

Evaluation Report RWA 1037

**Project title: Consolidation of Marshland Development in Huye, Ruhango and
Muhanga Districts, South Province, Rwanda (Consolidation phase ESIRU)**

Project No: RWA 1037 – P4214

Project period: 01.01.2013 – 31.12.2014

on behalf of Welthungerhilfe

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December 2014

Summary

1 Brief description of the project and framework conditions

The ESIRU (Establishing a System of Integrated Resource Utilisation) project area is located in the districts of Huye, Ruhango and Muhanga in the South Province of the Republic of Rwanda. These districts figure among the lesser-developed districts of the country. The project started in 2004 with its focus on poverty reduction and agricultural development, to be achieved by promoting marshland development, value chains and food security. The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kigali is the project's main funding source.

The current evaluation takes place during the ESIRU consolidation phase that lasted from January 2013 to December 2014. The objective being to consolidate the achievements made over the last ten years. Among the project's accomplishments evaluated is the support given to farmers, the farmers' organisations and Local Government Authorities (LGA). To which extent this collaboration has been successful, is examined through the implementation, operation and maintenance of the irrigation schemes. The degree, to which the cooperation secured, can be further illustrated, by the measures foreseen for the handover at the end of the project.

Over the last decade, the Republic of Rwanda has achieved substantial progress in economic and social development. However, especially in rural areas the living conditions are still characterised by a wide spread poverty and considerable challenges problems with regard to cover basic needs.

In the project area, agriculture is by far the most important economic sector. It's of great importance for the well being of a large majority of the population. The local framework conditions are characterised by high population densities and wide spread poverty. This is compounded by the domination of resource-poor smallholdings, low agricultural productivity, and critical levels with regard to the exploitation of limited natural resources.

The most important target group of the project are farmers. They are organised in cooperatives, water user organisations and associations. It is important to stress that the beneficiaries of the marshland development activities were selected on the basis of a poverty ranking. Thus assuring, that only persons figuring among the poorest section of the population became the beneficiaries and future users of the newly created irrigated field land. Representatives of LGA and LGA agents were supposed to play an important role for the achievement of the project objectives. Therefore, they are considered to be a further important target group of the project.

2 Relevance

In the light of the various core problems of the farmers and farmers' organisations such as insufficiently developed agricultural production systems and insufficient levels of organisational capacities. The poverty resulting from these challenges requires a more sustainable management of natural resources. The project's specific activities are well suited to adjust cropping systems, as they respond to priorities and basic needs of farmers and farmers' organisations. Moreover, advancing the organisational capacities of the farming population can contribute to the well-justified goals of improving the overall living conditions and economic situation.

The project has supported both the farmers' organisations and LGA by specifically boosting technical and organisational skills, directed at improving their performance by increasing

yields and overcoming existing weaknesses such as poor use of the land terraces. It has similarly contributed to community-driven enterprise such as livestock, which further facilitates diversification. The project has reinforced ties between farmers' organisations and LGA as well as other relevant actors. This is particularly relevant when it comes to maintaining these collaborations to cope with problems that might crop up in the future. Especially if one considers that once the project is closed, it is envisaged that LGA and other actors will help the farmers' organisations.

Generally, it is reckoned that the targeted project objectives correspond with the core objectives of Welthungerhilfe. While, the conclusions of the project's evaluation could be of considerable use for similar existing Welthungerhilfe projects. Moreover, the findings could provide a model for future ones, focusing on for instance, reinforcing the know-how of farmers' organisations or benefit from the expertise gained once projects are handed-over to national partners. It could similarly provide a useful template for decentralised government.

Overall, the project has made important contributions to the achievement of some of the major development programs of the Government of Rwanda. It has provided examples of how to help to reduce poverty in rural areas. This has been realised by modernising cropping systems, improving food security, improving the management of natural resources, reinforcing farmers' organisations and intensifying community-driven development initiatives.

3 Effectiveness

It should be noted that the planning and implementation of the project activities were well conceived and organised. These factors have predominantly contributed to the global achievement of the project's objectives. The achieved quantitative and qualitative results are very effective, and with a few exceptions, most of the planned activities have been implemented. The successes identified can be partly ascribed to the participatory approach involving the farmers' organisations and LGA in the implementation of the project. Its application has substantially contributed to beneficial results demonstrated. It can therefore be concluded that the project has substantially contributed to sustaining the achievements of the ESIRU marshland development activities.

4 Efficiency

The project is well managed, and shows the needed flexibility in the implementation of its work plans. Along with a well-functioning internal M&E system, the project has practices a good project cycle management.

The systematic documentation of the executed activities, has allowed to consistently record achievements and experience gained by farmers' organisations and LGA; which will be of value to them later. This well documented analysis gained, constitutes an important wealth of experience/information and a body of knowledge that could also be very useful for institutions of the Government of Rwanda and international development projects.

Concerning the cost-benefit ratio of the overall project, it was found that the costs of the executed activities were well proportionate to the achieved benefits. The analysis of selected measures led to the conclusion that the cost-performance ratio for these measures was suitable to very advantageous.

5 Outcomes and impacts

One of the major successes of the project is that it has significantly contributed to the improvement of the agricultural production, by increasing the technical and organisational capacities of farmers' organisations and LGA. The cited achievements are the direct result of the successful thoughtful application of a strategy and package of measures aimed at consolidating the irrigation infrastructure. Consequently, this has increased revenues and generated a better socio-economic and socio-cultural situation. The stability afforded by these advancements, leads to food security and improved nutrition. The impact of this economic progress will not only have a positive outcome on the socio-organisational conditions and future perspectives of the farmer's cooperatives but also in the ecological field.

