

**SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE AND PROFITABLE AGRICULTURE:
LESSONS LEARNED FROM MID-TERM REVIEW OF
CLUSA/NRMP AND WVIAP IN EASTERN PROVINCE, ZAMBIA**

Prepared by

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome
CLUSA	Cooperative League of the USA
CLUSA/NRMP	CLUSA/ Natural resources Management Programme
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
HIV	Human Immuno Virus
IFT	Improved Fallow Technology
JFM	Joint Forest Management
JFMP	Joint Forest Management Plan
LFs	Lead Farmers
POTC	Producer Owned Trading Company
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RGBs	Rural Group Businesses
SO	Strategic Objective
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Scientists
USAID	United states Agency for International development
VRMAC	Village Resources Management Area Committee
WVIAP	World Vision Integrated Agro-forestry Project

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INTRODUCTION

Brief Description of the Eastern Province

Located between 10 – 15 degrees South Latitude and 30 – 33 degrees East Longitude, Eastern Province covers an area of about 70,000 square kilometers and its population was estimated at 1, 300, 973 in 2000 (CSO 2001). It has an estimated farming population of 151,300 farm families with a total crop area of 245,000 hectares of which about 58% is ploughed by hand (MAFF, 1999).

The province has two of its districts (Chama and Mambwe) in Agro-ecological Region I while the rest of the districts fall in Region II. Soil types range from Sandy loams to clay loams on the plateau (Region II), while the valley (Region I) consists of clay loams to silt. Rainfall ranges from 600 – 1000 mm and between 400 and 650 mm per annum in the respective regions.

Farming is the most widespread activity. The region is good for groundnuts and cotton production. Pressure on forests for agricultural land is increasing rapidly due to rapid population increase and declining soil fertility in cultivated lands. Thus there is great need for sustainable utilization/management of these miombo woodland-based forests.

Background to the Review

The purpose of this evaluation was to obtain quantitative evidence of investment impact on rural incomes and forest management (in the case of CLUSA/NRMP) and adoption of improved fallows. Where quantitative evidence is not available or relevant, qualitative descriptions of impacts and processes shall be provided.

The evaluation included assessing the impact of the project and identified ways to improve implementation and has, in this report, presented to USAID/Zambia Mission issues for consideration regarding the options whether to extend, expand or cut short the project.

The Specific objectives of the evaluation were:

1. Determine whether USAID investments are achieving their desired impact, why or why not.
2. Generate ideas on how the impact of USAID investments in CLUSA/NRMP and WVIAP activities can be improved, and
3. Generate ideas on how CLUSA/NRMP and WVIAP experiences can influence ongoing or future USAID and other institution investments in increasing rural incomes, improving food security, and managing natural resources.
4. Make recommendations to USAID/Zambia Mission for consideration whether to extend, expand or cut short the project.
5. Package relevant findings so that systematic or national level impact from evaluation lessons learned might be achieved with specific reference to the Zambian context.

Methodology of the Review

The evaluation covered Chipata and Katete districts for both the CLUSA/NRMP and WVIAP; Chadiza for WVIAP; and Mambwe and Petauke districts for the CLUSA/NRMP. Petauke is a new district that the program has extended into.

Project staff and their collaborators were interviewed and groups of farmers were also interviewed in focus group discussions, group meeting and/or as individual key informants. The review used the following tools to collect data:

- Reviewing relevant program documents such as periodic reports, annual reports, financial and other management process reports, etc.
- Focus group discussions (FGD) with beneficiaries
- In-depth interactive discussions with community leaders, professional staff of the two projects and collaborative agencies
- Case studies of different categories of farmers
- Field visits to activity sites (Observations & transect walks).

The data collected using PRA was complemented by an individual household questionnaire. The data from questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS), while qualitative data was analyzed for content.

