

Evaluation of RMLSP project

The successful Rural Micro-Finance and Livestock Support Programme (RMLSP) concluded after 5 years on July 31st, 2016. The Programme was funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and implemented through the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). The Livestock sub component of the programme included an Integrated Dairy Scheme, Veterinary Services in the North, a Backyard Poultry Project, and a Dairy Goat Project. DCA-VET was responsible for the 'Veterinary Services in the Northern Region'. Special target groups of the RMLSP programme were poor farmers, women, and Kuchi, the Afghan pastoralists.

To evaluate the outcomes of this project, Dr Tania Thomson was asked to perform an evaluation mission in April 2016. The evaluation was based on the criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability. Additional information was collected on Partnerships and Coordination, Gender, and Lessons learned.

Outcome and activities

The desired outcome of the project was '*Strengthened livestock production systems of poor rural households, with developed marketing opportunities, and improved local livestock production, productivity and smallholders' incomes*'. To this aim DCA-VET would develop '*a self-sustaining network of high quality, animal health service providers established in the northern region*'.

In order to achieve this outcome, DCA-VET implemented activities in the following eight thematic areas:

1. Improve the services of the Veterinary Field Units (VFUs) in the target provinces by launching a marketing and awareness campaign;
2. Increase accessibility of the VFU services in the target communities through refining and addition of Basic Veterinary Workers (BVWs);
3. Improve the Kuchi nomads' access to veterinary and livestock services through involvement of a number of Kuchi linked to the VFUs as BVWs;
4. Identify poor in the communities and provide improved access to the services through subsidies, deferred and free payments;
5. Improve access to veterinary and livestock services with a focus on preventive health measures, proper fodder management, housing and farmer organisations, aimed at increased fertility, and productivity;
6. Develop value chains for two livestock products; 1) cashmere and 2) karakul skin through appropriate health plans, harvesting, and marketing;
7. Enhance collaboration between local livestock development providers by creating a regional Afghan Veterinary Association in the North;
8. Develop new activities specifically addressing 'gender'.

Evaluation

In the extensive evaluation report the reviewer makes the following remarks referring to the eight criteria of interest.

RELEVANCE – Yes. The project is in line with MAIL policy, and is relevant to the sector, and to beneficiaries' needs, including women and Kuchi.

EFFECTIVENESS – Yes, Partial. Data is available to support three of the seven Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

3. % of livestock owners adopting improved herd management practices in targeted villages
4. % reduction in animal mortality due to diseases in targeted villages
5. No of farmers reporting an increase in livestock production and productivity

In order to assess the effectiveness of the other four KPIs, the evaluator recommends to clarify some of the definitions, collect additional information, and review the existing data.

EFFICIENCY- Yes. Project staff and government stakeholders were satisfied with the way the project was implemented and with the timelines, types, and quality of inputs provided. Beneficiaries were happy with the support and inputs they were provided with.

IMPACT / OUTCOME – Yes, Partial. During the project period, positive changes have definitively occurred in animal production, productivity, and householder incomes. However, it is not sure if these changes can solely be attributed to the project. For during the implementation of the project, the Afghan government has implemented a rabies vaccination campaign, started a five-year National Brucellosis Control Program, and strengthened disease outbreak reporting by contracting some specially trained VFUs. Changes in farmer knowledge, awareness, and husbandry practices for sure can be attributed to the project. The evaluator remarks to take care that the positive impact, resulting in increasing livestock numbers, will not lead to overgrazing, causing irreversibly damage to the pasture lands.



SUSTAINABILITY – Partial. Sustainability has been planned by providing VFUs with business skills training, networking and marketing opportunities, and decreasing financial incentives. At the same time farmers were linked to VFUs, input providers and markets and organised in extension or business groups. It remains to be seen whether or not activities will continue in the long term, when VFU staff and livestock owners cannot rely on NGOs any longer but will be in charge themselves. Additional initiatives will be required to facilitate an environment which supports the continuation of activities.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION – Yes. DCA-VET involved relevant government departments in its activities and also provided opportunities of capacity building for government staff. DCA-VET initiated a partnership with Afghan Aid in Badakhshan to engage with VFUs with whom both projects were working. In addition, DCA-VET had good communication with other RMLSP implementing Partners, such as ICARDA and FAO.

GENDER – Yes. DCA-VET carefully respected gender and within the accepted context in each province provided culturally appropriate opportunities for women to be involved in the project. Engagement with women has been facilitated by female extension workers. Activities related to women include working with female VFUs and Basic Veterinary Workers (BVWs), use of LFEWs and establishment of female Self Help Groups (SHGs). Beneficiary women have reported being happy to take part in project activities.



LESSONS LEARNED – Partial. DCA-VET has recorded lessons learned through implementation of the project and moreover commissioned independent studies to provide recommendations in specific areas, such as the implementation of Fodder Banks. Some lessons and recommendations have been implemented, whilst others have not.

Conclusion

The evaluator concludes there is fair achievement towards having a *'Strengthened livestock production system of poor rural households, with developed marketing opportunities, and improved local livestock production, productivity and smallholders' incomes'* (Project Outcome). The evaluator appreciates the project's effort to develop *'A self-sustaining network of high quality, animal health service providers established in the northern region'*, but feels that at the moment this is not a cohesive network yet. For sustained functioning of VFUs, developing and maintaining an enabling environment will be essential.