



Summary of the External Evaluation for the Sustainable Livelihoods and Risk Management programme

Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua

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August 2014

Introduction

For methodological, procedural, monitoring and evaluation reasons, CAFOD hired our consulting services for an external evaluation of the programme "Sustainable livelihoods with a focus on risk management and adaptation to climate change 2014-2017". When offering our professional services and consulting team, we proposed to undertake evaluation using the methodological and procedural approach known as "Appreciative Inquiry". Roughly speaking, Appreciative Inquiry is characterised by an evaluative approach that seeks to identify the positive elements of programmes, projects and activities and tries to investigate what aspects can be considered as an opportunity for improvement. Seen this way, the approach and methodology evaluate from the perspective of the glass half full, not half empty.

CAFOD found using Appreciative Inquiry interesting but, given limited availability of time and resources, agreed with us that while the underlying philosophy would remain the same, the procedure would be less rigid and more suited to the rhythms and needs of countries, partners and local actors. For this reason, some of the collective activities were conducted as an open discussion group and on each occasion it was possible to inquire about driving forces, successful practices, environmental elements and areas of opportunity. It was not possible to differentiate activities for each area though we did try to keep the agreed focus.

In addition to Appreciative Inquiry, we reviewed, at the express request of CAFOD, ten pre-established criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, participation, participation of women, consistency, impact, feasibility, learning, and the role of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church (Catholic Social Teaching or CST). We also evaluated the indicators in each of the partner cooperation agreements.

To evaluate the programme, 14 projects with nine partners were reviewed in four countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

The evaluation used the following steps:

- a) Review of existing secondary information: Programme documents, agreements for projects, periodic reports, previous evaluations, among others.
- b) Joint planning between CAFOD and evaluation team.
- c) Outreach and planning coordination with the partners in each country.
- d) A round of fieldwork in each country, with each project, partner and with local actors identified by the partners.
- e) Information processing and sending the draft report document for feedback from CAFOD and partners.
- f) A round of feedback in each country with each partner.
- g) Integration of the feedback into the next report version.
- h) Preparation and submission of the final report of the evaluation.

As a way to facilitate practical and quick reading of the evaluation, we decided to start this document with the conclusions, and in them try to summarise the main findings and lessons. This is the section of the document is organized into nine sub-sections:

1. Each assessed thematic organised by country and partner
2. Relationship between CAFOD and partners
3. The organisation of local actors
4. The participation of women
5. Sustainable livelihoods

6. Food security, market development and analysis
7. Risk management
8. Actors and alliances
9. Knowledge management

The next section looks at our recommendations. This summary only presents these two sections. In the full evaluation we include another chapter where we present the findings in a much more detailed and illustrated manner, both in general and case-by-case, indicating whether these cases represent special significance. This chapter is also broken down into sub-sections: the first assesses compliance with the criteria, the second assesses the phases of Appreciative Inquiry, and the third assesses compliance indicators by qualitative assessment and comparative analysis.

Two large attachments were added as separate files outside the body of the main report: a file in Word (Annex No. 1: Compliance Indicators) and another in Excel (Annex No. 2: Comparative analysis of compliance indicators). In support of the claims made in the document evaluation report, we included additional annexes of individual evaluation activities (interviews) and collective evaluation activities.

Conclusions

From a qualitative point of view, the Sustainable Livelihoods and Risk Management programme has met its results toward achieving its goals based on the commitment between CAFOD and partner organisations, and between them and the target populations participating in the different countries. For the people consulted, this programme has meant effort, learning, commitment, hope, struggle, sacrifice, satisfaction, self-esteem, participation and exchange.

The emphasis around the family and, within this, the participation of women and youth, has combined traditional wisdom with new energy, enabling the continuity of social works built through community actions in each project. It should facilitate the development of a vision and strategy for gender equality that incorporates the worldview of the groups, considers the perspectives of indigenous peoples, and is in harmony with full rights for all individuals, particularly women, youth and children.

Thematic breakdown by country and partner

Guatemala: Access to water; food security and sovereignty; gender strategies related to the family; natural and human risk; political polarisation.

Parroquia La Natividad

- Strengthening education for life
- Training and promotion of organic agriculture and self-sustaining
- Diversified gardens as an approach to food security
- Human-made risks

Diocesan Caritas of Quiché

- Water and environmental health
- Food security and sovereignty
- Human-made risks

El Salvador: Uncertainty over land, food and citizenship; marketing strategies; natural and human risk; political polarisation.

