



Executive summary of final evaluation: ActionAid women's right to land

Greenwich Academic Literature Archive (GALA) Citation:

Forsythe, Lora and Wellard, Kate (2014) Executive summary of final evaluation: ActionAid women's right to land. Project Report. Natural Resources Institute, Chatham, UK.

Available at:

<http://gala.gre.ac.uk/12561>

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Executive Summary

Final Evaluation: ActionAid Women's Right to Land

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Executive summary

The Women's Rights to Land (WRL) programme aimed to support women's movements from marginalised communities, including indigenous women in Guatemala, Dalit women in India, and women living with HIV/AIDS in Sierra Leone, to improve their access and control over land. The programme ran from November 2010 to October 2013 and was funded by the European Commission (EC). ActionAid commissioned the Natural Resources Institute to conduct a final evaluation of the programme, the results of which are presented in this summary report.

The specific objective of the WRL programme was to support poor and excluded women (referred to as project members) to influence national policy and legal frameworks to promote and protect their equal rights to land. Key activities of the project included raising awareness among women on land rights, training leaders in advocacy, supporting women's land rights networks, and conducting research to influence change at local, regional and national levels. This was expected to contribute to empowerment, improved living standards and dignity for poor and excluded women. The programme was implemented through five organisations representing existing social movements of landless and marginalised women, with an expected reach of the total membership of the movements, approximately 49,100 women. Secondary target groups for awareness raising activities were men and local and national officials.

The evaluation draws on the EC evaluation framework, which includes an analysis of programme relevance; participation; equity; effectiveness; impact; replicability and sustainability; efficiency, and innovation. The methods used for the evaluation were: a document review; an email questionnaire; individual interviews with ActionAid staff, partners, project members and stakeholders; and focus group discussions with partner staff, project members and non-intervention community members, drawing on participatory methods where possible. An impact analysis was not possible for the evaluation; however, programme outcomes and pathways of impact were identified where possible, through comparison against baseline studies. The summary report presents the findings from the evaluation under the categories of the EC evaluation framework, followed by responses to the evaluation questions.

Evaluation Findings

The WRL programme was found to be highly relevant to the needs of women in the project countries, and of women in developing countries more broadly, along with country priorities and ActionAid country strategies. This was achieved through the involvement of experienced country teams and partners in the design of the project. However, as the programme targeted extremely marginalised groups, many of the women had a number of other needs that affected their ability to secure benefits from the project and improve their wellbeing. For example, some project participants in Sierra Leone required access to medication and in Guatemala and India women required access to credit and financial support to invest in agriculture.

A participatory ethos was evident in the programme, as project members were involved in various capacities throughout the project cycle and ActionAid addressed some of the key barriers to women's participation. This was evidenced at the proposal stage where involvement of country stakeholders during proposal development, continual engagement between the ActionAid international and country offices, the use of ActionAid participatory methodologies and the

representation of women leaders during events, in research and the development of communication materials. Financial support enabled project member participation; however, challenges to participation remained, such as time and travel constraints, and in some instances verbal abuse or threats from other community members or land owners.

Equity was also integrated into the programme in terms of addressing social differentiation (e.g. gender, ethnicity, socio-economic group, disability, etc.) and the extent to which the programme had a positive impact on people from the most disadvantaged or excluded groups. Equity was found to be a fundamental principle of the programme as it addressed equity on two levels, first the level of disadvantage or social difference (indigenous, Dalit and people living with HIV/AIDS), and secondly by gender. There were some cases of inequity in the outcome related to women's poverty, such as the inability to pay membership fees or forfeit to participate in activities or purchase/invest in land. More support will also be required to strengthen group governance.

