

**Food Security and Disaster Risk Reduction for
Marginalized People in Rural Areas of Eastern Nepal
(NPL 1013 – P3995)**

**Implemented by Rural Reconstruction Nepal
Evaluation on behalf of Welthungerhilfe, Bonn, Germany**

Funded by

**Welthungerhilfe and Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of the
Federal Republic of Germany**

Evaluation team

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March 2015

Acknowledgements

The evaluation team would like to acknowledge and thank wholeheartedly for the support provided by RRN staff – from the head office as well as from the project district offices. In particular we appreciate the open, constructive and inspiring discussions with the staff of the field offices, their readiness to even work on weekends as well as the perfect organisation in a difficult terrain. Our sincerest thanks go to the project coordinator and the project engineer for introducing us to the project background and accompanying us in the field.

Likewise, we thank Welthungerhilfe staff for discussions and effort in making us understand the project context and the work of Welthungerhilfe in Nepal providing information and filling information gaps.

And last but not least we deeply appreciate the readiness of the people in the three Project districts, to share with us their experiences, answering patiently our questions, and assessing the project outcomes and impacts. Thanks a lot!

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

BCTS	Brahmin, Chetri, Thakuri and Sanyasi
CA	Constituent Assembly
CLC	community learning centres
DADO	District Agriculture Development Office
DDC	District Development Committee
DDRC	District Disaster Relief Committee
DFO	District Forest Office
DLSO	District Livestock Office
FECOFUN	Federation of Forest User Groups of Nepal
FFS	farmers' field schools
FG	Farmers' Group
FSDRR	Food Security and Disaster Risk Reduction for Marginalised People in Rural areas of Eastern Nepal
GoN	Government of Nepal
HH	Household
LDO	Local Development Officer (District Level)
LDRMC	Local Disaster Risk Management Committees
LDRMP	Local Disaster Risk Management Plan
LG	Local government
LRRD	Linking Relief and Rehabilitation to Development
masl	Meters above sea level
NPR	Nepalese Rupee
RDAJ	Relatively disadvantaged Janajati
RAJ	Relatively advantaged Janajati
ISO	District Irrigation Office
RRN	Rural Reconstruction Movement of Nepal
SHG	Self-help group
SHO	Self-help organisation
SSMP	Sustainable Soil Management Project
VDC	Village Development Committee (lowest level of local Government)
WASH	Water, Hygiene and Sanitation

Currency conversion rates used: NPR 100 = EUR 0.85 (as of Dec. 2014)

Description of the Project and framework conditions

The project titled “Food Security and Disaster Risk Reduction for Marginalised People in Rural areas of Eastern Nepal” – FSDRR or “the Project” – has the following project purpose:

“...to empower 5,300 food insecure rural households in three districts to bring about a long-term improvement in their food situation through the sustainable use of the available resources, and to enable selected communities to be better prepared for extreme weather events (disaster preparedness)¹”

The Project was implemented in two Village Development Committees (VDC) of each of three spatially distant districts – Morang, Ramechhap and Sankhuwasabha – in Eastern Nepal. Implementation was carried out from September 2011 to December 2014 by the non-governmental organisation Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN).

The Project aimed to achieve the following complementary results:

- (1) Participatory development processes are initiated through strengthening of self-help structures
- (2) Food availability and nutritional health is improved
- (3) New sources of income are created and marketing structures are developed.
- (4) In three communities disaster resilience and management is improved

Intervention logic

By enabling the people to effectively cooperate through self-help groups (SHG) and providing them with necessary investments and knowledge/skills they will gain capacities to increase their self-reliance (economic, social, and political). By facilitating participation in local governance through local fora and planning, rural people will be able to gain influence on local political level. Mobilisation and activation of the people is expected to continue after the Project and to be maintained through a community development process based on the activities and services of local organisations (farmers groups, cooperatives). These will be able to access outside resources from governmental and non-governmental sources (services, knowledge, finances, and materials) which will lead to continued improvement of livelihood in the villages.

The aims of the Project are very ambitious and the multiple intervention areas very demanding, in particular concerning the aspect of institution building.

Since the ten years civil war ended in 2006, Nepali politics are overshadowed by partisan interests of a large number of political parties. After 6 years the constitution writing process is still dragging along. Up to now no local elections were held and the local level is governed by centrally appointed officials.

The project VDCs in Ramechhap and Sankhuwasabha districts are located in the mid-hills and those in Morang are located in lowland VDCs of the Terai. Whereas Sankhuwasabha showed an alarming level of hunger in 2008, Morang and Ramechhap districts on the whole were classified as moderately food insecure. In depth nutritional studies of two of the three project VDCs, however, showed severe levels of chronic malnutrition. In Jante VDC Morang district 44% and in Gelu VDC, Ramechhap district even 77% of children under 5 were stunted.

¹ Agreement of allocation, project number NPL 1013-11/AS 1534-11, p. 2.