Jesuit Development Service

- Advocacy for greater access to land

- Local economic initiatives with market connections
- Sustainable and organic agriculture, home cultivation with a diversified approach to food security
- Risk management planning

Honduras: Access to land; social insecurity; state engagement; threat of mining and palm oil plantations; natural and human-made risk.

ERIC

- Food security and sovereignty
- Strengthening risk management
- Organic waste management
- Communication and dissemination of knowledge

Red Comal

- Market connections
- Food security and sovereignty
- Transfer of ownership of the sugar cane processing plant

CEHPRODEC

- Access to water (reservoirs)
- Food security and sovereignty
- Sustainable agriculture
- Strengthen home and community gardens
- Market connections
- Management of natural and human-made risk

Nicaragua: Organisational strengthening; food security and sovereignty; greater access to drinking water; risk management.

Juan XXIII Foundation

- Food security and sovereignty (family land plots and sustainable economic initiatives)
- Strengthening cooperative organisational development
- Natural and human-made risks (burnings)

Diocesan Caritas of Jinotega

- Increased access to water (for human consumption and for production [reservoirs])
- Food security and sovereignty
- Gardens and sustainable agriculture
- Reforestation
- Natural and human-made risks (burnings)

ASOMUPRO

- Increased access to water and hygiene practices (for human consumption and for production [reservoirs])
- Food security and sovereignty
- Livestock and beekeeping economic initiatives
- Gardens and sustainable agriculture
- Reforestation
- Natural and human-made risks (burnings)

Relationship between CAFOD and partners

This relationship has been multifaceted and in some cases contradictory.

1. For some organisations, CAFOD is a highly flexible agency, ready and respectful in negotiating projects, approaches and methods.
2. Others perceive a tendency to define vertically topics such as:
 - i. Risk management – began with a homogeneous approach that has not yet managed to adapt to each group's own particularities, and that still faces challenges in terms of overcoming the "emergency-centric" vision and becoming more integrated between risks from natural phenomena and social risks, such as poverty.
 - ii. A gender approach based on bilateral relations between men and women arising from a Western worldview, and not grounded in the concept of family as used by the indigenous peoples of Guatemala.
 - iii. Answering the question whether it is valid to define the participating groups as the "poorest of the poor", or should the programme define subjects as having potential and resilience to move towards overcoming poverty and, more important, to act as agents of change in their own environment?

We identified institutional constraints due to contract arrangements and decision-making processes with partners, specifically regarding the acceptance by CAFOD for changes to indicators and/or results definitions.

However, in general terms the relationship of CAFOD with partners and local stakeholders was perceived by the consultant team as very constructive, democratic and flexible, without jeopardising the contractual rules or the principles and values of each party involved. Collective and individual activities with actors supported this perception and was recurrently confirmed.

The organisation of local actors

Key for the excellent programmatic relationship between CAFOD and partners has to do with the situation of local actors. The embedded nature of many groups within their communities and links to the partners strengthened individuals' participation during the programme, whether the group represented a geographic community, municipal level, wider territorial level, unions, sector interests, indigenous people, religious groups, etc.

Such a condition works positively in several ways:

- Gives a sense of belonging;
- Puts emphasis on enabling capacity;
- Creates efficiencies in the use of resources;
- And, above all, enables design of strategies that facilitate the sustainability of initiatives once the international funding ends.

In all consulted cases, though to a lesser degree among leaders in the dry zone of Jinotega, local actors showed confidence in their ability to continue after programme end through their accumulated and multiplied abilities as centred within their organisations.

The participation of women

Women have been a central subject during programme development: as leaders and as decision makers in their communities, in collective organisations such as cooperatives, economic initiative groups and as individuals subject to proposed changes.

Evidence that demonstrates the degree to which women have been empowered, and reflecting the changing mentality about women's place, due to the programme can be seen in the following quotations:

- Esminda Alonso, president of the cooperative *Cooperativa Multisectorial Sol de Libertad* of Ciudad Dario, Nicaragua, refers her election as one of her greatest satisfactions since there were also many men. She is prepared to achieve her goals and give her utmost to her new role, despite her husband's displeasure that she would be absent for almost a week at meetings. Her advice to him was to join her in membership of the cooperative to which he agreed.
- Johana Luna, who was re-elected as treasurer in her cooperative, expressed how much she learned and how she will benefit from her accumulated experience from participating in the programme. She can now better appreciate the importance of her organisation, because it is "not the same to go it alone compared to acting as a group under the cooperative's name".
- Blanca Martinez, of Canton Puentecito in Guaymango, expresses the change in her life since the Jesuit Development Service came and proposed that they organise themselves to farm sustainably; they now have a diversified plot over an acre with a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, poultry, tilapia, pigs and bananas, among other items. She is part of a saving and lending group, and sells food. The land belongs to herself and her husband.
- Women from the municipality of Progreso, Honduras, referred to the importance of radio to disseminate experiences; through it, they have felt encouraged and have better integrated within their organisations. The radio drew their attention to other women's groups with accumulated knowledge, to coordinate activities and build alliances, without fear of intimidation and threats, because they have understood that without organisation and commitment it is difficult to succeed.
- Indigenous women of Santa María de Chiquimula, Guatemala, shared:
 - I decided to study at the Popol Ja Centre because, besides the basic instruction, I learned a trade (carpentry) to improve my income.
 - I like to learning how to use medicinal plants, study botany and chemistry, produce medicines and opening my pharmacy.
 - My best achievement is to produce plants that I use in the daily feeding of my family; I can save and share with other women in my community. With family home gardens we have managed to meet the goals of weight and height (vis-à-vis children's nutrition).

