

Background

The SAHAS project was primarily focused on children and their nutrition status and empowering women and girls to revive their livelihood destroyed by the earthquake in a better way and enhance their understanding of DRR risk mitigation. The 36 months project (July 2017 to June 2020) was implemented by two local partners, i.e., UN Nepal Gorkha and Action Nepal Dhading.

Center for Research on Education Health and Social Science (CREHSS) carried out this evaluation for DCA Nepal from September to October 2020.

Objectives

The primary purpose of the evaluation was to assess the overall impact of the project intervention within the timeframe based on OECD DAC criteria (Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impacts, and Sustainability of Impacts).

Methodology

The study was cross-sectional in design and used both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection. The study was conducted in Gorkha and Dhading with the help of two local partners of DCA, i.e., UN Nepal Gorkha and Action Nepal Dhading. Data from Project documents and findings from surveys were used as a quantitative method. Furthermore, as qualitative techniques, Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and Key Informant Interview (KII) guidelines were developed based on OECD DAC criteria. A total of 24 FGDs and 18 Key informant interviews were conducted.

Findings

Context

The country's transition to a federal structure of government created an enabling environment for the overall operation of the project. The project team got the opportunity for frequent and effective interaction with local level government.

The co-ordination and communication procedures were easier and more fruitful. Likewise, frequent consultation with the local government helped in obtaining constructive feedback and suggestions.

"Co-ordination with Local bodies and representatives of political parties provided a favorable environment for the conduction of the project."

-Ward chairperson, Dhading

Similarly, some environmental and social factors influenced the project operations, such as lack of proper transportation facilities, social functions and rituals, and the emergence of the COVID pandemic.

Relevance

The project was relevant in the national context because the project's objectives were consistent with the government priorities and programs. Similarly, sufficient efforts were made to ensure that project activity was consistent with community people's needs and problems. Initially, a survey was done before proposal development to finding out the situation and needs of implementing area. In addition to this, a baseline survey was carried out at the initial phase of the project to gather the information on the situation of the implementing area. The major focus of the project was women and children. Similarly, the project also fostered the inclusion of marginalized groups of people like the Chepang community, differently-abled persons, etc., who were the neediest people.

"In our community, most of the local residents are Chepangs. The project's benefits were mostly targeted to help and support the Chepang community, especially poor and needy groups, through various livelihood activities.

-Ward Member, Benighat, Dhading

Efficiency

The project was able to achieve maximum benefit with little cost. The contribution and active participation of community people and efficient use of available resources helped minimize the project's expense. For instance, local people actively participated in construction-related activities to support the labor works. Similarly, although the project's activities were incredibly diverse in nature, involving nutrition, agriculture, and construction, the staff's sincerity and dedication contributed to the project's successful operation. On the other hand, human resource management for construction-related works was

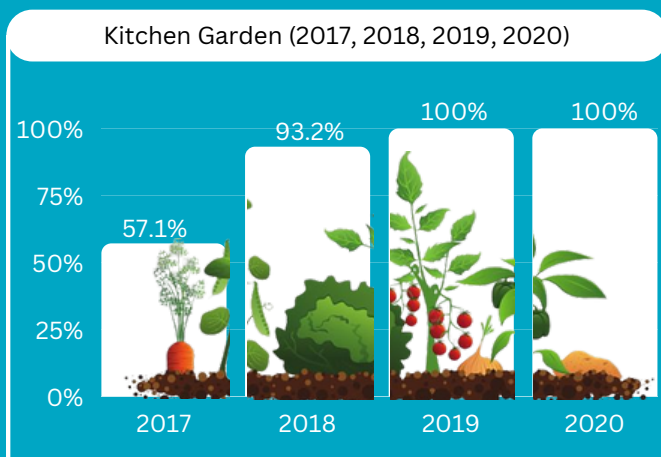
not good. Insufficient human resources (project staffs) available for construction and engineering created an obstacle for operation. It is because there was only one engineering staff available for both the districts.

