

PRESSD-SL



Promoting Renewable Energy
Services for Social Development



June

2015

Sierra Leone

Welthungerhilfe and
consortium partners IBIS, COOPI,
Energy for Opportunity

Real Time Evaluation Report

Project No.: SLE 1024 –
EuropeAid/133481/C/ACT/Multi

on behalf of Welthungerhilfe, Bonn

Hendrik Hempel
hendrik@hempel-souza.de

Acknowledgement and disclaimer

I would like to thank all people contacted during the real time evaluation for their support:

The staff of Welthungerhilfe in Freetown for organising the meetings, field trips and interviews so well, for their willingness to discuss and openly share information and to take the real time evaluation as a learning event; the officials of district councils and implementing partners, who were available for information sharing and discussions, answered questions candidly and were equally forthcoming when analysing lessons learnt.

I would like to express my special gratitude to the project team, who tirelessly facilitated communication and discussions, as well as field trips and security issues.

The results of the evaluation and the report are the sole responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of Welthungerhilfe. Of any factual errors or of ill-judged conclusions, which undoubtedly exist in assessing such complex and innovative projects, the consultant apologises in advance and welcomes corrections.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

A4D	Agriculture for Development
CO	Welthungerhilfe Country Office
COOPI	Cooperazione Internazionale
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DeGEval	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation (German Association for Evaluation)
ENFO	Energy for Opportunity
€	Euro
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
GOSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HQ	Welthungerhilfe Headquarters
IBIS	Danish international capacity building NGO
ICSU	International Council for Science
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRAG	Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions
PRESSD	Promoting Renewable Energy Services for Social Development Project in Sierra Leone
PRSP III	Third Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RTE	Real time evaluation
SL	Sierra Leone
SE4All	Sustainable Energy for All
TOR	Terms of Reference
WHH	Welthungerhilfe

Project background

After a decade of civil war, which caused tens of thousands of deaths, since 2000 the country has engaged in its reconstruction and is coming to terms with its recent history. The country is deeply indebted and struggling with extreme poverty. The human development index lists Sierra Leone among the least developed countries. In 2014, the Ebola fever epidemic was a major setback for the country as well as the region and aggravated the humanitarian crisis. The Ebola epidemic keeps the world in suspense. The World Health Organisation (WHO) registered more than 27,000 Ebola cases. In the three most affected countries Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, the epidemic has by now claimed more than 11,000 lives.

The general situation in the country was calm and stable. Apparently, even the Ebola situation is calming down. No severe incidences happened during the assessment and evaluation process.

Project description and preparation

The 'Promoting Renewable Energy Services for Social Development Project in Sierra Leone (PRESSD-SL)' intends to contribute to the alleviation of poverty in Sierra Leone by promoting renewable energy services for improved economic livelihoods, while promoting low-carbon development.

The project duration is 48 months with a total budget of €7,000,000. The EC as the major financing partner is contributing €5,250,000, supplemented by WHH with €850,000 and by the other consortium partners with €900,000.

The specific project objective is to 'Improve and increase access to renewable, affordable and sustainable energy services for rural poor in Sierra Leone focusing on productive use and scale-up effects'.

The results chain is based on three specific results – R1: Improved living conditions and increased economic revenues for rural poor due to access to electric energy; R2: The quality of public services is enhanced by electrification of public infrastructure; and R3: Awareness and capacity in respect to renewable energy systems (...) in the private and governmental sectors exist and is sufficient to sustain/ scale up the renewable energy sector in Sierra Leone – which are interlinked and represent a logical, convincing and simple concept.

The direct target group are 45,000 smallholder households and rural families, as well as farmer associations, private sector entrepreneurs and public sector units.

The improved energy supply in hospitals, health stations and schools will improve health and education services and indirectly benefit approximately 850,000 people.

The project is implemented by four partners: ENFO (Energy for Opportunity), IBIS (a Danish capacity building INGO), COOPI (an Italian INGO) and Welthungerhilfe (WHH, a German INGO). WHH is responsible to the EU and Sierra Leone Ministry of Energy for the overall successful implementation of the project.

According to the terms of reference (TOR), Welthungerhilfe's key objectives in conducting this (early interim) real time evaluation (RTE) are the assessment of the actual management set-up and its functionality versus project objectives and the provision of recommendations to allow for timely adjustments.

The purpose of the evaluation and coaching mission is to enable the project management team to reflect on the tasks at hand and receive support through an outsider's perspective, observation and

systematic assessment of the ongoing operation. It is further expected to facilitate institutional learning to continuously improve programme quality.

In Sierra Leone, the overall electricity access is very limited with an estimated 7–10% of households having access to electricity. And this is just supplying the people in Freetown, Makeni, Bo and Kenema. In the rural areas there is no grid supply and households must rely on private energy suppliers for their electricity supply. Private energy supply is mostly based on fuel generators, which are expensive, create environmental and health problems, and are annoyingly loud.