The target groups comprised 5300 households of small farmers in altogether 6 VDCs of the three project districts. The main problems related to agricultural production is a low proportion of year-round irrigated land, and low productivity rooted in several reasons, e.g. bad quality of seeds, non-optimal soil fertility management and cultivation practices. Furthermore, lack of rural farm-to-market roads and usually bad conditions of existing roads.

The evaluation's aim was to determine project performance according to the DAC criteria, particularly focusing on outcomes and impact. The evaluation took place at the end of the Project. The evaluation was implemented between November, 2014 and January, 2015 by a team composed of a national and an international evaluator.

Relevance

The project addressed the crucial problem of the target groups' insufficient food production to fulfil the basic food needs of the population. Project strategy and activities are aligned with Government policies and priorities regarding agriculture (e.g. agricultural training of youth, cooperatives, and farmers' groups – FG) and local government (e.g. participation in local planning).

Within the South-Asia regional programme of Welthungerhilfe it falls within its strategic programme "sustainable food and nutrition security".

Effectiveness

The targets were defined through four indicators at project purpose level.

With regard to result 1, 105 self-help and user groups were established (target: 105). These groups have developed specific action plans and some are implementing micro-projects in their communities.

With regard to result 2, 1735 families have increased their food sufficiency by 2 months or more (target 2500 families) which is 70% of the target. This figure might still increase since some irrigation works had not been completed at the time of data collection. Furthermore, people's, in particular women's awareness and knowledge about healthy nutrition has increased due to measures by the Project.

With regard to result 3, 1583 households have increased their cash income by an average of NPR 20000 (approximately EUR 200). This is more than the target value of 1500 households and a targeted increase of NPR 5000)

With regard to result 4, three disaster risk management plans were prepared as planned in 3 VDCs and disaster mitigation structures were built.

In numerical terms the targets have been achieved or reached to a substantial degree. Aside from this the Project has aimed to empower the communities beyond the SHG by facilitating participatory mid-term communal planning. Due to political circumstances and the restructuring of local government units this activity was not implemented.

Project implementation and management

RRN is a large NGO with long years of experience in implementing rural development projects all over the country. In the three districts the Project was carried out by three

teams, basically composed of 6 staff. The Project was coordinated and supervised from RRN's head office in Kathmandu. It was also closely accompanied by Welthungerhilfe's country and regional office. The set-up of the Project in three distant districts was associated with a lot of travelling and made coordination of the Project difficult.

The project was implemented with the participation of the target groups which were organised into SHG. Identification, implementation and monitoring of the projects on community level took place together with the target groups. The Project had close and good working relationships with Government on VDC and district levels.

Project activities as regards infrastructure development and agricultural trainings were professionally and effectively implemented by the Project. Concerning institution building RRN's substantial experience in social mobilisation has been used effectively. However, a comprehensive and differentiated concept for SHG and cooperatives is lacking. There is no system of performance assessment of self-help organisations. Findings also indicate that poorer communities in remoter areas with fewer resources, particularly water, have been addressed at a lesser degree and have been less benefitting from the Project.

The project concept with complementary result areas has proved to be effective. The overall effectiveness of the programme is good when assessed with reference to the time frame of three years but less so when assessed with regard to the set targets. A weakness can be seen in the institutional development of FG and cooperatives. The aim of developing cooperative based marketing has not been achieved. It has to be feared that cooperatives are not yet in the position to function effectively on a sustainable basis and thus don't serve as the development motor on a longer term basis.

Efficiency

Cost efficiency was realised by procurement rules of Welthungerhilfe and BMZ and close monitoring by Welthungerhilfe. The contributions of the beneficiaries to infrastructure development accounted for 33% on average. This increases efficiency if viewed from the perspective of the Project.

The major issue related to programme efficiency is the project set-up of implementing the Project in three relatively far apart districts. This necessitates three teams, each with a coordinator, and an additional overall programme coordinator. It also implies a major demand on time and monetary expenses for programme coordination and monitoring from Kathmandu. The same resources, in particular regarding personnel, could have been used more effectively and efficiently if the Project would have been implemented in neighbouring VDCs in one district.

The district teams have not been sufficiently equipped, in particular with regard to transport facilities and therefore spent long hours of walking, thus reducing time for effective project work.

Outcomes and impact

The use of outputs, in particular trainings was good among the members of the SHO. Training contents was applied to a great part by trainees and sometimes even beyond the beneficiaries trained. Facilitated through the rehabilitation and construction of

irrigation systems both subsistence production and market production have increased. Supportive to this result was the provision of good quality improved seeds produced by 250 small seed producers leading to yield increases between 20% to 50%. A great part of the beneficiaries cultivated different kinds of off-season vegetables for market sales and home consumption and other new crops with comparatively high market values. Project beneficiaries diversified their production by cultivating on average 3 new crops. The successful adoption of the new techniques can be attributed to (i) the needs-based training and (ii) the very practice- oriented training approach following the farmer field school system.

