

LUTHERAN WORLD SERVICE INDIA TRUST

Socio Economic Empowerment Project for Peace and Reconciliation (2014-2017)

Mid- Term Evaluation September
2016

Mrs Laura Coulter

Peace building Advisor,

United Mission to Nepal,

PO Box 126, Kathmandu,

Nepal

Email: lcoulter@umn.org.np

Phone: 977-9823043241

Table of Contents

Acronyms.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation.....	5
Methodology.....	5
Context.....	7
Conflict Analysis.....	7
The Evaluated Project.....	8
Project Goals and Objectives.....	9
Project Profile.....	9
Findings.....	10
Recommendations.....	29
Conclusion.....	32
List of References and Appendices.....	33

Acronyms

BTAD - Bodoland Territorial Area District

CC - Central Committee

CHW - Community Health Worker

ECE- Early Child Education Centre

LWSIT - Lutheran World Service India Trust

NRLM – National Rural Livelihood Mission

PMF - Peace Mediator Forum

PC - Peace Committee

SEEPRP - Socio Economic Empowerment for Peace and Reconciliation Project

SHG - Self-Help Group

VDC - Village Development Committee

Executive Summary

The main aim of this mid-term evaluation is to assess the progress of the SEEPRP Project towards its set goal via the degree of implementation of project activities and outputs to date against the proposed activities and outputs set out in the Project Document. The evaluation was undertaken by Mrs. Laura Coulter and based on:

- Review of Project documents and progress reports
- Field visits to each of the five Project zones between 5th-9th September 2016
- Unstructured interviews and focus group discussions with Project beneficiaries
- Checking of Community assets at several villages.
- A meeting with the Project Central Committee
- An interview with the two current Project Co-ordinators
- A discussion with all staff

A debrief meeting was held at the National Office in Kolkata on 8th September 2016 where the evaluator shared details of the field visits and discussed the initial findings to the programme staff. Their feedback has been incorporated into this report.

The main goals of the Project are to establish peace in the area, to improve the socio-economic conditions and build the capacity of marginalized communities enabling them to take collective actions to secure their rights. Since 2014, Project staff have been actively engaged in setting up development interventions through the formation of Self-Help groups (SHGs), Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Peace Mediator Forums (PMFs). The current 18 field staff members work in the local communities in the five Project zones and are supported by community volunteers. The Project Co-ordinator manages all project activities and is guided by a Central Committee and five subcommittees (one in each of the five zones), which meet on a regular basis to support and advise staff members.

The establishment of VDCs, SHGs and PMFs has helped to empower local communities to access resources. Training on relevant subjects has helped to build the capacity of local communities. The fact that 177 SHGs are now functioning effectively and 50 are linked to banks is a good sign of significant progress made to empower local women as entrepreneurs and has also given them access to credit and income earning opportunities. Income-generation schemes have also brought improvements in the level of household food security and the achievement of 36% (2551) families as now being food secure signals progress and will hopefully increase over the coming two years. Preventive measures have been put in place to reduce the spread of communicable diseases. It was impressive to see peace-building work ongoing within a high-risk conflict zone. Progress has been made to develop sustainability with the establishment of PMFs, PCs and Gaonbura Federations. Creating links with the Gaonbura (Village Headmen) has helped in achieving the Project objectives. It is evident that LWSIT is making a positive impact at the community level in the five Project zones.

Recommendations:

- Increase linkages with relevant stakeholders further build sustainability of the peacebuilding work
- Further training on peace-building and mediation for key local people so that they can develop skills and strategies necessary to maintain peace within the five zones

Introduction

Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT) is a leading not-for-profit non-governmental organization in India. LWSIT has been working in the areas of disaster relief and integrated development for more than four decades. Its National Office is located in Kolkata and it currently works in the states of Assam, Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand.

In Assam, LWSIT intervention was initiated after the riots in 1996 and 1998. The focus was initially on Relief (1996-2003) followed by Rehabilitation (2004-2008) and then on Development (2009-2013). The current project – Socio-Economic Empowerment Project for Peace and Reconciliation (SEEPRP) – started in January 2014 and is operating in 2 districts of Assam- Kokrajhar and Chirang targeting 100 communities in five zones. The Project is supported by Normisjon and, although Project work continues in the areas of development, livelihood and health, the main focus is now on peace and reconciliation. The Project has been in operation for over two years and will continue until 2017. This mid-term evaluation has been requested by Normisjon and facilitated by Mrs. Laura Coulter, Peace Advisor to United Mission to Nepal with assistance from Ms. Natasha Datta, Assistant Manager, Content Development, LWSIT.

Aims and Objectives of Evaluation

The main aim of this mid-term evaluation is to assess the progress of the SEEPRP project towards its set goal via the degree of implementation of project activities and outputs to date against the proposed activities and outputs set out in the Project document. In addition, the evaluation will consider relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project activities as outlined in the TOR signed on 10th August 2016.

Evaluation Objectives:

1. Assess progress made towards the achievement of results at outcome and output levels.
2. Determine if the results contribute to the overall goals of peace-building and sustainable development.
3. Assess the reasonability of the project financial costs and project activity results.
4. Assess performance in terms of the relevance of results, sustainability, shared responsibility and accountability, appropriateness of design, resource allocation and informed and timely action.
5. Identify lessons learned and provide inputs and recommendations for the next phase of the project in partnership with Normisjon.

Methodology

The evaluator, Mrs. Laura Coulter, reviewed the Project Documents made available by the project staff and studied the Terms of Reference agreed with the Programme Co-ordinator, Ms Monijinjr Byapari and the Executive Director, Mr Shaju Joseph. Field visits were made to each of the five project zones between 5th-9th September 2016 (Gossaigaon, Sapkata, Sidli, Patgaon and Kachugaon). Unstructured interviews and focus group discussions were held with project beneficiaries and groups who participate in the project activities such as VDCs, SHGs, Village Headmen, students who

have received support, PCs and PMFs. Community assets, such as a grain bank, compost pits, goat rearing and a bamboo plantation were checked at several villages. The evaluator had one meeting with the Project CC, an interview with the two current Project Co-ordinators and a discussion with all staff to assess their understanding of the project. One meeting took place with a government official at Gossaigaon Government Sub-Divisional Office.

A debrief meeting was held at the National Office in Kolkata on 8th September 2016 where the evaluation team shared details of the field visits and discussed the initial findings to the programme staff. Their feedback has been incorporated into this report.

Limitations of the Evaluation

There were several limitations to this evaluation:

First the field visits and interviews were based on those selected by the project staff that were also present at the village meetings for translation and organizations purposes. Due to the presence of Project staff and their selection of participants, the environment for candid responses was not ideal.¹

Secondly, the size of the focus groups was large, exceeding 100 people on occasions. These large numbers made it difficult to get in-depth information about the project activities.

The third limitation was that the evaluator was working alone, rather than as part of a team. Although excellent support was given during the field visit from the national office, the research and findings detailed in this report are the work of one person.

The evaluation field visit was cut short due to a strike which took place on 9th September 2016, limiting the planned discussion with the staff team.

¹ The Project Co-ordinator points out that staff encouraged participants to view their opinions freely. One staff from N.O and another from Unit office translated the participants' perception of the project activities and initiatives.

Context

Assam, with an area 78,438 square kilometres, has a multi-ethnic population of 31.2 million, distributed in 27 districts.² It has 72 identifiable communities including a large number of ethnic tribes who have their own religion and language.

The term 'Assamese' is defined as the union of various tribes. Within this multi ethnic society, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhist, Muslims have been living together for centuries in peace and harmony. A wide range of ethnic groups are also present, who have contributed towards the socio- cultural development of the state. Each group wants to preserve their unique identity. The project is focused in two districts, Kokrajhar and Chirang.



