

Analysis of the West Bank and Gaza Strip midterm review of its Plan of Action

Effectiveness, Relevance, Efficiency, Impact and Accountability to Affected Populations

June, 2012



This is an analysis drawn from the West Bank and Gaza Strip midterm review of its Plan of Action – the detailed report and a summary version are also available.

This document contains the analysis of the data gained through more than 300 household surveys and 8 focus group discussions held across the West Bank and Gaza Strip¹. The data was collated and translated prior to the analysis. The review was designed to gain feedback from project participants and communities with respect to the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and impact of FAO's programmes in WBGs. At the same time, it was designed to assess the accountability of FAO towards the people it seeks to assist, according to the commitments that FAO has made on accountability to affected populations (AAP). The details of this analysis will be incorporated into the final report of the review.

Each section summarises the questions that were asked, analyses the data collected and finishes with a discussion of implications for future programming.

¹ Note on HH survey analysis: Where possible, the HH survey findings are integrated into the analysis at the corresponding point to FG results. In some categories, the questions went into more detail and the trends were quite distinctively varying across locations and gender, therefore at times HH findings are dealt with separately with segregated responses according to whether respondents had received assistance in alternative livelihoods activities (AL), livestock (LS) or horticulture (HC). Where relevant, a breakdown of responses is also given according to location (West Bank or Gaza Strip) and gender where this is relevant (there are no women participants in the horticulture projects). This level of detail was provided for the country programme staff to be able to identify trends and differences in their particular programmes and projects.

Effectiveness

The following three questions were designed to elicit responses regarding the effectiveness of the interventions:

1. What are the main challenges and risks your community faces when it comes to food?
2. How do you usually deal with those challenges and prepare for the risks?
3. Has the assistance (inputs or training) you have received from the project helped you to deal with the challenges and risks? How?

Challenges

A summary of the challenges faced by communities, according to area should be attached in Annexe.

Coping methods as identified through the Focus Groups

- Credit “in general is the major coping strategy”
- Farmers might leave their farms and let the produce rot
- Sell the herd, or some of it (people note overall diminishing herd sizes over time)
- Weddings among herding households are dependent on the climate
- Credit lines are opened with grocery stores
- Use of a barter system
- Consumption levels are kept to a minimum
- Restrict expenditure on expensive foods
- Cut consumption of meat and chicken
- Men seek casual labour opportunities
- Try to prioritize needs, which includes neglecting some important needs to attend to the most important
- Non-traditionally farming households are turning to agriculture to cope with diminished income

Effectiveness of interventions chosen

Are the inputs you received helping you to manage the challenges and risks that you face?

AL: in all categories (location and gender) 40 - 50% of responses related to “yes, very much”, and GS reported the highest percentage of negative responses; nearly as many people said “no” as said “very much”.

LS: Men and women responded fairly equally as each other and between “very much” and “a bit” with a smaller percentage saying “no”, whereas GS was much more strongly positive than WB, who favoured “a bit”

HC: 100% of GS and about half of WB reported “very much”. In WB, 6% respectively reported “no” or “things are worse”

There were three categories of response with regard to effectiveness in the FGs. In some cases it was felt that the intervention plainly didn’t match their needs, in most cases people felt that interventions were effective, however within this group, there were two types of effectiveness; that which was clearly intended and unforeseen positive effects as a result of adaptation, ingenuity, the impact of meaningful occupation, and the community nature of life of the targeted individuals.

Effective, planned interventions

Training provided was often reported as having been extremely useful and appreciated. Groups recounted numerous ways in which the knowledge and skills gained from training have improved the quality of their lives. For example, herders were able to cut costs through making silage, less productive farming practices were improved, new techniques were introduced, people know more

about healthy food, and many examples were given of people increasing their income due to selling excess produce.

Basic inputs received, for example for greenhouse farmers, enabled them to spend their own money on other essentials.

A women's FG noted that sheep, home gardens and cisterns were all very helpful. They said that being able to produce dairy products and sell vegetables to raise money for more expensive food items gave them great pleasure to be able to provide their children with the food they had longed for.

"The well has for sure changed my life"

"The kids were craving for chicken that they have seen the neighbours eating, we could not afford it, now we do. Producing our vegetables gave us a room to afford buying chicken every once in awhile. I am thinking now to buy some chicks rear them bedside the garden"

Unforeseen positive effects

In some examples, people used the inputs in ways that had not been planned, adapting the resources they had to their own particular contexts. For example, farmers provided with seed for fodder decided to set some of the seeds aside to grow more seeds for the next season. Once a few started doing this, everyone around followed suit. This approach provided them with an ongoing source of high quality fodder seed and enabled boosted savings.

One of the strongest themes to come from the FGDs was the amount of community sharing of resources and learning. Despite the specific targeting of individuals according to their circumstances, it seems a widespread practice to pass on the knowledge within the communities as well as giving away excess produce or selling it at low prices to neighbours.

