SPARC
Supporting Pastoralism
and Agriculture in Recurrent
and Protracted Crises

STRUCTURED SUMMARY

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN RESILIENCE-BUILDING PROJECTS CLOSED

Stories of change from Chad

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Motivation

Investments in climate change adaptation and climate resilience are being made with too much guesswork, because very little learning takes place after projects have closed. The contribution to resilience of projects can only be seen in the medium term, long after the projects have closed. Because of this we know little about how their theories of change work out, almost nothing about their medium to long-term impacts, thus we learn little about how best to support resilience.

Purpose

We went back to a project that had introduced climate-smart agriculture to see what had happened in the five years since the project closed. We looked at technical and institutional innovations introduced by the project, and how people managed these when left on their own, to draw lessons for future similar initiatives.

Approach and methods

We visited eight villages in Dar Sila, eastern Chad, where a project operated from 2015 to 2017. The project aimed to: improve agricultural production and increase its resilience to drought and climate change; improve nutrition through changed child feeding; improve water and sanitation; and promote gender equality.

We spoke to women and men (separately) about their experiences with the innovations introduced, and visited local markets to see how agricultural innovations had affected supplies in markets. Life today as compared to life before the project.

Lessons were drawn from each of six (selected) project components: (1) agricultural extension for climate-smart agriculture, (2) groups for vegetable or market gardening, (3) community grain banks for an informal safety net, (4) rural resource centres, (5) women's life-skills training, (6) village early-warning committees.

Findings

The project seems to have been well implemented: the relationship between the NGO and the villagers had been good; and the project overall had clearly had a positive impact, including in areas we did not study.

For the six components examined, some were successful – agricultural extension, community grain banks, and women's training were highly successful – others less so.

Interventions worked best when they helped people to better what they were already doing. For example, fruit tree cultivation spread rapidly; group farming did not; centres for collective learning (rural resource centres) collapsed meanwhile improved community institutions for mutual support thrived.

What succeeded and what has lasted is activity where the project works with the grain of local institutions — such as reciprocity in hard times. The project worked because it brought new technology and ideas to longstanding needs, as felt by villagers, who were thus organised and committed to supporting the project.

Where the project brought in (familiar) development blueprints for what outsiders imagine is community development — such as collective growing of vegetables — their ideas were quietly dropped once the project ended.

Some failures were predictable; but old lessons about rural development are being ignored.

Policy implications

Introduced changes which match local people's ways of thinking and behaving are more likely to take root. Care is needed before leaping to radical, 'transformative' change.

Interventions should focus on facilitating change and learning. Improving people's ability to source and use new information is more important than providing specific technical packages, which should not be the primary design consideration.

Working together with local people requires trust. Intervention design should avoid demanding more trust than can reasonably be expected. Similarly, change requires confidence and holding group leaders or local institutions to account even more so. Interventions should explicitly aim to reduce this confidence threshold.

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