

Mid-Term Review of Strømme Foundation's
Norad Grant Agreement
GLO-0640 QZA-18/035

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CONTRIBUTORS:

OLE MORTEN STAVLAND, HEAD OF PMEAL, STRØMME FOUNDATION, NORWAY

CELESTE DE LA HUERTA, SENIOR ADVISORY PMEAL & RESEARCH, STRØMME FOUNDATION, NORWAY

CONSULTANT WRITERS:

DR. ALAMISSA SAWADOGO, SENIOR CONSULTANT

DR. TÈNÈ KINDA, NATIONAL CONSULTANT, BURKINA FASO

BIRAMA BAGAYOGO, NATIONAL CONSULTANT, MALI

HAMADOU GOUMEY, NATIONAL CONSULTANT, NIGER

ADROIT CONSULT INTERNATIONAL, UGANDA

SADEQUL ISLAM, CONSULTANT, BANGLADESH

MD. KERAMOT, BANGLADESH

ALI MINARA PERVIN, BANGLADESH

3D RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS, LALITPUR, NEPAL

STRØMME FOUNDATION PMEAL LEADS:

DONA JONAS SANGNINON, BAMAKO, MALI

ARTHUR ARINAITWE, KAMPALA, UGANDA

RAHUL KANTI BARUA, DHAKA, BANGLADESH

BISHNU KUMAR SHRESTA, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

STRØMME FOUNDATION: TANGEN 8, NO-4608 KRISTIANSAND

PHONE: +47 381 27 500

POST@STROMMESTIFTELSEN.NO

ORG.NO 952002139

WWW.STROMMESTIFTELSEN.NO



Glossary

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CMSG	Community Managed Savings Group
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IGA	Income Generating Activity
MLE	Mother-Language Education
MPI	Multi-dimensional Poverty Index
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPI	Poverty Probability Index
PWD	People with Disabilities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEEDS	Socio Economic Empowerment with Dignity and Sustainability
SF	Strømme Foundation
SGBV	Sexual Gender-Based Violence
SHG	Self-Help Group
SMC	School Management Committee
SP	Strategic Plan
SROI	Social Return on Investment
TVET	Technical Vocational Education Training
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VfM	Value for Money
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Executive Summary

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) has been undertaken in accordance with Strømme Foundation's (SF) Grant Agreement GLO-0640 QZA-18/0355 with Norad for the Strategic Plan 2019-2023.

The purpose of the Mid-Term Review is to assess factors influencing programme performance, progress towards achieving the planned results, identify lessons learnt and provide recommendations for the continued implementation of SF's current Strategic Plan. The MTR was conducted in all SF's countries of intervention, except for Sri Lanka, where programme implementation ended in December 2021, and Myanmar, due to the current political situation. The analysis was conducted within the framework of the OECD/DAC's six evaluation criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, coherence, and impact.

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The overall impression from the MTR is positive. SF's programmes are being implemented **effectively** and **efficiently**. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, progress towards the five-year targets for the Strategic Plan is strong. 72% of SF's global outcome targets and 88% of SF's global output targets for the mid-term stage have been achieved or exceeded. Moreover, the assessments show good progress towards planned impacts under the current Strategic Plan, particularly in the West Africa and Asia regions. The East Africa region experienced slight delays in implementation, mainly due to prolonged national lockdowns and school closures, particularly impacting results in Uganda and South Sudan.

The MTR finds that SF's partnership approach, which involves using local NGO for implementation on the ground, is a **cost-efficient** way to operate. Cost-efficiency is further enhanced by leveraging the competencies of other organisations through consortiums and strategic partnerships. The MTRs also find that SF programmes are efficient when it mobilises resources at different local levels to promote ownership. Further, the MTR shows that SF's finance and anti-corruption systems are robust.

Findings from the MTR show that SF programmes are regarded as highly **relevant** in their context, and well adapted to international, national, and local plans and priorities. Relevance to programme participants and key stakeholders is high and is further reinforced by a high level of participatory planning, implementation, and monitoring. There is potential for further improvement in the market relevance of the Economic Inclusion programmes. Changing contexts due to climate, insecurity and COVID-19, call for adjustments to strengthen the focus on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and the humanitarian/development nexus.

As a result of SF's decentralised structure and partnership approach, the **sustainability** of SF programmes has proven to be robust. A key strength of the model is that it builds on the capacity of local partner organisations and local communities. Evidence from the MTR also suggests there is a high level of government appreciation and ownership of SF programmes.

SF operates in highly marginalised areas, often in volatile security and emergency contexts. Migration and internal displacement of target groups, along with insecurity, pose a risk to programme sustainability. To strengthen sustainability in such fragile contexts, the MTR suggests a stronger focus on local peacebuilding efforts and conflict mitigation. To further reinforce the sustainability of

Economic Inclusion programmes, the MTR recommends stronger links with the private sector as well as enhanced market analysis for and adaptation of the Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) programmes. The inclusion and participation of men and boys should be strengthened across programmes.

