



**Heifer International Cameroon
Soudano Sahel Programme Zone (SSPZ)**

**Project "Sustainable Livelihoods
from Integrated Livestock Farming in the
Far North Province of Cameroon"**

**Mid-term Evaluation of the "Sustainable Livelihoods
from Integrated Livestock Farming in the Far North
Province" Maroua**

January 2010

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I. Introduction and general situation of the evaluation

Heifer international Cameroon supports farmers in the Far North region Cameroon since 2007 through the project titled “Sustainable Livelihoods From Integrated Livestock Farming In Cameroon Far North Province”.

This project seeks to benefit 1170 resource limited farm families over a period of five years (July 2007 to June 2011). These 1170 beneficiaries have 9,360 dependents. In all, this project has assisted 359 farm families from 16 common Initiative Groups since inception. This 359 original placement (OP) assisted farm families consists 2144 (382 women, 240 men, 783 boys and 739 girls) beneficiaries.

Like other development-oriented organizations and as part of its corporate requirements, Heifer International Cameroon (HIC) conducts formative and summative reviews of projects as a basis for improving planning, implementation management, to develop and document lessons and best practices. Such intermittent assessments further highlight institutional and human needs requiring attention.

It is against this background that the management team of HIC requested a mid-term evaluation to highlight the achievements obtained so far and also to critically bring out recommendations for future collaboration. This evaluation was carried out from the 8th to the 16 of January 2010 in Maroua by an external consultant.

Objectives of the mid-term Evaluation

In general, HIC hopes to understand the implementation of the project, the efficiency of its actions to its partners and have an idea of the changes observed by the partners in their various activities from the trainings received from HIC.

Specifically, the current review aims at:

1. Identifying and documenting what has been achieved and state reasons for success;
2. Identifying and documenting emerging development challenges and constraints within the project environment and state reasons why;
3. Identifying areas that need to be addressed/re-enforced in the current field projects;
4. Reviewing progress towards planned activities, outputs and objectives stated in the approved project document and check for relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability;
5. Developing an impact chain of Heifer International Cameroon activities in Far North Region;
6. Documenting emerging lessons and produce recommendations that address issues (opportunities and challenges) identified as needing attention; and documents findings, so that lessons learned can be shared with others and used to improve program delivery.

Main conclusions

Only the fundamental conclusions as highlighted in the ToR by Heifer will be highlighted. After discussing with the groups, collaborators and SSPZ team, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The pertinence of HIC actions in the Far North Region

The interventions of HIC address a visible need expressed, like the low level of income for families and especially by women which ensure that the responsibilities are not neglected within families. Also the issue of responding to a clear need expressed by the groups supported is a good base for adapting back up/support to needs. It is important to highlight that the pertinence of the activities developed is justified not only by the diversification of sources of income and avoid planning on only one activity but also to develop opportunities to facilitate repayment of support received.

However, it is important to note that some activities developed around animal breeding are not well adapted to the context, hence one questions if a context analysis was done before implementation of activities with a particular group (for example gardening which has never been done in a locality is being carried out more than 30 km away from the village. Does this have an impact on the group members who invest in it since a hired person realizes it?.

Effectiveness in implementation

The model put in place at the beginning seemed efficient enough for adequate reflections. This is because the team's expertise is directly linked to the kind of activities they undertake. In this same light, more emphasis should also be laid on collaborating with local technical partners to ensure proximity of interventions. There is also the need for continuous training of local technical partners to strengthen their development skills.

Apart from objective 4 which dwells on water availability, the activities are being realised in relation to the other 5 objectives, which shows that efforts are being made by HIC to carry out concrete actions which families identified. Another issue is the frequency of advices to the team from the head office despite the distance, which shows that the team wishes success for the planned activities.

However, a sad deplorable issue is the absence of a veterinary doctor with the HIC team for the supervision of activities of collaborators especially when animal rearing constitutes the pillar of HIC actions. The consequences are visible. At times one has the impression of overload and monotony in terms of repetition of the same activities within groups or within villages.