"I was very happy because the project not only helps me alone but also my neighbours in need"

An additional strong theme was the emotional impact that productive occupations, growing and caring for plants and animals, and the ability to independently provide for the family has had on people, in particular noted by women.

"The intervention I felt was life changing, I use my spare time in a constructive way. Now I am producing, feeding my family and giving away as well. It feels very good"

"I felt it is something big what I am getting, the feeling when I walk into the barn is indescribable. I feel that they know me and they come and stand in line to be milked, they have become used to me and I find that fascinating"

Non-effective interventions

In the most significant example, a group of greenhouse farmers had their greenhouses severely damaged during a windstorm. According to this group, rather than consult with them as to what was needed to recover from this, FAO consulted documentation at the ministry offices and provided them with irrigation networks (which they already had) and fertilizers (too late in the season for their effective use). This group recounted that some of them had invested their own family savings or assets into the greenhouses and then were forced to sell assets or take a loan to rebuild them at the same time they were receiving inputs they didn't feel they needed. The lack of consultation or an accurate response was particularly difficult for this group.

While overall, as described below, the trainings were applauded as effective and helpful, a FG and some households highlighted the problems in some areas of providing mixed training sessions. A woman described how, as an older woman without responsibilities for child rearing, she was the only female from her extended family in a position to attend a mixed training course. This meant that each day after the training, she went home and repeated the entire day's course content to her female

relatives so that they might put the learning into effect. In other cases, husbands have to attend on behalf of *their* wives, for whom it is “not possible to attend mixed trainings”.

Implications

These intervention examples highlight the critical importance of consulting with communities at the needs assessment and design phases. While the vast majority of the interventions were deemed effective, it would seem financially beneficial and more likely to increase effectiveness to routinely consult the communities themselves with an aim to:

- Avoid wastage on inaccurate and unnecessary interventions
- Ensure actual needs are met in a way that makes sense to communities and avoids causing further hardship
- Capitalize on the communities’ own adaptive strategies by, for example, designing interventions that come with resources and tools to spread the learning amongst the local communities
- Verify whether mixed or single sex courses are required
- Take into account and build upon the potential for positive psychological impact through occupation and productive activity

“Needs assessments should be the basis for intervening.”

Relevance

FG Questions for relevance of interventions were as follows:

4. Has the assistance you received been just what was needed? What have been the most helpful interventions?
5. What needs to be done differently?
6. Are there any other needs not being met that you'd like to see support on?

For Women:

7. Have you been able to fit the new jobs you have as a result of the assistance in with your other day-to-day responsibilities?
8. How could this be improved?

For Home Garden, (and horticulture groups as appropriate)

9. Do you receive the right kind of follow up support? How could follow up be better?

In this section, for clarity and because the surveys had more detailed questions, FG data and HH data are dealt with separately.

Relevance of the interventions provided

Household Surveys

Was the training useful; did it help?

Would you have liked to receive more training?

Across the board, training scored much higher in GS and amongst women.

GS wanted additional training more than WB, and women wanted more training in AL, while men wanted more training on LS.

In WB, a large majority responded that they do not want more training.

In your opinion, has your production increased since the intervention?

AL: results were fairly evenly spread in every category between "very much", "a bit" and "no".

LS and HC: GS reported a much higher production increase than WB

More women than men overall thought that their production had increased

To what extent has the training you received contributed to your ability to produce more?

Responses in all projects were fairly evenly distributed between "very much", "a bit" and "none", with a slightly higher attribution of the training to increased productivity in GS with regard to LS.

In your opinion, was there any improvement in your income level since the intervention?

Both GS and women reported a significantly higher level of income increase than WB and men.

WB respondents were much more likely to report that nothing had changed.

In your opinion, was there any improvement in the quality of food consumed by your household since the intervention?

AL: responses were spread fairly evenly across the top 3 options ("very much", "a bit" and "no").

More women thought the improvement was very good, although significant numbers of both men and women also thought nothing had changed.

LS: responses were more towards "very much" in GS than WB, but again across there was a significant representation of the top 3 options.

HC: most respondents felt food quality had improved "very much"

It could be theorized that the stronger response by women on improvements related to the projects could be related to the greater impact on women of being involved in the projects. It seems from some of the feedback that they have come from an almost null position on income and productivity, and this would impact on their responses.

Focus Groups

Again, the responses fall into three rough categories, where the interventions varied from not relevant at all or causing significant problems, through somewhat relevant but not without problems, to highly relevant.

Strongly relevant

The training courses were felt to be highly relevant. FGs noted that they bring farmers away from practices that are no longer viable to more modern approaches, and they assist in reducing mortalities of stock and increasing production. As mentioned above, as so many people take the approach of either directly passing on the knowledge they have gained, or of allowing others to follow their lead based on their new knowledge, the FGs suggested broadening access to the training. For example, in the production of silage, one group noted that after one person learnt the skill, approximately 15 more non-beneficiaries have started producing it as a result.

