

# Evaluation Report

## “Country Program in Tajikistan” of Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e.V.

Project Number

**TJK - 1048 / P2 889**

By

Frank Bliss

and

Dirk Zerhusen



**Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e.V.**

Friedrich-Ebert-Straße 1

D- 53113 Bonn, Germany

Tel.: (+49) (0) 228-2288-0

Fax: (+49) (0) 228-2207-10

<http://www.welthungerhilfe.de>

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## **Executive Summary**

### **0 Introduction**

This country evaluation was implemented between 4<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2009 in Tajikistan. The evaluation is embedded in the context of Welthungerhilfe's outcome / Impact, programme and instrument oriented, and thematic evaluation programme which should contribute to responding to cross-cutting and strategic questions and support the institutional learning process of the organization and its partners.

In order to allow for a critical review of the completed and ongoing country activities and for a planning of the 2010 - 2014 Welthungerhilfe country programme, the evaluation mission has focused its work mainly on the issues and challenges within the various projects and the work of the regional office and only to a lower extent to the quality of planning and implementation works of individual projects.

Conclusions and recommendation of the evaluation should be used as a planning basis for the elaboration of the country programme 2010-2014. The evaluation has been carried out by the independent consultants Frank Bliss (socio-economist) and Dirk Zerhusen (agronomist).

### **1 Description of Country Programme and Framework Conditions**

The Welthungerhilfe (WHH) country programme with the current total volume of almost 17 million EUR since 2005, is focused on two major outputs, first, to a minor part to support the national disaster prevention and mitigation planning and, secondly, to contribute to rural poverty reduction.

The implementation of the various projects under the umbrella of the country programme for Tajikistan is effected under difficult conditions. Development orientation of the national government is weak. Governance on all levels is very poor and almost no state budgets are allocated for rural development and poverty alleviation. The state does hardly care for the needs of the population and leaves most local investments, the prevailing parts of all operational costs for infrastructure and also most of all emergency interventions to foreign donors.

In the same time larger strata of the population (estimated still 50 to 60%) live under the national poverty line so that their own financial contributions to development activities can only be relatively modest. It is presumptuous to expect that these poor and extremely poor populations could contribute without support of the state to rehabilitation, new construction and long-term operation of public infrastructure and services such as schools, health institutions, bridges, access trails, etc.

As road infrastructure in Tajikistan is poor and mainly in rural areas still becoming stunted, transport in general and especially travelling is time consuming and expensive so that all projects in rural areas are negatively affected. In addition, qualified project staff is rare in Tajikistan and professionals are following the employers with the highest salaries.

One additional issue appears symptomatic for Tajikistan: most donors to Welthungerhilfe redact mainly or only short-time programmes of less than six months up to two (exceptionally

three) years which are adequate for emergency measures but do not allow for long-term sustainable project planning. In contrast, all activities in the resource management sector which gains more and more importance in the country require a long-term engagement of usually 10 years or more.

A specific issue in country development in Tajikistan are unusual extreme weather conditions which influence agricultural activities considerably. Also the poor electricity supply has a remarkable effect on many development oriented initiatives.

## 2 Outcomes and Impact

Implementation of all Welthungerhilfe programmes and projects in Tajikistan takes place in rural areas which are poorer than the national average. There, most projects are directed to the entire population of the selected villages as the (potential) target group while specific activities are implemented with surpassingly motivated people, particularly also with women, and in general, only with volunteers. Amongst the target group members, but also within the national and expatriate staff there are men and women in all positions. However, in some areas (e.g. in Gharm) socio-cultural conditions so far prevented the achievement of strategic gender needs.

The activities and results of the projects are numerous and remarkable with regard to the acceptance and appraisal of the target population in Gharm, Khatlon, Sughd, and Zerafshan. Various outputs within the disaster prevention sector and especially regarding rural infrastructure, agricultural production, to a somewhat lower extent also concerning energy efficiency have been achieved. Many activities are highly estimated by the respondents amongst the beneficiaries to the evaluation mission and quite a few outputs have also resulted in adequate outcomes and impacts e.g. in terms of increased agricultural yields, in environmental friendlier usage of biomass, or in direct income patterns.