Kokrajhar District

Kokrajhar is one of the districts of Bodoland Territorial Area District and can be described as the gateway to the north-eastern region of India. Both road and rail touches this district at Srirampur before they go on to other districts in Bodoland, Assam and the other northeast states. The district has a total area of 3,169.22 sq. km. In 2011³, Kokrajhar had population of 887,142 of which male and female were 452,905 and 434,237 respectively. The district is bounded on the north by the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, by Dhubri district on the south, Chirang district on the east and the Indian state of West Bengal on the west. According to the Census of India 2011, the average literacy rate of Kokrajhar district is 65.22% with male and female literacy being 71.89% and 58.27% respectively.

Chirang District

Chirang is also one of the districts of Bodoland Territorial Area District of Assam. According to the Population Census in 2011, the Chirang District had population of 481,818 of which male and female were 244,675 and 237,143 respectively. The population of Chirang District constituted 1.55 percent of total population of Assam. The average literacy rate of Chirang District was 64.71 % with male and female literacy being 71.35 % and 57.87 % respectively.

Conflict Analysis

After the ethnic clash of 1996-1998 between the Bodos and the Santals in Kokrajhar and Chirang Districts, the Bodo Accord was signed between the Government of India and the Bodo leaders which lead to the creation of the 46-member Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) in Feb 2003, in response to the long demands of the Bodos for self- rule. However, they still feel the accord has not

² Census of India, 2011

³ Census of India, 2011

brought the desired solution to the place. The Bodos are trying to consolidate their separate identity as a nation as they have been given political and economic advantage through the creation of BTAD. The other communities in the BTAD feel that the accord has been signed only for the benefit of the Bodo Community. This has led to growing resentment from the other communities who have sizeable populations such as the Rajbongshis, Muslims, Santals and Bengalis. This has resulted in the formation of various underground organizations who have been demanding their rights and are trying to create their own identity by lobbying at different levels. Different elements have been involved in creating unrest and violence in the region since the formation of BTAD. As a consequence of continued unrest, disturbances and violence from time to time, the development process in the region has suffered to a great extent. The people in the rural villages have been the main victims of these conflicts. Issues that still fuel the conflict can be described as:

- Ethnic and religious differences and strong communal feelings.
- Lack of employment opportunities, particularly among young men. Migration and unemployment led to many young men joining militant groups.
- Political powers over others both within and outside the communities.
- Anti- State Adivasi elements.
- Desire for political and economic powers over others by certain militant groups.

The living conditions of many communities are very poor, including those of the Santals/Adivasi communities which are even lower. Reasons for poor living conditions include encroachment of people from neighbouring districts, pressure on resources, uncertainties about livelihood activities. Unemployment continues to be a matter of serious concern which has become more acute in the proposed area. Many young men and women have migrated to the city in search of work and some are enticed by insurgency groups which can lead to anti- social activities.

The Evaluated Project

The main goal of the Project is to establish peace in the area, to improve the socio-economic conditions and build the capacity of marginalized communities so that they are enabled to take collective actions to secure their rights. The Project staff have been working to promote development interventions through the formation of SHGs, VDCs and PMFs. The field staff members currently work closely with local communities in the five zones and are supported by community volunteers. They report to the Project Co-ordinator who co-ordinates and oversees all project activities. The Project is guided by a Central Committee and five sub-committees in each of the five zones, which meet on a regular basis to support and advise staff members.

The Development Goal of the Project is:

Men and women and youth of the vulnerable partner communities from different ethnic and religious groups living with mutual respect, cooperation and protection for each other, taking collective actions for their socio-economic transformation with peace & reconciliation

The Project Goal is:

People of different ethnic groups in the project areas have organized themselves for collective initiatives to address common causes of insecurity, conflict and hunger and engaged in productive utilization of resources for sustainable livelihood, food and human security.

The Strategic Objectives of the Project are:

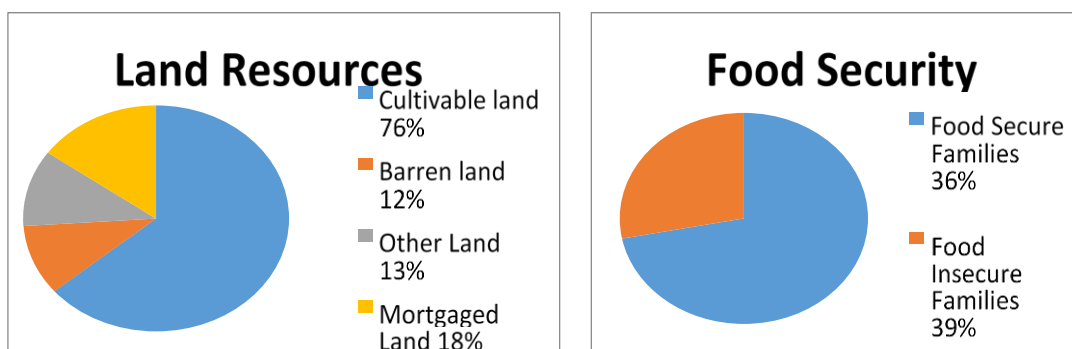
- 1. Institutional Strengthening, access to rights and entitlements**
- 2. Conflict Resolution and Peace-building**
- 3. Food Security and sustainable livelihood**
- 4. Health, water and sanitation**
- 5. Staff capacity building**

The Project Profile

The Project currently works in 2 Districts - Kokrajhar and Chirang, which are divided into three subdivisions and five zones. 100 communities have been targeted, with a total population of 35,039 people, 17,828 men and 17,211 women. The breakdown of the zones is:

- Gossaigaon, 1006 Households, 4,929 Population
- Kachugaon, 895 Households, 4,521 Population
- Patgaon, 447 Households, 20,191 Population
- Sapkata, 3989 Households, 19,215 Population
- Sidli (Chirang District), 844 Households, 4,283 Population

Castes and tribes represented in the area include Santal (35%), Bodo (11%), Muslim (41%), Rajbhongsi (2%), Uraon (2%), Bengali (2%), and Rabha (7%). Two major areas of development being addressed by the project in the area are use of land resources and access to food security. Only 15% of the total land of Kokrajhar and Chirang districts is utilized for agriculture and the average farm land is 2 acres. The small size of farms combined with low levels of mechanization and unskilled workers results in low productivity. Many farmers only cultivate and harvest their land annually which leaves huge areas of fertile land idle throughout the year. The Project aims to train farmers in more productive agricultural methods in order to use land more effectively and increase food security. The following tables illustrate relevant data which shows that there is still much work to be done to help more families have sufficient income for food and to help communities to be able to make the best use of cultivable land.



Findings

The main findings are given under the five Project strategic objectives and progress is measured against the indicators and expected outcomes for each objective, as stated in the SEEPRP Project Document 2014-18, with particular reference to the extent to which 2nd year indicators and expected outcomes have been met. The data sources used include the Project Annual Reports (2014/15) and field visit findings.

1. Institutional Strengthening, access to rights and entitlements

Communities are empowered to secure rights to improved quality of life.

The relevant indicator for this objective is

At the beginning of 2015, 100 youth groups would be formed in 100 communities.

Expected Outcomes and Progress made towards their Achievement

Communities are engaged in gender responsive community development actions, addressing social issues and violation of rights.

- 48 communities gained knowledge on 'Right to Information Act' through ten exposure visits
- 34 communities were made aware of legal aid from ten exposures visits
- At the end of 2015, 396 community organizations were operational reaching 70% targeted families. Links with government departments, regular monitoring and training on rights, leadership and management have all helped to build capacity.
- Women have been encouraged to participate in VDC's executive body (at least 30%).
- Women SHGs have been formed and strengthened to ensure more participation in decision making in the groups.
- Good steps have been taken towards promoting gender balance through 15 awareness exposure visits organized for 262 men and 305 women from 17 communities

CBO and their federations are actively engaged in the issues of advocacy, conflict resolution and peace-building.