For some FGs, cisterns were seen to be the most valuable intervention. Another group emphasised the assistance with greenhouse farming (although a different group from those who suffered the damage).

In general, people felt that the home gardens were very successful and people appreciated the change they have brought to their lives, including the improvement to the quality of food for both themselves and the people they share their excess with, and the additional household spending capacity. Some specific component problems were highlighted and these are mentioned below.

People appreciated the drought tolerant seeds, and in part due to the additional use they came up with of keeping some to produce more seeds, enabling them to plant larger areas for the next season, and thereby achieving some sustainability that wasn't built into the project.

The milking unit brought with it a number of benefits. It created a stable market for the milk, it relieved women of an extremely onerous task, and it made dairy products available to the community at reasonable prices. One issue noted regarding the milking units was that people living further away could not benefit from them without refrigerated transport, which they didn't have.

“During the season, my wife was working until late hours every night to be able to process the milk we produce. During that period, our children were never able to see their mother and we put all our socializing on hold. Our life has indeed changed since we started to sell our milk instead of processing it”

Somewhat relevant but with some problems

Farmers have a clear need for fodder during dry seasons, however many are concerned about the sustainability of the current approach of fodder distribution. One FG suggested fodder centres and fodder mills with seed money to establish a revolving fund. Nonetheless, a householder commented;

“The distributed fodder helped me to save 10 lambs. The size of my flock has increased thanks to the intervention”

An additional issue raised with respect to fodder was related to its high quality, (although it seems this may only relate to feed provided for rabbits). Members of one group felt that reducing the feed quality once the high quality food ran out caused the deaths of some rabbits.

The quality of the rabbits provided as a part of the home gardens programme was also questioned. Some of the rabbits had died and the local veterinarian had suggested this was due to the rabbits being a French breed that was not hardy enough for local conditions.

Rabbits posed a different dilemma to another group. They found the rabbits required more attention than the other animals and they felt that given this learning, they would prefer chickens in the future.

Not relevant and / or significantly problematic

The example has been given above of the damaged greenhouses and the intervention of irrigation channels/networks and fertilizers. In addition to the intervention not solving the problem of the damage, the focus group had more to say regarding the irrigation channels themselves. They said that networks they received were not suitable for the irrigation style that is practiced in their area, and when used, caused water loss. As the inputs arrived after they had, in the most part, put their own networks in place, they said that mostly they sold them, gave them away or put them in storage. As noted above, the fertilizer was also received after the time should have been used, but the farmers made use of it anyway. They had needed, however, plastic sheeting, double doors and other greenhouse items, which they never received.

A number of groups raised problems incurred by the distribution of sheep. Three issues in particular pertain to the sheep:

1. The cost of feeding the animals for 4-5 months before they started being of use was a burden to many. Some people reported going into debt because of this.
2. The number of sheep provided to households was often insufficient to meet the needs of larger households, and did not outweigh the cost of feeding them in the earlier months.
3. One group mentioned their belief that there were two different breeds of sheep distributed, and one was more productive and sold for higher prices than the other.

"The cost of feeding the sheep at the beginning was overwhelming for me, I indeed regretted the fact that I accepted this assistance, but was very reluctant to sell them as well."

What could be done differently

Aside from that mentioned above, people suggested:

- Consultation with the communities on their needs
- Attention could be paid to the timing of delivery of inputs, as this can lead to wastage if things arrive too late. In the case of cisterns, if they are delivered late, could they come with some water as well to give a head start on the planting season
- To support herders to improve the breeds of the herds to improve production and strengthen livelihood sustainability
- There were comments that the seeds provided should not be mixed, in order for the intervention to be more productive. "It should be the herders' choice to mix or not mix"
- A number of people suggested that inputs should come as a package so that farmers have what they need to get started. For example, livestock could come with a quantity of fodder and medication kits, and home gardens could come with some fencing to protect the plants from wild animals.
- To meet the needs of the larger households who have between 6-9 members, 5-10 head of sheep would be preferable.
- People would like more choice as to the types of inputs they receive., or the option to mix and match. For example, one group said that they very much appreciated the assistance they received, but they could see that the addition of some domestic livestock would have assisted them to increase their income further.
- Some women's groups suggested providing more training on healthy food and cooking
- One group suggested that participants could be asked to make a contribution towards the inputs in order "to show commitment and willingness to improve"

Other needs and ideas for future projects

The vast majority of the ideas for how projects should look in the future incorporated moving to a community level of operation, and seeing each individual as part of the wider context in which they

exist. Suffering this chronic emergency together, people clearly want to see themselves getting out of poverty together, with their communities in tact and strengthened.