The various disaster prevention activities are on the one hand visible on the output level. On the other hand, some outputs do not always have their outcomes (and impacts) as equipment for example of the regional training centre in Gharm or of various trained local rescue teams is still lacking. The evaluators could also realize that some pilot measures in the agricultural sector such as the cultivation with certified seeds (i.e. of potatoes, alfa-alfa, beans, peas, etc.) could not easily be replicated. Whereas seeds were provided (partly sold) by the project to many households it is not guaranteed that farmers could find such certified seeds on the local markets to start using them independently from the projects.

Some community development activities were very successful. First well performing Community Based Organizations (CBO) e.g. were already successfully implementing smaller infrastructure projects and even started to write project proposals for their own village in order to attract other donors. However, the evaluation mission cannot hide that community organization performance appears to be often (internally) top-down oriented, and thoroughly little gender-friendly. Most CBO also care rather for implementation of new projects than for operation and maintenance of their existing village infrastructure.

### 3 Sustainability

In order to encourage sustainability of various project activities, Welthungerhilfe and its partners such as the NGOs JOVID, Haqiq or Azal co-operate on village level with CBOs. These CBOs either already existed when project implementation started or they were newly created with support of Welthungerhilfe. In practice, the time for establishing sustainable CBOs is often insufficient if a project has only two or even one year's time. So far, many CBO are at the very kick-off point of their work and still more conditioned onto the implementation of individual investment projects than onto the continuous management of installations once established by such an investment.

Some projects (e.g. in the Zerafshan Valley) are not yet sufficiently based on integrated approaches: disaster risk management, energy saving activities, appropriated agricultural cultivations systems, irrigation, and community based organizations on the target group level. Although it is already scheduled to integrate all activities, a systemic and sustainable development approach in the use of the existing resources in the most environmentally friendly manner in a broader geographical context can be achieved mainly in participation with international funding organizations and the Government of Tajikistan. Long-term approaches (i.e. a minimum of ten years implementation) are inevitable for achieving sustainable environment outcomes.

Partner organizations such as Azal or JOVID received partner support by Welthungerhilfe since some years (beginning in 2003 with e.g. support to organizational development, to proposal writing, reporting, etc.). However, after several years of such support the organizational capacities are still low and need additional support and expertise in organization development. The organizations have also inflexible and autocratic management structures. Their prevailingly well-educated staff does not participate actively in the decision-making procedure of their organization.

### 4 Relevance

All Welthungerhilfe projects within the country programme contribute more or less significantly to rural poverty reduction as pretended by the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the national Tajik Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP-II), the National Development Strategy (NDS) of 2007, and the statutes and the various strategies and policies of Welthungerhilfe. Principles and designs of the more than 10 different ongoing programmes reflect also the strategies and policies of Welthungerhilfe donors such as e.g. the European Commission (EC), the World Bank or the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). This attaches high relevance to the various projects from the political point of view.

Regarding relevance from the prospect of the target groups and regarding their priorities and demands, a careful differentiation is coercible: highest priority amongst the current beneficiaries has the project's support to income generating activities. This concerns the agricultural sector, but also trade and all other types of business. Especially new "workshops" are often mentioned when it comes to proposals for solutions. The second priority of most rural households is the rehabilitation, an improvement or the new construction of social infrastructure. In the areas visited by the evaluation mission e.g. in Khatlon this concerns also the improvement of the drinking water supply or building up of irrigation facilities.

Conservations and protection measures in the environmental sector so far have less priority amongst the concerned populations.

## 5 Effectiveness

The targets of the various projects (and the country programme) aim at contributing to poverty alleviation i.e. improving living conditions of the rural population by support to self-help. In general, targets are realistic and indicators more or less appropriate although many projects provide a very ambitious spectrum of activities.

Quality of Welthungerhilfe supported construction works is sometimes poor and not sustainable. E.g. a river embankment in Gharm has been built without concrete compacting and without inserting any stretching fugues thus resulting in crannies. A potato storage room in Zerafshan is badly built and exposed to flooding. Window insulation in a school in Gharm left behind broken windows glasses and the windows themselves have still large open clefts.