"Human resources for constructing community building was not managed by Action Nepal. When we asked for help from the rural municipality, they did not agree to help first. Later, after collecting written evidence from the community people and project's staffs, rural municipality supported us by arranging human resources."

-Infrastructure committee representative, Dhading

Effectiveness

The project made remarkable achievements as per the information from different types of stakeholders. The knowledge and skills of modern agricultural techniques contributed to increasing agricultural production, resulting in increased food sufficiency and establishing a kitchen garden that made nutritious and healthy food items easily accessible at everyone's home.

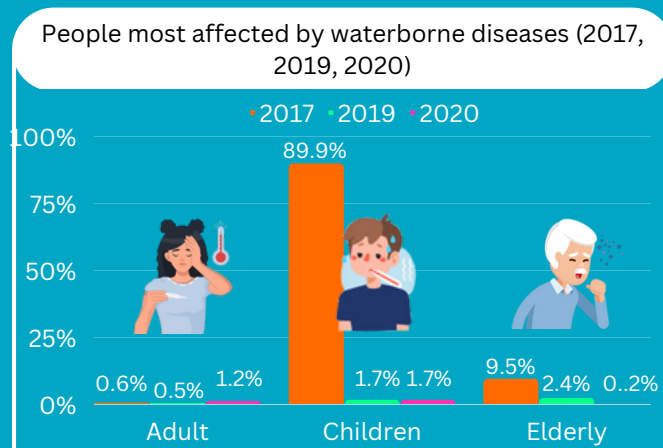


In regards to school nutrition and sanitation, teachers were trained in instructing children on health and sanitation practices, disaster preparedness at home and school, environment protection, healthy behavior, moral education, and additional classes were taken by teachers in these issues, which were found to be very fruitful. Similarly, the establishment of multipurpose community building had been very helpful in managing market chains of the various products, provision of employment, conducting joint meetings, and various discussions and meetings.

"Collection center has helped in sales and distribution of our agricultural production, but it is far from our community which has caused difficulties for us to reach there"

-KI HH Gorkha.

The quantitative findings are also consistent with the qualitative information. The proportion of children affected by water-borne disease decreased sharply from 90% in 2017 to 2% in 2020.



Commercial farming practices had also increased due to training on improved farming techniques like tunnel farming, drip irrigation, use of improved seeds, organic pesticides, etc. The awareness program on DRR had increased concerns and focused on various disaster risk reduction strategies. The project also helped increase access to drinking water through the "One home, one-tap" campaign, and drip irrigation was found beneficial in producing more vegetables and crops through efficient water use.

"Accessibility of water has reduced the difficulties faced while fetching water, which has also changed cleanliness pattern of the community also contributing to reducing the diseases and illness."

- MUS Group, Kamidada, Gorkha

Similarly, the establishment and strengthening of cooperatives had enabled people to obtain the loan at the low-interest rate.

"People no longer should face difficulties to get a loan with high interest from a bank or person which was only possible due to availability of cooperatives."

- Community Infrastructure Representative, Gorkha

Sustainability

SAHAS project ensured local ownership by engaging key stakeholders and community members throughout all stages of the project, including design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The project was delivered in partnership with two local partner NGOs, focusing on building their organizational capacity beyond simply implementation. Local groups were empowered enough to hold government service providers accountable for the quality and quantity of services delivered to the community.

Impact and Changes

The project enabled people to practice improved farming techniques. Many people built their capacity and skills by adopting new agricultural methods that enhanced their knowledge and skills and increased agricultural production.

"Before the arrival of this project, we usually did farming's for our household purposes only but now we are doing commercial farming which has increased our income and thus improved our livelihood."

-Farmer, Dhading

The income generated ultimately contributed to uplift the status of people.

"The support from SAHAS projects like tunnel framing, training for making organic manure, poultry farming, tailoring and doko weaving training, construction of community infrastructures, and capital support for Dalit and ethnic minority group has helped to improve the livelihood of these people to a greater extent. They can now use this support to maintain and improve their life in the future."