Even though there are some collaboration between groups and local veterinary doctors, there are so many limitations, in terms of availability of the staff and understanding of

HIC-groups objectives to create a spirit of partnership. This situation is aggravated by the fact that the collaboration is not formal hence difficulties in assuming responsibilities reciprocally.

We also observe that the project being in its first phase was on the preliminary activities; hence, the rate of success will be high if the project continues implementing its actions.

Efficiency in implementation

The combination of a modern system of agriculture (plant and animal breeding) and a traditional system underscores the fact that the SSPZ system minimises the investment cost to be borne by the groups in their activities. One can also say that the choice of low cost animals is easy (preference on sheep than pig) responds to the issue of reducing the cost when serving many farm families.

Nevertheless, though with certain exceptions, the costs are acceptable (which is known by the groups) in relation to prices. Unfortunately, certain costs are exorbitant because of HIC interventions, for example labour, price in the village etc. in certain villages, for example, labour for the construction of sties for animals is highly priced, and even the price of the animals to buy. This increases the cost of investment and reduces the benefits that the families could have realised. It is also important to highlight the fact that giving different treatment to groups with the same activities calls for various interpretations of cost especially those that received the first batch of animals.

Sustainability of actions

Without reiterating the aforementioned comments, one can say that there are great chances of sustainability except in a few cases. The revolving fund put in place within groups is a principle for repayments. The fact that each group has to finance its activities according to the conditions determined by the group, one can think that the issue of access to treatment and nutrition of animals can be managed easily at the level of the group without external support. At the level of families, the revenue from animals, the means of production and the yield are improved constituting a base for sustainability and self-sufficiency. This is quite encouraging. Whether in the group or families, sustainability of actions depends on the management system and the continuity in the future. This process obliges the team to be apt and ready to follow up the groups and their families to develop tools for sustainability of actions. A good organization from the team is hence necessary to assure that the pillars of the sustainability will not fall down just after HIC lives.

Gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming

The reaction from the team indicates that trainings on gender and the family have been done with each of the groups which is highly appreciated. The composition of team members during the training springs out the issue of gender mainstreaming of the actions directly. Also the groups supported till date are mostly women groups in relation

to the performance criteria retained in the implementation strategy highlighted in the project document

Nevertheless, we can highlight the fact that the technical collaborators and animators are all men despite the availability of literate women within some groups.

As concerns HIV/AIDS, sensitizations have been done as for gender within families. The beneficiaries say that they have understood the necessity of screening and preventive measures and treatment in case of infection. It is quite encouraging that women have no complex when talking about this subject and sex which was a taboo before. However, one questions the fact whether those infected are being taken care off psychologically within families, because according to a study carried out by the Belgian Development Cooperation in 2007 in the region, families do not support members who are known HIV positive.

Again all the technical collaborators and the animators are men. The HIC approach is to provide services on the spot (consequence of the convention of the partnership with the ministry concerned). Unfortunately, the team is in a situation where not only there are no women in the technical service but also HIC has no decision on which one of the technicians should be sent for support from the government technical service. While continuing with this partnership, the team should try to include women in the team everywhere when lobbying is possible.

We cannot analyze the capacity of the team and its technical collaborators in relation to integrating gender. We mention the fact that only one person has received gender training but its application has not been done (according to the questionnaires administered to the team).