On the one hand, the size of direct project beneficiaries and of indirectly favoured members of the target group in general is relatively high with approximately 15,000 to 20,000 individuals e.g. for projects in Khatlon. 400 or even 1,000 participants in the cooking stove programme are remarkable figures if we consider that energy saving has never been a subject in the area. The same is true for more than 650 hh using organic fertilizer for the first time. However, regarding the size of the entire rural population in the selected project Districts and the fact that resource management and especially soil erosion prevention measures require the entirety of the population of an area affected and not only the most active members of the communities, target group figures should be much higher in order to achieve a systemic and sustainable impact. This could be achieved either by the limitation of one project to smaller areas or by the increase of budgets and steps taken.

Within the frame of the WHH partner support the creation of some partner organizations has been driven mainly by the spin-off of Welthungerhilfe project staff in recent years. JOVID and Azal are some classic spin-off partners of the Welthungerhilfe and received support by the organization since many years. Nevertheless, the progress in capacity building and an extended independence of the organizations are not yet sufficient and do affect the effectiveness of the country programme. Analyses of the applied strategy and the concept of the partner support approach by the Welthungerhilfe so far do not exist, but are urgently required. The continuation of this kind of partner support should be reviewed.

## 6 Efficiency

For most infrastructure works, there are no average unit costs available. Almost every drinking water supply system, every bridge, every piece of road rehabilitated has its own specific costs. Therefore, a comparison of Welthungerhilfe activities with such general unit costs and even with Tajikistan specific unit costs is impossible. Nevertheless, the evaluation mission supports the opinion that most of such infrastructure - with regard to their construction expenses - has been achieved in an efficient way. Efficiency here is also seconded by the remarkable voluntary contributions in kind (mainly work) of the population.

Other than concerning the estimates of the infrastructure projects the evaluation missions doubts if - regarding the small number of the beneficiaries in some villages - all such inputs

are really efficient. Efficiency is also difficult to assess since there exists almost no outcome and impact monitoring. A few activities are apparently not efficient (e.g. the information boards established in the Gharm valley).

A proxy indicator for efficiency could be the (subjective) assessment of Welthungerhilfe by representatives of donor organizations. In comparison with other recipients of funds, Welthungerhilfe enjoys highest recognition with regard to the accurateness of their cost-for-activity planning which is "far better than schedules of other competitors". The same interview partners also stated that the general costs of Welthungerhilfe for various activities are very low to compare with other propositions.

## **7. Annual Cross Sectional Evaluation Subject „Self-Help“**

Most projects within the current country programme and the actual project portfolio comprise a help to self-help approach according to the concept of Welthungerhilfe. This approach is different from some other donor practices which, even 12 years after the end of the civil war, still provide presents to the people thus interfering with their own responsibility for themselves. In many cases this results in the fact that in case of problems (e.g. a damaged irrigation channel) in many villages people wait and see if assistance free of charge would come.

In contrast, at present almost all inputs of Welthungerhilfe in Tajikistan or of their implementation partners require - according to the capacities of the populations - either financial or in-kind (mainly labour) contributions. Accordingly, also many disaster prevention measures are supported by the target groups with their own labour inputs. Work inputs or in-kind contributions (e.g. materials for construction) are mainly based on voluntary work which is a common traditional practice in villages. This voluntary work (*hashār*) allows many people with little cash income including very poor households to participate at least in some project activities.

In EC TACIS projects in Gharm, Khatlon and Zerafshan, a major number of components, apart from similar labour inputs, require also or mainly financial contributions. For the majority of the rural population, despite a generally low living standard, such contributions are more or less justified and the amounts adequate.

However, two issues require certain attention: (i.) it is doubtful whether external supported aid should mobilize resources of the poor and the poorest in order to replace typical obligations of the state such as rehabilitation of schools, of health facilities, or of bridges and access roads; (ii.) secondly, projects should weigh on if the very poor strata of the population should contribute to the same extent in cash and kind as the wealthier parts of the target groups. Many families (mainly women headed households) are poor also due to lack of labour so that they could not contribute to the same extent to activities as "complete" families with sufficient labour force available.