In terms of **coherence**, the MTR finds that SF programmes are aligned with other interventions in the target communities. SF programmes are well-anchored at the regional level to align with national and international policies and strategies. Mechanisms and agreements are in place to coordinate well with national and local governments and other development actors to avoid duplication of interventions.

Sustained impact can be challenging to assess at the mid-term stage of a programme, yet findings from the MTR show clear signs of **emerging impacts** in communities. Despite the challenging context brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, a substantial part of the targeted population is progressing out of poverty. In five of the eight assessed countries, the MTR finds improvements in poverty levels. In Asia, 100% of targeted families in Nepal crossed the national poverty line, against a target of 80%, while in Mali the number of households living below the poverty line decreased from 73% at baseline to 57%. With necessary adjustments, SF is on track to deliver on the planned impacts under the five-year Strategic Plan.

Background

Strømme Foundation's (SF) vision is a world free from poverty. To contribute contribution toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 – “to end poverty in all its forms” is at the heart of SF's approach and strategies. This is operationalised by designing programmes within the framework of SDG4, SDG5 and SDG8, and with a strong emphasis on partnerships to achieve the development goals under SDG17.

This Mid-Term Review has been undertaken in accordance with the Strømme Foundation's Grant Agreement GLO-0640 QZA-18/0355 with Norad for the Strategic Plan 2019-2023. The purpose of the Mid-Term Review is to analyse factors influencing the programmes and results in performance, extract lessons learnt and provide recommendations for the continued implementation of the current Grant Agreement with Norad.

The review is conducted in line with SF's Thematic Goals:

1. To strengthen Civil Society
2. To ensure inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for marginalised and disadvantaged groups
3. To improve the livelihoods of the rural poor through enhanced income generation

At the outset, it is worthwhile pointing out that SF programmes have mostly operated in the context of COVID-19 restrictions and its aftermath under the current period of Norad Agreement. Accordingly, measures undertaken by different national governments to limit the spread of the virus such as lockdowns, closure of educational institutions, and limitations on public gatherings have directly affected SF's programme implementation to varying degrees across the three regions.

Methodology

The MTR was conducted in all SF's countries of intervention, except for Sri Lanka where programme implementation ended in December 2021, and Myanmar due to the current political situation.

In line with SF's decentralised model of operation, the reviews were conducted at the regional level to ensure that regional differences were captured, especially the varying extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected target populations and programme implementation.

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The reviews were conducted through a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data and also supplemented with intensive desk reviews. Thus, this approach facilitated analysis of results and triangulation of the findings from qualitative and quantitative data. To facilitate involvement of key stakeholders at different stages of the process, inception, and validation workshops were conducted with communities, local implementing partners and other stakeholders as part of the review process. The respective methodologies of each region are described in detail in the respective Mid-Term Review reports. Findings and recommendations were quality assured regionally and by SF's head office in Norway. The analysis was conducted within the framework of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria.

Findings

Effectiveness

"THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE INTERVENTION ACHIEVED, OR IS EXPECTED TO ACHIEVE, ITS OBJECTIVES, AND ITS RESULTS (...)"
(OECD DAC)

The MTR highlights that SF programmes are delivering results in a timely way. Despite the challenging situation caused by climate change, insecurity and COVID-19, SF's progress towards the five-year targets in the Global Results Framework is strong. SF's programmes met or exceeded 72% of global outcome targets. 88% of global output targets have been reached or exceeded by the end of 2021. A modest underachievement can be observed in the total number of education staff trained, and youth enrolled in formal vocational training. These targets, however, seem attainable in the remainder of the Strategic Plan period.

Aggregate results of SF's Global Outcome indicate the early impacts of programme interventions which have led 1,786 community mechanisms to be empowered and successfully advocate for their rights (against a target of 685). Children who have dropped out of school are getting a "second chance" at an education through SF's accelerated education programmes leading to 60,860 children to enrol in formal school (against a target of 53,537). A total of 30,592 adolescent boys and girls have gained life skills such as personal development, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making (against a target of 26,895). The loans and capacity building that Community Managed Savings Groups (CMSGs) provide to its members are contributing to real changes such an increase in savings and income levels, financial literacy, improvements to homes and support to children's education. Through value chain development, rural producers are accessing market opportunities, obtaining fair deals, and improving the quality of their products. As a result of these two interventions, 75,806 individuals have started or expanded an Income Generating Activity (IGA) against a target of 84,829. Finally, 3,626 youths have

gained the technical and vocational skills to find paid employment or become self-employed (against a target of 3,410).