In spite of the fact, that the achieved rice yields, have not yet achieved the planned level, they are still considered to be satisfying to good. The reasons for this have been analysed, and solutions have already been undertaken and tested. Nevertheless, some farmers have been able to use a part of the revenues from rice farming and invest them for example in livestock. Indirectly this has boosted the agricultural production of hillside cultivation systems like radical terraces and increased yields. The ramification of increased revenues from rice cultivation has played a major role in subsidising the diversification of livelihood systems and employment patterns in the local economy.

The fundamental knowledge gathered from the experience gained will be highly useful for LGA and development agencies aiming to promote similar activities as well as for farmers or even private investors. This is particularly true with regard to the valorisation of radical terraces and the introduction of high value crops. This can be exemplified by the project activities aiming to promote the introduction high value crops that showed mixed results. The promotion of pineapple cultivation was a success, whereas serious problems affected the introduction of commercial geranium cultivation. For the time being, these problems are not yet solved and even threaten the future of commercial geranium cultivation in the project area.

Serious ecological problems have occurred, as a result of changing the course of the Mwogo River during the previous project phase. These problems have been underestimated by the project. With regard to these problems, it is important to stress that they were treated by the project in an open and constructive manner. The problems have been well analysed. Appropriate measures to tackle the problems have been identified and partially been implemented. However, in order to protect efficiently the irrigation schemes from riverbank erosion, the implementation of a package of measures is necessary and poses a significant challenge that must be mastered after the end of the project.

It is important to note that the positive impacts generated through the implementation of the project go well beyond agricultural development and capacity. They also concern the access to health services, education, gender equality and prevention HIV / AIDS.

6 Sustainability

All relevant aspects of sustainability have been taken into account when elaborating the project-planning document and during the implementation of the project. This has helped to achieve sustaining to good levels of economic, financial, socio-cultural and institutional / organisational sustainability.

It can be presumed that empowering farmers' organisations and LGA with the required technical and organisational skills is fundamental to ensuring the successful hand over enabling LGA and farmers' organisations to fulfil, their future roles in maintaining and managing the irrigation schemes. This can be illustrated by the following examples.

With regard to socio-cultural and institutional sustainability, it is important to point out to the high degree of mobilisation that cooperatives and WUO have achieved. This success seems mainly related to organisational improvements, nevertheless it is indicative of the extent to which the leaders of these farmers' organisations enjoy a high socio-cultural reputation among the organisations' members. The successful application of the project's participatory approach has generated, within the farmers' organisations, enduring technical advisory competencies. Potentially, this has set up a framework where the individual farmer could continue receiving technical advice well beyond duration of the project.

When it comes to sustainability of rice farming, some uncertainties exist. In general, the predicted further increase for rice in Rwanda offers good future perspectives for the rice cooperatives. However, the future evolution of the rice price policy of the Government of Rwanda is especially difficult to predict. Potentially, another relevant element of uncertainty is the future development of fertiliser prices. In the most unfavourable case, the combined effect of both these factors could seriously affect individual farmers' revenues from rice cultivation as well as influence the economic situation of their cooperatives.

Given the fact that the cooperatives, have reached different levels of performance, some will still need more training and coaching beyond the end of the project. This also applies to the WUO. In this context, the bolstered relations between farmers' organisations and LGA agents are crucial, as these agents will have to play an important role of advisors.

The successful introduction of water fees has created a solid financial foundation for the WUO. However, their financial capacity to finance major repair works in the case of large-scale flood disasters is still rather limited. For the reparation of these possible damages, the WUO would partially, rely on the financial support of the LGA. This aspect should be taken into account when the LGA elaborate their annual budgets.

The project has successfully introduced activities favouring the environmental sustainability of marshland and hillside agriculture (for example: planting of agroforestry trees and compost production).

Finding an appropriate solution for the above-mentioned ecological problems in the Mwogo valley is of outstanding importance for ensuring, the long term ecological sustainability of irrigation schemes in the Mwogo valley.

7 Most important recommendations

The most important recommendations made, involve the followings issues:

- The further strengthening of the technical and organisational capabilities of farmers' organisations.
- The promotion of the agricultural diversification in rice farming schemes.
- Assistance in solving the conflict between the geranium cultivators cooperative and the geranium-processing company.

8 General conclusions and “lessons learnt”

From the example of the evaluated project, the main recommendation to be followed by future similar projects would be it's participatory approach. Concretely, the involvement of farmers' organisations and LGA in the planning and implementation of the project. This commitment, and the improvement of the technical and organisational skills of farmers' organisations and LGA, has created a favourable starting position for the handover of the irrigation schemes. Clearly this includes the future management and maintenance by farmers' organisations and LGA. Another asset, to be considered by comparable projects, consists in endorsing the practice of an integrated strategy for the economic, organisational and ecological conditions in the project area.

The training and material support provided by the project for farmers and farmers' organisations have created a number of best practice standards to be replicated. For example, the very good maintenance of irrigation channels and drains and the exemplary integration of agroforestry trees in terrace cultivation. All of which will have-practical applications for farmers' organisations, LGA and government institutions

Despite the impressive progress made, farmers' organisations and LGA face important challenges. The challenges concern, for example, the planned further increase of rice yields and the mobilisation of the needed financial resources for the maintenance of the irrigation and road infrastructure or possible major repair works. However, it can be assumed that the above-mentioned challenges will be overcome to a large extent by the established collaboration between farmers' organisations and LGA.