Community based suggestions included:

- A water pump installed at the main source for the whole community
- Build the capacity of the farmers to organise themselves for networking and marketing
- A large scale silage production unit at community level
- Working on a more sustainable form of intervention that provides support to more than just the few selected. For example, supporting feed centres instead of distributing fodder to individuals
- A tractor and harvester for community use, along with additional equipment such as small sprayers to be given with sheep units and home gardens, milk shakes, silage mixers, feeders, powdered milk and bottles and artificial insemination, chicken units

Additional suggestions included:

- Pesticides, seedlings and extension services
- Provide people with a bundle of possible interventions on offer and allow them to choose based on their need. "Needs are not uniform and so should interventions not be uniform"
- Food processing and marketing skills for women
- Training in business start up and management so they can expand the interventions they received into more income generation and self sufficiency, more focussed training on diseases and awareness
- Job creation programmes

Feedback on the time demands of projects for women

This question was asked to women to ensure that their particular circumstances and responsibilities were being catered for in the design of projects. While the additional demands of participating in FAO projects has been raised as an issue elsewhere, the women spoken to in the FGs unanimously agreed that the meaningful occupation, the improvement in circumstances and the joy that the projects have brought to them was welcomed. The result of the household surveys backed this up. It seems that the women of West Bank and Gaza Strip rather had a previous problem of boredom and lack of options and role restrictions.

"Women in this community are eager to become productive, to have a role other than housekeeping. We tried to start small projects but we had a problem marketing what we produced since it wasn't meeting the standard to be marketed. We love to receive more training and to become economically active"

Several groups mentioned that the occupation and focus on productivity had reduced the amount of gossip in their communities.

"This work activate us and reduce bad habits the women used to have like gossips and tattle."

Home garden and horticulture follow up support

The West Bank participants felt that follow up support could be increased. The sorts of issues they raised included:

- Private veterinary services, medicines and vaccinations are very expensive and beyond their means at times
- More follow up is needed between project staff and contractors, as the farmers don't have the technical knowledge required to ensure the contractors are meeting their contracts
- Follow up interventions could assist people to build one gain upon another to "lift themselves out of poverty". It was felt that this is particularly important as households receiving help from one agency are generally excluded from participating in the projects of other agencies, and therefore projects should have a longer term and more holistic view to them

- Some FG participants noted that they receive generally good follow up support from the MoA directorate, the agricultural association and other more experienced farmers

Implications

Feedback in this section invites consideration of a number of issues and themes, from very practical project adjustments to shifts in theoretical approaches.

Practical adjustments

- The reasons behind the varying feedback on training, in particular through the household surveys could be investigated, in order to identify ways to bring the quality of all training into line.
- The costs incurred by handing out livestock have an impact on recipients, and when the poorest are targeted, this impact must be magnified. Participants suggested ameliorating this effect with the addition of “starter kits” with the livestock, to get them through the unproductive period.
- The cost of supporting sheep should be outweighed by their value to the households. Consider the issue of larger households and how to resolve the imbalance for them in the number of sheep allocated
- There were numerous suggestions by women as to new projects or project adjustments. They also highlighted that they have less access to information regarding new projects, so a needs assessment exercise targeting women specifically could be considered, or at the least must be built into any wider needs assessment exercise

Theoretical shifts

While the “relief – development continuum” and all the splits and polarities it brings with it is often not a comfortable fit with the situations relief workers find themselves in, rarely is that more true than in relation to the situation in WBGS. In situations of chronic emergency, relief agencies can find themselves doing harm to the psychological and social fabric of individuals and communities when they adhere rigidly to an emergency relief model of service delivery over extended periods of time because this is the only way to fund their work. Over an extended period, a short-term relief model threatens to undermine the dignity, agency and cohesion of its recipients. The communities interviewed in the review highlighted these dilemmas most articulately, and set a challenge to the humanitarian community as a whole to redefine models of service delivery, creating something new that is neither short term relief nor strictly long term development, and which recognises the uniqueness of the Palestinian experience.

FAO is in an excellent position to embrace such a task, as compared to many peer agencies in the relief sector, its particular brand of emergency relief is inherently about meaningful human occupation, creativity and physical participation. The feedback provided by this review provides a perfect focus for capitalising on this comparative advantage and expanding the meaningful occupation to community participation and active engagement in all phases of the work.

In this new model, participants in the review counsel their supporters to think about them more as communities and less as individuals. When the projects they participate in don’t take that into account, they will find ways to bring the benefits to the community level anyway, but with more effort and less impact than might be achieved if it were built in consciously and collaboratively to project design. This could be achieved on two levels:

- Projects targeting individuals that have resources and strategies for community sharing and dissemination, and beneficiary selection with this in mind
- Community level projects

According to recipients, a Palestinian model of relief would offer choices to people so that they can exert their own agency in determining what suits them best. For example, a householder remarked; *“Uniform interventions are not good. Seeds were given to people with no land.”*

It would also design projects with the next step in mind, considering sustainability of interventions and goals, and the construction of building blocks and resources to move steadily out of poverty.