KEY FINDINGS

Project Implementation

The main issues found regarding the implementation of the 2 projects are:

- Though both projects were initiated by the implementing agencies, target communities have appreciated their activities as these have been seen to be appropriately addressing their livelihood needs. These needs were prioritized as increased access to improved farming technologies (39%); activities aimed at general improving of their well-being (29%); enhancing food security (16%); and increased marketing and credit provision opportunities at 9% and 7% respectively.
- Projects having a solid and effective structure on the ground with appropriately qualified staff for effecting activities focused on farmer groups are more likely to be successfully implemented and achieve planned targets. This was found to be more so for WVIAP than CLUSA/NRMP. Farmer to farmer transfer of improved technology was found to be efficient and cost effective as technology messages reached a greater number of farmers in a more sustainable way for the project. Efforts were made to make these structures facilitate farmers' adoption of improved technologies through for example facilitating the acquisition of credit and input and output markets in a way which is sustainable beyond project life.
- Late disbursement of funds in a way delayed activities in project implementation especially in the first year of implementation of the WVIAP. This was however overcome shortly afterwards.
- Strategic partnership with other relevant organisations/stakeholders and the private sector in technology generation and transfer, input delivery and produce marketing enhanced efficiency and sustainability of project activities.
- In the case of natural resources management efforts were made to raise resource users' awareness of deforestation and sustainable utilisation of these resources in order to encourage them be partners in developing models for community-based forest management. This was in order to make the target communities more responsive to the idea of Joint Forestry Management (JFM). However, some traditional authorities were not agreeable to some fundamental principle of these plans such as relocating forest squatters elsewhere.

Project Performance and Impact

With regard to project performance and impact, it was found that:

- Inability to recruit enough project membership of target communities greatly hindered the achievement of project targets, especially for CLUSA/NRMP due to employing of strategies for credit recovery which were unattractive to good performing farmers. The credit policy has been changed to suit the farmers in order to recruit more. In addition, marketing activities have been put under the Producer Owned Trading Company (POTC)

which has started buying produce from non CLUSA farmers. This is in order to increase the volume of marketed produce and meet its current orders which are, for example, in excess of 600 tons of groundnuts. The POTC has also formed a partnership with Farmers' Friend, a private company involved in input and output marketing, to enhance sustainability beyond project life. Farmers' Friend does not, otherwise, currently have the capacity to take over the functions of the POTC.

- There have been significant indications of impact, for both projects, on increased food security due to improved crop productivity arising from readily and timely availability of inputs, exposure to improved methods of farming especially the low input sustainable agriculture in agroforestry and conservation farming which farmers have readily adopted, improved marketing opportunities, and by taking part in group businesses (including farming) which is more profitable as it also reduces transaction costs. Beneficiaries also mentioned increases in income through selling of cash crops, though to a less extent.
- The training that the farmers have received through these projects has changed them a lot and are happy with the newly acquired technologies in farming and appreciate the fact that farming is a business. Some of the specific skills learnt by the target population include record keeping, business management, conservation farming, improved fallow technologies (IFTs), ability to read and write and HIV/AIDS facts. As a result of the project, farmers are now in the forefront looking for additional information in agricultural related issues.
- The project staff also now have increased knowledge of not only improved methods of sustainable agriculture production and sustainable forestry management but also of overall agricultural extension methodologies. This is so because at inception, project staff underwent a lot of appropriate hands-on training in agriculture and forestry (in the case of CLUSA/NRMP) in readiness for the task ahead. In the case of WVIAP, some farmers were trained as lead and contact farmers (LFs and CFs) to spearhead farmer to farmer technology transfer at the community level while CLUSA/NRMP trained a few crop specific monitors to train farmers in the management of each specific crop.
- Among community groups, there is increased interest to source for knowledge and other services being provided by the projects. Farmers in areas adjacent to project areas showed appreciation of what their neighbours were learning and yearned for similar services for them.
- In terms of empowerment, farmers are participating in the various aspects of the projects and thus being empowered through groups. Membership to these groups is the farmer's choice and acceptance of the individual farmers by the groups.
- In terms of gender, there are more men participating than are women. While it is likely that there were more women undertaking activities such as the cultivation of crops under men's benefits, e.g. credit, from the projects women who are married did find it more difficult to obtain credit than those who are not in marriage. In Mambwe district, Chief Jumbe's area, many of the women who attended the meeting with the review team were not in marriage. Married women keep away from activities that have implications to farmland use. They leave it to their husbands, who control access to their matrimonial village land.