- 46 VDC and SHG leaders (99 m/ 270 f) gained knowledge from Book keeping training organized by LWSIT in order to manage their VDCs and groups effectively. Project personnel who had already received training were used as resource people in the Leadership training.
- Improvement in the functions of VDCs and SHGs has been noted. Training has been delivered to communities on Right based issues, Disaster Risk Management and prevention of deforestation

Communities have mobilized resources from within and from the duty bearers.

- 177 SHGs (174f/3m) formed and 50 are now linked to banks and getting financial support
- 11 eco youth groups from 11 communities were encouraged with games materials support
- 225 youths from 30 poorly resourced villages were given training on life skills
- The Project Central Committee (with people from different ethnic backgrounds) and five subcommittees are operating at zone level to give support and guidance to project staff.

Men and women are actively participating in community development initiatives and decision-making processes

- 100 VDCs formed (5131M/1275F) - 6404 people and 177 SHGs formed (174f/3m)
- 1 Project Central committee and 5 sub-committees are functioning well.
- Women have been encouraged to participate in VDC's executive body (at least 30%).

Boys and girls are enrolled in formal schools and continue education successfully and being able to opt for their future career.

- 2 education projects are operating at village level and both girls and boys are attending school on a regular basis.
- 20 ECE centres have been established in 20 communities with 495 students (247m/248f)
- Training has been done for 20 instructors
- Early education is now available for 3-5 year olds (532 students).
- All eligible school going children are enrolled in formal schools at end of the year 2015
- High school students in partner communities are aware about different career options based on their interest and capability.
- 141 female students were supported with text books, admission fees and winter dress and they are able to continue their studies with the project support of LWSIT which helped to reduce drop out.

Data Collected from Field Visit

The evaluation team visited five local communities in the five Project zones and held group discussions with SHGs, VDCs and PMFs. Two study centres were visited. The following information summarizes the data that was collected. Direct quotations from local people are in bold italics.

Visit to Sapkata zone -05/09/16

Gaonchulka Rava SHG has ten female members and was formed by LWSIT in 2014. As a result of training organized by LWSIT they can now write their own names. They have also received book-keeping training. One woman said:

'They (LWSIT) have shown us the right path'

Boost SHG located in Matiapara No2 has ten female members and have been in operation since 2013. LWSIT gave them training on book-keeping and gender sensitivity. This has brought some encouraging results as two women shared:

'It was good training and she taught the others (in the group) afterwards'

'Women have more of a voice now- they feel empowered' (explained a Muslim woman who is traditionally not allowed to speak in public)

Visit to Kachugaon Zone - 06/09/16

Rampur Rava VDC was formed in 2008 and currently has 40 male members. In 2010 they started a Grain bank, which has benefited 63 families, particularly over the lean period. In addition to grain and bullocks, LWSIT gave the VDC members training on how to develop their village, live in peace and conduct aids/gender awareness training. They now plan to set up a loan scheme and LWSIT will help with capacity-building.

Kwnchwk SHG started in 2003 with 17 female members. They work together in paddy fields and combine their income. This is put in the bank and can be used for emergency loans. In 2008 LWSIT gave them 17 goats but unfortunately only five survived. They have done book-keeping training.

Marshal SHG began in 2009 with 11 members. They also work in fields to harvest jute and rice. They received training on peace from LWSIT and would like more training. Their agricultural work is going well and they have been able to buy more land for cultivation.

The evaluation team visited the Study Centre in Kachugaon⁴, which LWSIT supports. 16 boys/girls come daily to learn. Girls are helped financially to go on to higher education.

The evaluation team went to Patgaon zone and saw the ECE Centre located at Lakhipur Church, where we saw class of young children having a lesson- 22 girls/boys 3-5 yrs. old. One tutor has been appointed by the VDC and he gets a salary from VDC (300 INR from VDC and 900 INR from LWSIT). A local person told us: ***'Before LWSIT, there was no education for children- now all go.'***



⁴ The Project has two types of centres operating in the project area- Study Centre for students reading in Class-VI to Class-VIII and Early Child Education Centre (ECE) for children age between 3-5 years

Visit to Bodo community in Patgaon, (06/09/16)

The Village Headman (Bijoy Lakra) said:

'We are grateful to LWSIT as we didn't know much about development. We have been able to understand what development is..... We didn't know the importance of education. I learned to read and write'

The VDC has benefited from a Government housing scheme and tube wells for drinking. LWSIT has supported them to set up an ECC, a goat farm and a bamboo plantation which is managed by the eco-youth group. They have received training on leadership, advocacy and legal aid from LWSIT. Photos show goat rearing and the eco-Youth group beside their bamboo plantation.



Four SHGs were present at the meeting in Patgaon. The following summarizes the focus group discussions. One young woman from Nijira SHG spoke about how she had learned how to speak in public from LWSIT. Their activities include family support, education and income generation. Some have learned to read and write.

Rong jali SHG formed in 2014 with 12 members. LWSIT helped them to start a savings scheme. They save 10 IR per week and give loans to members with emergency needs.

They have received training on leadership & gender awareness.

Sansuli Discovery SHG has 11 members and started in 2015. Their work is weaving and they have five hand-loom in use. LWSIT helped with the purchase of looms. They make four types of dress and support their children's' education with the sale of their clothes. They have learned to work together. Maidangsri SHG formed in 2015 with 12 members. They save 15 INR per week and do Goat farming. LWSIT helped with buying eight goats and four kids. LWSIT gave them training on women's empowerment

Meeting with Gaonbura Federation- Sidli Zone, 07/09/16

The Federation was formed in 2014 on the advice from LWSIT. There are 26 members representing 19 villages (government appointed and appointed independently). Government headmen are paid and officially recognized while those appointed independently are not paid⁵. They meet monthly and the venue rotates around different villages. They are a powerful group in the community and are supported by local police. During the December 2014 violence, some headmen met with police and Student Union and political parties and helped to reduce the conflict. All village people stayed in relief camps for three weeks. They recognize the need for peace in the area. 14 headmen did conflict

⁵ ⁴ Government headmen are paid and officially recognized, while those appointed independently by their village are not paid or officially recognized. Both types were present at the meeting.

management training and learned about living in harmony with each other. Other issues are- land disputes, stealing, and domestic violence.

Meeting with Project Central Committee - 07/09/16

Some committee members highlighted as the Project's main achievements, educational support for poor families through scholarships/books/sport and the training on conflict management. However they also expressed their concern about the capacity in the local communities and suggested that the work needs more development and increased understanding in the communities

At the Meeting with the Assistant Commissioner, ³ (07/09/16) Sub-Division, Gossaigaon, Mr Dhritiman said that he knew about the project and expressed support for it. He mentioned the idea of a convention for Peace to be held later this year and suggested using drama as a way of raising awareness of LWSIT.

Meetings in Gossaigaon Zone in Amragutu Village (138 people present; 104m/34f) (08/09/16). The VDC has 25 members (23m/2f) and has been in operation since 2014, when they received support from LWSIT to form. The Government has provided five houses for poor families and 23 latrines. LWSIT provided six manual irrigation pumps and two compost pits and support for girl students in the form of books and fees. One person received leadership training from LWSIT, which helped him to understand group dynamics. 15 members received training on right to information and how to develop links with the government.

Meetings with 4 SHGs in Gossaigaon (08/09/16)

Sonali Marshal Mahila has 15 members and started in 2014. They organize loans and give support to the community to help in social issues. They also help each other with cultivation and receive 300INR for working for members and 700INR for working for others in 2014, LWSIT gave them training on mentoring and book-keeping.

Bahamala SHG was formed in 2014 with 10 members. In 2016, they are linked to a Bank. They work on each other's land and receive 400INR from members and 700INR from outsiders.

Kunami Marshal Mohila SHG was formed in 2004 with 15 members. They try to buy back mortgaged land through their group savings. They buy back the land and return to owner who pays back 3% every month to SHG. They share about health and social issues to the community e.g. Children dropping out of school is an issue and they have been working to raise awareness of the need for education. LWSIT gave training on jam/jelly/pickle making and this is working well.