Efficiency

The FG and HH questions grouped under the heading of efficiency took a broad definition of efficiency and also included a number of the topic areas related to accountability to affected populations. In this way, efficiency is interpreted not just in regard to timeliness of delivery of inputs, but also of processes put in place around projects that add to its quality and ensure that beneficiaries are well informed, fairly and accurately selected, and problems can be picked up on quickly and responded to.

The FG questions were as follows:

- Have you received your inputs at the right time, when they were needed?
- When there is a problem, does the agency respond quickly to sort it out?
- Without going into details of actual complaints now, if you had a complaint to make about the project or its staff, what are the ways you would go about doing that?
- What if the complaint was of a sensitive nature, for example a staff member was behaving inappropriately towards a member of your family, and you wanted to ensure it was confidential? *(Use this elaboration as necessary, if the channels they describe clearly wouldn't allow for confidential complaints or access for women to use the system)*
- If you have made a complaint, did you ever get a response?
- Do you get the information you need regarding the project, and regular updates?
- Is information delivered in the best ways for your community? How could information delivery be improved? (In what formats?)
- What other information would be useful for you to receive? (How could information content be improved?)
- Were you informed about the process that was used to target beneficiaries? *(Note if the respondents were actually involved in the targeting or not)*
- What did you think of it? How would you improve on the targeting process?

Timeliness

Some problems with timing of delivery of inputs have been referred to above. It seems that the overall response to this question fell into the category of sometimes, and perhaps more often than not inputs arrive at the right time. The household surveys support this in that in most case people felt inputs arrived on time, the main exception being that a significant percentage of the HC respondents in WB said no, that assistance did not arrived when it was promised or needed.

Responsiveness

Most groups did not have a strong opinion on this subject, as they had not often required rapid assistance and asked FAO for it.

Complaints handling

The FG participants were not aware of any identified method by which they could lodge a complaint. A number of groups indicated that they had no idea how to contact FAO or the project staff they have dealings with. Groups said variously that if they had a complaint, they would direct it to the municipality, the partner organisation or the partner association.

One example was given, however, where a complaint had been forwarded through the municipality to FAO and it was reported that it had been dealt with openly and effectively.

Some groups said that they would complain if need be, while at least one group agreed that they wouldn't dare to make a complaint.

"If I complain (to or about, this is not clear) the project staff, my name will be omitted, so I will never do it"

The HH surveys showed a similar trend, where the majority of people across categories said that yes, they would be confident to make a complaint, however a significant enough number said no: in AL, 15-20% in all categories (location and gender), in both LS and HC, more than 20% of WB respondents said “no”, including some women who indicated very much no.

Information provision and transparency

Most people in FGs agreed that they receive very little information or updates. Most of what they do hear is by word of mouth;

“The information is transferred from one to the other. Women hear from other women and so forth; the agricultural association gathers part of the farmers and informs them then the news spread in the community”

In this way, people indicated that information can be manipulated and used as a tool of power. They said that information should not be exclusive, that everyone should be included.

Currently, people said, they only hear about interventions and the inputs they will receive and who is targeted. The types of additional information they said they would like to have access to included:

- Updates,
- When items will be delivered and if they are delayed why,
- Information on the selection criteria,
- Clarification of the targeting,
- Who the project personnel are, and who to contact

“I had a problem with my cistern, the contractor decided to change the type of the cistern that he is building for me without consulting with me. My only contact with the project staff is the contractor, I didn’t know who else to call or to talk to”

The HH surveys revealed that about both the projects and the agencies providing services, GS respondents felt significantly more informed than the WB respondents. All categories felt less informed about the agencies than the projects. In the AL group, women felt more informed than men about projects, and in the LS group, men felt more informed than women.

Beneficiary targeting and selection

The HHs were asked if they were satisfied with the process that was used to target beneficiaries. It should be noted that the respondents were people who had themselves been targeted for participation in projects. Overall, more people were satisfied than weren’t, and GS respondents were more satisfied than WB respondents who appeared to have more reservations. In the LS group, women were more satisfied than men and the reverse was the case in the AL group.

Most of the FG groups spoken to expressed being unaware of the selection criteria or process. In the absence of clear information, there appears to be some speculation and variable practices, as indicated in these translated notes:

“This was reflected in the conflicting opinions the participants have expressed. Some thought that the targeting was for the needy and others said that the lists were manipulated by the representatives. The general perception is that that the municipality is influencing the selection of certain beneficiaries and selects people who are not necessarily the neediest.”

