

Report

**Final Project Evaluation:
“Empowering Women:
Access and ownership over land and land based activities
through education, legal literacy and advocacy
in rural India”,
Madhya Pradesh/ Orissa/ Jharkhand / Rajasthan and Delhi/ India**

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Evaluation on behalf of Welthungerhilfe Bonn/Germany

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I. Summary

1 Brief description of the project and framework conditions

The total budget for the project was EUR 540,000,-. 88% were contributed by EU and 12% of the amount (EUR 64,800,-) has been funded by Welthungerhilfe. The project aimed at gender equality by empowering women. As most important approaches to achieve this, the project worked at increasing women's *access and ownership of property* and education. Women's literacy was followed up with twofold understanding: 1. Adult women's *functional literacy* which was conveyed by two partners at women centres by informal teachers and (2.) *legal literacy*, implemented in Rajasthan and Orissa: Informing tribal women about their legal rights (e.g. rights to common and forest land, to jobs) and their entitlements to government programmes like rations, pensions and to political representation on village level. The self-help activities of women's local groups to practically access their rights has been supported and facilitated in a participatory manner by the four NGO-project partners who targeted 1200 women in 20 villages of Churu and Bikaner districts of Rajasthan and 2100 tribal women in 80 villages of Madhya Pradesh (M.P.), Orissa and Jharkhand. The intervention areas are the most backward districts in these states, many hamlets are not accessible by road throughout the year. Literacy rates among the tribal women are at a low of 15% in Jharkhand and Orissa, around 25% in M.P. and Rajasthan. Malnutrition is a regular feature among the vulnerable tribal households who belong to the ethnic groups of Bhil in Jhabua/M.P., Santhal in East Singhbhum/Jharkhand and Jhodia, Paraja (incl. sub-groups) in Koraput/Kalahandi/Rayagada of Orissa. Many of these families are forced into seasonal migration which regularly interrupts theirs and children's education. Illiterate women are highly dependant on others inside and outside the household and prone to multifacette exploitation by market forces, government officials and, especially in Rajasthan, by a rigid patriarchal society.

2 Relevance

The project was most relevant to the targeted vulnerable tribal and disadvantaged women as it addressed their need to improve access and right to property, especially to land with the extension to common property. The project also addressed women's need to have a space to meet and learn new skills like reading, writing and numeracy, to develop their own monetary funds or to get information about their legal rights. Organised, women could publicly deal with their common problems, like domestic violence, exclusion from local self-governance or access work under employment schemes with due pay. Relevance for the implementing partner organisations was realised by bringing up the issue of tribal communities' rightful common forest land-claims from block-level implementation to state and national level audiences, publish related documentations and tackle irregularities of government programmes. For Welthungerhilfe and EU the project was relevant as it broadened their women's empowerment approach to include more systematic gender equality perspectives.

3 Effectiveness

The total 39 months-project operated on the base of 5 planned LoAs/results with 24 single activity packages. Impacts and outcomes were measured against 30 indicators. Implementations were jointly planned and consolidated during annual partner meetings which allowed intensive sharing of project experiences and good practices. These platforms for joint learning were supplemented by annual theme workshops attended by partners and some important sector stakeholders, also realising various media reports about the project issues.

Field work in the rural districts was facilitated by community workers trained and coordinated by the four partners. Their internal monitoring mechanisms were of varying quality as also indicated by their capacity to report quantitative data according to the 6-monthly and annual log frame-based project format. Welthungerhilfe introduced an effective steering system across partners which largely benefited from established

previous cooperations but was significantly hampered by frequent staff changes on project coordinators' levels. Overall evaluation of the project: Regarding the issues adult literacy and effectively realising women's individual or common land claims, the planning had been too ambitious for the short span of project time. This is especially true for partners for whom these fields were new additions to their portfolio. Project results of women's functional literacy are laudable particularly as far as interventions in Jhabua/Madhya Pradesh are concerned and awareness levels about women's legal rights across partners. The partner in Rajasthan extended implementations considerably. Generally, planned activities could almost all be executed and related achievement indicators (if measurable) nearly be met. Women's functional and legal literacy in combination has been the most valuable new contribution to MDG 3.

4 Efficiency

Provisions for equipment and project personnel were very nominal looking at the whole project which resulted from substantial (staff) contributions from own sources made by two partners, allowing reaching out to many more women than initially planned. This assessment, however, is the reverse concerning the work in Jharkhand. Efficiency of the field monitoring system was also hampered by elaborate or sometimes not well coordinated project visits from project stakeholders' headquarters (2 partners). The national advocacy plan could not be implemented efficiently as partners did not support the initiative as planned and the lead partner had limited own issue-based expertise.

