

FINAL REPORT MID TERM EVALUATION

REVEAL -

Reducing Economic Vulnerability through an
Equitable/Inclusive Approach to Livelihoods

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since December 2010 a consortium of agencies including HelpAge International, Network Action Group (NAG), Young Men's Christian Association – Mandalay (YMCA), The Leprosy Mission International (TLMi), and Golden Plains Agricultural Cooperative (GP) started to implement a three year project titled **REVEAL** (Reducing Economic Vulnerability through an Equitable/Inclusive Approach to Livelihoods) with \$2,708,005 funding from the Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT).

The overall goal of REVEAL is to contribute to the achievement of Myanmar's agricultural and economic policy frameworks which identify self-sufficiency in food production and food security as key objectives through increased opportunities for rural households, including households with older people, persons with disabilities, women and other vulnerable groups to achieve secure and sustainable livelihoods and better nutrition and hygiene by 2013. Specifically the purpose of the project is to improve livelihoods and reduce economic vulnerability of food insecure households in 30 of the neediest Dry Zone villages in Ayartaw and Mahlaing Townships through inclusive community-based interventions

Sixteen months after REVEAL commenced, remarkable progress has been made. Most of the activities to date have been clearly and effectively implemented with only minor adjustments required for improvement. Thirty Village Development Committees (VDCs) have been established, trained and are capable of supporting community development activities. Over 40 per cent of all households (2,097 households), have received technical training and grants to support the livelihoods in farming, livestock or small business and these have been accurately and transparently targeted at the more vulnerable households. As a result of these grants, and as far as can be measured so soon after introduction of grants, there has already been some success in improving livelihoods especially in livestock and small businesses. Increasing the livelihoods of farmers has proved more difficult due to the challenging environments farmers face in the dry zone, namely a lack of water sources and irrigation, and further hampered by the late monsoon rains in 2012. Uptake of lessons learned in the livestock and agricultural fields indicate that this training will be positive in furthering improving livelihoods in the future.

Efforts made to include vulnerable groups such as older people, people with disabilities and women headed households in community development and specifically their livelihoods have had remarkable success both in terms of inclusion and the results of these activities. Strong emphasis on gender equality in the VDCs had led to recognition of the importance and validity of this approach, and bodes well for making a long lasting impact. The principles of inclusion are strongly emphasised throughout the project and are well understood and adapted by the project communities, leading to reports of enhanced social cohesion and understanding.

The recent construction of sources of water, namely tube wells, combined in some villages with electrification systems has great potential to improve the ability of the communities to improve the livelihoods.

The project has made links between the VDCs and the township authorities, to the mutual benefit of all parties. Ensuring these links remain strong and lead to further accountability should be a focus in the remaining duration of the project. Strategies on how to build greater local capacity at the township level would ensure a stronger platform for future development.

The project has been well managed and there is effective collaboration between the consortium partners. In future project design, fewer activities would help focus the project team on the fundamental issues facing these communities. Greater focus on how to monitor the results of the project, as opposed to activity monitoring would help the project management to know whether the project is on track to achieve the ambitious targets set. The project faces a busy 15 months of implementation remaining.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- The monitoring and evaluation systems are well established with a strong focus on detailed activity monitoring. Data to reflect **impact** needs to be collected, analyzed and reflected upon. This reflection should be integrated into the roles of all project staff as a key learning and capacity building tool.
- A simplified version of EVS which would give the project team data they can analyze and to use in the project may be more suitable. The usefulness of EVS can be more appropriately assessed after the end of project survey.
- If there is budget remaining increasing the irrigation and water systems activities would be sensible.
- Promote community ownership of VDCs, through membership fees, regular member meetings, as opposed to current 'client – beneficiary' model.
- Produce clear guidelines on different sources of income for the VDC and what they can be used for.
- Ensure that the collective businesses that will be established by the VDCs are low in time management requirements and where possible provide additional benefit for the community. Give some consideration to the use of funds as revolving loans, if there are some VDC who do not have a strong business plan they feel passionate about.
- As planned continue to work with the farmers to review practical and feasible technologies for improving irrigation. Pilot if necessary. Review remaining project budget to calculate if there is more financial resources for this.
- Increasing the size of the seed bank might be a way of supporting farmers who have lost substantial amounts of crops this year due to late monsoon rains.
- Hold group discussions before the next planting season of each crop, to understand and get feedback from farmers on what, if any, lessons demonstrated by FFS and demo plots they plan to implement. Golden Plains Support Staff and Agricultural Officers should then use these discussions to identify what further technical support is required and who should receive this support.
- The VDCs and village administrators should encourage paravets to take on a more proactive responsibility for monitoring animal husbandry practices in the village, not only the animals provided by the project.
- Take a decision on how to make the health education activities more effective. If this cannot be done consider the cancellation of these activities.
- Work with each VDC and village authorities to clarify precise roles and responsibilities for repairs and maintenance of water systems (not only collection of fees) and if required provide further training.
- Ensure follow up with all VDCs to complete the construction of the water systems, especially where completion is dependent on collecting outstanding community contributions.
- Start planning 'phase out' process. Formal handover of project to VDCs and relevant project authorities would be important. Identification of one key department to be the focal point for the VDCs might be appropriate.

CONTENT

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Executive Summary | 2 |
| Summary of Recommendations | 3 |
| 1. Overview of REVEAL project | 7 |
| 2. Purpose of evaluation | 8 |
| 3. Methodology of evaluation | 9 |
| 4. Key findings | 11 |
| 4.1 Project Purposes | 11 |
| 4.2 Project Outputs | |
| 4.2.1 Output 1 | 12 |
| 4.2.2 Output 2 | 15 |
| 4.2.3 Output 3 | 18 |
| 4.2.4 Output 4 | 20 |
| 4.2.5 Output 5 | 25 |
| 4.2.6 Output 6 | 25 |
| 4.3 Project Management | |
| 4.3.1 Management | 27 |
| 4.3.2 Monitoring and evaluation processes | 27 |
| 5. Recommendations | 29 |
| 6. Conclusions | 31 |

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| List of Graphs, Table and Boxes | |
| Graph 1: Analysis of VDCs composition by age and gender | 15 |
| Graph 2: Analysis of home garden distribution by priority wealth ranking and target group, Mahliang township | 23 |
| Table 1: Analysis of VDC leadership by gender | 16 |
| Table 2: Duration of time taken every day to collect drinking water in the normal and dry seasons, based on baselines survey (1194 households) | 21 |
| Table 3: Analysis of EVS baseline data related to food security (based on 1194 HHS) | 22 |
| Box 1: Including older people in income generating activities | 19 |
| Box 2: Improving inclusion through mobility | 24 |

Annexes

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Annex 1: Schedule of evaluation | 32 |
| Annex 2: Case studies | 33 |

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|---|
| DRR | Disaster Risk Reduction |
| EES | Energy Efficient Stove |
| EVS | Economic Vulnerability Survey/Scale |
| FFS | Farmer Field School |
| GP | Golden Plains Agricultural Products Co-op Society, |
| HelpAge | HelpAge International |
| ICAP | Integrated Community Action Plan |
| LSG | Livelihood Sub-group |
| NAG | Network Activities Group |
| NRM | Natural Resource Management |
| PwD | People with Disabilities |
| OP | Older People |
| REVEAL | Reducing Economic Vulnerability through an Equitable/ Inclusive Approach to Livelihoods |
| TLMI | The Leprosy Mission International, |
| VDC | Village Development Committee |
| YMCA | Young Men's Christian Association |

I. Overview of REVEAL project

In January 2011, HelpAge successfully received \$2,708,005 funding from LIFT to work in consortium with the Network Action Group (NAG), The Leprosy Mission International (TLMI), and Golden Plains Agricultural Cooperative (GP) to implement a three year project in the Myanmar's central Dry Zone titled **REVEAL** (Reducing Economic Vulnerability through an Equitable/Inclusive Approach to Livelihoods).

Overall Goal: To contribute to the achievement of Myanmar's agricultural and economic policy frameworks which identify self-sufficiency in food production and food security as key objectives through increased opportunities for rural households, including households with older people, persons with disabilities, women and other vulnerable groups to achieve secure and sustainable livelihoods and better nutrition and hygiene by 2013.

Specific purpose: To improve livelihoods and reduce economic vulnerability of food insecure households in 30 of the neediest Dry Zone villages in Ayartaw and Mahlaing Townships through inclusive community-based interventions.

This will be achieved through several steps:

1. Forming and building the capacity of 30 Village Development Committees (VDCs) in two Townships to ensure enhanced self-reliance through a fully inclusive community based approach to planning, implementation and monitoring of activities.
2. Increasing agricultural production and incomes for farming households and increase incomes for livestock/small business households.
3. Improving nutritional and hygiene status of vulnerable households through training and enhancing skills and knowledge.
4. Influencing livelihoods policy and practice in the Dry Zone, disseminating best practices through sharing lessons learned, and strengthening internal capacity of local organisations.