Judash SHG has just been formed with 10 members. LWSIT gave stationary and guidance on how to form. They want to develop an income generation scheme.

Meeting Students (08/09/16)

The evaluation team met four students (2m/2f) at the same meeting in Gossaigaon. The boys attend high school and the girls attend college. The boys received assistance from LWSIT with books and the girls received books and admission fees.

Meeting with Project Co-Ordinators - 08/09/16

They feel that the Project is going well but there is a need to strengthen the VDCs and PMFs to give them perspective and a long-term approach to establishing peace. They said that there is a lack of co-ordination between stakeholders such as the Student Unions, political parties, government officials and religious leaders. 34% Muslim community previously thought LWSIT wanted to convert them but this has been clarified and relationships with Project staff are now fine. The issue of local languages was raised and some concerns that not all staff can speak in the local dialects. In order to address this, training is planned for October 16 for those staff who need to learn Assamese.

Evaluator's Comments

Working to empower local communities to secure rights for improving quality of life is the strategic objective within Institutional Strengthening. Progress has been made in some areas but not in all. The indicator to establish 100 youth groups by 2015 has not yet been achieved as there are only 33 youth groups currently active.⁶ (Numbers of youth group members was not available). The progress in relation to the expected outcomes (outlined on p 10), is much more encouraging. The numbers of VDCs, SHGs and PMFs has helped in empowering local communities to access resources and to know more about their entitlements. Training on relevant subjects such as book-keeping and 'Information to Rights' has been helpful in building the capacity of local communities. The self-help model appears to be working well in terms of income generation and empowerment and several women spoke about their new confidence in being able to speak in public and to write their name. The Project has encouraged women's empowerment through opportunities for leadership development and using decision making skills. This is an indication of significant progress made on the outcome level- local communities are engaged in gender responsive community development actions.

Witnessing both men and women being involved in VDCs, SHGs and PMFs was encouraging although there is room for further progress in this area. The education work going on in 20 ECEs is positive and the children and students spoke proudly of their educational success. The formation of the Gaonbura Federations in several zones is important for both the development of local villages it meets the outcome of being actively engaged in conflict resolution and peace-building.

2. Conflict Resolution and Peace Building

The riot-affected communities developed their skills to address the issues of conflict and unrest

Expected Outcomes

The community resource groups have developed the Memorandum of Understanding and able to resolve communal violence, respect each other's dignity, maintained communal harmony in the area and living in peaceful co-existence

Holistic Development Initiatives have been developed

⁶ The Project Co-ordinator advises that the 33 youth groups are part of VDC in general but not as separate group or entity. These 33 youth groups were promoted for environment and peace in the 33 operational communities.

Relevant Indicators and Progress Made towards their Achievement

By the end of 2014, 200 peace mediators are selected and involved in peace process in the proposed project area.

Through the establishment of 18 PMFs, 490 members are active. (347m/143f). From these members, 175 (144m/31f) members of PMFs were trained in conflict management and maintaining a peace watch in tense areas. These PMFs are made up of local traditional leaders, religious leaders, youth and other key stakeholders across the operational area involved in maintaining peace in their own areas. In 2015, 93 Peace Committees were also formed.

Early 2015, 5 peace mediator forums would be formed in 5 different zones.

18 PMFs have been formed covering 100 communities, with the main aim of peace education and to ensure reconciliation in their communities and 18 MOUs have been signed. These forums comprise heterogeneous ethnic and religious groups and provide an opportunity for the restoration of broken relationships between these groups through a common platform of cultural and social action. In 2014, peace forums were active in keeping peace, negotiating between communities. Three sub-divisional PMFs were formed (60m/20f) and these groups co-ordinate the peace forums at district level.

By end of 2015, all village headmen of the project area would be involved in peace process and formed 5 Gaonbura federations in 5 zones.

Five Gaonbura Federations have been formed (123m) from 100 communities. These forums comprise heterogeneous ethnic and religious groups which are helping to build relationships through a common platform of culture and social action.

By end of 2015, 75% local youth of proposed project area would be involved in the peace process and maintain a peaceful environment in their own areas.

5 youth camps on Peace & Integration were organized and Sports tournaments between youth from different communities were organized at zone and unit levels. Three peace rallies took place in three zones. 22 youth groups have been formed. 2 central peace rallies took place in the 2 districts -a Peace rally was held to mark International peace day on 21st September 2015. The theme of the day "**Partnerships for Peace - Dignity for All**" was communicated through posters and banners in the form of slogans such as "**Stop conflict**", "**Stop violence**", "**Don't spread rumours, and not to believe the rumours**". Project staff organized a Programme, involving people who had made significant contribution to the riot affected areas.

Data Collected from Field Visit

The evaluation team held group discussions with PCs, PMFs and a Federation of Village Headmen. The following information summarizes the data that was collected. Direct quotations from local people are in bold italics.

Visit to Sapkata zone, 05/09/16, (40 people present)

Panchapradeep PMF represents five peace committees and comprises 31 members (24m/8f). All five ethnic groups are represented. They received training from LWSIT in conflict management in 2014/5. One member summarized what they had learned from the training:

'We learned about solving conflict collectively and to stop rumours spreading.'

They didn't know previously how to keep records but they have started doing this in 2016, as a result of LWSIT support. The forum has helped in minor village conflicts e.g. - a cow was stolen from a family. The PMF intervened and got the cow back.

Sachetan PMF meets every 3 months. They said that there was conflict between Bodo/Muslims in area and the Muslims were threatened. This created turmoil and violence. The PMF members went to the police and brought both groups together for talks. They tried to form a consensus and it worked. In 2015 they received training in Conflict resolution. One member shared his learning:

'This training helped me to understand why conflict takes place'

Meeting PMF'S at Kachugaon- 06/09/16

Judashi PMF, started in 2015. It has 30 members representing eight villages. They have regular meetings to discuss any potential threats and how to minimize them... E.g. in Haticar village four sons under 18 years were to be sent to Orissa for work but this caused some disagreement in the village. PMF members intervened and after discussion, they stopped the boys from being sent away. They said that the main challenge was long-term planning for peace and dealing with external factors:

***'It is peaceful now but conflict may occur at regional level which will affect us.
We need peace in the area for education and for developmentfor everything'***

Marshal PMF, located in Rampur Rava was formed in 2014 with 29 members (24m/5f). 20 members attended an awareness programme, organized by LWSIT. The area is currently peaceful and they are working to resolve family/minor disputes. There is an MOU between their villages but mediators are not officially recognized. In 2015 they received 'Do No Harm' training and conflict management training.

Meeting PMF'S at Patgaon- 06/09/16

Jougakhang PMF was formed in 2014 with five members. They attended an Awareness programme, organized by LWSIT and they learnt conflict management tools to minimize conflict.

Jwimaguri Village has Mother Teresa PMF, which started in 2015. They have 25 members from five villages. They received training on conflict management organized by LWSIT, which has helped them

to learn to live in harmony with other communities. Jiyon Jharna PMF was formed in 2014 with 25 members, five members from each of the five neighbouring villages. LWIST gave guidance on how to bring understanding among ethnic groups. The PMF meets to resolve any conflicts that occur in their villages.



Meeting with Gaonbura Federation in Sidli Zone - 07/09/16

The Federation was formed in 2014 on advice from LWSIT, comprising 26 members representing 19 villages.⁷ They meet on a monthly basis and the venue rotates. They are supported by local police and are seen as powerful and a major actor by LWSIT staff. During the December 2014 violence, some headmen met with police, Student Unions and political parties. They helped to reduce the conflict. All the village people stayed in camps for three weeks. They recognize the need for peace in the area. 14 members attended conflict management training, organized by LWSIT and learned that about how to live in harmony with each other. Other issues include: land disputes, stealing and domestic violence.

