommendations:

Evaluation of

Geographically based Programme India - GBPI - (IND 1096-04)

**Presented and discussed at the final meeting with representatives of
GAA Evaluation Unit, GAA Regional Office staff and the
Evaluation Committee of partner organisations**

New Delhi, 9 August 2007

1 Summary

The following summary of main findings and recommendations were presented and discussed at the final meeting with representatives of DWHH/GAA Evaluation Unit, DWHH/GAA Regional Office staff and the Evaluation Committee of partner organisations on 9 August 2007 in New Delhi.

Background and objectives of the evaluation

The Geographically Based Programme India (GBPI), which is co-funded by the Commission of the European Union (EC), is currently implemented over a period of five years (2004-2008). It involves twenty Deutsche Welthungerhilfe/German Agro Action (DWHH/GAA) partner organisations from six Indian states (Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Rajasthan). The programme funding with a total budget of 7.6 million Euro aims at contributing to poverty alleviation, food security and sustained improvements in the economic and social existence of poor rural populations.

Programme activities focus on natural resource management and watershed development, local institution building, skills development, education, child development and advocacy. Lobbying and public relations activities aim to promote an increasing NGO co-operation and co-ordination with local government and administrative agencies. The programme thus offers opportunities to expand networks and discuss matters of mutual interest at a regional level. With the help of this common platform of DWHH/GAA partner organisations in India, the programme envisages an enhancement of quality among individual projects through the exchange of expertise and harnessing of direct benefits for target groups.

This mid-term evaluation aims to assess the general and cross-sectional components of the programme in order to take stock of the existing achievements and, if necessary, to recommend changes or corrections. The main findings will also recommend further steps for the remaining programme period of 16 months until end December 2008. Hence, the evaluation will contribute to the shaping of the future regional programme of DWHH/GAA support in India.

As per the Terms of Reference (ToR) the evaluation will focus on the implementation of LoA 6 regarding networking, communication, capacity building etc. Outcome indicators, which relate directly to LoA 6 would be inter alia network coordination, the quality of interaction, benefits derived from workshops and trainings, as well as the sustainability of programme achievements.

Activities and methodology of evaluation

The evaluation combined a desk study of relevant documents, meetings with resource persons, partners and representatives of target groups, discussions and field visits. Data collection and evaluation tools included:

- Perusal of documents produced
- Questionnaires
- Workshop meetings
- Individual interviews of beneficiaries and selected stakeholders
- Focus group discussions with second line partners (of networks) and target group representatives
- Participatory dialogue with partner organisations.

In order to focus on the programme character of the GBPI the identified key issues were always at the centre of analysis. This means that individual project activities were not assessed in detail. Project related evaluation reports or supporting analysis were taken into account where applicable.

During the annual regional workshops in March/April 2007 a framework for the evaluation of the programme's Line of Action 6 (LoA 6) on communication, co-ordination, management, advocacy and support to local partners was designed, when the evaluation process was discussed with partners and followed up by a comprehensive inception report.

An Evaluation Committee (EVC) of six partner representatives had agreed earlier to follow the process and was subsequently involved during an interim discussion as well as in the debriefing meeting.

The Evaluation Team (ET) of three independent consultants, two from India and one from Germany was appointed according to their key qualifications to carry out the study in the three defined areas (water, local governance, education).

In order to make the evaluation as much as possible a participatory process, to which all programme partners could contribute, the ET invited their views and experiences with the GBPI through a questionnaire, sent out prior to the field phase. The responses fed into the analysis.

Subsequently, and as per ToR, field study concentrated on partner organisations from the States of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa with a selected group of different size, experience and focus on the main areas:

- *West Bengal:* Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama (RKM), Sri Ramkrishna Ashram Nimpith (SRAN), Kalyan, Deepan Yuba Goshti (DYG)
- *Jharkhand:* Centre for World Solidarity (CWS), SWADHINA, Indo Global Service Society (IGSSS)
- *Orissa:* Agramee, Sikshasandhan, Nysasdri, Sambandh
- *Rajasthan:* Social Centre for Initiative and Advancement (SCRIA), Women's Action for Development (WAFD)
- *Karnataka:* MYRADA

All relevant documents and reports produced during the programme period were made available to the ET in June 2007, before the field phase started off.