The project has 6 expected outputs:

- Output 1: Community capacity strengthened for integrated development.
- Output 2: Increased agricultural production and household incomes
- Output 3: Increased skills and knowledge increasing household incomes from livestock and small businesses.
- Output 4: Community mechanisms enhanced to improve hygiene and nutrition.
- Output 5: Community resilience enhanced for natural resources management and disaster risk reduction.
- Output 6: Stronger capacity of local organizations to influence livelihoods policy and practices in the dry zone.

Direct beneficiaries are expected to be 21,957 people comprising 4,082 households including 217 people with disabilities, 1,022 older people and their families, women headed households, and landless labourers. The majority of the population of the 30 villages are ethnic Bama. Indirect beneficiaries are expected to include an estimated 10,000 households in the Townships who can access the farm-field schools and IEC materials. Through sharing of information other stakeholders, including government agencies and NGOs, are to benefit as well from the successes and lessons learned from the project activities.

A three pronged approach was adopted by the REVEAL project:

1. The **INCLUSIVE APPROACH** insures that *all* members of society have the right to participate in their own personal development as well as the development of their communities
2. The **CAPACITY & CONFIDENCE ENHANCEMENT APPROACH** builds capacity and competence, in both individuals and communities, to achieve results for themselves.
3. The **INTEGRATED APPROACH** considers that various lines of action interlink with and affect other areas. Environmental issues, Age, Disability, and Gender Friendliness and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

are integral parts of all lines of action taken. Emphasis is given to the links between emergency relief, rehabilitation, development, and disaster preparedness efforts, and to bridge the gap between emergency response and development. Efforts are made to promote strong linkages to government and other agencies in order to ensure communities' access resources that promote strengthening of livelihoods and improved quality of life.

The role of the consortium partners was defined as follows:

- HelpAge, the REVEAL lead agency, to facilitate and manage coordination, donor liaison, and grant management. To lead on monitoring and evaluation. Lead agency for Output 4: Health and Nutrition and Output 5: Natural Resource Management and DRR
- NAG to be the main implementing partner at field level, in Ayartaw township working in 15 villages.
- YMCA Mandalay Division to be the main implementing partner at field level, in Mahlaing township working in 15 villages
- Golden Plains to provide technical training on a range of topics relating to agriculture including the farmer techniques, farmer field schools, home gardens, energy efficient stoves and so forth.
- TLMI to provide support to PWDs in the targeted communities and to support other partners in ensuring genuine participations of PWDs.

REVEAL was due to start in December 2010. However due to delays in obtaining appropriate permission from the Union Government of Myanmar, the field work of the project did not start until May 2011. The project is due for completion in December 2013.

2. Purpose of Mid Term Evaluation

The mid-term evaluation was carried out in September 2012, 16 months after the start of the field work, and with about 16 months remaining of the project implementation period.

The purpose of the mid-term evaluation is to achieve the following **objectives**:

1. To review the achievements of the project to date against its targets
2. To assess the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation to date
3. To identify lessons to improve the implementation of the second half of the project and ensure targets are met

The mid-term evaluation will be assessed against the criteria of

- Impact, (to date and anticipated)
- Relevance
- Equity
- Effectiveness and efficiency
- Sustainability
- Accountability
- Assessment of implementation roles

The evaluation results are expected to be reviewed and discussed by all consortium partners to

- Highlight any immediate and longer term actions that should be considered in the last 16 months of the project to improve the implementation, impact and sustainability of REVEAL project
- Help inform future strategy for programme implementation
- Improve project cycle management methodology

The evaluation report will also be shared with other stakeholders, primarily UNOPS (LIFT fund managers), Ministries of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, and Agriculture, and the HelpAge International regional and global network.

3. Methodology of mid-term evaluation

The methodology of the evaluation primarily involved qualitative data collection, which was supported by a desk review of project documents, some of which provided quantitative data for analysis.

A desk review of available literature of the REVEAL project was conducted with the purpose of informing understanding of project objectives and design; providing evidence of detailed records of project activity implementation and financial management; providing data in terms of monitoring and evaluation records of project activities and illustrating tools used for project management, and records of project management.

There were a number of group and individual interviews conducted. One to one individual interviews were held with:

- Chief Executive – NAG
- Executive Director – YMCA, Mandalay Division
- Country Director, National Programme Manager, Monitoring and Evaluation Office - HelpAge
- Township Agricultural Officer - Ayartaw

Group interviews were conducted with

- Field staff – NAG – Ayartaw
- Township Authorities – Ayartaw
- Field officers and manager, YMCA - Mahlaing
- Field facilitators, YMCA – Mahlaing

These interviews were used to evaluate

- a. organisational expectations, objectives and organizational development impacts of the REVEAL project,
- b. review project and budget management through the project implementation processes and systems
- c. gather opinions on effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the field work in the two townships to date in contributing towards the overall objectives of the REVEAL project
- d. gather suggestions for recommendations for the remaining project period

A sample size of six of the project's thirty (20%) was visited by the consultant over a period of six days, 11-16 September 2012. At the community level both group and individual interviews were held with a selection of community members which included

- Village Development Committee members
- Sub-committee members
- Health volunteers
- Paravets
- Village Administrators
- Individual participants of the project engaged in different livelihood activities such as farming, livestock and small business, and including older people, PwDs and female headed households

To ensure that the experiences, views and opinions of a wide range of community members are heard, there was some targeting of persons identified as 'vulnerable' by the project. Observation of group interviews and spot checking and observation of the assets provided by the project have also informed this evaluation. Informal discussions with community members and field staff conducted whilst visiting the communities also provided a wealth of useful data. The list of the participating communities and villagers in the evaluation is listed in Annex 3.

Immediately after the field work, initial findings were discussed with HelpAge and clarification sought on some outstanding issues. After the completion of the interviews and field work the qualitative data was systematically analysed by project outcome. This was supported by analysis of existing quantitative data.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the evaluation is as comprehensive and accurate as possible there are some limitations of the methodology which include:

- Language: the interviews were conducted in Myanmar language and then simultaneously translated into English. This inevitably meant that not all the conversations were captured by the consultant.
- Sample size: time constraints limited the sample size to 20% of the villages. To overcome limitations of this sample size the sample villages were identified by the project team to meet criteria determined by the consultant (village size, accessibility, project inputs) to ensure a fair representation of villages were included in the evaluation. Whilst this means the sample of villages is not completely random, it allowed the consultant to visit a wide range of villages in limited time.
- Privacy: despite best efforts of consultant and support team it has sometimes hard to get adequate privacy to conduct the group and individual interviews, in particularly the presence of VDCs members was a constant. It is expected that this may have inhibited some of the conversations.
- Work in progress: obviously with a mid-term evaluation some of the activities observed will only be partially completed. Therefore it was sometime challenging to understand the standard of the activity when fully completed (with particular reference to construction and maintenance of water systems)

4. Main findings

4.1 Project purpose

| INDICATOR | KEY FINDINGS FROM EVALUATION |
|--|---|
| INDICATOR 1: Reducing by 30% the proportion of households in the 'Most Vulnerable' category according to Economic Vulnerability Scale'. (Applied to the entire project area, this translates to reducing the households in the overall 'Most Vulnerable' category from 772 to 540-in other words, moving 232 houses from the 'Most Vulnerable' category). | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progress is being made by the project in reducing vulnerability related to a number of factors including assets, income, watsan, social participation, livelihood diversity and proximity to decision making. Project clearly targeted at the most vulnerable households. Therefore the indications are that the project is making good progress towards achieving its indicated target• Economic Vulnerability Scale has been used to measure multiple determinants of vulnerability, and was conducted at baseline and will be conducted again at the end of the project. It has potential to be a powerful tool, but there is still a lack of clarity in the project team about what they are measuring |
| INDICATOR 2: Proportion of targeted households with a reduction in the share of food consumption expenditure in overall consumption (excluding health expenditure) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some households concentrate on building up assets, especially households with livestock. Not much increased income• This is a fairly complicated indicator to measure. Data in food consumption was collected under EVS process so it should be possible to get good data at the end. However evaluator would suggest in the future using simpler indicators that can be measured throughout life of the project. |

The project's focus is to improve livelihoods and reduce economic vulnerability. From the baseline survey it is approximated that there are 722 'most vulnerable' households in the 30 target communities, equivalent to 13 per cent of the households. From the community based wealth ranking 2,331 households have been identified as poor and prioritised for direct project support in livelihoods. In addition to the technical training and input aimed at directly improving livelihood income the project aims to reduce economic vulnerability through diversification of livelihoods, improving access to water sources, increasing social participation and proximity to decision makers through the Village Development Committee structure, as well as through activities aimed at increasing mobility to those individuals whose not are fully mobile,

Good progress is definitely being made by the project team to reach the overall goals of the project. There has been a great deal of visible improvement in access to water, social participation and access to decision making and asset diversity. As the project activities have been very strongly targeted to the most vulnerable in the communities it is predicted that the EVS scores of the most vulnerable households will have improved. How much progress is difficult to quantify at the mid-term stage and will only be known with the end of project survey when the data for the Economic Vulnerability Survey is re-collected

4.2 Project Outcomes

4.2.1 Outcome 1: Community capacity strengthened for integrated development

| INDICATOR | KEY FINDINGS FROM EVALUATION |
|---|--|
| INDICATOR 1.1: % of inclusive Village Development Committees (VDCs) with Integrated Community Action Plans (ICAPs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All communities were clear on their top 3-4 community development priorities listed in the ICAP• Some ICAPs could be improved with further planning and implementation on how to achieve what is listed in the ICAP |
| INDICATOR 1.2: % of VDC sub-sector/thematic groups have revised their action plans and have institutional sustainability mechanisms | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of VDC sub-committees had recently been reduced to a core of agriculture, small business/livestock, fundraising and M&E• The committee understood their roles and responsibilities• Too early to say if institutionally sustainable – some work on funding, and capacity building of members would help |

Relevance

The VDC are representative of the community, transparent and engage with the community to determine priorities and develop the Integrated Community Action Plan, which is based on the needs assessment of each community. This is the first time in many of these communities that there have been such community development groups working.