Most of SF's programmes included elements of awareness raising on, for example, the importance of education and the need for gender equality. In addition to this, several programmes have a central goal to empower women. Through their participation in one of SF's programmes, 78,762 adolescent girls and women are taking an active role in household decision-making. Moreover, adolescent girls have become agents of change in their communities, organising campaigns against harmful practices such as early marriage. In Asia, 242 early marriages were stopped, and the incidents of gender and caste discrimination have been greatly reduced.

SF's programmes in West Africa and Asia regions are meeting most targets. The East Africa region has slight delays in implementation due mainly to prolonged national lockdowns and school closures, particularly impacting results in Uganda and South Sudan.

SF Asia implements the Socio-Economic Empowerment with Dignity and Sustainability (SEEDS) programme in the four countries of operation. The programme targets poor and marginalized communities and aims at transforming their mind-set from dependency into self-help through family development and stronger community-based organisations.

In Nepal, the Mid-Term Review showed that there has been significantly high achievement in the outcome and output results indicators despite the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 20, 11 outcome indicators have already met the five-year target. Likewise, 17 output indicators from among 34 have been met the five-year target. Partners in Nepal are using a holistic adolescent-led community development approach to guide all aspects of programme intervention. The Mid-Term Review found that this approach has been very successful in inspiring adolescents to take the lead in empowering families, building strong forums, and holding duty bearers accountable. In addition, the review confirmed that interventions with life skills components such as the adolescent empowerment programme Samvad, contribute to the elimination of violence and corruption in the community.

In Bangladesh, it has been observed that the programmes have accomplished most of the targets as set in the indicators of the results framework. The Mid-Term Review finds that participation in the SEEDS programme has contributed to a shift in families' mind-set from relief to self-help by taking ownership of their own development process. Increased awareness of their different entitlements allows the communities to claim their rights from duty-bearers. Families have also received training on different livelihood activities such as vegetable planting and animal rearing, which has contributed to 75% (against a baseline of 28%) of SEEDS targeted families to be involved in different Income Generating Activities (IGAs), mainly managed by women. As a result, 52% of households have increased their income by 20%.

The extent to which programmes achieved their goals (particularly in terms of outcomes) is more varied in East Africa. Most programmes achieved some, but not all their planned targets. The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the environment in which programmes operated, especially in Uganda. However, the Mid-Term Review still concluded that interventions in East Africa are highly relevant to the needs of the target groups. Early Childhood Development centres (ECD) have been supported with learning materials and soft-skills trainings for caregivers, while children attending these centres are more likely to enrol in first grade of primary school. In Tanzania, 80% of children that

attended ECD enrolled in primary schools. By 2021, 62% of Bonga graduates were applying life skills in their lives and advocating for their rights (against a target of 85%). Members of Community Managed Savings Groups (CMSGs) increased their savings and access to loans which they are using to pay school fees, buy learning materials, and 35% were able to start a small business. Youth are being trained with local artisans which is highly appreciated and 50% of graduates were generating their own income (against a target of 70%).

In the West Africa region, based on the findings of the Mid-Term Review, the programmes are achieving the targets set for the Strategic Plan 2019-2023. Most are performing on target or even better than expected. The Mid-Term Review specifically highlights the changes made by Community Managed Savings Groups (CMSGs). CMSGs have enabled poor women to form self-managed savings groups and receive training on financial literacy, business management and agriculture. According to the Mid-Term Review, 94% of women report an increase in their income which allows them to support their households. Across the three countries, 8 out of 10 women acquired items such as food, children's clothing or contributed to school fees. The regular meetings create – often for the first time – a forum for mutual exchange and support between the women of a community. In some cases, this translated to women jointly addressing the needs in their community and actively demanding their rights. The intervention has been highly successful in creating sustainable, cohesive groups that tackle the social issues facing their members and their communities.

Efficiency

“THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE INTERVENTION DELIVERS, OR IS LIKELY TO DELIVER, RESULTS IN AN ECONOMIC AND TIMELY WAY.” (OECD DAC)

Overall, the Strategic Plan 2019-2023 is progressing well in relation to how resources are being used. To implement programmes, SF uses local NGO partners which the MTR find is a cost-efficient way to implement SF's strategic interventions. This model allows for operationalisation and upscaling of large programmes through organisations with knowledge of the local context and the ability of reaching the target groups at a lower cost than would be incurred with direct implementation. By working through a network of local NGOs, joint capacity-building costs can be kept low without compromising quality.

The cost-efficiency of SF programmes is enhanced further by leveraging the competencies of other organisations. For instance, in the West Nile region in Uganda where majority of refugees are settled there is typically a high concentration of other implementing agencies. SF has entered a consortium with other international organisations to implement projects and share expertise. Programme activities and implementing areas in this consortium are streamlined with the support of local authorities such as the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the UNHCR. Partners in this location participate in coordination and technical group meetings, which facilitated lesson sharing for both improved efficiency and effectiveness in implementation.

