

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Title of Project	Sustainable Livelihood Program for Indigenous Communities in Dinajpur (SLPID-II)
Project location	Bangladesh
Implementing Partner/s:	Caritas Bangladesh
Program Duration	1/07/2017 to 30/06/2020
Total Program Budget	-
Evaluator	Commitment Consultants, external evaluator
Date of Evaluation	April 2020
Total local downstream partners and name	-

PROJECT/PROGRAM/ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

Caritas was established in Bangladesh before independence in 1967. Since then the organisation has been extending development assistance to the poor and vulnerable people. Its areas of activities include Integrated Development, Disaster Management and Human Resource Development. One of its six development goals is the “improvement of the living standards of the indigenous people.”

In line with the above development goal for indigenous people, Caritas Bangladesh launched the Sustainable Livelihood Program for Indigenous Communities in Dinajpur (SLPID-II) to achieve “improved socio-economic situation of indigenous people through strengthening Traditional Social Organizations (TSOs) and livelihood promotion of three *upazilas* in three districts under greater Dinajpur in Bangladesh.” The SLPID-II project is based on the knowledge and experience gained from an earlier phase. It is funded by Caritas Australia and the Government of Australia under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

The SLPID-II project has two objectives: (1) to strengthen TSOs in using available resources to access in social safety net facilities and mitigate social conflicts in 60 villages by 2020; and (2) to increase the income of disadvantaged indigenous peoples through enhancing capacity in income-generating activities and employment creation in the project area.

PURPOSE and METHOLOGY OF EVALUATION

The evaluation is an end-of-program study to determine and assess the success of Caritas Bangladesh in achieving the goal and objectives of the project and to help Caritas Australia and Caritas Bangladesh assess the impacts of the current project and design more effective future projects with better

implementation and management. A tender was floated to engage a suitable firm to carry out the evaluation. Commitment Consultants was selected through a competitive process. The evaluation team adopted a mixed method approach, comprising of desk review; questionnaire survey of households in intervention and non-intervention villages; semi-structured interviews with Caritas Bangladesh staff (central, regional and field level), key actors including government officials of agriculture, livestock and land department, and TSO members; FGDs with TSO members; and observations. Of the 60 target villages, 6 were randomly selected (2 in each district) for the evaluation study. For comparison purpose, 6 similar villages in nearby areas where SLPID was not implemented were also selected. 10 households were randomly selected from each of the 12 villages. The purpose of the household questionnaire was to investigate the changes within the intervention areas over time since the baseline study, and also investigate changes between intervention and non-intervention villages in a case-control manner. A total of 21 key informant interviews and 6 FGDs were conducted. The report notes that in comparison, the baseline study was conducted among 2,064 randomly selected households from the 60 project villages. As the list of selected villages in the baseline study was not available to the evaluation team, nor was the methodology or questionnaire used, as well as limitations in terms of time and budget for the evaluation, the evaluators were not able to repeat the baseline study with similar sample size or methodology. The report notes that the evaluation team tried to repeat selected questions from the baseline study based on the results presented in the report. Since the evaluation study has a much smaller sample size, the comparisons made should be taken as indicative and not statistically significant.

KEY FINDINGS

The evaluation found that the project has been largely effective in achieving its stated goal and objectives. The ABCD approach has been a key contributor to improving the confidence of the communities. The project has achieved a positive impact in creating better livelihoods for the beneficiaries. The handful of rice and goat rearing programs have been quite successful, as has been the organic farming program. These have resulted in an increase in income by the families.

About 1,206 disadvantaged households are now involved in homestead gardening, livestock rearing, aqua-agriculture and small business for additional income. Participating households produced 78,529kg of vegetables through this initiative. They earned AUD13,082 by selling 33,841kg. At the same time the vegetables and fruits grown are improving the nutrition intake of the communities.

About 443 farmers in the 60 villages are regularly practicing vermi and pit compost, perching in paddy crops to attract insect-eating birds, and application of pheromone for insect trapping. A total of 1,920 households cultivated vegetables in three *upazilas* after receiving training from the SLPID-II project.

In terms of gender relations and empowerment, the evaluation found that the project has been impactful. There were no women members in TSOs before the project started. Now all TSOs have active women members. The project encouraged 60 TSOs to reform and these TSOs now include 207 women members. Also, 251 women are involved in 180 sub-committees of the TSOs. Women can now voice their concerns in meetings.

The evaluation found that women have gained economic strength through the handful of rice program. At present, a total of 1,281 women project participants are directly involved with rice groups in 60 villages. The total collection amount of handful rice is 43,497kg from the 60 groups. In the first two years of the project they earned AUD5,854 by selling rice.

Some inhibitors that restricted achievements of the project were reported to be gender inequity as women's priorities are still sometimes not attended, continued alcohol addiction in some communities, and lack of employment in a few cases.

In terms of sustainability, the evaluation found that the achievements of the project are likely to sustain after the project is over because the project built the capacity of the communities and simply supported them. The contributing factor to sustainability is the ABCD approach and minimal reliance on project inputs. Some inhibitors are old social norms and habits may return (e.g. addition, disempowering women). However, these negative factors do not seem very strong.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluators did not provide their own lessons learned from the evaluation process in the report, however they did share some lessons that were provided by project staff during consultations, which were: (1) TSOs can play a vital role in community development and linkage with government offices if they receive training and capacity building support; (2) indigenous women can profitably run business ventures such as handful rice programs; (3) indigenous families can adopt organic farming, and (4) technical training can help indigenous youth to find jobs.

The evaluators provided a number of recommendations based on their findings. The evaluation found that the project has successfully introduced organic farming, but recommended that now it may be beneficial to introduce non-traditional fruits, vegetables, and flowers that may bring better prices for indigenous communities.

Market linkage was an area of the project found to be a little weak. The evaluators recommend the project work further to create better linkages with local and regional markets which will help ensure greater income for indigenous communities.

The evaluation report also recommended that to further improve the role of TSOs, all development activities should be coordinated through them. It was noticed that some projects or NGOs start forming groups bypassing the TSO. This should be discouraged. TSOs should be the focal point for all social and economic development activities. Further, while TSOs in project villages have been strengthened, a federation of TSOs is yet to be formed. Such a platform is recommended to boost the voice of the indigenous people at *upazila* and *zila* levels.

Finally, for significant impact, the evaluators recommend that future projects should have a larger scope. For example, indigenous communities are found in about 30 *upazilas*. The present project was limited to 60 villages in three *upazilas*. As the project has successfully demonstrated good benefits, future projects should be larger in scope.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Forthcoming