The process of developing ICAPs in a participatory manner has appeared to have been useful to crystallise the development priorities of the community, and what the VDC should be striving for. Some VDCs have taken the next step in the ICAP process of developing plans and requests for government support to implement their ICAP plans, such as requests for staff for a community built health centre, and the establishment of a middle school. These are powerful testimonies to the benefit of the ICAP.

There is a danger that the ICAP appeared to be a community development 'wish-list' with no plan or budget for as to how the ICAP would be implemented. The project staff could work with the weaker VDCs to develop implementation plans.

Equity

The VDCs are comprised of a gender and age balance. Whilst there were no females leading the VDC many of them had been appointed as Vice Chair. There was evidently pride and amongst the VDC members regarding the gender equity in the group, and at least 3 of the VDCs interviewed thought the appointment of women into leadership roles would have a long lasting impact on social participation of women in the communities.

Graph I: Analysis of VDCs composition by age and gender

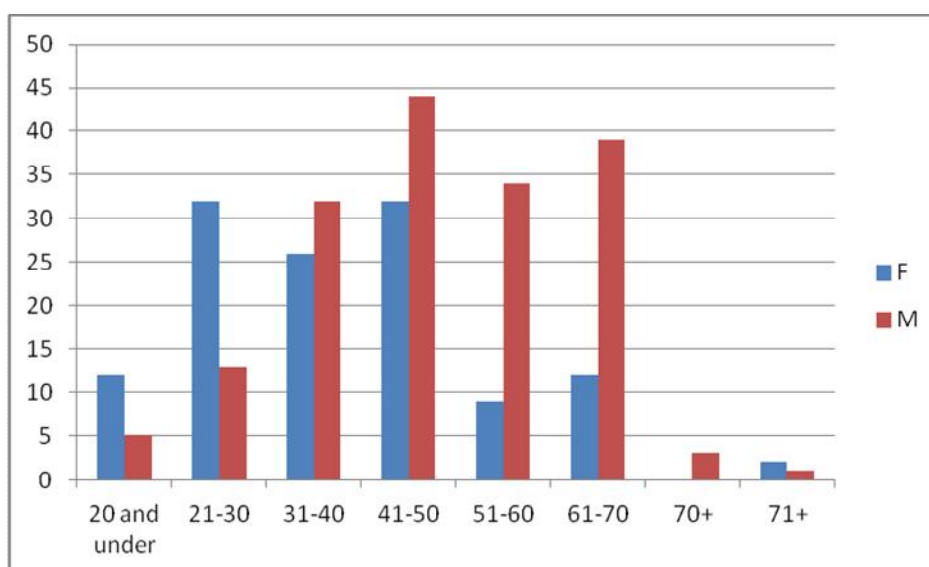


Table I indicates that the gender and age dispersion is skewed towards women at the younger ages, increasing equality in middle age categories and skewed towards men at the later age categories. Assumptions as to why this might be could be education levels, adherence to traditional gender roles, as well as for reasons of family commitments.

Table I: Analysis of VDC leadership by gender

| | Female | % | Male | % | Total |
|---------------------|--------|------|------|------|-------|
| Chairman | 0 | 0% | 30 | 100% | 30 |
| Secretary | 3 | 10% | 27 | 90% | 30 |
| Treasurer | 10 | 32% | 21 | 68% | 31 |
| Accountant | 10 | 32% | 21 | 68% | 31 |
| Vice chairman | 15 | 88% | 2 | 12% | 17 |
| Assistant Secretary | 15 | 100% | 0 | 0% | 15 |
| Member | 72 | 51% | 70 | 49% | 142 |

Given the young age of most of the female VDC members it is not surprising, as illustrated in Table 2 that the key VDC management roles of Chairman, Secretary and Cashier largely held by men. However this does mean that there is a new generation of female leaders developing capacity and skills for greater involvement in community development in the future.

Effectiveness and efficiency

VDCs were clear on their roles and responsibilities, and had received appropriate and effective training to help them manage their tasks. The process of reelection for VDC members was also not clear to VDC members. The VDCs had successfully established sub-committees to share the burden of the VDC duties and include a wider range of people.

All VDC members were extremely articulate on the purpose of the project to contribute to the long term development of the community, and on the inclusion of all in the community. Many community members said that

VDC members had come to their house to explain about the project and let them know when meeting were. The prioritization of project inputs to the poor households in the community was extremely clear. At the beginning of year 2 the list of 'beneficiaries' was re-evaluated by the VDC and collaboration with community monitoring and evaluation committees, as it was felt that the selection in the first year focused too much on income only. In Year 2 the communities looked at other causes of vulnerability, such as dependency ratios, health and so forth. The VDCs were extremely articulate in explaining this process reflecting positively on the project team's work in social mobilization.

In evaluated villages good links and relationships with the Village Administrators were clear. Based on common guidelines VDCs were encouraged to establish their own composition, in terms of number of members, and their own rules and regulations, for example over the exact number of VDC members, ranging from 9-11 people.

Output 1 requires 6 per cent of the total project budget (155,000 USD) to establish 30 VDCs which relates to approximately 5,200 USD per VDC, over three years. This is cost effective.

Sustainability

All the VDCs were confident that the VDC institution would sustain itself beyond the project, and that the current VDC members would still play a significant role on the VDC. They were also confident in their skills and ability to continue the VDC, although further financial management training would be appreciated.

The template for the VDC rules and regulations states *'Members of the VDC should be elected for a period of maximum 1 year and may not be re-elected after holding the position for more than three consecutive years when elected at community meetings'* However it seemed most VDC members were there to stay in the VDC for the foreseeable future. To increase leadership capacity within the community there should be a rolling system of 1 or 2 VDC members at least changing every year to give other communities members a chance to develop their skills.

None of the VDCs had a sustainable source of income as of date of the mid-term evaluation. All the VDCs mentioned the return of the 25% of the grant and the subsequent interest earned on this revolving fund was their source of income. The VDC guidelines also states *'The interest collected belongs to the Village Development Fund (VDF) , 40% of which should be used as risk funds, 30% for VDC activities and expenses, and the balance 30% should be added to the capital fund.'* However in practise all the VDCs had loaned the full amount out again therefore leaving no source of funds for the VDC itself. The project field facilitators should support the 'fundraising committees' to manage this more effectively.

At the year of year two in 2012, the project will support a grant for the VDC to establish a community business to provide ongoing income to the VDC. Some business ideas mentioned by the VDC were goat raising, hand tractors, threshing machines and so forth. In evaluating these business plans it is recommended the project team include evaluation criteria for i. time required to manage the business and ii. overall benefit for the community. Bringing access to machinery for example through threshing machine, may have a wider impact on the community than just raising income for the VDC. Raising goats on the other hand might not have the same economic impact with the benefits being limited to raising funds, rather than wider benefits to the community.

Currently the idea of using these funds for revolving credit, instead of a 'community business' has not been considered. However as this is a low cost, not time intensive and of potential benefit to the wider community, the idea should be given some consideration.

Membership fees for VDC community members could also be considered.

Accountability

All VDCs had detailed bookkeeping records and the financial situation of the VDC was publicised in the large community meetings held at least twice per year. The record keeping was generally good with room for some improvements to be made to the bookkeeping procedures such as reducing the number of different cash books the VDC uses; ensuring a cash count is conducted each month and the accounts are signed off by the Chair and

one other member of the VDC; ensuring that people have a record of the loans and input they have received from the VDC. At the moment there is no collection of signature to confirm receipt of loans and other inputs.

Each village has a comment box for discretionary and anonymous comments to be left by the village members and managed by the project field staff. Whilst these boxes are not used very often, there have been a one or two incidences of comments being left, usually to do with the exclusion of households from the list of beneficiaries who receive inputs.