Some householder comments support these concerns. One commented: *“I wasn’t in need, however why would I refuse it?”* Others noted that targeting thresholds change according to the availability of money and not to those in need, and that those targeted generally belong to associations.

Women in the groups pointed out that they often don't hear about projects because the advertisements are placed in venues where women don't go. They suggested schools and health centres.

Those who were better informed as to the criteria generally commented that they are too rigid and cause the routine exclusion of certain households, despite their being equally as poor or needy. They noted in particular:

- The requirement to have at least 500 square metres of land precludes people who are marginally under this, but who would benefit equally from assistance
- The exclusion of people in stone houses, as they used to be better off and work in Israel prior to the wall being built. Now their access to better paying activities is lost and their circumstances have declined significantly
- The size of the herd as a criterion masks the differential impact of varying incomes. They felt the criteria should be related to how much agriculture contributes to the family's income, and the herd size cut off point should be 70

Overall, people requested more transparency as to the process, and indeed, if they were more informed as to how the process is expected to occur, they would be in a better position to hold those influencing the process to account.

Additional Household Survey questions not covered in the FGs

Are you satisfied with the quality of the items you have been given?

Are you satisfied with the quality of the training you have been given?

Trends were similar for both questions. GS and women were overall happier with the quality, while men were more evenly distributed between "very" and "a bit". A significant number of LS respondents in WB were not happy with the quality of training.

Are you satisfied with the contact you have with the program staff?

Satisfaction with contact ranked higher in GS overall than in WB although a small group of men in the AL group in GS rated themselves as very unhappy. In the HC and LS groups, around a third of respondents in WB said they were not happy, with the rest spread across "very" and "a bit".

Do you feel that the assistance project is as good as it should be?

As with many of the responses, GS and women tended to rank the projects higher than men and WB, although overall, the majority of responses fell within very much, or somewhat.

Implications

The feedback suggests that there is a need to consider the circumstances that might lead to some project participants feeling unable to complain, and fearful of losing assistance if they did. At the simplest level, it would be important to clarify and publicise the best channels for complaints and then move on to considering more formal mechanisms.

The call for improved information provision was clear and problems of equal access and avoiding manipulation of information need to be addressed. The newsletter idea seems a positive one and perhaps this is something that could be explored where community members themselves could be involved. Other channels and means of more reliable and comprehensive information provision, both about the projects and the agencies involved in them, should be developed.

Beneficiary targeting seems unclear, somewhat irregular and easily influenced. A rethinking of the approach, blended perhaps with a move towards increased flexibility and choice, could be an important step. Community participation in redefining criteria would present a strong message of goodwill follow up to the review process.

More strategies for the verification of beneficiary selection against eventually agreed upon criteria may be important to work against favouritism and back room deals.

Some form of minimum guidelines for the role expectations of all staff, including project staff, including the what and how of community contact would enable all staff to be clear as to what is expected. Team participation in setting the guidelines would assist in building consensus on a refreshed approach and could capitalise on good practices already in place.

Impact

It was felt that impact may not yet be as evident as it will at the end of the three-year period of the PoA, however the following questions were included in the FG interview guide, which also included questions regarding participation and consultation.

- Are there ways in which the assistance provided has benefited the wider community? For e.g.
 - Has the knowledge gained from training been shared with others?
 - Has any increased food production been shared with others?
- Have you noticed any changes in your community that you believe are connected to the assistance projects?
- Have you noticed any side effects of the assistance projects that worry you?
- Do you believe the benefits of the assistance will have long lasting effects? How could that be improved?
- Does the community get asked for their ideas and opinions regarding the projects and improved food production? Often enough?
- Is the current system of community representation fair and effective? Do all interest groups have the chance to have a say?
- How could we improve getting your feedback and input?
- Is there anything we haven't asked about the assistance projects that you would like to tell us?

Assisting the wider community

As noted earlier, new techniques and knowledge are shared widely and tend to influence the farming practices of all those around a participant. One group said that this means they are establishing new norms in their practice. In addition, excess produce is shared with neighbours, either for free or for a reduced price.

Another emphasised benefit, or motivator, related to the sharing, is the social harmony and solidarity that it creates. Some groups felt this was particularly evident amongst the women, but another group noted the impact on a husband of what he had learnt through his wife's participation in a project.

"You know I shared the information i got from the training with my neighbours instead of talking about the gossips around... all women beneficiaries talk about the information we received from training, about the status of home garden, therefore they are talking about useful things; no gossips, no problems"

"One day a women participant's husband came to the association and he impressed them when he showed his awareness about all the information his wife got and he was so happy."