The programme demonstrated evidence of being effective to a significant extent (outcome achieved with minor shortcomings), given the assessment of outcomes and results achieved in relation to targets set in the logical framework. The first expected result area *"increased capacity of women's groups to develop and lead advocacy on land rights"* (through training women leaders to support women's groups and the development of training manuals) was achieved to a significant extent. The project demonstrated evidence of increased capacity of women leaders and groups to participate and lead on advocacy for their land rights, through greater awareness of their rights and legal procedures for land ownership. The target number of leaders to be reached was achieved in all three countries. As a result, women leaders are able to organise advocacy activities and interact, negotiate and challenge local, regional and national officials. All three countries produced training manuals that have been revised so they are more accessible for women leaders.

The second expected result area *"increased participation of landless women's movements in policy and legal framework at local and national levels"* (through at least two advocacy actions) was achieved to a significant/large extent (outcome fully achieved without major shortcomings). In India and Sierra Leone, activities of project members in local advocacy actions were very strong and targets were met or surpassed. This was an effective strategy for influencing local officials to obtain land rights. Participation of ActionAid country offices in events helped bring greater strength to the message and keep momentum on the issue. Similar events were held in Guatemala; however, there was little perceived change in government policy as a result.

The third expected result area *"increased awareness of rights and use of the justice system"* (through awareness raising sessions for women community members, along with men and traditional leaders/local officials and the production of communication material) was achieved to a moderate/significant extent (outcome partially achieved with minor shortcomings). All countries demonstrated evidence that awareness raising sessions took place with women, men, government officials and traditional leaders.

The fourth expected result area *"creation of an inter-regional alliance of women's movements and groups"* (through creation of an email list of movement leaders, participation in interregional and international networks, activities for Rural Women's Day, and organisation of workshops and exchanges), was achieved to a moderate extent. Progress was made towards most of the activities contributing to the creation of an alliance but the likelihood of it being sustained appears limited.

The fifth expected result area, *“increased knowledge and empirical evidence of the linkages between access to and control over land and women’s empowerment, disseminated regionally and internationally”* (through one piece of research and a documentary film) was achieved to a large extent. A baseline study and research into the linkages between women’s empowerment and land rights were conducted in each country, providing a contribution to knowledge on women’s access and control over land for the target groups. A documentary film was also developed. Wide distribution is ongoing, with country release around Rural Women’s Day and wider dissemination across networks via DVD and email.

The programme demonstrated capacity for replicability of processes to achieve the defined outcomes in other contexts. The approach of encouraging and supporting women’s agency by participating in land rights movements is an approach that can be replicated in any context. Selecting three countries on different continents was strategic to identify lessons learned for replication, and as such, there is strong potential to link the project to women generally and other excluded groups and evidence of this already occurring. Success in scaling out will depend on a number of factors such as the presence of dedicated and knowledgeable staff, village facilitation, strong implementing partners and an enabling policy environment.

In terms of sustainability, the probability of continued long-term benefits for the target groups, the presence of ActionAid country offices and the long-term work of partners indicate that outcomes can be sustained if investments are made, which was a logic clear at the onset of the project. However, documentation of country level exit strategies was conducted near the time of the project’s closure, which is not considered to be enough time to effectively draw activities to a close and inform project members and staff of upcoming changes.

The programme was found to display a significant degree of efficiency, as management systems were found to contribute to the achievement of results. Programme management (staff and systems) were, for the most part, in place, which enabled project teams to achieve a balance between flexible parameters for implementation while maintaining accountability through monitoring systems. However, delays in staff recruitment affected implementation and expenditure.

The programme design was also innovative and had a number of unique factors. This was due to its focus on specific communities of women with shared oppression, and working to support the whole advocacy chain (from the training of community facilitators and women’s leaders, sensitisation of local leaders and men, campaigning with local and national politicians and engagement with policy makers on land reform).

Responses to the Evaluation Objectives

1. Programme contribution to ActionAid’s organisational objectives

The programme has built on and contributed to ActionAid’s long-term strategy and organisational objectives by supporting poor and excluded women in accessing land in their own right (Strategic Promise 1). This is reflective of ActionAid’s long-term commitment to women’s rights, with a growing emphasis on land and natural resource rights based on the need expressed by country offices. As a result, women’s land rights is now mainstreamed in ActionAid’s organisational strategy and WRL programme learning is contributing to future land rights programming. This will assist in keeping

women's rights a priority within ActionAid's larger poverty alleviation framework and increase the sustainability of its work. However, the objective of promoting sustainable agriculture (Strategic Promise 2) could be expanded in the future, as project members need to be linked to complementary support for agriculture to be a sustainable occupation for women.