SF finance and administration processes are robust and efficient. Prior to the recruitment of partners, SF carries out a risk assessment which identifies areas for capacity building. There are robust mechanisms in place to mitigate potential risks associated with decentralised models of operation,

such as annual partner/risk assessments, programme quality assurance routines, monitoring systems and whistle-blower mechanisms. Financial reporting, internal controls and audits are continuously used to identify potential areas for revision.

In West Africa, SF optimises financial resources by using standardised unit costs for each intervention such as Speed School I and II, Active Literacy and S3A. These unit costs are used in contract agreements with NGO partners and keep the cost per learner stable. By 2021, the level of expenditure for interventions under the Strategic Plan was 94% of the budgeted costs. In addition, the MTR found that the unit cost of one Speed School learner is lower than the costs set by UNESCO in the traditional education system. In nine months, Speed School learners are taught the equivalent of a 3-year curriculum and generally become top ten students in hosts schools; thus, the programme is highly cost-effective.

The MTR in Bangladesh found that partners have spent between 95% and 99% percent of the budgeted amount for the last three years. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many activities such as training and workshops, partners were able to utilize the money for quality implementation of the SEEDS programme and achieve most of the output targets.

The MTR in Nepal used the “Social Return on Investment” (SROI) as an index of efficiency to measure the capacity of the SEEDS programme to transform financial resources into actions that generate social return such as improved education, higher family income and reduced violence and abuse in target areas. The SROI ratio is obtained by the valorisation of outcome results divided by the programme costs. The estimation showed that for every hundred rupees invested in the SEEDS programme, the intervention created a social return of 57.84 at 6% discounted rate, and 51.86 at 10 percent discounted rate. This is a satisfactory SROI score at this stage of the Strategic Plan. In other words, the SEEDS programme activities and results are on track in addressing the social issues in targeted areas and improving the livelihoods of rural communities.

The MTRs also find that SF programmes are efficient when it mobilises resources at different local levels to promote ownership. Thus, it is important to note how local authorities and communities contribute with their own resources and provide support to programme activities. In Nepal, local authorities are adapting the SEEDS approach and providing technical and financial resources for strengthening and expanding the interventions. In West Africa, communities are responsible for providing the premises to conduct classes and accommodation for the Speed School centre animator. In East Africa, communities support TVET activities with human resources such as artisans and the areas for training. Communities also contribute to ECD centres with their own labour on backyard gardens that provide food for children.

Finally, the use of digital solutions shows high potential to enhance efficiency by reducing expenses in travel, staff hours and monitoring. SF is in the process of rolling out the use of digital tools for programme monitoring in the three regions through the digital provider Zegeba. However, in East Africa, SF partners have been collecting field data using the mobile-based data collection app Open Data Kit (ODK). According to the MTR, the use of the digital tools ensured the verification of results during COVID-19 lockdowns and travel restrictions. Partners were required to provide information

including coordinates and images of the activities carried out and completed. In addition, digitalisation has also aided in facilitating timely collection and consolidation of data from the different countries.

Relevance

“THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE INTERVENTION OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN RESPOND TO BENEFICIARIES, GLOBAL, COUNTRY, AND PARTNER/INSTITUTION NEEDS, POLICIES, AND PRIORITIES, AND CONTINUE TO DO SO IF CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE” (OECD DAC)

The MTRs find that SF’s Strategic Plan (2019-2023) and the programmes implemented are regarded as highly relevant in meeting the rights and needs of targeted groups. In addition, SF programmes are thematically regarded as well aligned with local and national development plans and strategies across the countries of intervention. SF’s relevance to communities and stakeholders is reinforced by the high level of participatory planning, implementation, and monitoring, conducted by communities, local partners, and government services. SF is also commended for maintaining a high level of transparency with local authorities in terms of programme planning and implementation.

SF programmes align well with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 5 and 8. SF’s overarching mission to eradicate poverty may seem ambitious. Overall, the MTRs conclude that the integrated focus on strong societies, education, and economic inclusion, reinforced by the cross-cutting issues of anti-corruption, gender equality, inclusion, and environment are considered a relevant holistic approach to contribute towards the achievement of SDG 1 and SF’s mission to eradicate poverty.

SF’s decentralised structure allows programmes to be implemented in hard-to-reach areas, in volatile security contexts, and through global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To maintain relevance, SF’s programmatic approaches should increase the focus on strengthening community resilience. Adopting a Disaster Risk Reduction (DDR) approach for programme design and pursuing strategic partnerships will be vital to respond to challenges such as food insecurity and population displacement.