All partners have a common understanding of how sustainable energy interventions could enhance the long-term effects of previous project interventions. ENFO, WHH and COOPI developed the project with the intention of directly supporting the outputs of their agriculture development projects. All consortium partners complement each other's expertise in development activities with a joint focus on community empowerment and poverty alleviation. Therefore, the project objectives, as well as the project design, are well aligned to the general objectives of the consortium partners.

ENFO gained a lot of experiences with RE products, suppliers and technology appropriate for regional conditions. ENFO is the partner who provides most of the technical expertise for the project and also has a lot of knowledge with respect to general feasibility of interventions in the Sierra Leone context.

Until now, the government, donors, INGOs and the private sector have little experience on the topic of rural RE supply. They have not yet fully designed and developed sustainable implementation approaches.

In general, it can be stated that the project planning and preparation was detailed, very comprehensive and well prepared. The target group and situation analysis is based on several field experiences and seems plausible and realistic.

The project planning document is not precise enough regarding sustainability; this is a key concern of all consortium partners. The approaches and concepts on sustainability, which are frequently mentioned in the proposal, could have been summarised, explained and visualised in a better way in the section on sustainability.¹ In particular, the key role that ENFO has within the concept of sustainability is not sufficiently and transparently explained.

In principle, staff, equipment and logistics were realistically planned and budgeted for. Some changes were made in the starting phase, which might require some budget adjustments and amendments. This can be taken care of in the next project annual report.

Project execution and challenges

The staff recruitment took longer than expected and was definitely hampered by the Ebola outbreak. Owing to Ebola, some consortium partners decided to withdraw their international staff for a certain period, and some staff were replaced by new people. Currently, the implementation team, consisting of all involved partners, the project infrastructure and equipment seems to be set up, organised, stable and functional.

The project implementation is delayed. While this can partly be explained by the Ebola occurrence, there are also other reasons that led to the delays: for example, wrong prioritisation of project preparation and management activities, a less foresighted and organised management, WHH

¹ See section 2.1.4

bureaucracy regarding procurement, and government bureaucracy regarding the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

It is not obvious that there is an operational plan guiding the interventions of all implementing partners. The procurement plan was not executed as planned, because misunderstandings, mistrust and other difficulties contributed to some procurement that did not meet the requirements in-country. This lack of planning and planning execution caused implementation delays. Internally, the shortcomings in planning contribute to considerable work stress and bring staff to their physical and mental limits.

The country team of COOPI changed completely. The new team had to familiarise itself with the situation, which proved difficult, because an orderly office handover did not take place. New staff recruitment and office reorganisation still keep the country director busy as the loss of internal organisational knowledge had to be compensated, as far as possible.

The selection process for benefitting communities, social infrastructure or individuals running charging kiosks is of major importance for project effectiveness. The selection process determines outcomes and impacts, as well as sustainability of the intervention.

IBIS has developed a scaling matrix for the selection process for schools (see annex 5). A priority list is established by means of a transparent grading scale that takes into account different aspects such as the number of students, type of school (e.g. upper secondary school), significance for the region, school management commitment and others. With this approach, IBIS can ensure maximum transparency and prevent interests from influencing the selection process. COOPI and WHH are still in the process of developing similar selection criteria.

A baseline study was initiated based on ENFO's profound competence and knowledge and feedback by all parties. The quality and quantity of collected data is considerable well. The timeline for the finalisation of the baseline study report was November 2014. While an interim report on baseline results for the northern intervention area was presented in March 2015, the final comprehensive report is still pending.

In summary, it can be stated that the project management in the initial stage neglected the aspect of project stakeholder relationships. Partners' constraints, concerns, interests and experiences were not sufficiently taken into account. On the other hand, partners were not transparent enough to communicate their constraints and concerns. Therefore, it is now important to focus more on the relationship between the consortium partners. In addition, performance indicators have to be accomplished as stipulated in the indicative action plan of the project proposal.

HQ and CO management have certainly provided substantial project and management support to guarantee a smooth project start. In retrospect, it certainly would have been advantageous to have more trust in ENFO's technical expertise and to focus more on supervision and monitoring.

As ENFO is responsible for the technical implementation, the execution of the entire procurement should have been handed over to ENFO. Supervision and guidance should have been managed by WHH, supported by HQ as well as national country office staff.

Obviously, communication in the project is a challenge. Insufficient use is made of personal contact and face-to-face meetings, which are key for facilitating coordination. Currently, not everyone has the same level of information regarding the project. In order to improve information access, the project is developing internet options ('data cloud') for information sharing.

Outcome and impact potentials

It is far too early to assess outcomes at this stage of the project. But during the visit to possible project sites and interviews with teachers, doctors, hospital management staff, villagers and other stakeholders, the importance of electricity for the people and the potential for considerable outcomes was evident.

The rural hospitals are working almost without any electricity, and especially at night it is a tedious task for the nurses to look after the patients. Urgent surgeries cannot be conducted at night for lack of lighting. Vaccines and other medicines that need to be kept at cool temperatures cannot really be stored. It is not hard to imagine the beneficial impact that a reliable 24-hour supply would have on hospitals.