Main challenges

The main challenges are:

- The development of a clear strategy for the target groups to ensure that there is sustainability of actions carried out in the revolving funds
- Develop social capacities within groups through a process of autonomy of the groups vis-à-vis HIC and other organisations. This suggests that group members and their families engage in a change of mentality, self-confidence and self-development. The majority of the groups met say, they rely on external aid and finance from partners when Heifer withdraws to receive credits/gifts without clear objectives
- The development of a clear vision within groups for self-promotion. Have a vision that enables the team to reflect with the groups to canalise their efforts and have a clear growth process. With a clear vision, they can clearly see future projects, external aid and development of micro enterprises for example) and the team

- could establish a withdrawal plan to assist the groups to better plan to manage future collaboration.
- Make formal collaboration with the groups and with the technical collaborators to establish responsibilities of all the stakeholders.
 - Professionalize groups in the value chains including marketing of animals.
 - Concentrate around the most relevant and important aspects of intervention for a greater impact and credibility of HIC in the region.

Recommendations

From all the observations and analysis done, we have suggested the following recommendations which we think will assist the team, group and partners for better collaboration and improvement of the objectives of the group. We limit it to those which can be operational knowing that the observations made can assist HIC to rectify its interventions in the short, medium and long terms.

To the Head office of HIC

1. Reinforce the team urgently with an expertise in animal rearing and make formal collaboration at all levels
2. Develop a layout for the capacities building of the groups. This should include context analysis, development of a clear vision in the process of self help promotion of groups, self evaluation etc.
3. Resolve the problems of the team laying emphasis on the real time spent by the administrative personnel and for the back up of groups.

To the SSPZ team

4. Avoid over spreading which risks affecting HIC credibility in the region. It is better to concentrate and work hard with a small group of persons. Spreading here is in terms of geographical dispersion but also in terms of activities.
5. Develop a communication plan with the groups and their collaborators to solve the problem of high mortality rates for animals and clarify the passing on the gift system. In the case of the project, the team should gain collaboration with other institutions in the region which invest in animal breeding and elaborate a common vaccination program for follow up such as in the Maroua-Mokolo and Yagoua diocese. Forums can be organised to share experiences and begin collaboration.
6. Provide more importance to strategic reflections with groups in order not to limit interventions to technical routines.
7. Develop an efficient layout with all the groups in order to ensure sustainability of actions in the villages. This implies that all the groups can be trained to define their vision and elaborate their strategic plans of actions, even annual plans and short-term plans.
8. Identify other fruitful value chains in animal breeding to solve the problem of marketing (price) of animals in the market and also analyze the type of animal and

at the same time analyze the technical and financial feasibility of each activity in the context in which the group engages.

9. Integrate competitive selection of collaborators to reinforce the efficiency of the objectives of HIC and the groups because the criteria of proximity have its limits. It is also suggested that they should think of women collaborators especially when identifying animators.

Conclusion

The results of the study presented have been the fruit of collaboration with field partners, technical partners and the SSPZ team. Knowing that not all the points have been exhausted, we hope that the points of dissatisfaction will be used by HIC for further reflections between the team and the partners for further clarification and for sustainable solutions so that the lessons learnt will be used at the team and group levels.

We laud the engagement of the team and partners for the success of the mission despite other obligation, we wish to express our gratitude to each of them. Nevertheless, we encountered some difficulties during the mission as follows:

- The poor implication of the team during the process. We wanted that the team at the beginning engages in a central position during the evaluation and draws the lessons learned and best practices for future application. Unfortunately, the period of evaluation coincided with the writing of annual reports hence not favourable. We think that classic evaluation is not very well adapted for future lessons to be learnt, consequently recommendations seen as imposed externally. We hope that the team will organize reflection workshops and restitutions that will enable them indulge in the results.
- Late arrival of project documents and reports/communication guides, which were given very late, during the last day of the evaluation, made the work difficult. The exploitation of the documents was done at the same time during meetings with partners making it hectic.
- Underestimation of the time of evaluation which imposed a stressful rhythm and did not allow time for deep reflections with the groups (many groups were met in a day). Added is the fact that late coming was rampant which created pressure on the work during the week and the time for preparation of the debriefing session.
- Very few technical partners were seen in the villages during the mission, consequently, the interviews with this category were limited. Apart from those who participated during the debriefing in Maroua, the others were not involved in the work.