- Stakeholder, Gorkha

Likewise, community people had their capacity enhanced through active involvement, discussion, and participation in different kinds of groups and committees.

"SAHAS project has helped enhance the capacity of community people through various training, meetings, interactions, and involvement in various groups."

-Principal, Tanglichowk

Women were more confident through active involvement, participation, and conduction of different health and awareness programs.

"Formation of mother groups and active participation in various community activities has also reduced gender discrimination in the community to some extent"

- Mother group member, Dhading

Partnership and co-ordination

Timely monitoring was done from DCA and partner NGO to ensure the quality of implementation, and feedback obtained from the monitoring was incorporated in the project operation as far as possible. Real time reporting was done which made reporting more convenient and less time-consuming for the project staff. DCA played the role of an excellent democratic partner rather than an authoritative donor as per the information from partner NGOs. So, there was sound collaboration and co-ordination between partners during implementation.

Challenges

Difficult topography and lack of transportation in some implementing area was a major challenge which was even more challenging during rainy seasons.

Insufficient human resources, especially construction and engineering staff.

Political influences

Lessons learned

Promising practices:

More community participation and stakeholder consultation can be very fruitful for the smooth implementation of the project.

Mobilization of mother's group for project implementation can be effective not only for the operation of the project but also for women empowerment.

MUS system was found effective enough and is highly replicable

The use of community infrastructures for multiple purposes was beneficial for making people's life more convenient.

The strengthening of cooperatives was advantageous to increase financial independence in the community.

Areas to be improved

- Efforts for sustainability were not sufficient.
- Management of community infrastructures was not adequate.
- Irrigation support in the community was also not adequate.

Conclusion

The findings of the study advocate that the SAHAS project was quite successful in achieving the intended outcomes. The evaluation based on DAC criteria showed that the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the project were satisfactory despite few areas for improvement. The major focus of the project was women, children, and marginalized communities.

The positive changes brought by the project were visible in both community and schools. In addition, to increase food sufficiency, the commercial farming practice increased due to training on improved farming techniques like tunnel farming, drip irrigation, use of improved seeds, organic pesticides, etc. As a result, farmers' production, income, livelihood, and quality of life were enhanced, which was a significant change. The project contributed to increasing access to drinking water, which was fruitful for saving time and efforts and increasing the cleanliness patterns in the households. The utility of multipurpose community building and the availability of low-interest loans also eased and improved community people's lives to a greater extent. The DRR awareness program also increased the level of knowledge of community people for disaster response measures. Similarly, school-based programs for sanitation and nutrition were beneficial to develop healthy habits among students. In addition to this, the active involvement, discussion, and participation in different kinds of groups and committees helped strengthen community people's capacity.

However, the project also had a few shortcomings related to human resource management, management of community infrastructures, efforts for sustainability, and its coverage of some activities.

Overall, the SAHAS project made remarkable achievements in changing the lives of community people especially, the marginalized groups of people, and hence is replicable in a similar context with few improvisations.

Recommendations

The findings suggest that insufficient project staffs were an obstacle during implementation as only one engineering staff was available for both districts. Hence, sufficient and proper human resource management should be done in future projects.

The beneficiaries consistently practiced monitoring and follow-up mechanisms to ensure that the skills learned through the project were lacking. Hence, upcoming interventions should also properly define mechanisms for monitoring the practices of beneficiaries to ensure sustainability.

The irrigation problem still existed in the community, although the project tried to address it to some extent. Hence, the coverage of irrigation should have been expanded so that the broader replication of improved agricultural practices becomes effective.

As per the information from key informants, the management of the infrastructures built by the project was not satisfactory in some of the places. Hence, proper management of these structures should be ensured for obtaining the maximum benefit and sustainability.

Many beneficiaries and stakeholders recommended expansion of the project's working area and coverage.

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