In each village visited the village administrator was aware of the work of the VDC. He was not allowed to sit on the VDC. In each village there was also an innovative Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, consisting of respected members of the community, such as monks, and village elders outside the VDC, whose role was primarily to ensure accountability. This committee finalised the wealth ranking lists of the communities, and worked with the VDCs to ensure transparent and equitable distribution of project inputs such as seed from the seed bank.

Therefore the VDCs are being run with check and balances to promote accountability.

However true accountability of the VDC will come when the community feel like the VDCs is their own, as opposed to the project, and when they feel a part of the work of the VDC. As opposed to 'beneficiaries' only. From asking non VDC community members their participation in VDC meetings and event, the responses were usually muted: if they were asked to come to the meetings then they would. How to increase community ownership of the VDCs going forward should be a concern for the project team.

Anticipated impact

The VDCs are an accountable and sustainable vehicle for future community development. Their legitimacy and role are recognised by the village administrators and township authorities as well as by the community. They have the skills necessary in how to identified, prioritise and articulate the needs of the community, inclusive of the most vulnerable. They are in the process of learning how mobilise resources from within and outside their communities to develop and implement strategies to meet these needs. With this increasing skill set and experience the impact of work of the VDCs is likely to continue and increase after the project completion for the benefit of the 30 villages.

4.2.2 Outcome 2: Increased agricultural production and households incomes

| INDICATOR | KEY FINDINGS FROM EVALUATION |
|---|---|
| INDICATOR 2.1: Number of farming households provided with skills and technical training. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farmer Field School (FFS) content was appropriate for the specific community and their agricultural cycles Innovative methods of identifying participants for the intensive FFS were used |
| INDICATOR 2.2: % of trained farming households adopting lessons from training and sharing knowledge with other farming households | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some farming lessons being adopted from the training on farming methods, FFS and pilot plots, in particularly lessons on compost, fertiliser, how to identify good seed, planting Less evidence of better quality seeds being used as a result of the demonstration plots although these technologies may be taken up by the more able and resourced farmers Functioning 'cascade' of peer training implemented |
| INDICATOR 2.3: % of target farming households have increased household income | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 897 farmers received grants of in kind + cash of value 125 USD of which 25% had to be returned to |

| | |
|--|---|
| from increased agricultural production | VDC with interest of 3% per month <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No reported issues of difficulties in collecting return monies One key issue is late monsoon rains of 2012 which has meant some of the summer crops (sesame in particular) have been badly affected. |
| INDICATOR 2.4: % of target villages adopting relevant technology to improve soil fertility and water harvesting and irrigation techniques. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some farmers using lessons learned to improve soil fertility and water retention Rain harvesting culverts not popular with farmers (take up too much space), and hence not undertaken. Exchange visit to drip irrigation demo planned for end September Given the importance of irrigation, it may have been more effective to concentrate on this issue early on in the project |
| INDICATOR 2.5: % of farmer group members adopting skills and knowledge of post-harvest techniques and food processing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some reported useful lessons on post harvesting techniques learnt Too early to say if lessons being implemented |
| INDICATOR 2.6: % of targeted farming households with established links to government agencies and credit and trading entities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not much evidence that access to credit has changed as a result of the project so far |

Relevance

Given that the majority of the households in these 30 villages are primarily farmers, and the other will be day labourers focusing on improving income via agricultural is therefore relevant.

The biggest constraint mentioned by the farmers was a lack of irrigation. Therefore how to support the farmers to manage with limited water supplies is also relevant. Seven per cent of the original submitted budget had been set aside for rain water harvesting structures, which activity has cancelled due to a confirmed lack of interest from the farmers. However more work on issues of irrigation and technical skills to adapt to water shortages could have a longer lasting impact.

Equity

The project inputs (in kind and cash) were clearly targeted to households which had been identified as poor by the community. All farming households had received approximately the same value of goods, the difference being due to exchange rate fluctuations.

Seed bank membership was opened up to other households, in wealth categories 2 and 3, (middle and well off) which is a way of getting the wider community engaged in the agricultural activities so the VDC is not seen as solely being for the benefit of the poor households.

The methodology used for determining amount of seed loan from the seed bank was based on each farmer's acreage per crop. Each farmer then got a proportion of the seed required to plant that crop. Whilst this methodology is fairly equitable it seems it could become unnecessarily complicated with farmers needing to return different amounts of seed for different crops. As a result of this methodology, some farmers, especially in larger villages where there were more farmers, but same size seed bank, the farmers only received a small proportion of the seed required for each crop. Therefore the impact of this activity could be minimised. In the

larger villages giving fewer farmers each year a far more substantial proportion of the seed required might provide a more impactful boost to their income. For the subsequent planting season the farmers accessing the seed bank would rotate.

Effectiveness and efficiency

The identification of trainees to participate in the Farmer Field School (FFS) appeared to be effective. All farmers who received project inputs received 3 days training on farming techniques. From these farmers, the ones who showed potential to retain knowledge, and were willing to become cascade trainers were picked for the FFS. Given the expense and time involved in running FFS this is a sensible approach.

The cascade training was taking place in a structured manner. It could be beneficial to repeat the cascade training, and ensure the trainers get more practice, and the lessons given are better absorbed, as some farmers who attended the cascade training struggled to recall what they had learnt.

To provide further ongoing support to farmers to increase uptake of new technologies and new types of seed and to continually monitor the demonstration plots, in Year 2 of the project a full time staff member from Golden Plains had been assigned to each township. Given the project's investment in training and agricultural input, this investment in human resources seems sensible.

It was not clear to the evaluator the relation between two key agricultural activities, of the FFS, run by Golden Plains and the demonstration plots run by the respective implementing partners (YMCA and NAG).

The agricultural input to the farmers was made in Year 1 and at the beginning of Year 2. Given the delayed monsoon rains (which could not have been foreseen), and the fact that the agricultural training on new techniques was incomplete (which could have been foreseen) it might have been better to delay the in kind and cash input. Some farmers reported that they lost fewer crops than they would have previously due to adaption of new techniques, but the techniques did not seem widely adapted and hence many farmers have lost a large proportion of their monsoon crops, in particularly sesame and potentially pigeon peas. Therefore much of the input provided by the project has been lost as well. As a generalisation, the affected farmers are not as far in debt as they would have been without the project input, but the input is unlikely to have a major impact on improving the future income.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the agricultural activities is not assured at the moment. Some of the new agricultural techniques are being adopted.

The seed banks do have the potential to be a sustainable source of high quality seed to provide farmers access to such seed, reduce credit taking at high interest rates, and potentially invest more in the farming as long as the seed bank model used is simple to maintain.

The value chain analysis study was just completed after the evaluation but that may lead to measures and knowledge for farmers to improve their income. Access and conservation of water, natural resource management, protection against soil erosion would need a higher emphasises for the improvements to make a sustainable changes in the incomes of farmers.

Accountability

The village's monitoring and evaluation committee had worked with the VDC to come up with the amounts of seeds for the seed banks to be used, that would reflect the needs of the community.

Anticipated impact

There is likely to be some improvements in agricultural production from the access to high quality seeds, and new techniques. Some farmers may also be less indebtedness. However fundamental and structural challenges in the agricultural sector remain, highlighted by the negative impact of the late monsoon rains this year, which means it is unlikely that there is widespread improved incomes for farmers at the end of the project.

However with the knowledge gained from the project, capacity built through the project activities, and the work on market chains, irrigation and natural resource management planned in the last 16 months of the project the farmers will be in a better position to adapt to their challenging circumstances than before the project.

4.2.3 Outcome 3: Increased skills and knowledge increasing households incomes from livestock and small businesses

| INDICATOR | KEY FINDINGS FROM EVALUATION |
|--|---|
| INDICATOR 3.1: % of targeted livestock and small business households with increased skills and knowledge that are required for sustaining livestock rearing and small businesses. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1367 households (767 livestock, and 609 small business) received grants of in kind + cash of value 125 USD of which 25% had to be returned to VDC with interest of 3% per month for use in livestock raising and small business expansion Livestock appeared to be working well, with only one reported death of a piglet, reports of vaccinations delivered by township vet services Little increase in skills or knowledge for the small business, although most of the people supported already ran a similar business. No issues in paying 25% of money received back to VDCs |
| INDICATOR 3.2: % of prioritized livestock and small business households with increased in income and asset holdings. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence from both livestock and small business of asset enhancement, and some income improvement. Increasing assets seems to be the priority. Increasing livelihood diversity of households. Complementing daily wages. |
| INDICATOR 3.3: % of targeted households accessing markets and credit facilities through relevant information and links to government agencies. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No apparent improvement yet Daily labourers negatively impacted by the late monsoon rains. Much reduced amount of work over the last few months (50% reduction). Some reports of increased debt to cover this period Small businesses also negatively impacted by poor rains – less money in the community, therefore less business |
| INDICATOR 3.4: % of targeted livestock-households have adopted improved livestock management practices and accessing para-vet services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved animal husbandry techniques observed (animal pens), vaccinations reported Some adoption of improved techniques by community members raising livestock, not directly related to project (especially in smaller villages) Paravets largely focused their work on livestock that project provided. Could proactively expand their work to reach wider community Some larger villages (Kan Phyu) could improve their animal management. |

Relevance

For the large proportion of households who rely solely on daily wages, and those households who are unable to work, such as some older people, enabling them to build up assets via livestock, is a relevant activity to pursue and one that is very popular with the communities.