After an initial coordination meeting at DWHH/GAA Regional Office in New Delhi on 23 July, the ET split into travel groups to visit the various partner organisations for in-depth interviews and field visits. An interim meeting with the EVC on 2 August 2007 in Kolkata provided a first review of observations and feedback.

Finally, the debriefing session took place on 9 August 2007 at DWHH/GAA's Regional Office in New Delhi, combining a presentation of main findings and recommendations with discussion among the representatives of DWHH/GAA Evaluation Unit, DWHH/GAA Regional Office staff and the Evaluation Committee of partner organisations, pending scheduled field visits to three organisations.

1.1 The GBPI and its context

The idea to formulate a programme for its Indian partners came to DWHH/GAA's India Desk following a Call for Proposal of the European commission in 2000, when DWHH/GAA was invited to hand in a concept note and subsequent preliminary proposal. Being short-listed, a detailed proposal was presented to EUROPEAID in early 2002. However, additional requirements by the EU prolonged decision-making, and in May 2003 new formats and application outlines along with new contract regulations again requested a revised proposal. This stretched decisions at the EU until December 2003, when the approval finally reached DWHH/GAA. The GBPI could get on its way from January 2004 onwards, almost four years after its first planning! This extremely long and strenuous process adversely influenced the programme's conceptualisation, which reflects the analysis at the turn of the century.

The GBPI follows an overall objective towards alleviation of poverty in six Indian States. While concentrating on integrated rural development activities, with a focus on food security, and on improved natural resource management it intends to strengthen partners and self-help groups at local levels. Needs based approaches aim at improving land productivity, increasing income, strengthening community based organisations through capacity building, and thus improve skills with a transfer of knowledge. Facilitated by 20 Indian NGOs, existing partner organisations of DWHH/GAA, about 25 projects would be implemented over a five year period in the fields of watershed development and natural resource management, local level institution building, technical knowledge and skills development, women's and children's education as well as health awareness.

Over the past ten years considerable changes took place in India regarding the political devolution of decision-making and financial transfers from central government towards federal states, districts and local communities (panchayati raj institutions - PRI). The six Indian States, in which the GBPI is implemented, and their civil society actors are confronted with new opportunities arising from this process of decentralisation (i.a. RTI, NREGA, PESA), even as there is difference in speed of implementation and obstacles are faced at various levels. Vested interests and an unwillingness to share power considerably influence the process and the working conditions for DWHH/GAA partner organisations at local level to act on mobilising their target groups. The ET found these specific settings of the six GBPI states important with a view on the programme approach and project implementation.

For example, in the water sector improved technology has enabled individual farmers to opt for decentralised power generation systems that can work irrigation wells at great depths with impacts on water recharge potentials in the surrounding areas. - Also during this period, the Indian Government has accepted the objective of providing "Education for All" and responding to the civil society demand for making education a fundamental right, even as the gaps between different systems of schooling are on the rise.

Although no reference has been made to all these changes in the programme application, these developments should be taken into account when looking at the trends of rising inequality among the GBPI States and within their poorer populations.

- Concept framework and approach

The main thrust for the formulation of the GBPI came from DWHH/GAA's India desk to rationalise on its **continued support to** existing project partners for funding security and **in order to** add value through LoA 6. On the contents side, the approach sought for synergies to improve food security, natural resource management, institution building, self-help groups and education.

The Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) focuses strongly on results without adequate attention to processes and long-term sustainability. The fast changing Indian socio-economic context has not been adequately captured in the LFA.

- Target groups

The GBPI intends to reach out to poorer, marginalized groups of tribals, women, ST/SC/OBC, in less developed States. There is clearly a focus on organising women in SHGs, and user groups for services. Youth and children form an important target group as well.

Overall the ET found that partners largely work with those populations whose livelihoods are mainly agrarian with additional off-farm income from forests and other sources, including migrant and exploitative labour.

- Selection of participating partners

Due to EU restrictions, the selection of participating partners in the programme was based on previous working relationships with an identified need for continuation. No new partners with relevant work in the main areas were taken in to complement existing knowledge with innovation.

A diversity of partners of various size, capacity and expectations has been grouped together. Regional grouping seems to have followed a pattern of pragmatism.