VP David Murmu shared a true story from the area:

'On 23rd December 2014, 100 people were killed in 4 districts by extremists. This was very traumatizing and may have led to violence between Bodo/Santals. Everyone was afraid. Nearby the Bodos and Santals came together and set up a camp where people could come and feel safe. In the camp, people from five villages formed a relief committee- I was on it. They persuaded people to return to their homes as they were not destroyed after the two weeks. They started night watching and the situation became more peaceful.'

In response to the question- 'What is Peace-building?'- the following suggestions were made:

- Living together without conflict
- It is possible to build peace unless there is an outside threat
- We can guarantee peace at the village level and we try to persuade our sons not to join extremist groups.
- We are planning to make the Hindu festival more inclusive with the help of another NGO.
- Peace is linked to development and progress.



⁷ Government headmen are paid and officially recognized, while those appointed independently by their village are not paid or officially recognized. Both types were present at the meeting.

- The Federations are linked informally to PFM and peace committees and some members belong to these. They support each other informally.

Meeting with Project Central Committee, (07/09/16)

The members of the Committee said that the area is peaceful, but attitudes still need to be improved through seminars, more interaction with the community and cultural programmes to bring all groups together. There needs to be more awareness about LWSIT in the communities. One member said:

'The most important thing LWSIT is doing is bringing help for the peace process. Where there is trouble, LWSIT is the first to go. It needs to be stronger and better.'

Meeting with PMF at Amragutu Village, Gossaigaon Zone, 08/09/16

This PMF started in 2014 with 11 members representing ten peace committees with LWSIT support. They meet every three months and they have given awareness raising training to villages on building peace.

Case Story

In 2014 a thief stole an ox from someone in a village. The PMF solved this by calling everyone to a meeting, including the thief. The thief returned the ox and paid a fine of 5,000 IR- this was used by the villagers.

When asked to describe peace-building they answered as follows:

- To live in harmony
- Before PMF, rumours spread easily, now they are stopped as they can verify if they are true or not.
- The sub-division PMF can help with larger issues
- The need to be united. 3 Bodo villages are near (minority in the area). They discuss issues with Bodo villagers and link with PCs from Bodo villages.
- Inter-marriage may help to bring communities together
- Joint events with sports and music and religious festivals are attended by all.

Six members attended Conflict Management training, organized by LWSIT and learned why conflict happens. In the words of two members:

'Without peace no work can be done.....since LWSIT things are much better'

Meeting with Project Co-ordinators and Staff on 08/09/16

Both Co-ordinators feel that the PMFs need to be strengthened as they don't have a peace-building mind-set and don't think long-term. The communities see the need for peace but think that everything is fine now. They mentioned the ongoing threats from militant groups (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) and said that two are on ceasefire but one is still active. As a result, there is a heavy army presence in the area and killings on a daily basis. The current peace process is

temporary as the issues remain unresolved and forest lands are also disputed. The future challenge is to find ways that the Project can link with these groups. Another challenge is staff capacity and both managers believe that they need further training on peace-building and mediation. Staff personnel agreed with this and said that peace-building work is more challenging due to lack of trust. One person highlighted the challenges:

'We were addressing the results of conflict, now we are addressing the causes'

All staff received one day in conflict management training and trauma counselling. They highlighted the following challenges to the Project:

- Insurgency problem
- The need to mobilize political leaders
- Student Unions are not supportive- every community has its own Student Union which is recognized by the government.
- Alcohol abuse/Domestic violence
- Low literacy levels among villagers
- Lack of employment which leads to migration and recruitment to militant groups
- Land mortgaging which keeps people in poverty
- Frequent strikes called at short notice can hinder the work

The staff want to strengthen PMFs and PCs in order to build capacity. They need to link PMFs with other key stakeholders, such as the village headmen to help sustainability.

Evaluator's Comments

The first indicator under this strategic objective has been achieved as 390 PMF members are involved in peace-building in the project area. In addition 200 members have received training in peace-building. 18 PMFs have now been set up, exceeding the target of five for 2015 and 18 MOUs have been signed. Five Gaonbura Federations have been established in the five Project zones, meeting the desired outcome.⁸ The last indicator states that 75% local youth should be involved in peace-building. It is difficult to measure this as the only figures seem to indicate 33 youth groups were formed but actual numbers of those in these groups are not available. Several youth camps and peace rallies have been held and many PCs and PMFs also have young members. There seems to be a good involvement of the young people in the Project, but it is not possible to give exact figures. My assessment is that the PMF and PC model seems to be working well in raising awareness of peacebuilding and intervening to help with minor village disputes. Several people have highlighted what they have learned from LWSIT training on Conflict Management. The establishment of the Gaonbura Federations has been a strategic and useful step forward which will help in forming more links at local level. Having said this, it appears that many people are content and are not thinking about the future in terms of building a sustainable peace process and therefore much more focus

⁸ Mediation skills, peace building, and leadership development training are planned for the PMFs and members of the Gaonbura Federations, says the Project Co-ordinator.

and education needs to happen in order to build both staff and Project participants' capacity to sustain peace. My view is that although much progress has been made at the outcome level, more needs to be done to develop local mediators' skills in order to address conflict and community unrest. Local mediators have been intervening in local disputes and yet they have not received any mediation training, which would help to increase their capacity and equip them more fully to intervene in disputes. Measures are in place and Project beneficiaries are working together towards the overall goal of taking collective actions for socio-economic transformation with peace and reconciliation, but more progress would be made with the implementation of mediation training and interventions.

3. Food Security and Sustainable Livelihood ***Greater numbers of poor and marginalized people achieve sustainable livelihoods***

Expected Outcomes and Progress Made Towards their Achievement

Improvements in household level food security

36% (2551 families) of the target population now have food security

Reduction indebtedness to money lenders

To date a total of 177 SHGs⁹ (174f/3m) have been formed with 50 linked to banks, which is a key factor for sustainability. Nine SHGs disbursed funds of 56,530INR in 2015 to their micro entrepreneurship businesses with minimum service charges

Women have access to credit and income earning opportunities

87 women from SHGs have credit linkage opportunities for different earning opportunities.

Communities are engaged in environmental protection and regeneration activities

14 female and 86 male farmers from 64 communities benefited from training on sustainable agriculture practices and support in 2015.

One SHG has managed a fish farming scheme in one acre of water which was given to the group and to date, the group has earned 5, 100INR. Five SHGs have demonstrated their weaving skills and four SHGs are currently in production. 19 SHGs have started small scale goat rearing schemes and 2 SHGs have started small scale pig rearing.

14 solar pumps have been installed for use as an irrigation water source

50 K.B pumps (manual irrigation device) have been installed for 50 small farmers in 26 communities, which will benefit them through new irrigation land for vegetable cultivation. 83 compost pits have been dug by local farmers- the organic manure based cultivation is to create environment friendly situation in the farmer's field.

⁹ As on 31st August 2016, the total number of SHGs mobilized and formed by LWSIT is 180 (2192 members/families) out of 7060 families. the project is continuously mobilizing excluded families and assist them to organize into SHGs. Note by Project Co-ordinator

Relevant Indicator and Progress Made towards its Achievement

By the end of 2015, 80% families of the partner community would be members of SHGs.

2015 saw the formation of 30 new women's SHGs and one men's SHG. Combined with the other community groups, the total numbers in operational CBOs was 396 reaching 70% families, so the target has almost been achieved.