2. Effectiveness and impact of the project in relation to its objectives, intended results, and outreach to target groups

The programme demonstrated evidence of being effective in achieving its objectives and intended results to a significant extent, in line with the programme logframe. Positive outcomes attributable to the projects were evident and contributed to the specific objective. This was evident as land rights targets and contributions to policy change were achieved in Sierra Leone and Andhra Pradesh (one of the target states in India). However Guatemala and Tamil Nadu (the second state in India) did not obtain the targets due to unsupportive political environments that changed from the situation at the time of programme design. Positive changes were found in all countries in women's participation in social movements and decision making in their communities and households.

The programme was found to be effective in achieving impact. Outcomes attributable to the programme indicate a likelihood of positive impact in all three countries including those who had acquired land rights and those who had not. Changes in food security and economic wellbeing largely depended on if women gained access to land and the length of time the land was held; changes in the number of meals (Sierra Leone) and diet diversity (India and Guatemala) were noted among women gaining access to land. However, they still required further support to access credit, agricultural inputs and information. Some of the most profound changes were the increase in social and political capital, as women gained new skills and experience in advocacy activities contributing to their dignity and confidence. There were also examples where women were challenging male decision making and domestic violence. There was evidence of attitude and behaviour change among men and local leaders, which is likely the result of longer-term work of partners and ActionAid. This is a significant achievement as it will help to challenge structural gender inequalities in the long term. However, there were some instances where maintaining an emphasis on women's land rights within the wider movement, and that it is an important end in itself, was a challenge (Guatemala and India).

Outreach to the intended target groups was effective, which is commendable as the project was targeting some of the most poor and excluded women in their societies. This was achieved through strategic engagement with social movements supported by project partners in a long-term capacity. Awareness raising of other community members by women leaders was also a cost effective way to roll-out information and encourage participation. However, there was a range in capacity among women leaders and therefore field facilitators were vital for providing support. There were a number of unintended beneficiaries of the project who were also vulnerable but not of the specific target group (Sierra Leone and India). The secondary target groups (men and local officials) were involved in different capacities for each project; however the role of men in advocacy groups was unclear in some cases (India).

3. Results on programme performance

The evaluators conclude that the programme's performance has been very good. This is due to the considerable achievement made by the programme and country projects within the timeframe and budget, which was very close to what the programme set out to do at the proposal stage. Outcomes varied among the countries; however, it is notable that under-achievements were related to whether the legal and political context was supportive of women's land rights and the wider land rights movements. This, along with the potential for the political context to change during implementation, should be considered for future programming that aims to work in more challenging political contexts.

4. Assessment of the implementation strategy and partnership approach

ActionAid supports the causes of excluded groups by strengthening social movements, building solidarity through connecting and organising people, and campaigning for policy change. This implementation strategy was effective in making significant achievements towards the programme objectives. One reason for this is that the strategy targeted both the local level to produce change that made a real difference in the lives of women, while also campaigning at the regional/national level for change in the wider legal framework. Crucial to the programme's success in implementation were the village field facilitators that provided ongoing support for women leaders to support their communities. There were challenges in working within larger social movements; however, as in some instances in India and to a lesser extent Guatemala, the message of women's rights as important in its own right was less clear among some interviewees (men). Broadly, the strategy of supporting women to organise at the local level, while advocacy actions of partners and ActionAid were held at the regional and national levels, was effective in contexts that were relatively open to women's land rights.

The partnership strategy was also very effective. The positive results of the project were largely achieved due to the successful long-term partnerships between the country offices and project partners. The approach demonstrated an efficient way to reach communities, and resulted in a shorter learning curve and reduced risk associated with new partnerships. The project was able to leverage and build on the trust built from the previous work of partners, which will contribute to the sustainability of programme outcomes. The programme enabled partnerships to deepen through capacity strengthening opportunities.

