

EVALUATION OF FOUR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA



Prepared for Brot für die Welt, Germany

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Environmental Partnerships for Resilient Communities

BACKGROUND¹

Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World) is supporting four “Rural Community Development Programmes” across the Middle Belt and north-eastern Nigeria, which were the subject of this independent evaluation in 2019. A range of topics are addressed by these programmes, including peace building and trauma healing, inter-religious dialogue, strengthening community structures, health infrastructure, adult literacy, food security as well as income-generating activities.

While the four programmes are implemented independent of each other, there are some structural, contextual and design similarities, including the facts that:

- all programmes are centred around community engagement and local participation;
- each programme addresses more than 35 dispersed communities with a mostly poor, rural population engaged in subsistence level farming and livestock raising;
- all programmes take place in a region characterised by increasingly unsafe living conditions, especially in terms of food security and personal security, with desertification, conflicts of land access, severe clashes between farmers and pastoralists, and women’s inability to access land;
- most programmes were planned in co-ordination with local churches, several of which provide direct support in implementation; and
- each of the four organisations implementing these programmes has been financially supported for many years by Brot für die Welt and its predecessor, the Protestant Development Service, some for more than 20 years.

PROGRAMME APPROACH AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

The programmes have been designed to address a combination of social and economic needs: They prioritise support to women’s groups that are engaged in income-generating activities, in addition to supporting self-help activities such as the construction of nursery schools and clinics for basic health care services, as well as road rehabilitation. All four organisations have a similar structure in terms of governance – a Board, Director and different levels of field staff. Activities are channelled through community facilitators who, in turn, support and strengthen local community development committees that help organise and support individuals as well as the wider community. In most programmes, structures such as saving groups have been established, in addition to collective activities (such as farming) by different stakeholder groups within the respective communities. Training has been provided on a range of subjects, including trauma healing, skills development, agricultural practices and marketing.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS OF THE EVALUATION

The independent evaluation was undertaken at the request of Brot für die Welt. The objective was to conduct a comprehensive review of the four programmes, with attention given to the institutional capacities of the respective organisations as well as the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the various programme activities. Learnings from the evaluation – in addition to specific recommendations made for each of the programme’s implementing partners as well as Brot für die Welt – are expected to inform ongoing and future interventions in this programme, as well as other organisations working in the field of community development.

In addition to a desk review of programme reports, the evaluation was based on extensive consultations with a range of stakeholders on the ground, using a suite of participatory methods that

¹ Cover image: a community-owned mill allows people to process their harvest locally, saving time and money, while at the same time contributing to central saving schemes to support priority needs.

included direct observations, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analyses were conducted with each organisation while the evaluation team also reconstructed a Theory of Change with each partner organisation in addition to an overarching Theory of Change for all programmes together.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

The four programmes considered in this evaluation are all seen as being highly relevant to the general context in the respective states, each addressing distinct and priority needs of the different communities. In many instances, these programmes are the only form of external assistance that people have received. Project zones are characterised by different situations of conflict and violence, including ethno-religious crises that include herder-farmer clashes, inter-religious violence, inter-communal clashes, political violence and direct armed conflict. Some of the main programme activities have been designed around this context, in particular, trauma healing, inter-faith dialogue and peace building.

EFFECTIVENESS

The participatory community development approach that is common to all four programmes has allowed for a broad range of topics to be addressed effectively – climate change and agriculture, water and sanitation, economic empowerment and self-help initiatives, for example – and was adapted to the specific contexts.

One of the most effective outcomes has been the successful formation of Women's Groups, many of which are now functioning successfully through revolving loans. A wide range of activities are being supported through their funds, including supporting other members in times of need or groups purchasing cloth for uniforms – an outward sign of identification, pride and unity.

Awareness raising through the various programmes has started to alert people to their rights and the responsibility of duty bearers. Particular emphasis has been given to advocacy training which has encouraged and enabled people to approach local government offices for financial and other assistance. Other activities such as adult literacy are helping women build their confidence and find new employment opportunities, while training has allowed farmers to diversify and expand the range of farming activities they now practise, helping make them self-employed and self-reliant.