Changes to the community

A number of groups pointed out that there are not many projects aimed at the community level, and as mentioned earlier, this is something they all would like to see as a natural evolution of FAO's work with them. In part, it could be theorised that their growing awareness of this as a logical way forward is possibly a result of the community level impact that is building around them, at times almost on an unconscious level. For example, when asked directly what impact the projects had at a community level, FGs were more likely to initially respond none, because the projects are aimed at individuals. Throughout their answers to other questions and on further discussion of this question, however, a number of types of community level impact become evident.

Impact on the communities' quality of life

One FG noted the longer-term impact of a previous FAO project of introducing water reservoirs, saying this had "changed the face of their town". As a result of the reservoirs, more than 100 greenhouses had been established, and more than 500 jobs had been created.

Of the current projects, a few groups highlighted the benefits of the milking unit activity, which enables farmers to market their products, reduces the burden on women to perform the same tasks manually, and the whole community benefits from availability of low priced dairy products.

The increased availability of meat and vegetables due to the increased agriculture activity has meant that more quality food is available in general in the community.

Impact on solidarity within communities

As this is the first such consultation with the communities, it is not possible to measure just how far community solidarity has increased, however a number of the focus groups highlighted this aspect themselves, and therefore it is worthy of note. Throughout their responses to a range of questions, their concern for each other and desire to bring each other along with them was notable. As has been described, women's groups in particular highlighted the positive impact on their collective behaviour when they have something meaningful to occupy them with and they are improving the quality of their families', and neighbours', lives.

Impact in highlighting asset discrepancies

Conversely to the point above, groups also noted that there was an unequal level of potential amongst participants in the projects to extend and build on the capacities they had gained through the project. People who had just enough additional assets, resources or advantages had been proven able to use those assets to take their activities to another level of success and therefore income generation. Those without such advantages called for the projects to be designed sequentially in order to assist them to capitalise on gains and to reach a higher level of financial security.

The groups seemed unanimous in their belief that there had been no negative impacts of the projects at community level.

Feedback, participation and consultation

HHs were asked, "Do you feel that people ask for your opinion about the assistance project as much as you would like them to?" This question received the strongest negative response across the surveys. WB respondents conveyed a clear majority response of "no" across all projects, GS had more of a mix of "no" and "a bit" in the HC and LS responses and a majority "no" in AL, and overall it was the most significant negative GS response. In the LS group, 10% of WB respondents were "very unhappy" about this.

Lack of opportunities for feedback and consultation was a theme throughout the FG discussions, and when asked directly about whether they are asked their opinions and whether it is often enough, participants responded either that that they are never consulted or that they are only consulted regarding selection. For the respondents, the issues of minimal information, limited two-way communication and no opportunities to share their ideas and opinions were all interlinked.

"The community is usually consulted at the stage when it is time to choose the beneficiaries and not before. The project is introduced to the community when it is designed and ready to be implemented"

"All the attendees said that no one asked them about their opinions and .all activities have been imposed on them"

In general, with the exception of the one example of the damaged greenhouses, participants were satisfied with the nature of the projects and throughout the FGs discussed the benefits of their participation. However, in addition to the issue of their right to a say and the dignity inherent having input to interventions that impact their lives, it is clear from the feedback detailed in this report that programme quality and efficiency could only be improved by ensuring that the experience and learning of the communities is incorporated throughout each stage of the project cycle.

“It is a good idea that we are consulted or if we participate. We know what we need.”

Issues with the current representation systems

HHs were asked, “Do you feel that the current system for community representation is fair and effective?” Women were more positive about this than men, and GS more than WB across all project categories. In the HC group, a highly significant 75% of WB respondents said “no” they don’t feel it is fair and effective, and in one other interesting result, a small group of women in the LS group reported being “very unhappy” with representation.

Some of the FGs appeared to feel freer than others to speak to this issue, however those that did speak at least somewhat openly, alerted the facilitators to some potentially critical issues that need to be considered. These also tended to be WB FGs.

The key issues, most of which were raised in more than one group include:

- The current system structure is not bad, however it could be improved to ensure it is more inclusive as at the moment it favours an exclusiveness that enables some unfair practices
- Inclusiveness should ensure that all relevant associations and organisations have influence as some associations are excluded at the moment
- Announcements concerning new projects are not made transparently and widely enough, so that many eligible people miss out, and in particular, as mentioned earlier, women have less access to information. At the moment, announcements must be spread by word of mouth, which is an extremely unreliable method. A participant commented that this system is aimed at decreasing the workload of the implementing partners by cutting the number of potential applicants. It was suggested that announcements be made by a neutral body, with the advice:
“You should be aware of local community organisation politics”
- Some people believed that the lists of beneficiaries are manipulated by community representatives, and the people most in need often miss out

Feedback, consultation and information suggestions

FG participants all seemed to enjoy the opportunity to participate in the groups and many suggested using this format on a recurring basis to gain community input. Other suggestions included:

- Regular newsletters or briefs about FAO’s activities in WBGs and upcoming opportunities
- Regular meetings with community representatives and associations, in addition to occasional consultations with participants directly
- Being transparent about how to contact focal points

Implications

The findings of this section very much echo those in others with regard to community level interventions and the importance of consultation, feedback, participation and fair representation.