Relevance of Thematic Goal 1: Strengthen Civil Society and Public Sector

SF’s integrated and rights-based approach to strengthening civil society and the public sector is highly relevant to targeted communities. Strengthened community mechanisms play an active role in advocating for their rights, holding duty-bearers accountable, and promoting community resilience.

In Bangladesh, the SEEDs programme is implemented in highly vulnerable areas where households face multiple climate hazards. Self-Reliant Groups (SRGs) elaborated their development plans which include how to support their members and the community. Almost 100% of SRG members received health, nutrition, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) training organised by SF partners. To help support their community, SRGs have initiated collective vegetable gardening and elaborated lists of eligible people for different safety nets and government services. The SRG level plans creates volunteerism, enthusiasm, and a collective action to address community issues. During COVID-19, these community mechanisms along with Shonglap groups played a vital role in local initiatives to prevent the spread of the virus, and in providing community support during the pandemic.

In Nepal, the main target groups are women, people with disabilities (PWDs), adolescents and children. Through the SEEDS programme, they are participating in various community mechanisms i.e., CBOs, SHGs, Samvad groups, etc. These community mechanisms become empowered and begin addressing their needs. The 360 Self-help groups (SHGs) formed are providing needs-based services to their members with 54% of the beneficiaries increasing their income by 30%. The SEEDS programme has also significantly addressed the nutritional needs of participants through home gardens. The MTR also found the empowerment of adolescent boys and girls through Samvad to be highly relevant. The programme has not only brought changes in their personal lives but also has changed their attitudes and transformed them in agents of change in their communities.

The East Africa MTR finds that strengthening the role of state and local authorities will enhance programme relevance and impact. While activities in East Africa focus on improving the capacity of local partners, increase advocacy initiatives and empower rights-holders to claim their rights, there are limited activities towards local authorities. Partners have strengthened the capacity and ability of rights holders, including People with Disabilities, to hold duty bearers accountable by improving awareness of their rights. However, lobbying, network creation, and building channels with local authorities are needed to make them aware of their roles and responsibilities to the local communities and how to fulfil these obligations. Collaborations with local authorities should be scaled up in the remainder of the SP to increase alignment to SF's strategy in this thematic area.

Relevance of Thematic Goal 2: Inclusive Education and Life-Long Learning

SF education programmes are appreciated and considered highly relevant by targeted communities and stakeholders. There are close collaborations in place with both national and local education authorities.

In Bangladesh, the MTR found that most government primary schools were far away from the communities, so it was difficult to send small children to pre-primary education. In addition, mother tongue education is not provided in mainstream primary schools where Bangla is the official teaching language impacting learning outcomes of children with ethnic backgrounds. The SEEDs project is implementing a mother tongue based Multilingual Education (MLE) component in Early Childhood Development Centre (ECD), where children can learn in their mother tongue and have a better start once they enter the formal education system.

After 18 months of school closures in Bangladesh, national and international NGOs highlighted huge learning gaps among children in primary schools. Child clubs were kept running by the community and hugely contributed to the support of Grade 3 and 4 learners that were already falling behind at the beginning of 2020. The MTR found that the child club concept is innovative and effective. The school management committees and local authorities appreciated this initiative and acknowledged that the overall learning performance of learners participating in child clubs has improved. Therefore, the relevance and need for ECD centres, child clubs that provide remedial support to students, and Shonglap centres where adolescents learn about life skills and increase their self-esteem will remain in some time in the future.

In West Africa, given the large number of out of school children, SF's interventions are perceived as highly relevant in response to challenges faced by the governments of the three countries. Speed School I and II are educational alternatives that contribute to the achievement of the Ministries of Education objectives in terms of their contribution to the attainment of SDG4. According to the MTR, Speed Schools have contributed greatly to the enrolment of many children in school: "As far as SS is concerned, we find it good and very important for our people, because without it, many of our children would not have the chance to go to school. We appreciate the work that the animators and supervisors do to ensure that our children go to school. SS came to our rescue because we were really in need" (SMC member in Northern Burkina Faso). The learners who attended Speed School I and II expressed their satisfaction with going to school and hoped for a better future.

Relevance of Thematic Goal 3: Economic Inclusion

Stakeholders regard SF's Economic Inclusion programmes as relevant. However, there remains potential for further scale-up of Economic Inclusion programmes considering the changing global context.

The MTRs shows that Savings Groups provide an effective platform for economic development, financial security, and resilience. Before the introduction of the programme, many women had no resources, stayed home, and relied entirely on their husbands. Women from focus groups in West Africa stated that being part of SF's savings groups gave them the knowledge to start Income Generating Activities (IGAs) which allowed them to increase their income. Belonging to savings groups was also highlighted as a key resilience factor by community members during the pandemic.