Other Key Achievements:

- One Bore well has been installed for irrigation in 13.5 acres of land belonging to 25 farmers
- 44 grain banks were installed in 44 villages benefitting 1412 families (20% total families) which has helped to address food security. This has enhanced VDC's capacity to address food security issue with the support of Grain Banks.
- 6 communities are managing fishery ponds, benefitting 341 families (5% total families)
- Training for livestock care was organized for seven young men. They successfully completed the training and started delivering primary service to the communities from their new knowledge, linking livestock families with the nearest government facility.
- Each of the 100 farmer families have cultivated 0.16 acres of idle land with suitable agricultural practices
- 2.66 acres of common resource property under VDC ownership has been covered under social forestry. Two VDCs jointly and two other VDCs separately have created the social forestry at the side of the village. The area was covered with the plants to protect the environment and to create sustainable assets for the VDCs for future income.
- 16 young people from three villages have formed an Eco youth group and have purchased 0.66 acre uncultivated land with a loan from three VDCs and their own contribution. The group planted 165 bamboo plants on the land which are growing well

Data Collected from Field Visit

The evaluation team visited a number of local communities and held group discussions with a number of SHGs in different zones. The following information summarizes the data that was collected. Direct quotations from local people are in bold italics. Several community assets were shown to the evaluation team:

- ✓ Water pump used by six families for crops-radish/potato/eggplant/coriander (Sapkata)
- ✓ An ECE centre - 30 children (4-8 yrs.) attend 2/3 hours daily (Sapkata)
- ✓ Grain bank - empty at present as grain has been distributed already.
- ✓ ECE centre - Patagaon (12 children present)
- ✓ Bamboo plantation with eco-youth group
- ✓ Goat rearing scheme – (see photo above) and a Pineapple plantation.



- ✓ Fishery and Tube well - three families are using this for drinking water (Sidli)

Meeting with SHGs in Sapkata Zone, 05/09/16¹⁰

Bawn SHG, Matiapara 2 has ten members and has been operational since 2013. It is going well. The women save 10INR per month and received 15,000INR from NRLM, which allowed them to start their own business in goat/calf rearing. They also have joint vegetable cultivation (cauliflower/tomato) and the profit goes back to SHG account. Only two members are literate. LWSIT helped them to recover after staying in relief camps in 2012. They received 6,800kg grain from LWSIT to help in lean periods. In the words of one member:

'We have benefitted a lot from LWSIT and hope to continue'

Nwtin SHG from Gaonchulka Village has ten members. They got 15,000 INR loan from NRLM and members save 40INR per month. They produce and sell turmeric and weave garments. LWSIT gave a start-up grant which helped to buy thread and training in book-keeping. 8 out of 10 are illiterate but they said that alcohol abuse is the main problem in their village.

Boost SHG, Matiapara 2 North has ten members and started in 2013. Members deposit 50INR per month in bank and they received a 15,000INR loan from NRLM, which was used for turmeric cultivation, poultry and vegetable farming. A further two loans secured six goats. LWSIT gave them training on book-keeping and gender sensitivity.

SHGs in Kachugaon- 06/09/16

Kwnchwn SHG was formed in 2003 with 17 members. They work together in paddy fields and combine their income. This is put in the bank- can be used for emergency loans. In 2008 LWSIT gave 17 goats, but only five survived. They have done book-keeping training.

Marshal SHG started in 2009 with 11 members. Members work in fields to harvest jute and rice. In 2010, LWSIT gave them 15 piglets but 12 died and three were sold. They bought land and, which is used for pineapple trees and paddy fields. They share 50% of proceeds with other members¹¹.

Meeting SHGs in Patgaon, 06/09/16:

Rong jali SHG was formed in 2014 with 12 members. They started a savings scheme and each member saves 10R per week so that they can give loans to members with emergency needs. They have received training on leadership and gender awareness from LWSIT.

¹⁰ The Project Co-ordinator adds that there were 2 other SHGs named –Kwnchwk SHG, Amainorosong SHG – with 30 members during the meeting. The weaving initiative was supported by the project-with looms and other weaving materials.

¹¹ The Project Co-ordinator adds that the SHG bought 0.66 acre of land themselves and started cultivation with pineapples in one part of land, leaving the remaining part for vegetable cultivation. The Project provided a manual irrigation device called K.B Pump.

Sansuli Discovery SHG has 11 members and reformed in 2015. The members are involved in weaving and have five hand-loom in use. LWSIT helped with the purchase of the looms. They make four types of dresses and are able to support their children's' education with the sale of the clothes. They have learned to work together.

Maiangsri SHG started in 2015 with 12 members. They save 15INR per week and they manage a goat farming business. LWSIT helped with buying eight goats and four kids and gave training on women's empowerment.

Meeting with 4 SHGs from Gossaigaon Zone, 08/09/16

Sonali Marshal Mahili was formed in 2014 with 15 members. They give support to their community and help in social issues. They help each other with cultivation and get 300INR for working for members on their land and 700INR for working for others. They also help to put mud on houses. In 2014, LWSIT gave them training on mentoring and book-keeping.

Bahamala SHG started in 2014 with 10 members. From 2016, they are linked to a Bank. They work on other to help with harvesting and receive 400INR from members and 700INR from outsiders.

Kunami Marshal Mohila was formed in 2004 with 15 members. They try to buy back mortgaged land through their group savings. They buy back the land and return to owner who pays back 3% every month to SHG. They share about health and social issues to the community e.g. Children dropping out of school. They try to raise awareness about the importance of education. LWSIT gave training to members on jam/pickle making and this is working well.

Judash SHG was just formed in 2016 with 10 members. LWSIT gave stationary and guidance on how to form. They want to develop income generation.

Case Story- Gossaigaon (told by a Project Staff member)

One PMF member organized 6 SHGs and helped them to open bank accounts. Land mortgaging is a big problem, so they suggested loans from SHG instead. One lady mortgaged her land (less than 1 acre) and the SHG bought it and gave back to her for cultivation. This was successful and she gave 50% income from crops back to SHG.

Evaluator's Comments

Although the indicator for this objective has not been fully achieved there has been progress made towards achieving the objective of sustainable livelihoods for greater numbers of poor people. Seeing the community assets first-hand and hearing people speak so proudly about the different income-generating farming schemes was impressive and witnessed to the effectiveness of the Project's strategy. The fact that 177 SHGs are now functioning effectively and 50 are linked to banks is a sign of significant progress made to empower local women as entrepreneurs and has also given them access to credit and income earning opportunities. Many women that we met spoke proudly of their achievements and hopes for the future. Many of these income-generation schemes have also brought improvements in the level of household food security and the achievement of 36% or 2551 families as now being food secure signals progress and will hopefully increase over the coming two years of the Project. Several SHG members spoke about saving money to be able to give loans to

their members- Rong jali SHG in Patgoan operate a loan scheme for the benefit of their members and Kunami Marshal Mohila SHG in Gossaigaon zone has set up a scheme to buy back mortgaged land which is then given back to the owner in their group. These schemes are evidence that there has been some reduction in women being indebted to money lenders. Progress has also been made in environmental protection and regeneration through the pumps which have been installed for 50 small farmers to benefit them through new irrigation land for vegetable cultivation and the 83 compost pits which will create environmentally friendly land. The implementation of social forestry and the bamboo plantation that we saw managed by the eco-youth group are two positive signs of progress. The progress that has been made in this area contributes overall to the Project goals of security and long-term peacebuilding as local people will be enabled to settle in local areas if they can achieve sustainable livelihoods. A settled community will help to bring about the Project goal of human security and peaceful interactions.

4. Health, Water and Sanitation

Improve health status through better access to government health services, safe water and sanitation

Expected Outcomes and Progress Made towards their Achievement

- Maternal and child mortality is reduced
- Malnutrition among children is reduced
- Preventive measures have been taken by the common people of our partner community and lower incidence of communicable diseases
- Young boys and girls are mainstreaming in family life education
- Strengthened linkage with government health department and improved access to primary health care services

As there are no indicators for this objective for 2014 and 2015, it is not possible to measure achievements to date. However, based on the field visit records and previous annual reports, a limited update is highlighted as follows.

2014 Achievements¹²

The project areas are prone to diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and other health related issues. Malnutrition and maternal health issues among Santal and Advasi children is high. Superstition is prevalent across ethnic groups and often people go to quacks and village doctors (Ojhas) for treatments which are unscientific and do not bring permanent cures. Witch hunting is very common in Lower Assam and innocent men/women can be killed if they are suspected of practicing witchcraft. Several awareness camps and exposures were held to address pertinent issues such as the importance of healthy relationships, preventive measures from diseases and the use of safe

¹² SEEPRP Annual Report, 2014

drinking water. HIV/AIDS awareness education was also conducted because there is a high possibility of young people contracting these diseases due to migration. LWSIT built 20 latrines and conducted several health camps.