## **8 Important Recommendations**

⇒ The evaluation mission supports the elaboration of a new country concept for Tajikistan which should be based on a clear analysis of the key problems of the country. Concerning the objectives, the concept should focus on the long-term strategy of Welthungerhilfe -

aiming at reducing poverty (mainly) in rural areas -, and on the Tajik development and poverty alleviation strategies based on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP-II), the National Development Strategy (NDS), and the Millennium Development Goals. A close co-ordination and co-operation with other donors and involved NGO should be an essential part of the approaches defined in the concept.

⇒ Although women have various positions in the Welthungerhilfe country team, gender mainstreaming should considerably be intensified on all levels, starting with the *internal structure* and *work approaches* of the various project management teams, and including the *community development approaches* adapted in the various projects. Gender mainstreaming should also mirror in the *set-up of the Welthungerhilfe supported CBOs*, concerning their internal structure and the manner how they are carrying out their activities. Last but not least, gender mainstreaming should also be a challenge for all Welthungerhilfe implementation partners and organizations supported by Welthungerhilfe.

⇒ The evaluation mission encourages the community based approaches of almost all projects. There is still space for a more community participation. Participation of the entire population should better be mainstreamed and mobilization techniques improved in order to obtain this objective. All staff members including the technical personnel should be adapted to these important challenges.

⇒ In order to allow for a more sustainable engagement in the natural resource management sector, Welthungerhilfe country team is encouraged to discuss with its donors the possibility to develop mid- and long-term strategies for co-operation aiming at to agree upon multi-phase projects which are binding both, the donor and Welthungerhilfe, to implement conservation measures over periods of at least six to eight years if the implementation meets the implementation schedules and other contractual agreements.

⇒ Together with other important actors a joint strategy could be elaborated and a schedule agreed on how to better co-ordinate operation of CBOs on village, Jamoat (rural community administration) and District level. Training for these organizations should be provided on how continuous work could be ensured with regard to operation and maintenance of previously financed infrastructure investments. Continuous work of CBOs should also cover social work with women, youth, elder people and other activities and not be limited on infrastructure.

⇒ As many activities in integrated resource management and within the agricultural sector depend strongly on the clarification and allocation of local land use titles, a strong emphasis in future should be put on legal aspects of land usage and land ownership both, as integrated parts of ongoing programmes as well as an additional new field of work of Welthungerhilfe.

⇒ It is recommended at least to test implementation partnerships with Jamoats and District administrations even if capacities and governance on these levels is still very low. However, strengthening the capacities of these existent and important stakeholders and even empowering them to independently plan and implement community oriented activities would be most essential for the country's future.

⇒ Effectiveness and efficiency of at least some project components could be increased by a stronger focus on the formation of clusters of villages for interventions instead of working in too many different geographical areas. This is mainly important for watershed management projects but also for most other natural resource conservation activities which require an integrated systemic approach.

⇒ To ensure the quality of the projects of the country programme, an appropriate monitoring system with qualified staff in the regional office is required. In addition, an improved and coordinated exchange of information between the projects and the regional office is essential to ensure transparency and avoid misunderstandings among each other.

## 9 General Conclusions and „Lessons Learnt“

⇒ More awareness, especially in environmental issues, can increase the motivation of the target group to use their knowledge and their capabilities for an advanced development of their environment toward the project objectives. However, awareness creation in environment is a long-lasting process and it is difficult to achieve clear results within short-term planning periods of often only one, two or, at the most, three years.

⇒ Newly constituted NGOs as implementation partners should not be overcharged with implementation assignments. If it proves necessary to establish NGOs by an I-NGO itself a slow and accurate direction should be chosen. In this case and also if identified potential partner NGO already exist, at first only smaller commitments should be made. These commitments should be increased with the growing experience of the partner(s) and also the increasing experience of the I-NGO and the implementation partner in co-operation.