- Identification of themes and issues (LoAs)

As DWHH/GAA's main mandate lies with ensuring food security, the key area of action focussed on increasing water availability to enhance agricultural production. Long-term partnerships in the field of natural resource management fed into the process of partner selection without a renewal of needs based analysis at community levels.

In addition, since an integrated approach to rural development demands a focus on education, health and children's programmes with a view towards sustainability these elements were included in the programme design.

The programme later made reference to PR developments by addressing the fact that there was an emerging need for partners at local levels to work with PRI on issues of local governance.

LoA 6 conceptualised a need for networking, exchange of experiences, joint advocacy, and training emerging during the planning phase with partners.

- Methods of implementation

The GBPI worked through organising workshops, exposure visits, and capacity building and thus created a common platform for partner organisations at regional level as well as through annual theme conferences. These activities have been documented in a large number of reports and documents with little effort on following up of issues raised.

Programme financial and progress monitoring mechanisms are in place and were supplemented by two EU monitoring missions. However, little capacity was set aside to systematically review outcomes and take necessary steps for correction.

At project level, the first step in this process was conducting the baseline surveys. Next, community and user groups were formed to prepare the basis for delivery of inputs. The implementation of projects was channelled through community organisations, sensitisation and awareness generation, systematic training and identification of the required range of inputs. Some internal evaluation exercises took place to assess project activities and progress made.

- Areas of action

In the water sector, the primary unit of implementation was the watershed model, with its attendant requirements of community user groups, self-reliance, and the use of local materials and labour. Measures for agricultural improvement include land development, water harvesting and use, better and more diverse choice of crops and cropping patterns, and some efforts towards alternative uses of the water resources thus generated. The technology focus of these interventions is strongly evident, with interest in incorporating local ideas and knowledge in some places. There have been significant efforts at resource protection and management in local areas through the user groups, with accompanying education and awareness efforts to support these. The cultural bases for environmental education and natural resource management have also been developed in some cases.

The intervention through LoA 4 has been aimed at raising awareness on health matters as well as providing educational opportunities. These two concerns have also been linked at the project level through the health check ups organised for children where educational centres have been established. The projects are diverse in terms of the target groups for whom education is provided and also in terms of prioritising education in the entire range of activities of the partner. In relation to the target groups, some partners have established pre-school centres, while others have set up centres for adult literacy and yet others have provided education up to the primary level. In the case of educational support for children, the projects have attempted to link up with government schools. In relation to prioritisation, some partners have focussed exclusively on education while for others it is part of their integrated approach to development. The partner organisations have drawn on community support in general and the SHGs in particular for the functioning of the centres.

Local Governance interventions by partner organisations are much depending on the often precarious power relations at local levels and a willingness of the various stakeholders, e.g. village leaders, block/district administrations, party functionaries, police, to allow the PR system to work according to legislation. While in the new state of Jharkand PR elections did not even take place since ten years, Orissa has made some progress on establishing PR structures, e.g. PESA, NREGA, through which CBOs and local populations theoretically have access to the system. In West Bengal on the other hand, party dominance influence most initiatives to make the PR work. NGOs have to maintain a careful position, not to get involved on either side, while strengthening communities, representatives, or office bearers in applying the new procedures. The GBPI discussed these major issues, potentials and obstacle during the 2005 conference. However, no follow up on conference outcomes from DWHH/GAA guidance has taken place on the implementation side, so far.

- LoA 6: Programme issues

This Line of Action aimed to provide the umbrella for the different sets of project action, imbuing them with a higher purpose and relevance that connected activities across the states and local situations to achieve the goal of the project (see below). The primary responsibility for LoA 6 rests with DWHH/GAA India Desk, through the Programme Advisor

based in India. LoA 6 constitutes an important instrument of programme management. It provides an opportunity for DWHH/GAA to involve itself in contributing directly to the content of projects as they develop, and to influence the development of stances towards emerging issues in accordance with its mandate.

Its expression on-ground was through sets of planned and systematic opportunities for exchange (exposure visits, sharing of information and knowledge, cross-partner groups to take forward issues), recognition and documentation of systematic advances in implementation in the different sectors through review and thematic workshops, and a comprehensive and standardised monitoring effort coordinated from DWHH/GAA and supported at the local levels by lead partners of networks.