5. Effectiveness and efficient use of funds to deliver results

Overall it is considered that the funds for the programme were used effectively and efficiently to deliver results. Firstly, the programme has made significant achievement towards its objectives, outcomes and areas of intended impact within the budget parameters. ActionAid also contributed its own funding to activities, showing considerable commitment to the programme. Good management practices were also demonstrated at the international and country levels and the financial management capacity of partners was increased. However, delays in staff recruitment, staff turnover and time constraints caused delays in project implementation and budget expenditure.

6. Overview of lessons learned

The programme demonstrated the importance for land programmes to focus directly on women's land rights in order to be effective and to harness opportunities for women's empowerment. A package of project activities is required, such as training of leaders, working with groups for awareness raising and mobilisation for advocacy actions, increasing knowledge of governance procedures, with the support (and convening power) of the partners and ActionAid to provide continuing advocacy. The programme also demonstrated the effectiveness of the programme design of focusing efforts at two levels: at the local level at women, men and local officials, and at a higher level at key 'change makers' and other stakeholders. Achievements will depend on the 'perfect storm'; the coming together of different elements at an opportune time (strong movement, open governments, policy structure in place, women leaders trained and active in leading the movement). As some of these elements are out of the control of the programme, country contexts should be carefully considered prior to implementation.

Women's land rights must be emphasised in larger land programmes in their own right, or minimal outcomes will be made for women. Targeting of women who experience double exclusion was a bold commitment by ActionAid and it demonstrates that positive impacts can be realised among the most excluded groups. The common experience and identity of these groups provided a rallying point for land inequality to be challenged and created solidarity. But there are also inequalities within these groups that impact on securing land rights, due to differences in income and education. Identifying and addressing the different needs among women while supporting solidarity is essential to achieving the objectives of any intervention.

A long-term partnership approach is effective in securing successes within a short timeframe and minimises risk and use of resources. Working with groups was effective in mobilising women, facilitating training, and providing a support network for the land struggle and other issues in the household. However, they require regular follow up and support.

7. Recommendations to help improve project outcomes and sustainability of impacts

Programme Strategy:

- a) Future work of ActionAid on land rights should include specific engagement strategies for working in different socio-economic and political contexts that constrain land rights. This should be informed by more comprehensive risk assessments of the contexts in proposed countries.
- b) ActionAid will also need to look closely at the implications of working on women's rights within larger movements and how it works with men and mainstream mixed organisations.
- c) In addition, future activities aiming to build international and regional alliances should be led by a clear strategy.
- d) ActionAid should continue to build on what has been accomplished and monitor the impact to inform any future strategies for women's land rights. This should include actions for addressing situations where community members, who may be vulnerable, are displaced from land due to the project (India).
- e) A final impact study including aspects of a cost-benefit analysis is advised of how this will be achieved.

Project Management:

- f) A longer inception period will be required in the future, which budgets adequate time for the recruitment of project managers who can initiate activities on a timely basis.
- g) Future programmes should consider the trade-off between the number of staff relative to the size of the geographical area and number of beneficiaries and groups for and effective implementation and monitoring.
- h) Greater support is required at international and country levels in developing integrated tools with consistent indicators for monitoring (logframe, baseline, monitoring etc.) to ensure that the appropriate data is collected to determine outcomes at the close of the project.
- i) Support could be provided through greater involvement of the international programme manager in ActionAid International thematic areas.
- j) Financial payments could be organised in the future by result-based components (e.g. expected results), which would link deliverables to results.

Project Implementation:

- k) Undertake a needs assessment at proposal development stage to engage with women and define their priorities/hierarchy of needs.
- l) Future activities that involve land rights for groups should involve a strong component of group governance to ensure equity in participation and outcome.
- m) Projects need to begin developing exit strategies at the mid-point of programme implementation.