



Mid-term Evaluation

on behalf of Welthungerhilfe Bonn
Food security and livelihood
support of war and drought
affected population in
the Red Sea State, Sudan

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I. Summary

1 Brief description of the project and framework conditions

In October 2012 a mid-term review evaluated the EC financed project “Food Security and Livelihood Support of War and Drought Affected Populations in the Red Sea Area” (SDN 1079). The project aims at contributing to the improvement of food production methods and enhancing the livelihoods of the rural population in two localities of Red Sea State (RSS), where approximately 15,000 people are living in 16 selected communities. The project activities are to improve access to clean water and sanitation awareness, introduce environmentally sound practices and improve use of natural resources. The project participates in the implementation of the Red Sea State Development Plan (RSSDP) by advocating for an increase of the overall food security and by contributing to the improvement of the management of scarce natural resources, which constitute a potential risk for conflict. Project duration is from November 2010 until October 2013. The project started with a delay of about eight months, because of several reasons.

Red Sea State is situated in the north-eastern part of the region, bordering Egypt to the north, Eritrea and Kassala State to the south, River Nile State to the west and the Red Sea to the east. The RSS economy depends largely on the traditional agricultural sector that occupies more than 94% of the workforce and feeds the majority of peasant farmers’ families. Most farms are rain-fed and susceptible to droughts. Sorghum and millet are the main subsistence crops. Principally, the arable lands are located in seasonal valleys and river deltas. Natural pasture and grazing land is limited, but available. Rain is the major limiting factor for the production of food, farming and livestock.

The region is marked by very harsh environmental and climatic conditions. Although experiencing low rainfall (in average about 150mm per year), it often falls in extremely heavy downpours, regularly causing severe flooding. Effects of climate change such as decrease of rainfall or shortened rainy seasons are noticeable, but difficult to prove. Erosion and land degradation are visible everywhere.

The predominant ethnic groups in Red Sea State are the Beja and Rashaida tribes, who are living in the rural areas as typical agro-pastoralists. The project intervention area was seriously affected by the border conflict between Sudan and Eritrea in 1998–2005, as well as the civil war between Beja-front and Sudan government, when the majority of the rural population was displaced to the towns of Tokar and Port Sudan. Nowadays the agro-pastoralists become increasingly sedentary because the very harsh environment and the strenuous working conditions, as well as the old traditional survival strategies, are no longer sufficient to ensure food and nutrition security. Their traditional, conservative culture hinders women from any participation in public life, which impedes women’s access to formal or informal education and hinders them from carrying out income generating activities. As a consequence, the family’s food and nutrition security and livelihood are negatively affected.

Most urgent problems include:

- securing sufficient drinking water
- increasing the effective use of the torrential rains and floods
- diminishing erosion
- combating the invasive growth of the Mesquite tree, a fast growing legume which spreads rapidly on cultivated land.

2 Relevance

In principle the relevance of the intervention is high. The region's poverty, particularly among the rural population, is so enormous that almost all interventions appear to be relevant. The interventions correspond exactly with the key competences of Welthungerhilfe (WHH). The project has high relevance for the objectives as set out in WHH statutes and the newly conceived Strategy for Sustainable Food and Nutrition Security (SFNS).

The project results are all aligned to national development strategies. They correspond to regional goals, strategies and priorities appointed in the Eastern Recovery and Development Programme (ERDP). The project is cooperating with government agencies to achieve activity implementation.

The most significant shortcomings in terms of relevance have their basis in the proposal and the logframe. Regrettably the relevance of this intervention is not reflected clearly and straightforwardly in the proposal. A clear focus is missing; fewer but more precisely formulated objectives and results, having a comprehensively formulated implementation strategy with the focus on fewer but effective activities would have been more helpful. Unfortunately it was not planned and explicitly designed as a pilot project.

The problem of the invasive growth of the Mesquite tree (see section 1.3) is mentioned in the proposal, but the complexity and the causal consequences are partially wrong and insufficiently reflected. But the Mesquite tree increasingly threatens agricultural productivity. This is neither sufficiently considered in the proposal and the baseline survey, nor in the derived project measures.