With regards to small business development so far the project has focused on pre-existing businesses or businesses in which the prospective owner had some prior experience and skills. The injection of assets has strengthened those businesses, improving income in all interviewed cases and leading in some cases to additional employment, and often the cessation of daily wages work which is much appreciated.

Equity

All households, whose primary occupation was not farming, and who had been identified as poor in the community wealth ranking, received input of either livestock or cash for a business of their own choosing.

There were some good case studies of people improving businesses to include the older relatives (spinning cotton), or of household bound older people being able to raise livestock.

Box 1: Including older people in income generating activities

Daw Kyway, 47 years old, lives with her elderly aunt, 86 years old in Bon Le Khet village, Ayataw township. With the small business grant from the VDC they invested in 100 vis of raw cotton to process which cost 70,000 MMK. After a further 30,000 MMK spent processing it, they were able to sell it for 175,000 MMK, repaying the VDC back 25,000 and leaving a profit of 45,000MMK. They chose this small business as it was something both of them could do.

Effectiveness and efficiency

The grants of 125 USD are reasonable low cost, and it seemed that many of the livestock owners had increased the value of the assets over and beyond this. The lessons from the 'trainers of trainers' livestock rearing training attended by some of the beneficiaries had been retained. There was evidence that lessons had been implemented as well, with improved animal shelters observed and wide spread vaccinations of the project animals. A few of the key points from the cascade training on livestock rearing, had been retained, although not in too much detail.

The project trained paravets' main role seemed to be to contact the township livestock departments when vaccinations were required, and advise people on how to care for their animals. If the paravets could take a wider role to take some responsibility for the wider community not just project provided animals it would be beneficial. So far the project has only trained 1 paravet per village, with training for a second paravet planned for next year. This point could be emphasised in the training, and with 2 paravets supporting each other in the village, they might be more successful in encouraging change.

The people supported with their small business had only received very limited business training (0.5 day) but this had not seemed to have hindered the businesses.

Sustainability

No villages reported pressure on community resources required to feed and water the increased number of animals. Prices for animals had remained constant.

The link between the paravets and township authorities, established during the project, is likely to continue beyond the project.

Unlike many projects, the businesses strengthened so far, had been diverse with sufficient (if not large) market demand. When the project staff start the project activities related to vocational training and introducing new skills and businesses in the latter half of the project, care should be taken to ensure sufficient market exists, or is created, for the output of these new businesses. More concentrated follow up and coaching will be required.

The work in livestock and small business conducted so far should be sustainable.

Accountability

The identification of beneficiaries was transparent and all parties why certain households had been identified and how much each household had received. All beneficiaries had been able to pay back the required 25% of the grant.

Anticipated impact

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the work in livestock is leading to an increase in assets in many of the participating households, which will in turn, increase their ability to cope with sudden shocks. For some small business owners as well as investing in assets (livestock) the increase in income is meaning a more reliable and less taxing means of earning a livelihood as opposed to previously relied upon daily wage work. For some the additional income is being invested in health (latrines) and education. Whilst the amounts generated by the small businesses and livestock is currently small, proportionally the increase in asset base and income is an important component of household income.

4.2.4 Outcome 4: Community mechanisms enhanced to improve health, hygiene and nutrition

| INDICATOR | KEY FINDINGS FROM EVALUATION |
|--|---|
| INDICATOR 4.1: Number of home bound OP and PwD receiving home care services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 196 home bound OP (159 F, 37 M) and PwD receiving homecare services. 124 PWD provided with physiotherapy service Home visit reported as 2 times per month |
| INDICATOR 4.2: % of households practicing at least 2 better hygiene practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not really clear what these better hygiene practises are to be and how they will be encouraged, or measured Only very infrequent health education sessions held, 1 per village so far, and approximately 20 per village attend the training (675 in total) |
| INDICATOR 4.3: % of targeted households with increased knowledge and incorporating better nutrition, food preparation and hygiene. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 350 home gardens targeted at older people, PwD and FHH. One person per household had attended home garden training Some strong gardens especially with people who already had home gardens, introducing new crops, such as dragon fruit Some gardens struggling (lack labour and water), and due to land restrictions not all targeted groups could benefit |
| INDICATOR 4.4: Number of targeted households with water harvesting facilities and ongoing maintenance mechanisms competently managed by VDCs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No water harvesting facilities Eighteen new tube wells constructed; 2 ponds desilted and 1 pond renovated, 1 new open wells, 4 water systems extended and improved. |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash for work for pond renovation in Kuu Gyi village provided 735 working days for community members at 2000 MMK per day (no gender discrimination in daily wage) • Electrification systems installed in 13 villages. Electricity to be provided by the tube well generators from 6-9pm in the evening. Household payment for electricity (for example 2,000 MMK per bulb) will cover the costs of diesel to run the generator • Widely appreciated by the villages, and VDCs proud of these improvements. Transformative for the village • Responsibility (and skills) for maintenance not clearly defined |
| INDICATOR 4.5: % of mobility impaired PwDs and OPs have increased mobility in and around their homes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some very good examples of increased mobility witnessed (see case studies I and box below) and distribution of mobility aids to XX people • Some construction to improve access in the community as well to enable greater social participation |

Relevance

Since limited access to drinking water is a major constraint in many of the villages in the dry zone, the renovation of ponds and construction of tube wells and water systems is highly relevant, and probably the most appreciated aspect of the project. In the dry season almost 50 per cent of the households spend over one hour a day collecting water, and 16 per cent over two hours. This burden falls largely, although not solely, on the children and women of the households. The electrification of villages that has been made possible by the generator required for the tube wells is a good utilisation of resources.

Table 2: Duration of time taken every day to collect drinking water in the normal and dry seasons, based on baselines survey (1194 households)

| Time | Normal season | Dry season |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------|
| Less than 30 minutes | 50% | 42% |
| Between 30-60 minutes | 11% | 10% |
| 1-2 hours | 27% | 33% |
| 2-3 hours | 8% | 11% |
| 3-4 hours | 3% | 4% |
| Over 4 hours | 1% | 1% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

There are a 196 home bound older people and PwD who suffer from high levels of exclusion and enhancing their mobility to enable them to improve their incomes and increase their social participation in. The home visits from health volunteers are important to improve community solidarity, improve the mental and physical well-being of the housebound people and maintain physical health.

The home gardens are a means of improving the food security and nutrition of specifically vulnerable groups who might have limited livelihood options such as older people and PWDs. 10 per cent of all households frequently need to borrow food from neighbours and family to meet their needs, whilst 34 per cent sometimes do. However there is little reported reduction of consumption of food or skipped meals.

Table 3: Analysis of EVS baseline data related to food security (based on 1194 HHS)

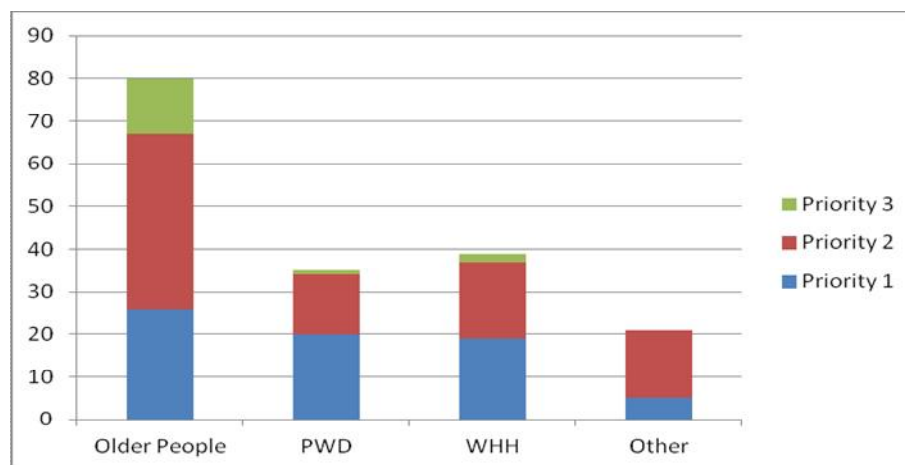
| | Anyone in household had to borrow food from relatives/neighbours or not | Anyone in household had to reduce food consumption or not due to lack of food | Anyone in household had to eat cheaper food instead of rice or not | Adults in household had to skipped more than one meal or not | Children/dependents in household had to skipped more than one meal or not |
|------------|---|---|--|--|---|
| Frequently | 10% | 1% | 7% | 1% | 0% |
| Sometimes | 34% | 4% | 8% | 2% | 1% |
| Never | 56% | 95% | 85% | 97% | 99% |

Equity

With limitations of budget and extensive requirements for improving water sources the project management have made sensible choices as to which villages the budget for water systems, based on the needs and the number of households and this by and large corresponds to the EVS baseline data on watsan based on time spent collecting water.