While the Boards in general have a good governance structure on paper, their expected roles were often not performed in practice. Successes of the programmes are largely the benefits of committed individuals. Community facilitators – most of who have long-standing relationships with specific communities – work closely with people to help them identify, prioritise and then start to address their needs or challenges which is seen as a highly effective strategy for community self-development.

EFFICIENCY

Frequent mention was made to "step down training", in which people who received training on a specific issue/technique then passed it on to other community members. This is seen as being particularly applicable and cost-effective in the area of agriculture, leadership, co-operation and team work within communities.

From a review of the cost of training incurred by each of the four organisations, it would appear that in almost all instances the cost of training events is appropriate (for Nigeria) compared with the

benefits seen. For instance, the trainings received on fundraising, community development approaches, crop storage and how to compile a community development plan have helped several communities initiate community clinics, and nursery and primary schools through the mobilisation of local resources – in kind and cash.

IMPACT

Much can be learned about the impact of this programme from the many testimonies shared with the evaluation team. People spoke widely of increased team work within their community, with families showing more respect for each other's members and neighbours. In some troubled situations, there is now increased understanding, trust and forgiveness among community members as a result of trauma healing. Overall, many lives have been transformed by the knowledge and skills acquired.

It is fair to say that these four programmes have made a positive contribution to addressing poverty reduction, peace building and trauma healing, inter-religious dialogue, women's' empowerment and community cohesion, amongst others. In some instances, community fundraising – a first time experience for most – has also started to show its potential which, when combined with external advocacy with government agencies, is likely to become a transformative action for many communities, allowing them to fulfil their priority action plans, such as having an operational clinic or school at their direct disposal.

SUSTAINABILITY

Community-based approaches are appropriate and effective in the current context and should, if they continue to be well delivered and supported, enable communities to be better organised and self-sustaining in many aspects. While positive signs were visible in many of the communities visited, for example the replication of saving and loan groups, the evaluation is aware that achieving sustainability in fragile contexts takes time and determination to succeed.

The long-term goals of the four programmes are to a considerable degree being met through the application of rights-based approaches and strategies. The economic empowerment of local women and the active involvement of communities in self-help programmes are clear indicators of ownership and sustainability. While many communities that were seen as part of this evaluation will continue to apply their new-found knowledge and practices, some are likely to not do so, perhaps for reasons outside of the scope of this programme. Individual ambitions, political aspirations or a lack of willingness to contribute to overall community development will likely infringe on progress already made unless more individuals realise benefits from this approach, and unless strong and respected institutional structures are in place in each community.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Improvements are suggested for the areas advocacy training, outreach engagement with other organisations and potential donors, in addition to overall security awareness and training for field staff. Partners are keen to improve their programming skills, are eager to reach out to more people and are ready to learn from their own experiences as well as those of others in this programme – which should be supported. Future rounds of funding should however ensure that the governance of these partners – from Board to field level – is strengthened to ensure professional engagement of all officially involved stakeholders. To assure sustainable results for the beneficiaries, community projects should be completed within a "reasonable" timeframe, i.e. not be drawn out. Communities should at the same time, strive to complete one project before starting another. To support sustainable

development in-built learning should be part of a continuous process of programme management of the organisations that are implementing the programmes.

The following is a selection of some institutional and programmatic lessons identified through this evaluation

- √ Community action planning is an important and effective way of bringing people together to collaborate and find solutions to common problems: where this can address several sectors/needs at the same time will likely yield great results.
- √ An adaptive, multisectoral and multi-thematic community development approach has proved to be an appropriate step towards sustainable development for the targeted communities.
- √ Having received initial guidance of fundraising, communities can be quite adept at finding innovative ways of raising funds to support mutually agreed projects or activities.
- √ The inclusion of small livestock management in community programmes can serve as a viable income-generating and nutritional support activity, particularly for women, the elderly and those facing problems with access to land.
- √ The benefits of functional adult literacy stood out in some programmes and should be considered as an integral component of community development, particularly for women.
- √ "Joint Projects", where people of different beliefs/religions, or functions– farmers and pastoralists, for example – work together on a common project are practical ways of peace building and community enrichment.