

# Evaluation Brief



## Evaluation of the Impact of Food for Assets on Livelihood Resilience in Nepal (2002 – 2010)

### Context

Nepal has a population of approximately 31 million and ranks 157th of 187 countries in the United Nations Development Programme's 2012 Human Development Index. Despite improvements over the last 15 years, poverty, food insecurity and chronic undernutrition are still significant problems, with higher prevalence in the mountains and mid- and far-western hill regions and among certain caste/ethnic groups. The evaluation reference period has been characterized by conflict and post conflict.

### Food for Assets in Nepal

The evaluation covered the cash and food-for-assets components of two WFP programmes in Nepal: Country Programme (2002–2007) and Protracted Relief And Recovery Operation (2007–2010). These provided 40 to 70 working days of support during the lean season. An average of 107,710 labourers participated each year, indirectly reaching approximately 603,178 people annually<sup>1</sup>.

### Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation assessed the outcomes and impacts of WFP's food-for-assets programming in Nepal and was part of a series of five evaluations on the impact of WFP's cash-for-assets and food-for-assets activities on livelihoods resilience. The evaluation emphasized learning by identifying lessons and changes for enhancing the impacts on resilience and aligning food-for-assets programming with WFP's recently adopted 2011 Food for Assets Guidance Manual and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy. Other countries in the series include Bangladesh, Guatemala, Uganda and Senegal. A synthesis of all five countries will also be conducted.

The evaluation addressed three core questions:

1. What positive and negative impacts have FFA activities had on individuals within participating households and communities?
2. What factors were critical in affecting outcomes and impacts?
3. How could FFA activities be improved to address the findings from the first two questions?

Evaluation methods included document and literature review, analysis of PRRO baseline and final household surveys, stakeholder interviews, and detailed qualitative fieldwork in 15 village development committees (VDCs) in five districts.

<sup>1</sup> based on an average household size of 5.6

### Key Findings and Conclusions

#### Asset Functionality

Of 99 assets directly assessed by the evaluation 54% were fully functional, 33% partially functional and 13% were not functional. Functionality was lowest for water management and agroforestry assets; even controlling for date of construction, these types of assets tend to have complex ownership and management regimes.

#### Biophysical Environment

Notwithstanding the absence of baseline comparative data on the biophysical environment, the evaluation found qualitative evidence of positive biophysical impacts:

- Substantial increases in agricultural production (from 1 to 2 or 3 crops per year) as a result of terracing, irrigation and plantation work
- Diversification of cropping with introduction of new species (including vegetable production)
- Enhanced community water sources (ponds and/or drinking water) provided water for households, livestock and vegetable production
- Access infrastructure increased availability of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertiliser, advice)
- Agroforestry increased the number and variety of trees on otherwise barren lands (although some species were more successful than others).

However, overall impact was limited, with interventions not sufficient to achieve watershed-level impact (small scale, scattered interventions). In addition, some unintended negative consequences were observed, such as land slippage from poor design.

#### Food Security and Livelihoods

For four months a year 2002 – 2010, FFA met short term food needs of between 47,000-218,000 households annually; and over the entire period almost one million participants and an estimated five to six million beneficiaries were reached. Compared with comparison households, more participating households reported improvements in:

- Severity of food shortage
- Acute malnutrition rate
- employment
- income
- living conditions
- Reduced out migration

Different types of assets provide different levels of

benefits to the poorest groups. Important in Nepal's socio-economic context of severe caste, ethnic, gender and geographic inequality, private or semi-private and agriculture-related assets tend to benefit land- holders.

### Effects on women and girls

Women constituted 36-50% of project participants. Male headed households reported slightly higher incomes, living conditions and self sufficiency of food production than female headed households (who formed 13% of survey respondents).

Food was reported to benefit poorer households and women/children as compared to cash transfers. User Committee membership delivers associated capacity development and empowerment benefits, and 27-51% of members were female, against WFP's target of 50%.

Road construction, especially of larger or longer roads, presented particular challenges for women because it required that women work away from home. Conditions in workers 'camps' for those not able to return to their houses at night posed security problems for women and child care was rarely provided.

### Contribution to Livelihoods Resilience

Roads and other assets had a number of positive effects such as helping to increase accessibility, agricultural productivity and access to water for both domestic and agricultural use. Improvements were seen in food consumption scores and evidence of improved resilience was observed, with participants having lower Coping Strategy Index scores, less reliance on credit to purchase food and less migration than non-participants.

Public assets made a significant contribution to building economic and social capital during and after conflict, although benefits were not always equitably distributed. Similarly, there is significant variation in distribution of benefits by type of asset with some activities targeting the poorest better than others.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Overall Assessment

The evaluation found that FFA achieved significant short-term positive impacts through the rapid delivery of food aid to several million food-deficit beneficiaries during the evaluation reference period, which was characterized by conflict and post-conflict conditions and recurring natural disasters. WFP often operated in remote communities that received little alternative support.

Cash/food for assets was less successful in reducing chronic, structural food insecurity or providing long-term benefits for the poorest. WFP's short-term approach focusing on maximum geographical coverage within the limits of funding available was not conducive to long-term sustainable impact, particularly for the

poorest and most excluded groups. The evaluation found insufficient alignment with national systems and partners for ensuring the technical support, asset maintenance and complementary programming necessary for long-term impact.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** In collaboration with Headquarters, the country office should develop a funding strategy for the new CP that ensures a minimum three-year funding commitment from all sources, to deliver the long-term livelihood resilience impacts expected from C/FFA activities.

**Recommendation 2.** The country office should adopt a more flexible programming approach for C/FFA that is better adapted to Nepal's diversity and geography in site-specific operational contexts by employing the twin tracks of: i) wide coverage and short-term interventions focused, on meeting the immediate food needs of the greatest number of the poorest and most vulnerable groups; and ii) more focused longer-term programming aiming at building the livelihood resilience of vulnerable groups.

**Recommendation 3.** With support from the regional bureau and Headquarters, the country office should develop a theory of change that describes the intended results of C/FFA activities on short-term food insecurity and long-term livelihood resilience in varying operational contexts, for different household categories, and for different types of assets.

**Recommendation 4.** To ensure that the benefits of long-term C/FFA programmes reach the poorest, the country office should target specific households based on local context analysis and household wealth ranking.

**Recommendation 5.** The country office should undertake a partnership review, then develop and implement a strategy for partnerships that delivers the short- and long-term objectives of C/FFA.

**Recommendation 6.** To ensure that assets are built to maintainable standards and that long-term support is available to maintain them, the country office should identify – at the asset design stage – responsibilities and institutional arrangements at community, district and/or national levels for long-term maintenance.

**Recommendation 7.** The country office should reach agreement with the Government on the development of a functioning and sustainable government system for responding to food insecurity, to enable the eventual managed hand-over of C/FFA implementation.



#### Reference:

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at [www.wfp.org/evaluation](http://www.wfp.org/evaluation)

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