3 Effectiveness

In principle, the project purposes are realistic and the intentions of the project are well chosen, although a strategic approach with respective action plan is missing from the proposal. The needs analysis in the proposal is vague, although the European Commission (EC) recommended that a baseline survey should be used for this analysis. The conducted baseline survey analysed the situation and needs well, but final activities were not clustered properly, in the manner suggested by the EC. Additionally it did not adequately consider the regional potentials as a base of any self-help resources and how they can be promoted in a professional frame of rural development.

Finally the planning document came up with a wide range of activities, which are much too ambitious and not properly focused. This attitude of "doing a little bit of everything" might support a superficial intervention approach.

Fortunately the project management team (PMT) is focusing on the self-help potential of the target communities and is trying to strengthen it as much as possible. Thus, the project insists on the community's contribution in the beginning of activity implementation. This forces the communities to organise themselves and provide their own share to the activity and to develop ownership.

The overall execution is presentable; project outputs, especially construction works, are of good quality and appropriately designed. The implementation of activities is behind schedule, but an estimated average of 45% of all outputs has been achieved so far. The project is still in the initial phase, but is increasingly gaining implementation dynamics. With a No Cost Extension, the project can be accomplished.

The project contributes to an increase in agricultural production, especially of subsistence and staple foods, by various measures. It has constructed a number of diversion dams as well as rehabilitating or constructing a number of shallow wells; vaccinated a large number of animals and trained para-vets; some social infrastructure was built and a developed concept for women's empowerment supported some of the long-overdue socio-cultural changes.

Welthungerhilfe cooperates mainly with the government agency "Humanitarian Aid Commission" (HAC), which considers itself as a supervising body, signing MoU or other technical agreements with the INGOs. HAC is supporting Welthungerhilfe in all terms of implementation, access to target

communities, facilitation of communication, and defending the current activity implementation strategy. The line ministries and institutions, namely the Ministry of Agriculture, the Soil Conservation Department, the Forestry National Cooperation and the Animal Resources Department are also supporting the project.

The opportunities to cooperate with other INGOs in RSS are limited, as there are few INGOs working in the project region, owing to many INGOs being kicked out because real work success was, according to HAC, not visible.

The analysis of assumptions and risks can be regarded as realistic and complete in general. The security situation in Red Sea State is stable and most probably will not hamper further project accomplishment and achievements.

4 Efficiency

The total approved budget was €1,250,000 for 36 month. This equals an average of approximately €10 per family (€2 per person) and month. The calculated share of aid goods of the total budget is 34%. The budget corresponds to development project finance plans, where project monitoring and implementation costs are always higher than the funds for communities and target group support. If one takes the share for aid goods, the net amount is €24.58 per person and project period. This also corresponds to the budget composition of development projects.

Probably the project's efficiency regarding managing the work load could have been better, if the inception rider and the logframe had been better designed. Some project expenditures were overestimated as were the involvement and contribution of the communities in supporting project efficiency.

The internal monitoring and evaluation system focuses on finance administration and achieved outputs and, up to a certain level, on project outcomes, but the latter in a less well-documented and systematic way. Monitoring against the project planning matrix (*planned-achieved*) delivers data on implementation status. Reports focus on the accomplished activities, but rarely on outcomes, impacts or lessons learnt.

The PMT incorporates their own former implementation experiences as well as experiences of other projects and took the mid-term review as a reflecting and learning process.

The PMT works very efficiently, but expenditures for community development activities are behind schedule. Some activities might be better conceptualized and thus increase overall project efficiency.

5 Outcomes and impacts

Impact, as a long-term effect, cannot be seriously reported, because project implementation started only about one year ago. The project tries to monitor its outcomes, but because the respective indicators have not been identified professionally, the monitoring system is still struggling with the way of recording and reporting. Therefore, no secured data are available. During the review, a lot of information was collected through interviews, field visits and observations and assessed to conclude lessons learnt.