Teachers expect that with a regular electricity supply, schools would be able to conduct night classes, meaning that lessons and lectures could be extended. Students could use the cooler evening and night hours for studying and extend the time available for exercises and reading. Internet access will contribute to enhancing education, literacy and general knowledge. Teachers therefore expect that more students would achieve better degrees. In addition, the security aspect that lighting brings to schools is certainly an important aspect, particularly for female students.

The economic outcome for smallholder business and agricultural productivity up to now is difficult to estimate and depends on how people get access to appropriate and corresponding machinery; and respectively access to microcredits.

This empowerment of local communities through renewable energy development and capacity building is an important aspect for rural development in general. Starting with RE, community development dynamics are stimulated.

The security aspect of electricity access is considerable. As previously mentioned, by night people rely on open fires and candles, which often cause fires that destroy people's thatched huts and their household assets. Burglary and chicken theft can be reduced, simply because burglars avoid illuminated areas for the fear of being identified and caught. Dangerous animals in the house such as snakes, spiders and scorpions are easier to detect and eliminate with bright light. Frequently people mentioned that to them 'light is life'.

Sustainability approaches

The claim for sustainability is the biggest challenge for any development project implementation. In the case of the RE project, ensuring sustainability is even more challenging, given the complexity of the technical component and the post-emergency circumstances prevailing in Sierra Leone.

ENFO works with a social entrepreneurship approach, even though it is aware of the pitfalls of being an NGO with economic activities. The organisation has made sure to establish a transparent organisational structure. WHH project management developed another approach for ensuring sustainability. The financial sustainability aspect of this approach is based on community contributions.

There is no doubt that any sustainability depends on the communities' ownership and communities' benefits (revenues) on one side. However, the success of the RE interventions also depends largely on the professionalism of the supporting and serving institution (organisation or company) conducting the maintenance and systems management. One aspect is granted: only if the services rendered are lucrative and advantageous for the institution/organisation will the tasks be fully accomplished. In the current context of Sierra Leone, the public sector is not an option worth considering.

For this reason, as a local registered and legalised NGO with a social entrepreneurship status, ENFO is the appropriate stakeholder for the intervention. However, this does not mean that only ENFO's model should be prioritised. It is urgently necessary to jointly reflect on these different approaches and come to an agreement on how to proceed. All consortium partners should be involved in that discussion.

Overall, it can be expected that the consortium will be able to manage the programme without major difficulties and objectives can be achieved, provided that the project delays can be made up for and the performance indicators achieved.

Recommendations

Recommendations given in the report should be discussed, adapted to discussion results and translated into a plan for action to be taken that is binding for the consortium partners.

Project success strongly depends on the urgent establishment of a much more foresighted project management. To strengthen the project management coordination and to focus on priority issues, a project coordination workshop (WS) is recommended. It should take place immediately after summer holidays, not later than at the beginning of September.

The following WS outputs should be pursued: a common understanding of implementation models, a final set of RE systems models, a scaling matrix for prioritising beneficiaries for all RE models, an operational plan, an entire procurement plan, improved coordination and communication and an outcome-oriented M&E system.

The WS should be considered also under the aspect of team building. There should be space and time for discussions and presentations.

People responsible for the execution as well as administration and procurement should participate, but the WS should not be overcrowded (approximately 12–15 participants). Potentials for collaboration should be detected and incorporated in further implementation.

An external moderator is recommended. At least five days will be required for the workshop. As far as possible, all partners should dedicate their time to the workshop and avoid many side-activities.

Keep the PRESSD office in Freetown to facilitate communication and strengthen coordination. In this context the project cycle indicates different requirements for the four major phases: (i) project structure establishment and start of execution; (ii) establishment of monitoring system and consolidation of activity execution; (iii) focused results monitoring; and ultimately (iv) project output/outcome analysis and evaluation and aggregation of project results for further project development (roll out phase or consolidation phase, etc.) Particularly during the first two phases, coordination and communication among all partners, donors and ministries is of major importance, which is certainly easier from Freetown. For the last two phases, intensive project site visits in all areas are essential. Therefore, Kenema project office should be managed as a field office.

The training, preparation and introduction of the project manager should be better adapted to country, project subject and project donor, as well as personal needs and requirements. In general, it is necessary to improve staff preparation and introduction by structuring it better, ensuring proper handovers and developing performance indicators.

A project of this magnitude and complexity needs a full-time staff for administration and procurement in the project itself, particularly at the beginning of the project. In addition, a project kick-off workshop should be planned and budgeted for right from the beginning.

Country programmes of this magnitude, innovativeness and complexity need to employ experienced country programme managers (people with many years of project implementation experience) to facilitate and support the above mentioned issues.

The responsible HQ expert for RE should closely monitor implementation and outcomes. He should aggregate the results and develop replicable project design models