The increase in income has also contributed to the improvement of women's participation in household decision making, with 92% of women becoming more involved in family decisions in targeted communities in West Africa. Participants from focus groups in the region of Sikasso, Mali unanimously agree: "Thanks to our participation in the savings group we are more involved in decision-making in the household. Men appreciate our contribution to household expenses from the money we receive from our income generating activities. In our households, no decisions are taken in our absence, and we are now consulted on different matters regarding our children, health, or family property". Participation in CMSG groups has built solidarity, while social cohesion among members of the group has been strengthened. Women appreciate the social support from groups which allows them to achieve collectively what would have been impossible as individuals such as access to agricultural land or food processing equipment.

SF economic inclusion programmes will likely benefit from increasing their engagement and collaboration with private and public sector actors. In some SF TVET programmes, graduates do not receive a certification which may hamper the employability of these youths. Additionally, the relevance of programmes could be enhanced through improved and informed market adaptations, to ensure alignment with the commodity and labour market. The latter will imply a more thorough market analysis and subsequent adaptations of programmes.

Sustainability

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE NET BENEFITS OF THE INTERVENTION CONTINUE, OR ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE” (OECD DAC)

The MTR concludes that there is high potential for long-term sustainability in SF programmes and operational approach. SF’s decentralised and highly contextualised implementation model enhances sustainability. A key strength of the model is that it builds the capacity of local partner organisations and local communities.

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In terms of good practices, programmes are conducted to ensure a high level of accountability, participatory planning, and social transformation. Good mechanisms are in place to ensure programmatic alignment with ethical standards such as impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

SF is commended for entering communities by first engaging local authorities. Evidence suggests there is a high level of government appreciation and ownership of SF programmes. The capacity of key public servants, including teachers and local government officials, has been enhanced through the programmes. Thus, direct partnerships with local and national level governments support the long-term sustainability of SF programmes, government collaboration and capacity building.

The suitability and acceptance of programme interventions among communities and other stakeholders are considered central factors to achieve sustainability. The MTRs find that awareness on different issues has improved in many intervention areas, such as the importance of children’s education. In East Africa, Baba clubs (father’s clubs) have been instrumental in building a good relationship between children and fathers. Men participating in these monthly meetings discuss factors affecting their children, such as gender-based violence on children psychosocial well-being and performance in school, and good nutrition to improve learning outcomes. Fathers are working on school gardens and provided with seeds.

One factor that enhances programmatic sustainability is a high level of formal registration of community-based organisations (CBOs). By being formally recognised, the groups and organisations become stronger actors in advocacy, and may also gain access to public support. The satisfying level of local resource mobilisation is highlighted as a positive factor to promote sustainability in SF programmes.

Although planning for the exit strategy was conducted at the onset of the SP, there are indications that detailed exit plans are not yet in place in all intervention areas. SF must ensure that detailed planning, budgeting, and monitoring of exit activities are in place as soon as possible.

Potential sustainability gaps and risks

SF operates in highly marginalised areas and volatile security and emergency contexts in all three regions. Migration and internal displacement of target groups, along with insecurity, pose a risk to programme sustainability. Operating in fragile contexts may also pose a risk to sustainable development programmes, thus the need for peacebuilding efforts and conflict mitigation.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a minor lag in the process of mobilising and strengthening communities for takeover programme interventions. For continued sustainability, it is essential that all mobilisation activities are performed towards the end of the Strategic Plan period. There are also some potential gaps in SF's approach in tracking programme participants, for example Speed School graduates in formal schools. Finally, the MTR emphasises that there is a limited engagement from the private sector in Economic Inclusion programmes which would be beneficial for programme sustainability.

In terms of SF's operations, the MTRs point out that staff turnover in partner organisations may cause a risk to programme sustainability by causing a loss of competence. In West Africa, the MTR suggest a better retention strategy with more team building activities and training to help strengthen leadership and motivation in the workplace.

Coherence

"THE COMPATIBILITY OF THE INTERVENTION WITH OTHER INTERVENTIONS IN A COUNTRY, SECTOR OR INSTITUTION." (OECD DAC)

There is evidence of a high level of coherence between SF interventions and government initiatives. Programme locations are identified in collaboration with relevant government offices and in some cases with local actors such as the UNHCR. SF regional offices and local partners have agreements in place with government ministries and agencies to clarify roles and responsibilities. To avoid duplication in outreach, SF and implementing partners actively participate in coordination forums.

The MTR in Nepal finds that the empowerment of community mechanisms allows them to be involved in government planning processes and have access to more resources. On the other hand, local authorities are including the priorities of Community Based Organisations (CBOs), Self-help groups (SHGs), and Samvad forums in their annual plans after receiving trainings in transparency and accountability provided by SF's partners. Components like child clubs and ECDs are in line with national and provincial government strategies to improve the quality of education. Samvad is developing knowledge and leadership skills of adolescents in line with government priorities. Thus, the SEEDS programme in Nepal is regarded as highly coherent.