Although the project has only effectively been functional since October 2011, some positive and encouraging outcomes have been achieved and point to the way forward.

A significant increase of arable land being used for subsistence staple crops (sorghum and millet) was achieved with the promotion of agricultural and horticultural production. Many families have increased yields and fodder for their animals from harvest residues, which are also attributable to a good rainy season. This slightly reduced the number of famine months. The rural communities demand more support for vegetable production and irrigation possibilities.

Many farmers reported on additional income, but do not want to be precise. Also some women's groups reported on significantly increased income, which is supporting the whole family. Some farmers have become acquainted with more commercial production and commercialisation.

The proposal emphasizes women's empowerment, a point not appreciated by local stakeholders. As well as traditional leaders, HAC were afraid that "women's empowerment" activities meant women might start to turn against their husbands and traditional roles and bring unrest into the communities.

With the project intervention carried out by an exceptionally committed and dedicated female project staff, project stakeholders and rural communities can see for themselves the benefits of having better educated women. Male family heads realised that these activities for "women's development", as it is called now, are contributing to improved family nutrition and household hygiene. Children are better cared for and some additional income for the family is available.

The project had a strong contribution to the millennium development goals (MDGs) I and II through improved agricultural productivity and women's development activities.

6 Sustainability

It is too early to seriously assess project sustainability. Nevertheless, in this mid-term review it was taken into account to what extent the PMT conceptualized a sustainable implementation strategy and how far relevant factors have been considered.

Certainly, under these circumstances, sustainability in food security and rural development projects is not achievable within 36 months, and significantly more time is needed. Experiences show that a minimum of 15 years are necessary to strengthen and consolidate outcomes and impacts. A major challenge for Welthungerhilfe is to develop an effective long-term strategy and to find donors who are willing to finance at least some phases or specific project components.

Another important aspect is that the private sector with its possibilities and limits must be sufficiently assessed and involved, as it can contribute to economic continuity. Here, the project is still at the beginning, but with some meaningful ideas.

Once people become empowered and motivated, they will not easily lose this. Therefore, the socio-cultural changes will most likely continue and evolve. Rural communities already feel that the measures and activities can help them to improve food security and economic revival. This has opened up a new perspective in farming and fishing for some communities.

The learning process that communities have to pass through, initiated by the mobilisation of community participation and contribution, is a slow but effective way to increase ownership, promote self-help initiatives and to strengthen civil society to compensate government weaknesses.

7 Most important recommendations

- It is recommended that the project ask and prepare an extension of six months, in which to successfully complete its implementation. A No Cost Extension is possible. The project budget should be readjusted according to field and outcome requirements, without changing the ratio of aid goods to project management costs. The logframe should be streamlined.
- The project is already pushing the implementation drive, but should continue to increase it. This should be carried out by focusing on a few but effective activities.
- The PMT should intensify the cooperation with the private sector and the rural commerce. Ideas have been discussed.
- Women's capacity development is a key project outcome. The PMT should develop a concept, a strategy and an improved structural framework (financial allocation) regarding women's capacity development, and intensify and diversify the training.

- PMT should reinforce outcome and impact monitoring and introduce a more systematic documentation.
- A successor phase is definitely recommended. The PMT should start in time with the preparation by initiating a strategic planning workshop.
- To the organisation, Welthungerhilfe, it is recommended that proposal writing and impact monitoring should be reorganised and professionalised.

8 General conclusions and “lessons learnt”

At the moment, the situation in Sudan is unpredictable and awaiting outcomes. Nevertheless, during this review and former evaluations in Sudan, many villages have been visited in which it became visible how important the commitment of Welthungerhilfe is for the communities to embark on rehabilitation and development work. In many communities Welthungerhilfe could come up with more innovative and successful approaches.

Project planning and proposal writing should be outsourced to professionals, as other NGOs are doing. A good project preparation, including professionally elaborated project documents, contributes to project relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, is generally regarded as the “trademark” of the organisation and is influencing its reputation.