- The other reason for less participation of women in program activities, is that illiteracy levels are higher among women than it is among men. To this effect the functional literacy component of CLUSA/NRMP has adopted a positive discrimination policy to enrol more women (80%) in the classes.
- Though what was expected of the Forestry Component of the CLUSA/NRMP after two years of project activities has not fully materialised, the project has made significant strides in raising forest users' awareness of deforestation and sustainable management issues; building capacity of local Forestry Department staff in forest management skills; and developing models for community-based forest management. The project has contributed to better forestry management practices through Village Resource Management Area Committees (VRMACs); organisation and training of user groups; production of forest management plans; and use of appropriate technology in the mapping and assessment/inventory of forest resources.
- Implementation of this component has, however, been hampered by encroachment of forests by squatters; uncooperative traditional leaders; and inability by the Forestry Department to respond quickly on project matters requiring their attention.

LESSONS LEARNED

Food Security

From these projects it has been learned that the importance of having an effective and efficient input and output marketing systems in increasing productivity and hence household food security and income can not be over emphasised. The need has also been noted that this has to go hand in hand with an efficient and cost effective system of improved technology (low input sustainable agriculture) transfer to the farmers who need to be assisted in assimilating and adopting these technology through enhancing their ability to read and write by way of functional adult literacy.

Rural Incomes

In addition to increased income through the marketing of surplus produce resulting from the above, cash cropping and non-farm rural businesses (which can be forestry based) need to be promoted/encouraged as well for the purposes of raising rural incomes to meet non-food household expenses. This needs to be facilitated with linkages to input and out markets accompanied by provision of technical knowledge and seed capital where appropriate. The POTC is a good thing that has so far happened to the CLUSA program in Eastern Province. It is unfortunate that this out grower approach faced a number of implementation problems as some farmer opted to leave the programme due to group responsibility of loans. The amount of crop marketed is directly related to the number of farmers in the program. As the number of farmers increase, the amount of crop marketed will also increase. In addition, the project is now beginning to market crops from other NGOs and non CLUSA farmers which should significantly increase the amount of crop marketed.

Increases in household income would reduce pressure to sell food crops and income raised could be used to purchase food items in case of poor production of food crops. Increased food security and income under out-grower schemes above would also help reduce pressure in exploiting endangered forests for those communities living around such forests.

Sustainable Utilisation and management of Natural Resources

For sustainable natural resource utilisation, it has been learned that:

- (a) Resource users and their leaders need to be involved in processes to develop Joint Forestry Management Plans right from the start in order to avoid cases such as a chief's last minute refusal to append his signature to the JFMP
- (b) Squatters need to be moved away from gazetted forest areas before plans for Joint Forest Management are made in order to avoid problems of their evacuation at the point of implementing the JFM plans
- (c) Proper assessment of an area intended to be declared as a JFM area needs to be done in order to minimise potential hurdles in the implementation process
- (d) Arrangements to articulate policy issues at Ministry of Forestry level in Lusaka to minimise cost and time lag in communication. Perhaps there is need for USAID to become more involved at this level

- (e) The JFM process needs to be decentralised and simplified in order to shorten the long time it has been taking the project from getting a joint forest management plan written with communities and the approval of the plan in Lusaka.
- (f) To develop realistic project goals and objectives (including targets) in the initial planning stage, a clear problem identification backed by factual concrete information of an area. It will be necessary to get a clear picture of the physical, human and environmental setting of the intended area for project activities. The literature review should be followed by a physical inspection of the area and conducting a quick run down survey.

Concluding Remarks

All in all the projects are breaking new and unique ground in Zambia and the sub-region as a whole. The projects initially focused on developing and refining strategies/methodologies unique to the socio-economic situation of the target areas. At maturity, they will serve as models for other areas in the country and the sub-region requiring increased food security and rural incomes. It is for this reason that synthesis and documentation of the projects' processes and experiences for the benefit of other would be implementers is strongly recommended.