In West Africa, the establishment of strong partnerships with state technical services, partner NGOs and programme participants makes it possible to identify community needs and address solutions. SF has in place an annual accountability session between state actors, partners, and targeted communes. This session is held in each country in September with the goal of creating an arena for reflection and learning, and to improve the collaboration and transparency between all stakeholders. These accountability sessions also consist in presenting the achievements by partner, encourage critical analysis of results achieved and what has not worked well in the implementation of activities with a view to achieving annual targets on the one hand and the Strategic Plan on the other hand.

Interviews with the heads of technical States services in the three countries in West Africa indicate that the contribution of SF to the promotion of education, particularly the inclusion of out-of-school children, is considerable. The education programmes such as Speed School I and II and Active Literacy

contribute to the improvement of national education indicators. However, challenges remain in terms of keeping children in school after they transfer to the formal system. Efforts must be made by SF but also by State actors to better monitoring these vulnerable children.

In East Africa, the programmes implemented complement government development priorities to a great extent and country objectives in enhancing production and social well-being of the population. In South Sudan, a review of the National Development Strategy (NDS) shows alignment between one of the six national development strategies, which calls for expansion and provision of access to basic services, and SF's strategic focus on quality education through improvements in educational infrastructure. In addition, one key South Sudan national priority is nutrition which SF is promoting through agricultural value chains, and the promotion of backyard gardening among programme participants.

Impact

“THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE INTERVENTION HAS GENERATED OR IS EXPECTED TO GENERATE SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE, INTENDED OR UNINTENDED, HIGHER-LEVEL EFFECTS.” (OECD DAC)

Sustained impact can be challenging to assess at the mid-term stage of a programme. However, clear signs of “emerging impact” are evident and highlighted below.

On a national level, the MTR finds that SF programmes have already made an impact. In South Sudan, the interventions were able to influence the new Inclusive Education Policy through financial and technical support. In addition, findings indicate that SF initiatives have increased government infrastructure in several areas including the construction and renovation of classrooms.

Progress out of poverty

There is a positive trend in terms of poverty eradication in SF target areas, despite the social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In five of the eight countries assessed, there is positive trend of progress out of poverty. In East Africa, there was an increase in the percentage of people living below the poverty line between 2020 and 2021. Strict government measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 had severe impacts on the livelihoods of programme participants in the three countries.

In Asia, 100% of targeted families in Nepal crossed the national poverty line, against a target of 80%. An estimation of per capita income shows an average result of NRS 30,081 against the national poverty line of 19,262 NRS (approximately 50% above). In Bangladesh, the Mid-Term Review used the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and found that 30% of households crossed the poverty line from a baseline of 74%. While 45% of households remain below the poverty line, a positive trend can be expected towards the end of the Strategic Period.

In West Africa, the Mid-Term Review also used the MPI to analyse changes in poverty status. According to the results, the number of households living below the poverty line in Mali decreased from 73% at baseline to 57%; while in Burkina Faso the number of households living in poverty decreased from

65% at baseline to 55%. However, in Niger, the number of multidimensional poor increased to 63% from a baseline of 41%. Households in the West Africa region have experienced multiple shocks in the last two years, from a surge in violence to extreme weather events and high levels of food insecurity. The number of households that suffered crop loss in Niger increased from 18% at baseline to 24%. Given this situation, SF is providing food relief to targeted communities in Niger.

In East Africa, the MTR analysed the Poverty Probability Index (PPI) and found that 37% of the target communities in Tanzania, 29% in Uganda and 27% in South Sudan are living below the national poverty line. There was an increase in the percentage of target groups below the poverty line from a regional baseline of 22% in 2020. Country specific restrictions such as total lockdowns, closure of educational institutions, and constraints on movement across locations were contributing factors that led to people losing jobs and income in 2020 and 2021.

Impacts in communities

The community assessment in East Africa showed an improvement in community attitudes and practices in solving their own challenges. The programmes have created a sense of togetherness that influences and promotes better management of community conflicts. Findings indicate a reduction in crime and a greater community focus on the elimination of Gender Based Violence (GBV), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriages.

Improvements in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sensitisation and facilities in schools in the East Africa region have had a spill over effects on the households, and improved hygiene practices in children's homes. Similarly, youth who have been trained in hygiene, life and business skills are sharing these skills with other community members.

There is also evidence of improved self-esteem in marginalised groups, including people with disability in East Africa. SF programmes have provided assistive devices to people with disabilities, and this has increased their access to markets and other services. There is evidence of improvement in attitudes of communities, parents, and teachers in East Africa towards children with disabilities.