The benefits of programme activities at different levels were aimed to be consolidated at grass roots level through the establishment of community organisations of different interest groups, working together under the guidance of NGO partners to lobby for causes and rights with local government systems and the bureaucracy.

The diversity of programme partners (size, goals) meant that larger NGOs with more experience were able to contribute ideas to smaller ones, while still being able to utilise the different inputs offered in their own ways. Smaller partners were enabled to adapt these inputs to local contexts with the support of larger groups.

- Goals of project implementation

The stated goal of the programme is poverty alleviation through integrated rural development activities in various sectors, with an effort to address food insecurity as a primary feature of extreme poverty. This was expected to be achieved through strategies of empowering marginalized groups and women, rights based initiatives, technology improvements and skills development. These have met with varying degrees of success.

1.2 Main findings of evaluation

- Relevance of programme activities for partners and target groups

As the programme was designed in alignment with existing, reliable partners and few new inputs were provided to ongoing projects, one can certainly presume that the areas of action were relevant at partner levels. Although the ET could not get down to primary project baseline data, the reports and field visits suggest an improvement to livelihoods to various degrees, implying that inputs offered by the project were relevant and important to the target groups addressed.

SHG and other CBOs were formed with a view to mobilise their self-help potentials. While a large number of groups exceeding planned numbers were established, the ET found it difficult to verify whether innovative activities or harnessing of potentials took place.

LoA 6 intended to provide a platform for debate about joint issues and consensus building. Most partners felt that workshops and case studies were important sources for reflection and a streamlining of project activities. Managerial and administrative trainings helped in complying with programme demands, while a sense of common identity grew over time and a complex, diverse and cooperative model of partnership evolved.

In the following some network partners were more capable of using the opportunities and inputs offered by the programme to develop own mechanisms for capacity building within their teams. Other partners were not able to transform these inputs into activities relevant to their projects.

- Results and outcomes

The ET confirms in the report that infrastructure was created, technical transfer was effected, groups formed and income generated as an indirect result of the programme.

Partners appreciated that workshop reports were produced, studies and research commissioned as well as thematic knowledge shared, and activities publicised to interest a broader audience towards the projects (media workshop, exhibition). Partners also contributed with case studies and presentations to this common platform.

On the other hand, efforts to motivate community contributions were rarely encouraged at project levels. This inconsistency was partly due to the fact that the EU did not promote local contributions to the projects. At the same time a large number of partners too, focus their activities on providing services to the target populations without always motivating their capacity or initiating processes to build ownership for structures created.

- Programme management

Partners reiterate that communication with the DWHH/GAA team was good and they mostly received a positive response whenever they had any queries or need for clarification. At the same time they would have appreciated to receive better feedback on the progress reports they produced at regular intervals to the programme office.

While reporting, documentation and monitoring was such a strong component for project partners, the programme coordination was predominantly occupied with organising workshops, preparing documentations or managing the administrative part of the programme. No consistent monitoring system is in place at programme level, which enabled a comparative analysis and quality assessment. Moreover, the EU formats for narrative reports restrict the scope for processing of information beyond results.

Workshops were considered good forums for meeting and provided opportunities for exchange. Partners were willing to freely share expertise. However, workshops seem to have not offered enough room for discussion on processes and feasibility. Workshop documentation mainly includes paper presentations. Follow up of workshop outcomes appears to be weak and depends on individual partner initiatives.

While primary partners are invited to workshops, very often the relevant staff or second line partners could not be involved. No specific budget support was available at network level for follow up meetings to disseminate the information from workshops.

DWHH/GAA positions and priorities are not clear to all partners, e.g. on rights based approaches, land reform issues, gender and empowerment, social exclusion, or labour, which are critical issues at the project level. There appears to be insufficient acknowledgement by DWHH/GAA that with this programme their role has shifted from being mainly a funding agency towards partnership and dialogue.

- Impacts

Since the present exercise is a mid term evaluation the ET did not make a conscious attempt to measure impact. The remarks made here derive from random observations and specific attempts to find out whether impact monitoring systems are in place.

Skill levels have gone up due to high technical quality, e.g. in water projects, so that diffusion of knowledge has become possible. However, illiteracy is sometimes an impediment to this.