This section highlights:

- The importance of supporting solidarity in communities
- The need to consciously exploit the positive psychological impact of meaningful occupation and activity as a counterbalance to the demoralising restrictions of people’s lives.
- The readiness of people and the projects to move to a more consecutive focus where gains are built on over time to construct pathways out of poverty
- The communities want a say, they want to participate, and they clearly appreciated the process of the review and the chance to share their wisdom and experience

From the feedback on participation and representation, some key points to address emerged:

- Representation structures need to be freed from the restraints of local politics and influence to address problems such as bias, favouritism and factionalism

- There needs to be regular fora to meet and consult with representatives, along with further opportunities for input and feedback by regular project participants and community members (which will also enable verification of the health of the representation structures)
- Community input needs to occur in some form or other at every stage of the project cycle, including:
 - Needs assessment
 - Design
 - During implementation
 - Monitoring
 - Evaluation
- It could be worth also considering the potential for active roles in these stages for community members, for e.g. training them to conduct some of these phases.

Annexe1

The CAAP

In December 2011, the IASC Principals endorsed the following 5 commitments:

Leaders of humanitarian organizations² will undertake to:

Leadership/Governance: Demonstrate their commitment to accountability to affected populations by ensuring feedback and accountability mechanisms are integrated into country strategies, programme proposals, monitoring and evaluations, recruitment, staff inductions, trainings and performance management, partnership agreements, and highlighted in reporting.

Transparency: Provide accessible and timely information to affected populations on organizational procedures, structures and processes that affect them to ensure that they can make informed decisions and choices, and facilitate a dialogue between an organisation and its affected populations over information provision.

Feedback and complaints: Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming, ensuring that feedback and complaints mechanisms are streamlined, appropriate and robust enough to deal with (communicate, receive, process, respond to and learn from) complaints about breaches in policy and stakeholder dissatisfaction.

Participation: Enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them through the establishment of clear guidelines and practices to engage them appropriately and ensure that the most marginalised and affected are represented and have influence.

Design, monitoring and evaluation: Design, monitor and evaluate the goals and objectives of programmes with the involvement of affected populations, feeding learning back into the organisation on an ongoing basis and reporting on the results of the process.

Background

At their meeting in April 2011, the IASC Principals acknowledged the fundamental importance of accountability to affected populations. They agreed to integrate accountability to affected populations into their individual agencies' statements of purpose as well as their policies. Further, they requested that the Sub Group on Accountability to Affected Populations (part of the IASC Cluster Sub Working group and comprising a diverse representation of UN agencies, NGOs and quality and accountability initiatives), develop a proposal for inter-agency mechanisms that would enable improved participation, information provision, feedback and complaints handling.

The Sub Group compiled a draft operational framework through collaboration with a wide group of stakeholders, in addition to drawing from current industry standards on accountability and quality in humanitarian work, in particular, the Sphere Minimum Standards³ and the HAP 2010 Standard in Accountability and Quality

² Excepting the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, who have their own commitments in place

³ <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/>

Management⁴. The framework aims to highlight some of the “bottom line” accountability activities and indicators that should be in place at each stage of the project cycle.

As a complement to the framework, the Principals endorsed the statement of accountability commitments in December 2011, also prepared by the Sub Group. The CAAP aims to establish a shared understanding of the broad tenets of accountability to affected populations and is intended for integration within policy, guiding documentation and practice. Over the course of three meetings in 2011, in February, April and December, the IASC Principals therefore discussed the issue of accountability to affected populations in some depth and made a number of binding decisions, complementary to the CAAP, summarised below:

In line with the decisions of the IASC Principals, each member agency has committed to:

Incorporate the Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP) into all relevant statements, policies and operational guidelines and to promote them with operational partners, within the HCT and amongst cluster members.

Establish a clear organizational statement of commitments to AAP.

Develop a plan and put these commitments into practice, including incorporating them in staff inductions and clearly within agreements made with operational partners, ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

Systematically include participation of affected population in all needs assessment (in conjunction with the rolling out of the NATF consolidated needs assessment approach), as well as monitoring, review and evaluation processes (including IA-RTE).

Include affected populations in programme/operations planning and review.

Facilitate the provision of feedback from affected people on the services and protection offered by their agencies, including a complaints mechanism.

Provide information to affected people about services and support available in local languages and ensure that in any new disaster, information on the emergency situation, availability and nature of humanitarian responses is systematically communicated to affected populations using relevant communication mechanisms.

Designate a senior focal point on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), develop a PSEA work plan and report back on progress.

⁴ <http://www.hapinternational.org/projects/standard/hap-2010-standard.aspx>