



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Village-based Community Development
project evaluation
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Executive Summary

The Village Based Community Development project has operated in the provinces of Kampong Thom and Preah Vihear since July 2007. It uses a Community Development Model created by CWS that has three phases: building relationships, strengthening livelihoods, and strengthening village structures. In summary, the program aims to build strong capacity for ongoing development in the village, while improving living standards, equity of women and overall peace.

This evaluation was requested as the project approaches the end of its current funding in 2011, to review achievements and make recommendations for further work. It used literature review, a survey, focus groups and key informant interviews as the main tools to assess the project.

Relevance

The project was found to be addressing key needs of the target areas, food shortage and (clean) water supply being the most common of these needs. Communities had been selected through a detailed baseline survey, although it would have been useful to document more of the process of selection. Existing capacities in the target villages were very limited, although CWS was generally making use of what resources were already available. The capacity building activities in leadership were highly relevant and important; technical capacity (in agriculture, infrastructure and veterinarian skills) was also a key need, although less project resources were available to address this. The Community Development Model was well worked out and consistently applied and reflected on by staff.

Effectiveness and efficiency

Program implementation had followed the project plan, but generally been slower than planned for a number of reasons. These included the Ketsana cyclone disaster in KPT, staff turnover, border tension between Cambodia and Thailand, gaining participation and illiteracy/ limited education. Activities were clearly recorded and monitored, and well focused on target groups. Community members were increasingly partnering in activities, making their own contributions of time, materials or labour where possible.

Forming effective village development committees had been a challenge for the project, but in at least some project areas, good capacity building and learning had been seen. Communities in some areas had taken the lead in initiating projects, contributing significant resources. Considerable training had been delivered; although recall of this was sometimes limited, particular messages had clearly been learned, and more importantly acted upon. Health and sanitation training appeared to have been best remembered and appreciated. In training and programme operation there was evidence of gender issues being considered.

Impact

Considerable and significant impact was demonstrated in some areas based on the survey results and focus group/ interview information. While this cannot be attributed solely to CWS, its activities in these areas do suggest a good contribution to outcome.

In both areas there had been a general reduction in poorest households, and improvement in housing quality. Land ownership had also increased. Household activity had grown, particularly in KPT, and there were small but significant indications that project activities were affecting livelihoods, although effects were limited at an overall level so far. Households indicated facing similar or higher levels of food shortage, and food scarcity still extended for most months of the year for many; more work is needed to achieve project goals.

Education showed a significant increase in attendance in KPT (to nearly 95%), although no such change could be observed in PVH which remained around 86%. Reasons were similar in both areas, with not wanting to go to school, poverty and responsibilities for cattle and/ or siblings being the main causes of absence. Children starting late, or failing to advance grades annually were also identified as major issues. Literacy for adults had increased in KPT but showed little change in PVH.

The project showed excellent impact on some health behaviours, most notably making better water sources available for use, and seeing a huge improvement (up to 58% increase) in use of boiled/ filtered water. Despite this, reported incidence of disease increased, but this may be due to more health awareness; focus group information suggested reductions in diarrhoea and common illnesses. Most people were receiving health education messages from NGO staff, with HC staff and VHV also making a contribution. Other than this health messages were increasing received from TV and from campaigns.

Malaria prevention strategies had also significantly improved since 2006 – and in KPT latrine use had also slightly improved. However vaccination of children and latrine use remained important health challenges with only around 50% of children fully vaccinated, and 80-90% of households still defecating outside.

Sustainability

Some good progress had been made towards creating sustainable structures, although all staff and stakeholders in the project thought that a longer period was needed before hand over. There was considerable variance between villages, with staff being able to clearly identify better and poorer examples of well established structures. There were numerous cases of villages successfully initiating and carrying through a project with inputs from CWS; generally villages in Preah Vihear seemed to have stronger structures.

In terms of activities, vegetable growing, animal raising, rice banks, use of clean water and maintenance of wells, and personal encouragement to children for attending education were seen as things likely to continue if current support stopped. However further building of leaders capacity, larger work on infrastructure, material support for poor families food and school supplies, livelihood development and dealing with

emergencies were seen as things that village or commune structures did not yet have the capacity to successfully deal with.

The main barriers to successful handover were judged to be commune council involvement, capacity of village development committees and the poverty and limited resources of the target villages selected (meaning longer and greater input will be needed before greater independence can be achieved). Assessment of key needs related to sustainability will be important in judging what further support is appropriate; a framework or tool for making this assessment would be useful in this process.

The project had good links to a number of relevant government bodies and departments. Formal agreements exist and regular meetings were held; CWS appeared to have a good and balanced partnership with these groups. A greater focus on information sharing and advocacy may be helpful in making these relationships more fruitful. The partnership with World Food Programme also seemed to work well, benefiting both partners and the target group.

Relationships with other NGOs operating in the target areas were limited and it appears opportunities to work together and learn from each other were being missed. Some practical difficulties, such as different incentives for participation could also be addressed by meeting together.

Organisation and management

The project was well structured, with clear goals, job roles and communication most of the time. Staff appeared to have open and constructive relationships, and give appropriate time to meeting together, reflection and problem-solving. Activities were planned through a monthly process – occasionally but not often there were short term priorities introduced which made implementation of plans difficult.

Considerable resources were given to monitoring of the project and detailed field observations carried out and reported on. The process would benefit from a sharper focus on outcomes and written feedback to staff in Khmer. The commitment to evaluation, learning and reflection in the project is very much a strong point; however, while there are some practical difficulties in delivering staff training because of project locations, it would be good to strengthen planning and delivery of staff development.

Recommendations

Key recommendations include continuing with the community development model, but considering extending it, including spending further time on the work in current target villages; increasing work at commune council level; developing more technical skills in agriculture, animal raising and small businesses; and increasing focus on analysing and addressing key development barriers at individual village level.

Full recommendations, including a number of important more specific actions are detailed on pages 41-43 of this report.