Instrumental for achieving these outcomes were the SHO. The SHG and the capacity building offered to their members through accompaniment by social mobilisers and through training have provided a number of benefits to their members. The most prominent are, (i) gained skills and knowledge, (ii) developing a saving habit, (iii) know how to plan and implement projects, (iv) women increased their self-dependency because they earn their own income, (v) know how to speak in public. All cooperatives organised by the Project are still in their initial stages of development. Mostly they act as saving and credit cooperatives.

The Community Learning Centres (CLC) built in each of the six project VDCs are mainly used as cooperative office. Their function as a multipurpose community learning centre was still in an elementary stage.

Especially women have taken the chance to cultivate off-season vegetables and were able to start earning their own income. This income helped to bridge food scarce months.

The impact on household level showed in improved well-being by increased food security and higher incomes. This enabled many households to pay for their daughters' and sons' secondary education. Still, this impact was limited because in many places secondary education was not easily accessible. Discussions indicated furthermore, that the gainful self-employment opportunities generated through project interventions even prevented some men from labour migration.

Another widely mentioned impact was the change of nutrition habits with the result of healthier families with stronger members. Especially the consumption of vegetables has increased. This effect seemed to be more profound in VDCs with particularly high malnutrition and where another RRN-Welthungerhilfe Health and Nutrition Project had been implemented in addition.

Women felt strengthened in their families and communities and attributed this to their own incomes and increased self-confidence.

In most groups impacts beyond household level, such as community spirit, increased political participation and influence were only mentioned upon specific inquiry, although people stated that cooperation in the communities had improved.

The project promoted environmentally safe and sustainable production methods. The farmers became more knowledgeable about soil fertility management and potentially harmful effects of synthetic pesticides and mineral fertilisers. Fertiliser use is minimised and disease control is mainly managed through self-prepared organic repellents. At the end of the project no major detrimental effects on the environment were observed.

Sustainability

The impacts achieved on household level are likely to continue. Young people trained as rural workers are supporting vegetable production as resource persons. However, these are not systematically linked to government's agricultural institutions and have limited access to knowledge systems to enhance their skills and to tackle future challenges autonomously.

A precondition for the sustainability of infrastructure improvements are the infrastructure management committees (for roads, CLCs and irrigation). The prospects for irrigation maintenance are comparatively good because maintenance fees paid by members will be accumulated over time. Furthermore, irrigation user groups are registered with government which may provide support in cases of substantial repair needs. Regarding the CLC, most management committees hope that these will be transferred to the cooperatives which will then manage the buildings. Road maintenance committees support the VDCs in their task of road maintenance, in particular by organising labour. However, the VDCs' funds are usually far below the actual requirements, thereby reducing prospects of good road maintenance considerably.

Rural institutions like SHG and coops have not yet reached a level to continue independently. It is also doubtful that they can access appropriate outside support for their further development, e.g. from the divisional cooperative office or agricultural offices.

The key to sustainability of Project interventions beyond the household level is the alignment with Government policies and institutions. This is the case with the Project's basic approach. However, the Project did not systematically align the supported SHO to this support system, nor are there federations of SHG. The capacities of these systems were also not assessed. Sustainability and phasing out strategies have not been elaborated. RRN itself has no post-project support system for former beneficiary communities. It should, however, be mentioned that three years are too short a time to strengthen SHG and complex cooperatives to a level of autonomy.

Most important recommendations

- (1) The integrated approach which addressed key livelihood factors has worked out well and has led to the desired results regarding increase in food security and generation of additional incomes. The alignment with Government policies as an element of sustainability must be specifically mentioned. Alignment should be followed up in practice, e.g. by more binding agreements with government regarding the linking of its agricultural young trainees and seed producers.
- (2) If formation of SHO is a distinct component of a project, the conceptual approach and a sustainability strategy should already be elaborated in the proposal. Since a 3-year time frame is too short to develop sustainable SHO and systems, a longer term funding strategy should be envisaged from the beginning, in particular by Welthungerhilfe. In view of sustainability a phasing out strategy should be developed in the last year of project implementation.
- (5) RRN should refine its approach to rural community institutions in order to provide systematic capacity building to the same. Frameworks for assessing the performance of SHO (e.g. "level-of-maturity assessment") should be a part of this concept.

- (6) RRN as an organisation should think of developing a post-project resource and support system with and for the SHO it has started.
- (7) Aside from monitoring outputs and project purpose indicators, monitoring should also include process monitoring to strengthen project management and project steering.
- (8) Findings indicate synergies between a health and nutrition focused project and FSDDR, which led to higher impact regarding the reduction of malnutrition. These should be studied in more depth and - depending on the results – should be considered in the strategies of future food security projects by Welthungerhilfe and RRN.

General conclusions and “lessons learnt”

The comprehensive approach with complementary result areas has worked out well and reached good impact regarding food security and income generation. With regard to complex tasks to be taken over by self-help organisations, like for example marketing by cooperatives, a three years' time frame is not sufficient.

The implementation of a project with only one team in adjacent areas instead of working in three geographically separated districts can be expected to be more effective and efficient. Project coordination should be localised.

Already in project planning, sustainability issues should be addressed and a sustainability strategy be developed. A phasing out strategy in the last year of implementation could help to increase sustainability.