Approximately sixty per cent of the 350 home gardens had been targeted at older people, with the aim of improving their nutrition. The remaining forty per cent of the home garden input of tools, fruit and vegetables worth approximately 76 USD were distributed to people with disabilities, female headed households and some 'other priority households. 40 per cent of the home gardens in Mahliang township went to priority group 1, 50 per cent to priority group 2 and 10 per cent to priority group 3. Some households without sufficient land were not able to receive home garden inputs which could be the reason only 40 per cent of home gardens went to priority group 1. Whether the VDCs can arrange to 'borrow' spare land from other community members to allow households without land to tender a small home garden could be explored, or whether an arrangement in exchanging labour in a home garden for the output can be established between 2 households for example, might be methods of enabling the food insecure to access a source of fruit and vegetables.

Graph 2: Analysis of home garden distribution by priority wealth ranking and target group, Mahliang township



Effectiveness and efficiency

The communities with new wells had contributed some material and time to assist in the construction reducing the budget required. In some villages, substantial community contribution were still required to complete the systems (to build covers on tanks, basin for taps, protective cover for tube well and so forth). Whilst communities were confident they will be able to collect sufficient contribution and construct these important finishing touches to the water systems, the project staff needs to ensure they do. If it cannot be done some compromise between the project and community will need to be reached, before there is damage to the water system.

In Ye Htwet community contribution of 1million MMK is required before electrification of the system can be installed. The VDC currently have 250,000 and expect to have raised the remainder by middle of next year. Until this system is complete they are relying on donations from villagers to pay 10,000 MMK daily to run the generator for the tube well. This seems like a long time to rely on donations only. It was mentioned by the project team that there are cultural barriers to charging for water and hence introducing a water user fee system in the meantime might not be feasible. However as some other villages have successfully implemented water user fees, this should at least be explored in Ye Htwet, as relying solely on donations for the next 6-9 months may not be sustainable.

The community health training, held twice a year, to cover basic health messages and nutrition did not seem very effective as no one could recall anything learnt. The focus of the health volunteers training seemed to be on health care for older people, and the volunteers could recall these lessons.

Sustainability and accountability

The plans for generating income from the newly installed electricity systems to pay for the diesel for the generator for the water and electricity system, is in theory sustainable.

To strengthen the system the committees responsible for collecting the electricity fees should ensure a proportion of all monies collected is saved for maintenance and repairs.

It was not clear exactly who was responsible for maintenance and repairs of the water system (as opposed to collecting the fees). The VDCs mentioned they had not had training on maintenance and repairs which they thought would be useful. Clear roles and responsibilities should also be defined.

The VDCs are accountable to raise funds to complete the water systems construction, but for some villages this might be a heavy burden. Additional budgetary support if available could be considered.

Anticipated impact

The improved water systems in 25 villages currently being completed will dramatically reduce the amount of time required to collect water and reduce the physical strain of carrying water over long distances. A minimum of 1,557 households should be positively impacted reducing the burden on the children and women who have the prime responsibility, although not sole responsibility, for collecting water. Water for home gardens will also increase improving productivity leading to improved nutrition and reduced food insecurity.

The electrification of the village will improve the communities' access to information (television), ability to work in the evenings, and make life more comfortable.

The work of the health volunteers has been appreciated not only by the older people but by the community. As a result of the home care scheme improvements in intergenerational solidarity and understanding were also reported.

Box 2: Improving inclusion through mobility.

Po Po Myint, 21, and her brother Aung Myint Lwin, 14 live with their parents and grandmother in Nyaung Duu Gi village, Ayartaw township. Disabled from birth, neither can walk and their speech is very limited as well. The TLMI physiotherapists have given both of them an exercise routine to improve their mobility and strength. In addition the project provided each of them with a walking frame. Po Po Myint previously would 'shuffle' on her backside to get around the house. Now she can visit her neighbours, go to the grocery store and pharmacy. She leaves the house every day. Aung Myint Lwin would never leave the house before, but with his walking frame he has even made it as far as the monastery in the village where he can sit and watch what is going on in the village. The VDC have also built a ramp at the monastery for easy access. Their father says there are still areas of the village where they cannot go due to steep hills, but both of his children are a lot more active, and stronger now.

4.2.5 Outcome 5: Community resilience enhanced for natural resources management and disaster risk reduction

| INDICATOR | KEY FINDINGS FROM EVALUATION |
|---|---|
| INDICATOR 5.1: % targeted households use energy efficient stoves for cooking. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where the community members had been given financial support in the construction of Energy Efficient Stoves (EES), these were being used and were being appreciated. Time was being saved in collecting wood, cooks more efficient (retains heat) Not clear how identification of EES trainees occurred. Some villages had lots of trainees, others only 2 or so |
| INDICATOR 5.2: Number of villages utilising natural resource management and DRR practises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not yet implemented yet. It could have been useful to have implemented this earlier on in the project |

Under output 5 the only activity conducted to date was the introduction and training on energy efficient stoves (EES) which had recently been conducted. After the training the trainees were supported with iron rings to build their stoves. The people with the stoves were happy with them, with the reported benefits being a reduction in wood needed, less time required for collecting wood, retention of heat. The EES were relevant and suitable for the topography.

Some villages had a large number of people with EES (30+), and some with a small number (5). It was not clear how these number and trainees had been identified..

The evaluator is unable to quantify the impact of the EES, although it was a fairly low cost activity in total (USD8,340 budgeted).

The introduction of concepts of national resource management followed by practical action plans for enhancing NRM of the communities is planned to take place in late 2012. In hindsight it might have been better to bring this forward as one of the initial activities in the community prepare for natural resource challenges and build resilience. Concerted effort on this output with associated budget support is required in the last year of the project.

4.2.6 Outcome 6: Stronger capacity of local organisations to influence livelihoods policy and practices in the dry zone

| INDICATOR | KEY FINDINGS FROM EVALUATION |
|---|---|
| INDICATOR 6.1: Number of local NGO/CBO officials provided with training in advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some VDC members had been trained in advocacy Growing confidence in working with township authorities, although the monthly meetings still seems to be one way |
| INDICATOR 6.2: Integration of the lessons learned from REVEAL project by other parties. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lessons have been shared with other Food Security Working Group. Not sure if any lessons have been integrated by other parties yet. YMCA - more capacity of project management systems; currently introducing a pilot to integrate disabled children into one of their preschools. NAG (not much) |

| | |
|--|---|
| INDICATOR 6.2: Engagement of local government authorities in the monitoring and reviewing process leading to recommendations to scale out the most successful activities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local township authorities participate in monthly meetings • Meetings are called, organised and facilitated (in terms of travel expenses) by the project. VDCs would like the meetings to continue but it unclear how this would happen. No one township authority taking a lead |
|--|---|

Relevance

Building capacity and links with local authorities is extremely relevant for the ongoing learning, capacity building and sustainability of the VDC model and project activities as is teaching the VDCs and other NGOs how to effectively engage with local authorities. As the project finishes in 16 months time but the VDCs are hoped to be sustainable beyond that, ensuring that the VDCs have the capacity and know how to work with local authorities is vital. Visibility of the project and sharing lessons learned with other agencies not only allows for sharing of best practises from REVEAL as well as learning about other best practices to improve the current implementation of REVEAL.

Effectiveness and efficiency

In each township there are monthly meeting between all the VDC, representation from the VDC members rotating, and the township authorities. Meetings are called, organised and facilitated (in terms of travel expenses) by the project. VDCs would like the meetings to continue but it unclear how this would happen. Between the township authorities there is no apparent one lead agency.

With the odd exception, the capacity of township authorities appeared to be fairly limited. Whilst the township authorities have received some training, more ongoing involvement of the township in implementing and monitoring the activities at field level, would provide ongoing opportunities for capacity building.

Sustainability

Project staff will only be in these two townships area for the term of the project and then are likely to leave these townships. Greater emphasis on building capacity for people who are likely to stay within the dry zone should be emphasised. This could be

- Involving township authorities more closely in implementation of the project
- Internship scheme for people from the communities to work with the partners

Accountability

These monthly meetings are a good initial step in establishing some accountability between VDCs and the township authorities. In the remaining project period more formal accountability systems, such as a formal designation of a lead township authorities and a formal handover the project, at completion would strengthen the accountability.

Anticipated impact

Some impressive examples of communities using the ICAP as a basis for demanding services (staff for a newly constructed health centre and middle schools). As yet, there not much evidence of the township authorities adopting and replicating what they have learnt from the project and scaling up although given the resource of the township and the timeframe this is a very ambitious target. In both townships the authorities were very enthusiastic about the VDC model and the project in general which indicates that closer working with the township authorities to build their capacity to adapt, adopt and replicate the lessons learned from REVEAL could be considered in any future project.