A different situation occurs in indigenous communities in Guatemala, where the chauvinism is so internalised that many women refuse to participate just because they are women, or because they are suffering the highest rate of illiteracy and poor command of the Spanish language. However, at the Popol Ja Centre in Santa Maria Chiquimula, there is greater enrolment of women, though more men finish their education because parents say women don't need to continue studying and should instead look for a husband. Changes in gender equality are observed more in youth; however, one elderly indigenous man did say that not all they have learned from their ancestors is necessarily good and it is time to undo the evil, in reference to the discrimination of women.

Sustainable livelihoods

This component of the programme is the most taken up by partners and local actors, especially if we consider that, in one way or another, livelihoods has been an inseparable part of the challenges faced in their daily lives in the four countries.

The central contribution of the programme is that now, people are re-thinking and re-designing conceptually and empirically the challenge of living in harmony with nature. The perspective is shifting to take only what is needed and to minimise the inevitable damage that arises from human existence. As Dona Blanca, from Puentecito, El Salvador, says "it means un-learning the bad and re-learning the cultural heritage of our ancestors." The response has been about searching and learning, trial and error, and the sharing of knowledge. Capacity-building activities on new means of production played a special role in achieving this, especially given the message of how production must be integrated within a greater system.

In accordance with our findings, initiatives arising from the livelihoods component have been developed with different degrees of ownership and success based on the reality of partners and local stakeholders:

1. The diversification of plots as a food security strategy, generating marketable surpluses and biodiversity protection, has had excellent results in almost all territories. The clearest commitment for women is oriented towards vegetables, fruits, squash, medicinal plants, fish, small livestock and, to a lesser extent, basic grains; i.e. the focus is on food security of the family and diversification of products. Men are more focused on traditional production oriented towards selling surplus cash crops.
2. Protection works for soil and water, such as terraces, contour lines, hedgerows, water harvesting, micro-irrigation systems, reforestation, were less enthusiastically taken up in some instances. Where it has been it has been taken up, these have been done enthusiastically. For people in the dry zone of Jinotega there is very visible positive impact from the construction of water reservoirs which should be considered as a separate case to other land management activities. This is because of the existing drought situation in Central America and climate change, effects of which will likely become more pronounced with time.
3. In cases such as El Salvador, the limited access to land ownership reduces the possibility of appropriation of soil and water protection work. When such works are established on rented land, the risk is that, once in operation, the land owner will force the renter onto a new, unimproved piece of land to re-start the work again for free.
4. There is general adoption of eco-friendly technologies such as the production of bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides and use of native seeds.
5. Under the Sustainable Livelihoods banner, various economic initiatives began such as construction and operation of grain silos (to mediate against grain prices and for food security), artisanal food and beverage production, artisanal construction of baskets, and the production of soaps and shampoos. In these cases, despite the relevance of these initiatives, we detected an important issue with the difficulty actors faced connecting to the market. This lack of connectivity prevents increasing the scale of production for viable returns, resulting in production patterns where goods are sold to family and neighbours and only on demand. There is a risk that production does not become a regular business in communities, becoming instead an occasional activity of artisanal skills.