Implementation and maintenance was well monitored in watershed projects. There is a conscious attempt to build on traditional means of water storage and recharge. Community organisations to manage water resources are visible.

In some areas the programme intervention has resulted in an enhanced sense of optimism and confidence at the level of the community. In such areas the participation of women in the public sphere too has gone up dramatically. Awareness about the usefulness of education too has increased. At some project sites the ET observed visible signs of improved incomes from diversified agrarian activities with attendant spread of risk. However, in other areas no significant impact was observed.

Concerns about sustainability of this programme are beginning to emerge among partners, because project action for food security may require longer-term interventions. The primary investments in all sectors need to be reinforced and protected by complementary investments in community building and perspective development.

- Overall assessment

Overall the incorporation of different projects under the programme has started to create a common platform for the DWHH/GAA partners. As yet though one cannot say whether all the different project processes are a direct outcome of the programme or of other networks and initiatives. It is clear however that there are enough starting points from which DWHH/GAA can consolidate the programme in the remaining period extending over a year.

Thus far DWHH/GAA has emphasised on programme administration and on achievement of results. The next steps need to focus on conceptualisation, quality enhancement and goal realisation, e.g. poverty alleviation, food security and sustainability. As there will be no further EU programme funding, DWHH/GAA's commitment to the thematic and financial sustainability needs to be placed high on the agenda for the remaining programme period.

1.3 Recommendations

- To partner organisations

Partners also need to develop concepts of sustainability, both at the level of the organisation as well as the community they are working with. This may include reflection on exit strategies or building upon their previous activities as well as a realistic assessment of the resource requirements for this, and supported by a comprehensive perspective for development. Partners may find it challenging to not limit themselves to producing results but becoming more process oriented in reaching their overall goals. Similarly, empowerment processes should be more consciously gender sensitive and inclusive of marginalized groups.

At the community level, mechanisms for impact monitoring should be evolved. Including the community in these efforts is a critical educational issue and feeds into sustainability and ownership.

- To Deutsche Welthungerhilfe/German Agro Action

As the GBPI is a new form of collaboration for DWHH/GAA with Indian partners, the experiences of the first three years need to come under review for the remaining programme period. Starting from a lack of clarity about DWHH/GAA's plans for long-term engagement in

India, the perspective country concept and strategy has to be updated on an urgent basis. This includes a common understanding with the EU and other possible co-funders on the country strategy. Such a comprehensive perspective of the India programme has to refer to DWHH/GAA's role vis-à-vis its partners. As the opening of a regional office in Delhi indicates a long-term commitment of DWHH/GAA to support to Indian development processes in the civil sector, this concept has to address not only key issues of operations but also different dimensions of sustainability.

Administrative systems of programme management are in place but need to be complemented by effective programme analysis of monitoring information from projects. The process of concept clarification and refinement can be further enhanced through more regular and critical presence in the field.

In order to optimise processes DWHH/GAA staff on the India desk in Bonn and in Delhi may find it useful to discuss role clarity and to review division of responsibilities across the teams. In addition local technical support to projects as well as theme specific support can be recruited.

More effective communication about its positions on emerging issues in Indian development is required for an equitable dialogue with programme partners. Existing loops in feedback should be closed.

The steps proposed above will also demand from DWHH/GAA an effort to develop strong synergies with government programmes, other donors and consortia, emerging partner platforms and other partner networks (e.g. SUSTAINET). These experiences should be incorporated within the overall India programme of DWHH/GAA.

DWHH/GAA should clearly communicate the implications of the end of GBPI programme funding to partners.

1.4 Lessons learnt

EU and DWHH/GAA seem to have plunged into programme funding without considering its implications in the long run. Especially the inflexibility of programme implementation changed by the EU during the application phase had an adverse effect on planning. The long period of programme gestation and other unexpected developments (Tsunami) may have distracted DWHH/GAA from concentrated attention to its quality development.

The experience with the GBPI is in itself a learning process, right from the stage of planning to its present stage of implementation. It will certainly not end with completion of either EU-funding or a five year commitment. The programme experience is gradually leading to a more equitable partnership based upon mutual learning and resulting in convergent action.

The suggestions made through this evaluation aim to hasten and consolidate the progress on this front.