4.3 HelpAge and partners' roles

4.3.1 Project Management

The consortium approach allows different partners to bring different expertise to the project. TLMI bring their expertise working on disability, HelpAge with older people, Golden Plains on certain agriculture skills with YMCA and NAG managing the implementation at the township levels. The project in the two townships is implemented in parallel. NAG with their greater field experience than YMCA might benefit from more flexibility to respond to the needs of the communities in their townships. Currently there has been little interaction between the two teams of field staff, which is a gap.

There are a number of clear and regular management processes that are followed to ensure the effective implementation of the process. There are regular monthly meetings at the township level with the local authorities, of the township project teams and subsequently of the Project Coordination Team in Yangon comprising of the responsible manager from each partner and the two township coordinators, occasionally accompanied by their officers (Livestock and Small Business/ Agriculture), as well as an annual review (see section below). The regularity of these meetings means issues are raised and can be acted upon in a timely manner. There were some comments from both township teams that proposals and suggestions are made to 'HelpAge' but the project field teams were not clear as to the response or the reasoning behind the response. Since decisions are taken by the PCT and hence the consortium and not HelpAge solely, it suggests more work to be done on ensuring partners feel as equal partners in the consortium and/or the rationale behind some decisions more clearly communicated.

Sufficient management resources had been included in the project for staff from all partners. There are regular visits from HelpAge to both townships, with greater emphasis on supporting YMCA in Mahlaing as required.

The project budget had been revised once time so far and is in the process of another revision.. A lengthier process with greater inclusion of the partners in the initial budget amendment inclusive of all partners might be beneficial. The budget as of September 2012 of 50 per cent spent. With the delay in the implementation of activities this means that 50 per cent has been spent during 17 months of activities (May 2012+). There is 15 months of project remaining. It should be manageable, if challenging, to complete all the activities and expenditure by the project completion.

4.3.2 Monitoring and evaluation processes

A detailed monitoring and evaluation framework was established at the beginning of the project. Detailed activity indicators have been developed and the HelpAge M&E Officer accompanied by the township staff, is responsible for collecting data on these indicators on a regular basis.

The REVEAL baseline survey covered 1194 households in the 30 villages (approximately 25% of households) using a framework called 'Economic Vulnerability Scale' (EVS) which identified household scores against ten different vulnerability factors such as debt, income, assets, health, watsan, social participation and so forth. This process has collected a source of rich quantitative data and will provide a solid baseline to which to compare to at the end of the project. The project team received training in EVS and understands the main principles behind the model. The process has also contributed to the staff's understanding of the different determinants of vulnerability and how the project interventions are designed to reduce different determinants. However the use of EVS data in project implementation does not seem to have occurred and an in depth understanding of the results of the EVS data, what it means and how it can be used is lacking. The principles behind EVS are simple to understand, the statistics used in the analysis are less simple.

At the end of the project the EVS survey will be conducted again to collect data to compare against the baseline to review the project's progress to the indicators for the overall purpose of the project. There seems to be some confusion in the project team as to what is the key indicator for the overall purpose, whether it is to increase

household income by 30% or reduce the number of households identified as most vulnerable according to EVS. This should be clarified as it is having an impact on the current project implementation.

What is currently lacking in the monitoring process is a focus on the outputs. Most of the indicators in the logframe are activity indicators, with the assumption that the activity indicators will lead to the desired results. The outputs of the activities are not strongly captured. As a result there does not seem to be much usage of the M&E data collected. It is used for reporting purposes and ensuring the project activities are on track but not to reflect on to gauge what impact the project is having.

Two excellent monitoring initiatives of the project include firstly the annual 2 day review meeting with various stakeholders including all project staff and a representative from all VDCs. The recent meeting, in August 2012 was referenced a number of times as a forum for reflection of the project implementation to date, consensus reaching and decision making. Secondly the community based monitoring and evaluation committee consisting of largely non VDC members is an excellent tool to build accountability at the community level.

5 Lessons learned and recommendations

- The monitoring and evaluation systems are well established with a strong focus on detailed activity monitoring. Data to reflect impact needs to be collected, analyzed and reflected upon. This reflection should be integrated into the roles of all project staff as a key learning and capacity building tool.
- Since this is the first time EVS has been used in Myanmar it is perhaps an unrealistic expectation that it could be used to its full potential for project implementation. However given the complexity of EVS statistics and the resulting lack of capacity and understanding within the project team about how to use the EVS data, this does raise questions about its suitability. There is a lot of rich data collected in the baseline survey which the team cannot analyze themselves. A simplified version which would give the project team data to use in the project may be more suitable. The usefulness of EVS can be more appropriately assessed after the end of project survey.
- Providing project inputs to the community quickly is popular, especially to ensure wide community engagement in the project activities. However in future consideration should be given to implement 'foundation block' activities (national resource management, irrigation and so forth) as this would then enhance the effectiveness of inputs, in particularly agricultural inputs, provided later. (That said three years duration for a project of this magnitude is not very long).
- If there is budget remaining increasing the irrigation and water systems activities would be sensible.

Output 1

- Ensure Integrated Community Action Plans are matched with budgets, and fundraising plan.
- Promote community ownership of VDCs, through membership fees, regular member meetings, as opposed to current 'client – beneficiary' model.
- Promote women in leadership and decision making roles on VDC, such as Chairman and Secretary. Ensure regular turnover of VDC staff to build further capacity in the community.
- Produce clear guidelines on different sources of income for the VDC and what they can be used for.
- Ensure that the collective businesses that will be established by the VDCs in the remainder of the project, are low in time management requirements and where possible provide additional benefit for the community. Give some consideration to the use of funds as revolving loans, if there are some VDC who do not have a strong business plan they feel passionate about.

Output 2

- As planned continue to work with the farmers to review practical and feasible technologies for improving irrigation. Pilot if necessary. Review remaining project budget to calculate if there is more financial resources for this.
- Careful calculation of the impact of the late monsoon rains this year required, to see if the redistribution of assets to farmers is the most cost effective way of enhancing their incomes. The impact of losing one or two crops in the full annual cycle should be calculated. Increasing the size of the seed bank might be an alternative way of supporting farmers when they come to plant the lost crops (sesame and pigeon pea) next year.
- Work with all VDCs to make a likely projection as to how much seed they will have in their seed bank in 3-5 years time, if all seed is returned to the bank on time and with interest. This can act as a powerful motivator for the VDCs, as well as help in their future planning processes
- Hold group discussions before the next planting season of each crop to understand and get feedback from farmers on what, if any, lessons demonstrated by FFS and demo plots they plan to implement. Golden Plains Support Staff and Agricultural Officers to use these discussions to identify what further technical support and to who should receive this support is required.

Output 3

- As already planned ensure that small businesses established after vocational training are provided with strong monitoring and mentoring as the likely of failure could be high. Ensure sufficient market for goods especially if supporting duplicate businesses. For people wishing to establish new businesses (as opposed to strengthening existing businesses), a process for ensuring proper business planning, market analysis, budgeting and financial management could be introduced. Providing training to the new business owner can be arranged by linking them up with a willing peer trainer either in the same village or surrounding communities. The peer trainer would also be able to provide ongoing support and mentoring to the new business.
- Encourage paravets through the VDC and village administrators to take on a more proactive responsibility for monitoring animal husbandry practices in the village, not only the animals provided by the project.

Output 4

- Take a decision on how to make the health education activities more effective. If this cannot be done consider the cancellation of these activities.
- Work with each VDC and village authorities to clarify precise roles and responsibilities for repairs and maintenance of water systems (not only collection of fees) and if require provide further training.
- Ensure follow up with all VDCs to complete the construction of the water systems which is reliant on community contribution

Output 5

- Important to integrate the Natural Resource Management work across the other activities

Output 6

- Open discussion with township authorities as to what their ideas are for continued engagement with the VDCs after the project completion, and how the project can work with them in the remaining 14 months to increase the likelihood of there being future engagement. Formal handover of project to VDCs and relevant project authorities would be important. Identification of one key department to be the focal point for the VDCs might be appropriate.
- If budget and timing allows encourage greater participation and monitoring of the project villages by wide range of township staff, to build their capacity and understanding of the VDC model, and the achievement and challenges of the project.
- Budget allowing, if there is time for intensive capacity building of local (township/village) skills, perhaps through a small internship scheme for a few people to work with the project team, this would leave behind in the two townships some skills that will be lost when the project concludes and the project teams are disbanded

6. Conclusions

The activities to diversify and improve their livelihoods and reduce their economic vulnerability are relevant. One of the strengths of the project is the focus on multi-dimensional causes of vulnerability, and as a result the intervention has been designed to reduce these different causes. One weakness of this approach is that it does lead to a large number of diverse activities. Some of the complementary activities could be dropped given the time pressures of the project and more time focused to the major underlying factors that the project is in a position to influence.