5 Outcomes and impacts

The project measurably improved women's access to property in the form of individual and community land, housing, ration/job cards, livestock and savings in individual bank accounts. In all project areas women demanded more work under governments' work guarantee scheme NREGA, significantly more work was actually allotted and fair work conditions and payments are on the rise because women know their rights. Also other government programmes crucial for women's livelihood were successfully targeted by women groups in all intervention areas to operate more properly (ICDS-Anganwadi, mid-day school meals and total girl child's school attendance). Legal literacy and organisational capacity development also motivated most targeted women to attend village self-governance meetings, some actively participated and few got encouraged to stand for elections thus increasing women's representation in Panchayati-Raj institutions in the most backward villages and blocks in the country. Functional literacy directly improved the women learners's status in the family and community and prevented her exploitation in the markets and at (NREGA-) work. Developed new skills and built up confidence levels also empowered participating women to actively tackle some of their common problems, like domestic violence, liquor abuse by men and delayed government provisions. The projects advocacy concerning women's right to education and legal land property was most positively perceived on district and state levels where some government stakeholders later actively followed up the cases presented during workshops/hearings. An important impact among most direct project participants and stakeholders is their generally sharpened understanding of women's empowerment with an inherent gender equality perspective.

6 Sustainability

Most partners organised targeted women in SHGs with a sustainable economic approach (membership fees and integral thrift and credit). With these internal financial means at hands, women in Jhabua/M.P. mobilised their own meeting spaces. As the main project activity, functional basic literacy is felt demand-responsive, there is high potential that women groups will continue it by themselves which may also happen in selected places in Jharkhand. This sustainability approach may however be at the cost of excluding women from the poorest households. Women's access to new property is sustainable as in all cases legal ownership is documented (e.g. land deeds, housing certificate, bank accounts) in the women's name. In Rajasthan and Orissa, partners were successful in mobilizing the men and male youth to understand and support their women's struggle. Especially in Rajasthan, the partner's thorough gender equality

approach prevented conflicts within families and allowed women's sustainable participation in local PRIs, an indicator for women's empowerment within a most patriarchal social environment. Partners federated women groups as (registered) CBOs on district level and thereby developing new female leadership.

7 Most important recommendations

1. Turn malnutrition into a cross-cutting development issue

Addressing malnutrition is the core mandate of Welthungerhilfe and should be observed as a cross-cutting issue in all projects irrespective of the individual project focus.

2. Addressing women's access to (common) land

Develop a strategy of how women groups can translate their legal awareness into constructive action on local level and what could be taken up by women-CBOs.

3. Promoting local Women Resource Centres (WRC)

WRCs should only be promoted if women group members do mobilize these spaces by and for themselves. NGO-partners should guide the WRCs in how to observe all-inclusiveness and how to avoid internal authoritarian power structures. WRCs may also be formally registered so that they are entitled for independent government support.

4. Develop a partnership strategy

Welthungerhilfe should strategize their mid- and long term partnerships and designate roles according to partners actual strengths in case projects are in a consortium mode. These partnerships should foster peer learning and allow regular peer reviews.

5. Gender training

To improve the basic understanding of gender equality and make staff to refrain from imposing own social norms on target groups, gender trainings should be offered to concerned partners' and Welthungerhilfe-programme staff.

6. Quantify benefits for improved impact assessment

Property and assets mobilised for and by the target groups (like land, livestock, pensions, houses, work days) should be systematically valorised in monetary terms.

7. IEC-development and publications' clearing by regional office

IEC, TLM and posters, videos etc. material published by partners in project context and with official (EU-) logos, need to have prior approval by Welthungerhilfe Regional Office.

8 General conclusions and lessons learnt

➤ Peer learning

An effective method to strengthen self-help capabilities of women groups and also reduce the work load of NGO-field staff is *systematic peer learning*: If one women group faces a challenge which another group tackled already, the facilitating NGO will link them up with each other for mutual exchange and support.

➤ Intra-village networks of women groups

At village level, government, NGOs etc. form a number of different women groups, together reaching to large portions of village women. It is a good practice to regularly organise joint meetings of all these groups on village level and facilitate their discussions of common problems and how these can be jointly followed up. These platforms strengthen women's cohesiveness and influence in local politics/Gram Sabha.

➤ Annual Participatory Review and Planning (APRP)

Reviewing project activities regularly and jointly together with all concerned stakeholders directly at the village level, is a good practice for mutual learning and to improve accountability on commitments made from either side. If consistently implemented, these social audits can be use by Welthungerhilfe for impact monitoring.