Terms of Reference: Independent Final Evaluation

Poverty Reduction through Sustainable Agriculture in Southern India

1.1   Background information

Department for International Development (DFID), a UK government department responsible for administering overseas aid, provides significant funding to civil society organisations (CSOs) annually in line with its overall strategy to alleviate poverty and promote peace, stability and good governance. The Programme Partnership Arrangements (PPA) and Global Poverty Action Fund (GPAF) are two of DFID's principal funding mechanisms and have provided £480 million to approximately 230 CSOs between 2011 and 2013. The current political climate and results-based agenda demand a rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of funds disbursed to ensure that they are managed to provide value for money.

TripleLine is the Fund Manager for the GPAF and is responsible for assessing performance of grantees at the project level. Coffey International Development is the Evaluation Manager and is responsible for assessing the performance of the funding mechanisms as a whole.

1.2   Project description

The project entitled "Poverty Reduction through Sustainable Agriculture in Southern India" started in July 2012 and will come to an end by June 2015.

Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS) in association with Vrutti Livelihood Resource Centre has been implementing this project with funding support from Department for International Development (DFID) and co-funding from HIVOS, Netherlands. The project works in three Districts viz. Nagapattinam, Tiruvanamalai and Kancheepuram of Tamilnadu state, covering a total of 9000 households spread across 75 Gram Panchayats. The project aims to enhance incomes of smallholder agricultural households in an accelerated and sustainable way. It intends to ensure delivery of local and household-specific critical information, proven technologies and practices through a mechanism of village-based agricultural service providers, and focused convergence efforts. The project approach is built on a farmer-led social enterprise model with the potential to sustain itself, and to upscale for larger impact

The objectives of the project are given below:

Impact: To contribute to reduce poverty and hunger reduction (MDG1) in Tamil Nadu

Outcome: 9,000 smallholder agricultural households in 75 villages in Thiruvannamalai, Kancheepuram and Nagapattinam districts of Tamil Nadu have increased income levels

Output 1: Improved adoption of ecological and better management practices by the farmers and technical support through Village Agriculture Business Development Service Providers (VABDSPs) in the target areas

Output 2: Developed agriculture value chains for selected crops, leading to improved returns from agriculture enterprise, through value addition and market initiatives

Output 3: Community based organisations (producers groups, federations, Sustainable Agriculture Self-Help Groups (SASHGs), Common Interest Groups (CIGs), Women groups) involving men and women farmers in the target area facilitate one or more services across agriculture value chain - 'soil to table'

Output 4: Knowledge dissemination and policy engagement contributes to more accessible and improved quality of extension services in Tamil Nadu

The project has an inbuilt monitoring, evaluation and learning system and rigorous impact study planned at baseline, midline and end line. The impact study focuses on the measuring the impact created by the project as well as its attribution to the project interventions through before-after-control-treatment study design. This study at the baseline was done with a sample population of 500 treatment and 250 control households, and midline covered 50% of these samples.

1.3   Purpose of the evaluation

The overall purpose of the independent final evaluation is to inform the Fund manager's understanding of the project's performance at the project level, and also to use the Evaluation manager's assessment of performance at the GPAF fund level.

Therefore, the independent final evaluation report needs to be a substantial document that (a) answers all the elements of the Terms of Reference (ToR); (b) provides findings and conclusions that are based on robust and transparent evidence; and (c) where necessary supplements the project's own data with independent research

1.4   Key objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation has two explicit objectives that are explained below:

1.   To independently verify (and supplement where necessary), the project's achievements as defined in the project log frame; and as stated in the annual reports

2.   To assess the extent to which the project was good value for money, which includes considering:
     a.   How well the project met its objectives;
     b.   How well the project applied value for money principles of effectiveness, economy, efficiency in relation to delivery of its outcomes;
     c.   What has happened because of DFID funding that wouldn't have otherwise happened; and
     d.   How well the project aligns with DFID's goals of supporting the delivery of the MDGs.

1.5   Verification of Project Reporting

The first task of the final evaluation is to verify the project achievements. This exercise should include verifying information that was collected by the project for reporting purposes (annual reports, report on log frame) and possibly should supplement with additional information collected through primary and secondary research

Verifying the results from the project log frame should begin to capture what the project has achieved. However, there will be other activities and results that occur outside of the log frame that may require examination in order to respond to the different evaluation questions. Verifying

reporting should also necessarily include a review of the data and systems that were used to populate results

1.6 Assessment of value for money

The final evaluation should assess the extent to which the delivery and results of the project are good value for money. Value for money can be defined in different ways, but at minimum the evaluation report should include an assessment against:

1. How well the project applied value for money principles of effectiveness, economy, efficiency in relation to delivery of its outcome;
2. What has happened because of project's funding that wouldn't have otherwise happened;

1.7 Evaluation questions

The evaluation study should respond, however not limited, to all the following questions

Relevance

- To what extent did the project support achievement towards the MDGs, specifically off-track MDGs?
- To what extent did the project target and reach the poor and marginalised?
- To what extent did the project mainstream gender equality in the design and delivery of activities (and or other relevant excluded groups)?
- How well did the project respond to the needs of target beneficiaries, including how these needs evolved over time?