At community level equity is paramount for the project implementation. Inclusion of the whole community including vulnerable groups is a clear project strategy and one that is being effectively implemented. Full inclusion cannot be achieved immediately but the project has made good progress in establishing mechanisms, improving the environment and supporting excluded individuals and households, to enable them to be further integrated.

There have been some good initiatives to ensure the project is efficient, such as the use of cascade and cluster training, identification of FFS trainees and so forth. The VDCs are relative low cost structures to set up and support over the three year project. The communities have contributed to the construction of water systems keeping costs down. To be more effective and efficient it might have been better to delay the distribution of agricultural input until after the NRM and irrigation work.

The VDCs with the technical support they receive over the next 15 months should be sustainable. They will be able to manage the Village Development Fund, seed banks and continue the home care programme. More defined links with the township authorities will be useful. Maintenance mechanisms of the water systems need to be tested.

The project has been very innovative in relation to promoting accountability, both with the community itself (with the community M&E committees) and between the project staff and the communities (project review meetings, complaint boxes and so forth). To build on this the VDC should promote stronger community ownership of their VDCs. Ensuring regular turnover of VDC staff will also enhance accountability.

By the project conclusion the project should be able to demonstrate substantial impact in reducing the economic vulnerability of the most vulnerable households in the community. Since the backbone of the local economy is primarily agriculture where weaknesses remain the communities are still vulnerable. However the project will have given the individual households and the communities' greater capacity, infrastructure, access to resources to manage and cope with these challenges in the future.

Annexes

Annex I: Schedule of evaluation

| Date | Location |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Monday 10 September | Interviews in Yangon |
| Tuesday 11 September | Kan Hpyu village, Ah Tar Taw |
| Wednesday 12 September | Bon Le Khet village, Ah Yar Taw |
| Thursday 13 September | Nyaung Duu Gyi village, Ah Yar Taw |
| Friday 14 September | Aie Ma Yoe village, Mahlaing |
| Saturday 15 September | Ye Ni village, Mahlaing |
| Sunday 16 September | Ye Htwet village, Mahlaing |
| Monday 17 September | Interviews and feedback in Yangon |

Annex 2 - Case studies

Case study I - Daw Kha, Ye Ni, Mahliang

Daw Kha, 64 years old, lives by herself in the village she was born in, Ye Ni village. She is a widow, her husband dying 17 years ago. She has four adult children, three of whom live in neighbouring villages and one son in Ye Ni village.

When she was younger she used to be a vendor, earning income from selling vegetables and groceries. However since her health has turned for the worse she has been unable to do this. Shortly after her husband passed away she had an accident when she was chopping wood. A splinter of wood went into her eye, and since then she has had very little vision in that eye. Four years ago she had a stroke that left her bed-ridden for a year. Slowly she learnt to walk again relying on two sticks. Since then she has been relying on her children for food and income. Her son comes to see her regularly, but her other children only come back to the villages every couple of months.

When the REVEAL project started, she was identified by the VDC as someone who would benefit from home visits. She has two community volunteers, trained by HelpAge that come to see her at least twice a month, check her health including her blood pressure and help about the house. She also calls the volunteers when she feels unwell. In March 2012 the physiotherapists from TLMI visited her and after their assessment, gave her a routine of exercises to do to improve her mobility. The volunteers helped her do her exercises. Her mobility has improved dramatically and she can now walk without relying on a walking stick at all. This has given her a great deal of freedom and dignity. She can now walk to the well and draw water herself to bathe herself rather than relying on her son, and she can cook herself as well.

Her increased mobility has also had an impact on her ability to build up her assets. Last year she received a small pig and some pig food from the project. After paying the VDC back 25% of the value of the grant, she managed to sell the pig for a very small profit, which she invested in another pig and 3 chickens. Now she is no longer relying on walking sticks she can prepare better food for the animals and is able to feed them more than before. She now has 12 chickens and she expects to make more profit with the second pig which is growing faster.

She attends the VDC meetings when asked and enjoys going to the meeting but she cannot remember much of what was discussed at the meetings. She feels happier than before as she has something to do with her time – the animals keep her busy. She plans to raise more animals when she can.

Case study 2: Aung Myint Kyi

Aung Myint Kyi is 42 years old and lives in Aie Ma Yoe village with his wife and three of his four children. He and his wife work at a toddy farm for a daily wage when needed, and in addition they process toddy juice to make 'jiggery'. They estimate their annual income to be 400-500,000 MMK (470-590 USD). The oldest son, 14, left school after 5th grade and now helps around the house. His 13 year old son left the village last month to go and work in a tea shop in Mandalay, owned by a relative. His son is paid 25,000 MMK per month and last month he managed to send 15,000 MMK back to his family.

The family received a grant from the VDC which they used to buy a cow which they will use for breeding. Aung Myint Kyi has experience in cow raising, as he has done this for other people before. He attended the cascade training on livestock raising and learnt about the need for immunization and how to build an effective shelter for his cow. He has already paid back 25% of the value of the grant to the Village Development Fund from his income from the toddy farm and producing jiggery. His plan is to take another loan from the VDC when possible to start raising goats which will not take such a long time to realize a profit. His aim is to be able to improve his income situation so that his daughter, currently 10 years old, will be able to school beyond the 5th grade, when they will need to start paying for uniforms and books.

Aung Myint Kyi thinks the biggest impact the VDC has had on the village has been from the tube wells which means his daughter does not have to walk so far to collect water for the household. The village also now has lighting along the main paths, and in the future he is looking forward to getting electricity for lighting in his house.

Case study 3: Thida Oo - Nyaung Duu Gyi village, Ayartaw

Thida Oo, 22 years old is the Vice President of Nyaung Duu Gyi village. She lives with her parents and her younger sister. She left school during the 4th grade, when her father had an accident falling out of a toddy tree which left him unable to work. Her mother, herself and her sister all engage in daily wage work.

Thido Oo decided she wanted to become a member of the VDC when she heard that the VDC membership was open to all, even young women. She was a member of the VDC before being elected to Vice President earlier this year. Her role is to support the President, chair meetings when he is unable to attend, and take responsibility for the health volunteers and home care programme. She finds the role challenging, especially when she forgets to write the reports immediately and sometimes she has to miss half a day's wages to attend the meetings. However she enjoys the work, and says her neighbours and other members of the VDC provide lots of encouragement to her. Last month at the township level meeting with the local authorities she even facilitated the meeting, which she was very proud of as were the rest of the VDC. She hopes in the future the VDC will be able to work harder to provide more assistance to the older people in the village.

Case study 4: Ma Khe San - Nyaung Duu Gyi village, Ayartaw

Ma Khe San is 43 years old from Nyaung Duu Gyi village. She lives with her husband. They have no children. Previously she worked for daily wages earning 1,500 MMK (1,75 USD) a day when there was work available. However she heard that grants for small businesses were available from the VDC and last year she completed her business plan to set up food business. With the grant of 98,500 MMK she bought a frying pan, juice extractor, cooking oil and some rice. She now makes a dish of rice juice, beans, and vegetables and plates of it in the village. She has paid back 25% of the money to the Village Development Fund. She estimates she makes about 45,000 MMK (53 USD) profit a month. With the money saved from the business she bought a pig to raise for 40,000 MMK. She hasn't seen the paravet yet, or had the pig vaccinated.

Ma Khe San concluded that previously she had to get sunburn from working in the fields, wait for work to come and work out of the house. Her current income is much better and more reliable than previously. In the future she wants to continue her business and raise more animals. Ideally she would like the VDC to be able to construct another water tap in the village so she wouldn't have to walk so far to fetch water.

Case study 5: Zaw Win Myint - Aie Ma Yoe village

Zaw Win Myint, 27 years old, is the Treasurer and Health volunteer of Aie ma Yoe VDC. He lives his his wife, 5 year old daughter, mother and two aunts. His parents separated but his father still lives in the same village with his new family. The family has 13 acres, 80 toddy trees and 16 cows to support themselves

Zaw Win Myint completed grade 11 at school, and so his writing and record keeping skills are much in demand in the VDC. He was interested in the idea of doing something for his community and developing his village so he volunteered for the VDC. He works very closely with the President and accountant. In addition he also is a homecare volunteer, regularly visiting and helping one older man in the village.

Zaw Win Myint has been very interested in the demonstration plots that have been growing a different type of pigeon pea seed and sesame seed. If the demonstration plot yield is good he will consider using this seed next year. He will definitely using the technique of thinning the seeds, as he can see already the plans are growing well. The biggest challenge he faces on his land, is that it is far away from any water sources and is not irrigated.

He thinks that one of the main benefits of establishing the VDC has been the realization that when the village come together to identify their essential needs, through the ICAP process, and work jointly together that they will be able to meet their needs. The VDC working together with the Village Administrator have already manage to construct a rural health sub-centre. A proposal has been made to the local authorities to provide the human resources to run this health centre and he hopes this proposal will be approved.