In addition, joining savings groups and vocational training have far reaching benefits for the target communities. Savings groups in East Africa have enhanced the savings culture in communities, hence attracting more formal financial institutions. Community members who were not part of the programme have decided to join savings groups due to the positive experience of participants, and there is the replication of savings groups beyond SF's programmes. New businesses started by vocational training participants have increased access to commodities in target communities.

In West Africa, the review found a decrease in conflict levels and more cohesion within communities. Women's participation in decision-making at community level also had a considerable improvement from 42% to 70%. Women have a larger presence in school management committees, health committees and management of water points. Moreover, community savings groups (CMSGs) have become platforms for advocacy and community mobilisation. Village authorities use the leaders of CMSG groups to pass information on women's issues. In Mali, savings groups in the regions of Timbuktu and Ségou obtained access to certified and resilient seeds, fertiliser, and processing equipment for peanuts and sesame seeds through dialogue with local agricultural authorities.

In Asia, findings from Bangladesh show that off-farm income increased 29% from the baseline, while the income from agriculture and animal rearing has increased 80% from the baseline. Households are conducting Income Generating Activities such as cattle and poultry rearing (64%), agriculture (20%) and petty trade (12%) which have resulted in higher incomes according to the MTR findings. Furthermore, the financial empowerment of household members has contributed to a stronger relationship between civil society, the public sector, and local NGOs. The increase in rights awareness and income of poor households has reduced violence and discrimination against women and children (from a baseline of 9% to 7%).

In Nepal, health clinics in SF's target communities report a notable reduction in early pregnancies (from a baseline of 25% to 14% of the total births). At the local government level, issues addressed by community mechanisms strengthened by SF such as domestic violence and early marriages are being integrated into local plans. Self-help groups and Samvad forums participate in public planning processes. Discrimination issues and child marriages are decreasing in targeted communities. Adolescent empowerment groups play an active role in disclosing and addressing incidents of child marriage and potential cases of corruption.

Negative impacts

The MTR has highlighted some unintended negative impacts of SF programmes. For instance, vocational training graduates have not been successful in selling their products due to a lack of local market.

In terms of gender dynamics in the programmes, the findings note a growing dissatisfaction of males, given that some perceive the affirmative action to include a higher proportion of female participants as unfair. In East Africa, some men even expressed their dissatisfaction with women's empowerment since they feared women would no longer obey them. It will be important to address the inclusion of men and boys in programming and in gender sensitisation efforts moving forward.

Recommendations

The key recommendations below will form the core basis for SF's global management response plan to the MTR. A more detailed and extensive tool for internal purposes, including all relevant recommendations from across the regions, has been developed separately from this report.

Effectiveness

- Address implementation delays to ensure completion of all planned activities and achievement of expected results by the end of the Strategic Plan.

Efficiency

- Leverage the competence of respective implementing partners for peer learning and training.
- Increase the use of digital solutions for monitoring and evaluation.
- Identify and address capacity gaps (staffing/competence/structural).
- Expand the use of strategic partnerships.
- Increase the use of unit costs, SROI and other methods to measure efficiency.

Relevance

- Enhance SF's relevance in strengthening community resilience by designing and implementing programmes within a Disaster Risk Reduction framework.
- Expand relevant elements of the SF Asia integrated community programming approach to West- and East Africa.
- Expand strategic partnerships to integrate complementary programme components (WASH, nutrition, agriculture, etc.)
- Where relevant, consider humanitarian components within development interventions.
- Address food security as a key challenge in target communities.
- Strengthen the engagement and capacity building of duty-bearers.
- Ensure market relevance of Economic Inclusion programmes such as vocational training by conducting more comprehensive market analyses and providing certificates to TVET graduates.

Sustainability

- Ensure programme adaptations in conflict areas and for mobile populations.
- Analyse and address reasons for high staff turnover in SF and partners.
- Strengthen tracking and follow-up of programme participants.
- Strengthen collaboration with the private sector.
- Ensure sufficient budgeting and sufficient planning and monitoring of exit activities.
- Ensure inclusion of men and boys in programming and gender sensitisation efforts.

Coherence

- Support state actors in the follow up and tracking of children after they transfer to formal school.
- Scale up the use of strategic partnerships and coordination with other implementing organisations to avoid duplication and to complement SF's competence and capacity.

Way forward

To make effective use of the Mid-Term Reviews in the short, medium, and long-term, a roadmap for dissemination and operationalisation will be developed. Recommendations from the MTR will be shared and discussed in workshops within SF, with NGO partners, and other stakeholders in the respective countries of operation. The findings from the MTR will be used to adjust of activities in the remainder of this Strategic Plan and will inform the next SP (2023-2030). A management response plan will be developed within three months of submission of this report