Some economic activities deserve greater attention for their success:

- i. Beekeeping, though a recent introduction, has been successful and is seeing growing momentum among women of Jícaro (ASOMUPRO). Good understanding of the practical skills, need to conform with institutional health norms and need to connect with the market to ensure profitability.
 - ii. Pig rearing, driven by the same ASOMUPRO women members, has seen early success in breeding but not yet much progress on processing initiatives to add value and reach markets beyond the community. This experience was similar in all visited territories, regardless of whether the item produced differs (e.g. poultry, aquaculture, fruit.)
 - iii. Small animal husbandry, as part of diversified food production for nutritional security, facilitates the consumption of animal protein and generates surpluses that enhance the economic empowerment of women relative to their male partners. In general, greater systemic integration of livestock, agricultural and forestry production facilitates better quality food for the whole family, and the ability to sell surplus for profit in order to meet other needs.
6. In cases of very poor rural families, production in diversified plots usually falls to women because the men go out to sell their labour to other agricultural organisations or urban services. This has meant higher levels of economic independence and empowerment for women in the family.
7. An emblematic and controversial economic initiative is the granulated brown sugar plant, which integrates the agricultural production of sugar cane with industrial processing and marketing of sugar. Despite other issues, we believe that this example is the epitome of the purpose of the Sustainable Livelihoods component since integrates the entire business cycle: primary, secondary and tertiary.

Given this example's complexity and richness, it is examined separately from this evaluation in the final assessment of HON070 project and a case study.

Food security, market development and analysis

Although the market is part of the Sustainable Livelihoods component, we wanted to open this small section in order to highlight the particularity of a debate that underlies the initiatives in all projects visited.

The partners are generally progressive organisations trying to develop alternative pathways to those imposed by the market. They are promoting responsible consumption while seeking fair prices for producers and consumers. There is a disjointed connected between these and the operating reality of their environment for which, at least to date, there is no clear solution:

- a) Safe production, recovery of traditional forms of production, protection of genetic heritage (native seed), responsible consumption and fair trade (including barter) as a function of food security.
- b) Increased productivity through use of industrial products (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides), use of certified improved seed, generating marketable surplus to increase revenue, adoption of market rules.

The great challenge for this work, present and future, is the market. For all the initiatives promoted by the 14 projects, the lack of a clear connection with the market tends to limit the ability to scale production to levels that would strengthen the position of producers to better respond to demand and prices.

It is partly because the issue was not considered enough, and partly because there are other driving forces that affect the market. The amount of surplus or the ability to produce new products is limited to the local area, which affects the ability to scale up production and as a result significantly increase family income. The concept of food security and sovereignty should not be contradictory to linking with the market. A broad and open debate is necessary to define joined up approaches.

Risk management

Risk Management is a component of central importance for the programme; its momentum, however, does not enjoy uniform understanding and ownership, since it is a relatively new topic and its focus still under debate. Thus, we encountered various approaches to risk management:

1. Those for whom risk management still refers exclusively to the response to emergency situations caused mainly by weather. We find here an emphasis almost exclusively focused on the number of risk maps and resource inventories made (when there are any) and a disconnect between risk management and the Sustainable Livelihoods theme.
2. Those who understand risk as arising from multi-causal situations and who link it closely with the Sustainable Livelihoods component around negative factors such as food insecurity, extreme poverty, violence and insecurity, inequality of relations (gender, age, ethnic, etc.), the complicity of States with transnational corporations, the partisanship of public policy, political polarisation of our societies, institutional weakness and organised violence. With this approach it is more evident that a macro meteorological phenomenon such as climate change has, and will have, determining consequences on human life, in particular for smallholder farmers and indigenous people.
3. Those for whom risk management is an issue derived from the institutional vision of CAFOD and that partners need to integrate into their work if they are to access funds for initiatives they consider most urgent (e.g. water and sanitation, productive diversity, rescue of traditional forms of production, economic initiatives oriented towards increasing family income, traditional medicine, etc.) This perspective is strongest with those who work with communities and actors where the common Central American meteorological impacts are not felt strongly or recurrently.
4. There are those who have incorporated risk management as an essential part of their ways of working, whether or not the focus is mostly on climate phenomena. These tend to be local actors and partners in areas very vulnerable to dramatic and recurring events such as floods, droughts, hurricanes, landslides and earthquakes, and also those actors and partners in territories where extractive industries operate mining and hydroelectric projects in forest areas.
5. The approach and practice of risk management is also strongly influenced by the attitude of States, particularly governments. In Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, although there are institutions and agencies with clear mandates for such management, involvement in disaster and risk management is very low and is usually restricted to emergency response. There isn't strong promotion of stable community levels of organisation for response, quality

of training or equipment. We find that if funding is not allocated for institutional and operational components, structures will fail over time or remain weak. At the other end of the spectrum, in Nicaragua the State is very actively involved in organising, training and equipping structures for risk management at all levels, which, added to the efforts of civil society, gives such structures stable operation and acceptable vertical and horizontal coordination, and an active prevention system. Thus, CAFOD should take this into consideration when addressing risk management according to each country.

