

Evaluation of working with Model Couple Campaigners in Nepal (2018/2019)

Working with Model Couple Campaigners (MCC)

The partner organisation CAED (Centre for Agro-Ecology and Development) in the Nepal Country programme has been working in two projects (Karnali Livelihood Empowerment Programme (KLEP) and Women's Reproductive Rights Programme (WRRP) on gender in a transversal way with model couple campaigners (MCCs) as pillars of project activities. MCCs are an instrument to analyse different roles within families and are functioning as a starting point within communities to reflect on gender relationships. The idea is that the workload between man and woman is analysed together and afterwards shared in a more balanced way. Moreover decision making within households should happen in a more gender equal way and mutual respect become an important component of family life. This example of MCCs shall then spill over to other families within the community.

The evaluation: objectives and methodology

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the effectivity and impact of the two community development projects using the MCCs (KLEP and WRRP), both at household and community level, especially regarding gender relations. Elements of the MCCs should be identified that are particularly relevant for its effectivity and impact. The evaluation should also explore whether these elements should be disseminated throughout the Nepal Programme and/or in other Fastenopfer Country Programmes.

An evaluation of MCCs had so far not been done and the evaluation should give insights if the underlying hypothesis of the effect/impact of MCCs can be proved. Two general evaluation questions were formulated which were complemented by more concrete questions regarding the approach and the concrete changes at MCC and community level:

- a. What has actually changed in the MCCs life (as individual and as family)?
- b. Which of these changes could be spread out into the community?

This external evaluation was led by Tulasi Nepal, a sitting Board Member of CAED. He has been engaged in CAED's business from its establishment in different ways, from training facilitator to collaborator and evaluator. Before definitely defining on his engagement in this evaluation, a series of discussions between Fastenopfer and him were carried out regarding a potential conflict of interest. Considering his past engagement with CAED in various forms, Fastenopfer team, both in Switzerland and Nepal, recognized that his critical awareness of the issue and his self-critiquing position proven in the past allowed to do so.

A female Gender Expert, Rita Khatiwada, supported the lead evaluator. The evaluation team visited the field together and carried out various explorations including household surveys and interactive discussions. This assured different (gender) perspectives and allowed for decreasing biases.

Evaluation findings

At MCC level, the findings of the evaluation were the following:

1. The performance and impact of MCCs is different in different project regions. These differences can be explained by local circumstances but as well by the different functioning of CAED regional offices and the involvement of CNGOs (cooperating NGOs working at local level).
2. The Approach has empowered men and women equally in most cases and made a discussion on private and reproductive issues within the communities possible.
3. MCCs are a convincing vehicle, because they are following the premise to "walk the talk". In places where MCCs were selected from the most marginalized groups (Dalits, Janjati etc.) their influence has been

found to be even higher. The integration of a conscientization process into the capacity building of MCCs (perceiving themselves as a change agent) can be a vehicle to uphold their motivation.

4. The role of MCCs after phasing-out has to be reflected upon, defining especially the expectations towards MCCs after phasing-out. The fact that they were not given clear roles and responsibilities after phasing out led to an uncoordinated process. The connection of MCCs to Palikas and other relevant stakeholders would have been one important element to guarantee the continuation of their activities.
5. The MCC Approach is especially promising in societies where women's reproductive rights remain a social taboo.

At community level, the findings of the evaluation were the following:

1. In some project regions an impressive societal change has happened. People are aware of untouchability, menstrual hygiene and post-child birth care. But sons are still preferred to daughters.
2. With regard to agro-ecological practices (three crop cycle) there is nearly nothing left in the phased out regions.
3. Behaviours and attitudes have been changed to a great extent with regard to food habit, nutrition, equal treatment between sons and daughters and restrictions during menstruation, pregnancy and child birth.

Recommendations and response

The evaluation team recommended

- to pay more attention to the selection process of couples and to re-examine if remuneration really is the best incentive to find and motivate couples to engage;
- to provide more coaching and mentoring to the couples on how to deal with local stakeholders and how to coordinate and cooperate with local authorities;
- to develop space for women performing alone at times depending on the activities in order to become more confident;
- to improve sustainability of the MCC by fostering their participation in regional groups working on specific topics;
- to foster regular exchange and critical review among MCCs for mutual learning and improving effectiveness

The evaluation report and its results led to fruitful discussions between the evaluation-team, CAED and Fastenopfer and made it possible to define the next steps regarding the amelioration and adaptation of the MCC Approach. As MCCs are one of the main vehicles in CAEDs projects the results are highly relevant and led already to first adaptations in WRRP and KLEP.

The full evaluation report can be requested from Fastenopfer via email to mund@fastenopfer.ch, indicating the purpose of the request.

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