2015 Achievements¹³

15 Community Health Workers (CHW) received training with support from the State health department. They have also been equipped with essential clinical apparatus such as weighing machines, thermometers and blood pressure monitors. The CHW regularly visit their targeted communities and monitor the health of mothers, pregnant women, new borne babies and children. The local women have participated in camps such as Nutrition for lactating mothers and Children, HIV & AIDS, family life Education, Communicable diseases under the guidance of project staff. Health education conducted in 2015:

- 21 HIV/AIDS awareness camps were organized for 355 men and 392 women from 22 communities.
- 40 exposure visits were done in 40 communities (378 m/1199f) in nutrition for lactating mothers and children.
- 20 exposure visits on family life education for parents and adolescent boys and girls was delivered to 257 men, 358 women and 119 children from 39 communities.
- 16 exposure visits on communicable diseases was organized for 304 men and 353 women from 16 communities.
- 21 exposure visits on Behavioural Change Communication Water Sanitation practices was delivered to 363 men and 427 women from 22 communities.
- 20 Tube wells were installed in 20 communities for safe drinking water for 84 families. We saw one in Sidli Zone which provides three families with safe drinking water.

Evaluator's Comments

Although no specific comment can be made on progress made based on indicators, it is clear from the information accessed through the Annual Reports that preventive measures have been put in place to reduce the spread of communicable diseases, health education and family life education has been implemented by Project staff to some extent and that CHWs are receiving useful training which will help to reduce malnutrition and mortality rates among young mothers and children.¹⁴ The links that the CHWs have with government health departments should also help to improve access to primary health care services. It is my view that these links should continue in order to improve the access to health care in remote area. This would also meet partly the objective of improved health

¹³ SEEPRP Annual Report, 2015

¹⁴ In June 2016, the project conducted a survey in 100 communities which revealed 91% of institutional deliveries in 100 communities till June 2016 i.e. 314 out of 344 child deliveries. The number of malnourished children is reduced from 388 (in 2014) to 298 (28.35%) in 2015 according to survey conducted in 65 communities (June 2016). Note by Project Co-ordinator

care through better access to government health services. However I would question the relevance of this strategic objective with the overall Project goal of using collective actions to address insecurity, conflict and hunger. I would recommend combining the strategic objective, Food Security, Sustainable Livelihoods with Health Care so that there is some provision within the Project to help improve primary health care but it is no longer one of the five strategic objectives.

5. Staff Capacity Building

Enhance the capacity of the project staff to deliver quality service to the riot affected communities

Expected Outcomes

- Understanding of the programme approach of the staff members are improved
- Improved management, follow-up, monitoring and documentation of the programmes
- High quality programmes acknowledged by partner communities and other stakeholders

Relevant Indicators and Progress Made towards their Achievement

By the end of 2014 all 22 staff and 10 volunteers will develop a clear concept on developmental issues and the difference between relief and development

Eight volunteers help in all five zones with administration, meetings and language. They have received a number of trainings on development and need to focus on a development approach. They were specifically asked to describe the difference between relief and development at the meeting on 8th September 2016 and said that relief was a short-term intervention but that development was a long-term approach to help communities address issues such as poverty, illiteracy and health.

By the end of 2014, staff members will improve their skills on participatory methodologies and project management issues

The Project Co-ordinators and staff members agreed that, although they have received a short training course on conflict management, much more training on this subject is needed if they are to improve their management skills. Some staff said that peace building work is more challenging due to lack of trust between the communities.

By the end of 2015, all staff members will improve their skills on monitoring, proper documentation, record keeping through proper training and orientation

- Monthly and weekly progress reports are fine according to the Project Co-ordinators but staff still need more Professional skills, such as record keeping
- Regular Project progress review meetings are held with all staff
- In 2014, The Project Management Committee was reformed for better coordination and monitoring of the project activities.
- A Complaint Committee was formed at the unit level to redress the complaints pertaining to sexual harassment, violence, fraud etc. (in line with LWSIT policy).

- The staff have quarterly meetings with CC and find them supportive. Members of the CC said that the staff function well but need to know local dialects more. They are satisfied with reporting at quarterly meetings and staff also contact CC members if there are any concerns in the communities.
- Five sub CCs operate in the five zones and these committees work with project workers, meeting monthly. Minutes are kept. All groups meet twice a year but there is a need to link the sub CCs more formally to CC.
- The Project Co-ordinator and the Accounts Officer made visits to monitor all ongoing activities.
- A Half-Yearly Internal Audit (By National Office) and a statutory audit (CA Audit) occurs yearly.
- In 2015 there were regular field visits by the Project Co-ordinator and accountant and feedback was discussed with the project staffs in zone and unit level meetings.
- A revised procurement policy was strictly followed in the project

By the end of 2015, 50% of partner communities could strongly take part in implementation of the project activities and would be able to monitor themselves.

VDCs and SHGs are actively involved during planning, implementation and monitoring stages.

VDCs could sustain themselves according to Project staff and 90% SHGs could also be sustainable as they are linked with banks

Staff want to strengthen PMFs and PCs in order to build capacity and they say there is a need to link PMFs to help sustainability.

The evaluator conducted an interview with the two Project Co-ordinators, met a government official and had a meeting with the Project staff team. Unfortunately this meeting was cut short as we had to leave the area earlier than planned due to an unexpected strike. No interviews took place with Project volunteers.

Challenges Facing Project Staff - In 2014, the implementations of planned activities were affected due to frequent strikes-about 36 days in 2014, road blockades, abduction/extortion etc. Incidences of killings in the districts of Kokrajhar and Baksa affected the implementation of planned activities. The safety and security of all Project staff was a great concern when two field level staff were abducted for ransom by a militant group and kept in custody for 26 days from 25th October to 19th November 2014. This affected the mobility of the staff among the communities due to fear and risk of further abductions and even though no further incidences have occurred since then, this continues to be a challenge facing Project staff and volunteers.

Evaluator's Comments

I cannot comment on the capacity of the Project volunteers as I did not meet any during my visit but I did meet staff members on several occasions, in the communities and in the Unit office. My assessment of the staff is that they are competent in delivering project objectives and they are clearly committed to their work. Good progress has been made in the last two years to meet eh objective of enhancing the capacity of Project staff. The Project reports that I read were factual and

easily understood. They have developed good relationships with the Project beneficiaries and appear to be well accepted in their supporting roles in the villages. Every meeting and visit during the week was well organized, well attended (sometimes over 100 people came) and we were warmly welcomed. Through my discussions with staff, my view is that they understand well the issues associated with development and they recognize their need for more specialized training in conflict management and mediation skills. In the last two years the staff have developed skills on Project management and monitoring Project activities. Recent monitoring and reporting systems that have been implemented will help to increase the level and quality of information about the progress of field work. Regular visiting of the field by the Project Co-ordinator and other Project personnel is helpful and should continue. Language training in Assamese is planned for October 2016 which should help some staff members to communicate more easily and further training in professional skills would also be helpful in developing staff skills in this area of reporting and proper documentation. My understanding is that some of the Project volunteers are from the target areas and can speak the local dialects so it may be helpful to recruit a number of these volunteers as staff members or to involve them more in the Project's activities.

Recommendations

I will assess the Project activities and strategies under the four evaluation criteria and make recommendations under each criterion.

Relevance

The overall goal of the Project remains relevant and most of the Project objectives and activities are making progress towards this goal. I will comment on the appropriateness of the Project design under evaluation objective number four. The strategic objectives, Institutional Strengthening, Conflict Resolution, Food Security/Sustainable Livelihood and Staff Capacity Building are relevant to the overall Project goal. However I would question the relevance of the objective, Health, Water and Sanitation as it does not seem appropriate with overall impacts and the results to date are weak. The self-help model organized through women's SHGs appears to be working well in terms of income generation and women's empowerment. Progress has also been made in environmental protection and regeneration through the manual pumps which have been installed and the compost pits which will create environmentally friendly land. The implementation of social forestry and the bamboo plantation, managed by the eco-youth group are two positive signs of progress.