Actors and alliances

In all the examples we noted how partners and local actors consider a system of working in alliance an indispensable condition to ensure the success of the initiatives. This conviction was shown in all projects, highlighting specific experiences of note:

- Powerful resources such as community radio stations are playing an important role in generating a sense of belonging, in the development of a growing organisational culture, in generating greater awareness of risk management and learning new patterns of production, and in the public policy. Radio Copinula, Radio Progreso and Community Radio Red Comal have concentrated their efforts in promoting organisation for risk management, functioning not only as centres of influence but also for coordination.
- In El Salvador, an interesting relationship with the Central American University was developed which could evolve into a pilot project to begin a consortium with their counterparts in the rest of the region. This has allowed joint research to develop based on the use of students in related careers (social economics, industrial engineering, communications) to do fieldwork, theoretical and methodological training, plus capacity building work.
- Although in all cases studied, the partner organisations and organised local actors have sought alliances and to coordinate with institutions linked to risk management and agricultural production, these efforts have had their best results in the case of Nicaragua. In this country there is greater receptivity of the authorities and there is a better national, municipal and territorial coordination on the subject of risk management.
- All partner organisations have sought alliances with civil society organisations that agree with their approaches and methodologies. In addition, all establish or seek to establish relations with others to enrich their work.

Knowledge management

CAFOD has been proactive in creating spaces for knowledge management, and proof of this is the promotion of valuable activities such as experience exchanges, an Internet forum and platform, all recognised by the partners as important spaces for learning and mutual enrichment. Local actors who have participated in such spaces highlight their practical importance and ask for more of this kind of initiative which facilitates horizontal learning, promotes democratic relations among actors, and facilitates the adoption and adaptation of technology due to the comprehensibility of the language used.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the following recommendations are made for future action under the programme.

1. With the proven value of knowledge management in the regional context, the platform can be used in a more systematic and orderly manner to the extent that CAFOD and partners take a more proactive role and use the space for analysis and discussion, learning and feedback, for informed dialogue and the search for solutions. Better use the forum should be made to increase sharing of learning, establish thematic filters and for coordination of schedules and calendars. We suggest the same for any forum and experience sharing activities.
2. Make better use of public spaces to generate opinion and knowledge, such as Radio Copinula, Radio Progreso and Radio Comal Community Network, to enhance the role of youth and integrate them as an intrinsic part of risk management activities.
3. Improve proactive debate for issues on which there is still no consensus, such as:
 - a. The contradictions between traditional markets, alternative markets and fair trade, producing at a scale to generate surpluses, the adoption of safe practices, product marketing and branding, so that the Sustainable Livelihoods component goes beyond only food security and basic needs. We suggest studying the experiences like the Colectiva Feminista in El Salvador and Red COMAL in Honduras. They have achieved success in marketing their products because they collect them from around the country (larger amount to trade), ensure standard quality and safety and have legally registered as needed. These experiences indicate the difficulty to successfully market products if solitary groups work outside networks.
 - b. The contradiction between the moral and ethical opposition to extractive industries for its negative effects on natural resources and the health of populations, against the immediate need of income by the same people. Local actors perceive mining as important for supporting the local economy through direct and indirect jobs, trade facilitation and provision of services.
 - c. The difference in approaches to gender relations in societies that are culturally Westernized, and use nuclear family constructs (comprising a mother, father and children), and placing importance on the rights of the individual versus the reality of indigenous peoples, where collective vision and a network of relationships and interdependencies is broader and centred around the family, not in the individual.

This same issue is particularly important when it comes to promoting the participation of indigenous women in initiatives supported by projects. One must always take into account the structural constraints in societies, as among indigenous people illiteracy it is higher among women, and most of them - save traders who go to town to sell - do not speak Spanish.
 - d. Promote a debate on risk management, as there is not a unified level of ownership or approach. It is important to move towards a comprehensive vision. Integrate cultural elements that influence, for better or worse, the risks.

4. Evaluate very promptly the effect of a valuable initiative given the reality of climate change: saving and harvesting of water. Reservoirs begun in the dry zone of Jinotega today are having a very important role on drought impacts. Needs experienced during this cyclical weather opportunity should be taken advantage of as it will eventually become regular. Evaluate now where to locate structures, how much water to capture, required associated technologies, etc. The need for these initiatives will become increasingly necessary over time.
5. For the cases of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, a major challenge to respond to is the demand for access to land, on which rests a significant burden for ensuring sustainability of livelihoods interventions. Experiences accumulated by organisations such as ODESAR in Matagalpa, Nicaragua, could serve as a basis for generating ideas and sharing knowledge.
6. Better articulate indicators for the programme and projects, conduct studies for baseline measurement, and avoid proposing indicators whose compliance parameters transcend the partner's ability.