Effectiveness

- To what extent are the results that are reported a fair and accurate record of achievement?
- To what extent has the project delivered results that are value for money? To include but not limited to:
  - How well the project applied value for money principles of effectiveness, economy, efficiency in relation to delivery of its outcome;
  - What has happened because of project funding that wouldn't have otherwise happened; and
- To what extent has the project used learning to improve delivery?
- What are the key drivers and barriers affecting the delivery of results for the project

Efficiency

- To what extent did the project deliver results on time and on budget against agreed plans?
- To what extent did the project understand cost drivers and manage these in relation to performance requirements?

Sustainability

- To what extent has the project leveraged additional resources (financial and in-kind) from other sources?
- What effect has this had on the scale, delivery or sustainability of activities?

- To what extent is there evidence that the benefits delivered by the project will be sustained after the project ends?

Impact

- To what extent and how has the project built the capacity of civil society?

- How many people are receiving support from the project that otherwise would not have received support?

- To what extent and how has the project affected people in ways that were not originally intended?

Learning

- What are the lessons learnt from the project implementation in terms of

1) Innovative approaches/strategies adopted – Eg: localized service providers, Agriculture machinery facilitation centres
2) Reducing inequalities with respect to gender and social categories and empowerment of socially marginalized especially, women and landless categories
3) Good practices that can be up-scaled and replicated

1.8   Timeframe and Tasks for the evaluation

The overall timeframe for the evaluation will be 45 days from start of May 2015 and should comprise the following tasks:

- Review and validation of project reports and other secondary data available with the project (project proposal, log frame, baseline and mid-line reports, annual reports etc.)
- Finalization of evaluation design, development of tools, sharing with project team and incorporation of suggestions
- Evaluation of project impact with target population (field work) and other key stakes
- Debriefing meeting with project team to share the findings and submission of draft report
- Submission of final report

1.9   Methodology for the evaluation

The evaluation study should adopt mixed methods design using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies with quantitative being dominant. However, the consultant/firm can suggest appropriate design that is rigorous and most relevant to measure impacts. The study process should be participatory with the involvement of all key stakeholders of the project. Some of the suggested tools are individual interviews with beneficiaries, focus group discussions, most significant changes, case studies

1.10 Experience/Expertise of the consultant or consultancy firm

The evaluation team should have the following expertise

- A minimum of ten years of experience in development sector

- A minimum of five years of experience in conducting evaluations of development projects, preferably for international donor organizations

- Design and development of rigorous impact evaluation designs

- Use of participatory approaches in impact evaluations

- Deep understanding and experience in livelihood support projects, especially agriculture and allied

- Analytical and Documentation skills, presentation of reports

- Excellent command of English and fluency in Tamil

- Familiar with and sensitive to the local culture

1.11 Deliverables

The final report is tentatively expected by 30th Jun 2015

1) Final Evaluation Report
2) Study tools
3) Datasets (complete and organized)

1.12 Report Structure

The main body of the report (draft and final versions) must be limited to 40 pages (this can include or exclude annexes). One of the annexes should consist of a table which summarizes the findings.

The suggested report structure is,

1) Executive Summary
2) Introduction
    a. Purpose of the evaluation
    b. Organization context
    c. Logic and assumptions of the evaluation
    d. Overview of GPAF funded activities
3) Evaluation methodology
    a. Evaluation plan
    b. Strengths and weakness of selected design and research methods
    c. Summary of problems and issues encountered
4) Findings
    a. Overall results
    b. Assessment of accuracy of reported results
    c. Relevance
    d. Effectiveness
    e. Efficiency
    f. Sustainability
    g. Impact

5) Conclusions

    a. Summary of achievements against evaluation questions

    b. Summary of achievements against rationale for GPAF funding

    c. Overall impact and value for money of GPAF funded activities

6) Lessons learnt (where relevant)

    a. Project level - management, design, implementation

    b. Policy level

    c. Sector level

    d. GPAF management

7) Recommendations

8) Annexes (such as)

    a. Independent final evaluation terms of reference

    b. Evaluation research schedule

    c. Evaluation framework

    d. Data collection tools

    e. List of people consulted

    f. List of supporting documentary information

    a. Details of the evaluation team

    b. Grantee management response to report findings and recommendations

Interested consultants/firms should submit their proposals highlighting their experience in similar kinds of evaluation assignments, past achievements, technical and financial proposals on or before 25th April via email to contactus@vrutti.org with a Cc to arunabha@vrutti.org