The formation of the Gaonbura Federations in several zones is important for the development of local villages. These village headmen are influential and exercise power within their communities. They are active in many areas of community life from performing religious ceremonies, blessing weddings to intervening in conflicts. The strategy employed by the Project in linking with these Gaonbura and in setting up a Federation in each zone is consistent in achieving the Project objectives, particularly through the impacts of institutional strengthening and conflict resolution. The establishment of the Gaonbura Federations has been a strategic and useful step forward which will help in forming more links at local level. However it was clear that the Gaonbura members are not fully aware of the peace-building work being carried out by the PCs in their villages. The PMF and PC model seems to be working well in raising awareness of peacebuilding at community level and intervening to help with minor village disputes.

Recommendations:

1. Set up formal links between the Gaonbura Federation with the relevant PCs and PMFs in order to strengthen their involvement and to develop further strategic links for the PMFs.¹⁵
2. Conduct a conflict analysis of the Project area with the CC and Project Co-ordinator. This will help in identifying the key actors involved in the conflict and in planning appropriate intervention strategies by Project staff.¹⁶
3. Establish more youth groups so that they are well represented among the 100 targeted communities and are working for sustainable peace.¹⁷
4. Join the strategic objective, Food Security, Sustainable Livelihoods with Health Care so that there is some provision within the Project to help improve primary health care but it is no longer one of the five strategic objectives.

Effectiveness

The establishment of VDCs, SHGs and PMFs has helped in empowering local communities to access resources and to know more about their entitlements. Training on relevant subjects has helped to build the capacity of local communities. The fact that 177 SHGs are now functioning effectively and 50 are linked to banks is a good sign of significant progress made to empower local women as entrepreneurs and has also given them access to credit and income earning opportunities. Progress has been made in the strategic objective of institutional strengthening. In relation to conflict resolution I have been very impressed with both the strategy and activities that the Project has employed. The work carried out in Assam for more than a decade through LWSIT with the continued support of NORAD and Normisjon through four different phases, including the new focus on peace-building in the last two years, has resulted in peace-building measures in a conflict area being mainstreamed in the five Project zones. However Project staff have pointed out that many local communities are content with the current peaceful situation and are not thinking about how to maintain a future sustainable peace process. This will hinder the extent to which the expected outcome of maintaining communal harmony is realized. Therefore more focus and education needs to take place in the next Project phase in order to build the Project participants' capacity to sustain peace. Local mediators have been intervening in local disputes and yet they have not received any mediation training. Mediation skills would help to increase their capacity and equip them more fully to intervene in disputes.

¹⁵ The Project Co-ordinator advises-The Gaonbura are incorporated in the PFs and VDCs. In future, Gaonbura Federation shall be linked in Peace Forums with more and distinct structure, system and representation.

¹⁶ Conflict analysis with Central Committee may be conducted in November 2016 says the Project Co-ordinator

¹⁷ Youth group in all VDCs shall be organized with separate identity/entity for well representation in peace related programs and for sustainable peace says the Project Co-ordinator

Recommendation

5. Specialized training on peace-building and mediation for staff members' and PMF members should be organized to build knowledge and skills in order to increase the effectiveness of building peace in a conflict area.

Efficiency

My view is that the Project staff understand well the issues associated with development but there is a need for more specialized training in conflict management and mediation skills, which would provide a cost-effective way to achieve results in conflict resolution. In the last two years the staff have developed skills on project management and monitoring project activities. Recent monitoring and reporting systems that have been implemented will help to increase the efficiency and quality of information about the progress of field work. Regular visiting of the field by the Project managers and other Project personnel is helpful and should continue. The annual budget for 2015 was fully used for Project activities (1, 20, 85,270 INR). According to the Finance Manager at the National Office, who said that the Project operated within the budget and that financial reporting was working well and that the financial reports were submitted on a regular basis. On examination of the budget allocations, the amount designated to Peace Education (4, 39,500INR) seems low in comparison to other Project activities and it is my view that more financial resources should be made available in order to build peace-building capacity. Overall the Project's financial costs seem reasonable to the Project's activity results.

Recommendations

6. Further training in professional skills, such as record-keeping, report writing and monitoring would help to increase the skills of staff members and increase efficiency.

7. The Project Co-ordinator has limited knowledge of peace-building. He has participated in a short course on Conflict Management but he recognizes himself the need for further training in this area. In addition to the specialized training in peace-building and mediation, I recommend an exposure visit to a peace project in a similar developing country (such as Bangladesh or Sri Lanka) so that he can observe the strategies employed and gain knowledge from a different context.

8. Increase the amount allocated to Peace Education budget to enable further training and support for sustainable peace-building initiatives.¹⁸

Sustainability

Many Project activities are focused on long-term sustainability, e.g. institutional strengthening, sustainable agriculture, natural resource management and conflict resolution. As previously stated, 50 out of 177 SHGs are now linked to banks. Many of these income-generation schemes have also brought improvements in the level of household food security and the achievement of 36% or 2551 families as now being food secure signals progress and will hopefully increase over the coming two years of the Project. Preventive measures have been put in place to reduce the spread of

¹⁸ In the coming Annual Action Plan (2017), more emphasis and focus shall be given on peace education and other peace building initiatives with considerable increase in activities and corresponding budgetary allocation says the Project Co-ordinator

communicable diseases. CHWs are receiving useful training which will help to reduce malnutrition and mortality rates among young mothers and children. The links that the CHWs have with government health departments should also help to improve access to primary health care services. It is a good sign of progress that these partnerships have been made within institutions but clearly much more work is needed in this area to develop sustainability. Progress has been made to develop sustainability in the area of conflict resolution with the establishment of PMFs, PCs and Gaonbura Federations but more linkages with relevant stakeholders would help to build sustainability.

Recommendations

9. Increase the links between the Project and key stakeholders such as police, political and religious leaders, Student Unions and extremist groups.¹⁹

10. Continue to support SHGs to build linkages with banks and other relevant institutions so that more SHGs develop sustainable income generation schemes.

Conclusion

LWSIT is making a significant impact at the community level in the five Project zones in Assam, north-east India. Staff members are highly motivated and have built good relationships with the Project beneficiaries in 100 communities. Many people spoke about the difference that LWSIT had made in their village and how they had personally benefited from the training and support received from Project staff. It was particularly encouraging to see local women, who were illiterate, speak publically about their work and what they are learning through their involvement in the SHGs. The Project strategy used to form and support PMFs and PCs at different levels, including village and district is both effective and sustainable. I was most impressed with the peace-building work currently ongoing in with limited resources within a high-risk conflict zone. Staff safety while working in these difficult areas must be prioritized at all times. It is crucial to the success of the project that the peace-building work is further strengthened and developed over the next two years. This will help to maintain a sustainable peace in Assam in the future.

¹⁹ Mapping local actors, influential persons and organizations has started in October 2016 and should be completed by 30th October 2016. This will help Project staff to develop a strategy in order to establish links with Police, Political leaders, student union leaders and religious leaders. Note from Project Co-ordinator

List of Reference Documents

- Assam Riot Victims' Rehabilitation/Development Support Project Full-term Evaluation (2009-2013)
- Copy of Assam Budget 2014-2018
- Copy of Assam Budget Breakdown 2015
- List of household breakdown zone-wise
- LWSIT Annual Report 2015
- LWSIT Project Document 2014-2018
- Project Annual Reports- 2014/2015
- Presentation by LWSIT and Zone Staff on 05/09/16

Appendices

- Terms of Reference
- Field Visit Schedule and Meetings
- Map of Project Area
- List of Project staff