

Evaluation of AWO Regional South Asia Project

Final Report

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO) International head office has commissioned an evaluation of its South Asia Regional Project. The field phase took place in November/December 2012. The team consisted of Bernward Causemann, Tübingen/Germany and Kaustubh Devale, Pune/India. Objectives of the evaluation were to have an independent assessment of the adequacy of the strategic orientation chosen in the different sub-projects, of the impact of the projects and to get recommendations for the further development of the Regional Project. For each partner project, a debriefing note was produced with suggestions for adaptations in project concepts.

The head office and the regional office have been visited, plus each of the six partners for three to four days during this evaluation. Apart from document review, interviews with staff, beneficiaries and stakeholders have been conducted and participatory tools (causal diagram and trend analysis) applied that give a quick insight into the knowledge that the people involved have. These tools involved visualisation, high group engagement and reflection. They provided sufficient validation to generate reliable information. The principles of “optimal ignorance” and “proportionate accuracy” applied (chapter 3).

The report gives detailed **feedback on all six partner projects** (chapter 4.1). In terms of **relevance** of the regional project, the projects address key problems. They are all relevant in their own region and context. The strategies chosen are relevant. The lack of a regional strategy in the past contributed to a situation where projects do not sufficiently address some key problems like gender issues. Strategic orientation on gender and disaster risk management mainstreaming, social inclusion and social protection aspects would have made it even more relevant. The holistic rural development approach with rights-based elements is adequate and in line with current discussion. Marginalised communities have been focussed upon (chapter 4.2).

In terms of **effectiveness**, the objectives and strategies of individual sub-projects are to a large extent in line with the current state of knowledge of the development sector. Positive outcomes have been achieved in all four key components of the project. Social structures have been built, livelihood security enhanced, access to rights and entitlements increased and advocacy and networking improved. Identity, a sense of unity and collective voice has been created for the targeted marginalised communities in each partner project. However, there is scope in most partner projects for being more effective, partly through more sharing and exchange. Hardly any negative effects were discovered, except for an increase in disparity of well-being (some benefiting more than others), and a reduction of soil fertility in a few cases. Factors that contributed or hindered the achievement of impacts have been analysed: Success factors were that the societies are ready for change, the projects have clear design and orientation, staff are well qualified and the projects receive good support from the regional project. Inhibiting factors are structural marginalisation of communities, an inhibiting policy framework in Nepal, staff fluctuation and lack of synergy between the partner projects (chapter 4.3).

There are many indicators that **efficiency** is high: The presence of the regional office with its improved link to partners has contributed to it. Partner projects have contributed very well with their in-house resources. Organisations have leveraged a high level of government resources. The wide spread of partners on the other hand has reduced efficiency. Participatory statistics and participatory needs assessments could have contributed to even more efficiency (chapter 4.4).

Impact achieved at target community level is that social structures have been formed and capacities built both of the community based organisations and of the communities to bring positive change on many issues. Income and food security have been increased, there is better hygiene and sanitation, schooling, cultivation techniques, while forced seasonal migration has been reduced. Participation of women and youth in social structures has increased, too. Some unplanned positive impact could be observed like the reduction of alcohol consumption and in India the election of members of the targeted communities into local and regional governance structures. The experience showed that social structures of grassroots communities can be enhanced through a stronger clarity of purpose and role and the participatory development of goals, a systematic engagement with existing social structures and establishing collective leadership, also including women and youth.

At partner level, the partnership with AWO has helped in better positioning of the partners' work. Capacities were built especially on impact orientation and related competencies. The organisations were strengthened.

At macro level, particularly local government is now fulfilling marginalised communities' entitlements better and a couple of agricultural policies of the Indian regional and national governments have been influenced. Impact at macro-level can be further strengthened by cooperation of partners on core thematic areas (chapter 4.5).

The **sustainability** has been assessed on three levels (chapter 4.6):

Level 1: Much of what was achieved so far as a benefit for the communities, is likely to remain after closure of the project. Practices have been included in people's daily routines. The sustainability of social structures has limitations, indicated i.a. by the fact that the communities aspire for stronger organisations. How sustainable the access to government resources is, depends partly on the continued strength of the social structures, and partly on government itself.

Level 2: The benefits created by the six partner projects are likely to survive some crises or changes, but not others. Resilience needs to be increased. Also, communities need a mentor or reference point to which they can go if they face a challenge that they cannot handle themselves.

Level 3: The upward movement of improvement that has taken place during the projects, should not come to a halt, but more improvement needs to be brought after project end because most people have not yet crossed the poverty threshold, because population pressure increases and the environment brings challenges. The idea of a sustained upward movement after project end was hardly considered by partners during our discussions, nor by the regional office. This level of sustainability needs to be planned for, too.

The level of sustainability of the projects could be achieved because AWO through the Social Structure Fund has the possibility to support organisations for a couple of project phases.

There was a good level of **Coherence and Complementarity**, while some projects could have been more effective through more **Coordination**, cooperation and networking. All partner projects have related to government policies and funding opportunities for communities. All projects are consistent and in line with earlier phases and have learned from experience. Some of the partner organisations network closely with other NGOs. Other do not do that strongly and could benefit from more exchange. Organisations that run more than one project have had cross-learning between projects: Experiences from the AWO project have been used in other projects, and approaches from those have been applied in the AWO funded projects. No issues have been found where a lack of coordination has led to major problems (chapter 4.7).

Regarding **cross-cutting issues**, there is participation of women at different intensity. In some partner projects, participation is very high; in others it is not satisfactory. In all projects, women are beneficiaries. There is generally not much focus on the strategic needs of women, nor a strong gender understanding.

Most partner projects focus on particularly marginalised communities. By that, they contribute to social inclusion. In the case of the two partner projects where there are landless, and the projects do not target them, the projects are likely to contribute to increased social disparity. The same happens in some credit cooperatives (chapter 4.8).

The evaluation makes a couple of **recommendations** for partner organisations: That they introduce participatory surveys and needs assessments, that they extend project areas through community efforts, introduce more practices of sustainable agriculture and develop the concept on migration and youth. The projects should focus more on women's concerns, limit the risk of promoting a dependency mentality and be careful in terms of their effects on poverty stratification. It also recommends that partners focus on sustainability of community based organisations by promoting their lasting usefulness and being available as a mentor after project end (chapter 5).

The **coordination by the AWO regional office** has intensified monitoring and support by AWO and has highly contributed to partner organisations gaining institutional strength. Partners appreciate that also in comparison to other funding partners. It is recommended that AWO and German government requirements for per diems should be done in a way that allow South Asian partners to follow their own organisational per diem regulations.

Regarding human resource development, the evaluation sees a missed opportunity. Partners could learn much more from each other, and motivate each other. Developing a human resource development policy for partners is therefore recommended. In terms of its thematic advisory role, the regional office has also missed opportunities. Likewise, successful concepts applied by partners have not been spread in the region. AWO International would be well placed to create international linkages between its German member organisations, its German federation and its partners in three regions, in order to mutually benefit and contribute to international civil society discussion, bringing in voices from the Global South. But little international linkage has been developed. It is therefore recommended that a regional strategy be worked out with thematic priorities which involves building the competence of its partners and spreading such competence beyond the partners, facilitating partners to cooperate with each other and with AWO Germany in building networks for changing national and international policies and practices.

Lastly, it is recommended that the project be continued (chapter 6).