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ASSET CREATION: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Field colleagues weigh in on lessons learned from Food for Peace's development and emergency programs in East and Southern Africa for potential use in the creation and monitoring of community assets.

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ACRONYMS

AOR	Agreement Officer’s Representative
BCC	Behavior Change Communication
DFAP	Development Food Assistance Programs
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FFP	Food for Peace
MCHN	Mother Child Health and Nutrition
PREP	Pipeline Resource request Proposal
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VS&L	Village Savings and Loans
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

INTRODUCTION

Food for Peace (FFP) helps communities build resilience to prevent or mitigate shocks, and provides them with the tools to recover and build the foundation for long-term development. Asset creation activities are the foundation for recovery and resilience-building efforts. Through these programs, communities usually receive food or cash assistance in exchange for working to construct lasting assets for their communities, such as irrigation schemes, water catchment systems and feeder roads. This creative approach assists vulnerable people in times of crisis while simultaneously supporting communities' efforts to build resilience for a more prosperous future for many generations to come. Asset creation is also a common intervention in FFP's development programs.

This *Lessons from the Field* report highlights nine common lessons learned that can help inform the design, implementation and monitoring of asset-creation activities. While not a formal guide, FFP activity implementers, technical evaluation committees reviewing proposals as well as FFP and partner program monitors can benefit from the information contained in this report. FFP staff captured these lessons during monitoring and assessment visits in Southern and Eastern Africa and the Horn from 2011 through 2016, and gathered them from both FFP multi-year Development Food Assistance Programs (DFAPs) and emergency food assistance programs.

While this report contains useful information, it does not constitute official FFP guidance.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIELD

ENSURE ASSETS ARE INTEGRATED

Community assets often become an important gathering point. Knowledge of how communities come together around assets creates a great opportunity for partners to design the activity in a way that supports the greatest impact and likelihood of long-term sustainability. Assets, therefore, do not have to be stand-alone engineering efforts. From the design phase, partners should seek to integrate planned assets from a livelihoods, health and nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and disaster risk reduction (DRR) perspective when possible and feasible.

FFP staff and implementers should also cross check with their respective technical offices to determine any possible synergies between those offices and the asset creation activity. In addition to this sectoral approach, partners should consider incorporating additional components, such as behavior change communication (BCC) and village savings and loans (VS&L), to support the long-term maintenance and sustainability of the asset.

Not all assets allow for significant layering but asset creation programs should look through an integrated lens. In Ethiopia, for example, one partner rehabilitated the school pictured below. The partner did a fantastic job by incorporating and integrating latrines, hand washing stations, and a roof water catchment system all well designed and well built. However, additional, and low cost opportunities for integration existed. During an assessment visit, the team learned that

the partner also had existing WASH and nutrition curriculums developed under the program’s Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) components. The teachers were happy to learn about these materials and were willing to utilize them in the classrooms, however the implementer had not thought to include the teachers in the program’s nutritional and WASH BCC components. With a little imagination, time and resources training the teachers, perhaps the WASH and nutritional components of the program could have also benefited the students and their families potentially increasing the program’s impact. Perhaps the children would take these messages home and teach them to their younger siblings and possibly improve their health? Additionally, implementers could post nutrition and WASH BCC messaging near the latrines or hand washing stations as well as used the runoff from the new water supply for a fruit tree nursery. These are just a few examples of additional integration activities that implementers could have considered for what was a well-engineered and thought out intervention. Consulting with other technical offices (MCHN, WASH, etc.) could lead to better integration.



Primary School in Amhara, Ethiopia.

Irrigation assets create fantastic opportunities to integrate multiple technical areas. Potential integration activities for irrigation sites can include a separate water filling station with BCC signs reminding users about proper water storage and water container cleaning, and a clothes washing station to keep users from washing clothes in the canals or water source. Both of these additions could improve a community’s WASH responses and health. As stated previously in an earlier section, this was another opportunity to consider secondary uses for



Irrigation assets in Amhara and Oromia Ethiopia

The above photos show two well-engineered stand-alone irrigation asset sites where people are washing themselves, their clothes, and drawing household water. Farmers with access to these assets have significantly increased their incomes and decreased their number of months of food insecurity. However, the picture of the water source on the left lacks a fence and the site pictured on the right was damaged by both people and livestock to gain access to the water. Learning more about the ways in which the community comes together to use the site provides a good indication of what else programs can build into the designs for these activities, even after initial construction is completed. In these cases, the program could consider building a cattle trough to protect the asset, a water filling station to prevent the water contamination potential in both photos and a clothes washing station, both with health BCC messaging. In addition, depending on resources, the program could add a latrine or fruit tree nursery to utilize excess water.

excess water. For example, excess water could have been utilized to develop fruit tree nurseries which may have positively contributed towards the project’s environmental and nutritional goals. Perhaps programs could also consider fish ponds, which provide an additional livelihood source, and separate livestock drinking troughs to improve livestock health while protecting the infrastructure.

PROTECT THE ASSETS

Livestock and people can create significant damage to assets and, in some cases, even the watershed upon which assets and communities are dependent. Livestock, if allowed in and around water sources, can frequently damage and reduce the impact of these assets, increase siltation, and pollute the water source, which can spread disease and make humans ill. Partners should include plans at the beginning stages to protect the assets with a combination of fences, stone layering, ditches, vegetation, guards and/or no-plowing zones adjacent to the asset (e.g. canals). Each asset design or proposal should properly discuss and budget for store-bought or locally available material to protect infrastructure. It is also important to plan for the protection of “work in progress,” as assets not completed before the start of rains, for example, could be completely destroyed or significantly set back as a result.



The irrigation canal pictured above was damaged by livestock, rendering the system useless. It is



not always financially feasible to build fences to protect canals, water catchment areas, dams and reservoirs, but other local methods can work just as well.

In Zimbabwe, several partners gathered sharp-edged stones and layered them, starting from the edges of the asset one layer deep and two meters wide. Pictured to the left, the stones will protect the dam wall from livestock prone to breaking down fences. This method will keep the livestock off of the dam wall, reduce siltation, and

keep the water clean.

Another inexpensive option for keeping the livestock away from water assets is to install a simple gravity fed pipe leading to a cattle trough downstream for the livestock.

ENSURE ASSETS BENEFIT TARGETED BENEFICIARIES

Not all assets benefit the population we target in the longer term. There are a number of questions that programs can ask to determine if the targeted beneficiaries are indeed benefitting as planned. Some of these questions include: How will landless people access an

irrigated plot? How does a family with little or no livestock benefit from land reclamation or improved fodder? How does a cattle dip tank help the poorer families who often only have goats? Does a school benefit the poorest that cannot afford to send their kids to school?

In Zimbabwe, for example, development and emergency program implementers encountered beneficiary issues when renovating existing irrigation sites. Food for Peace’s mandate is working with the “poorest of the poor.” This mandate cannot be met when an irrigation scheme farmed by the same households for years is assisted with FFP-funded infrastructure work. During interviews, beneficiaries identified themselves as “by far” the best off in their communities. Additionally, implementers learned that less than 10 percent of the households in these communities have access to the irrigated land. Therefore, it is possible that these programs were actually assisting the wealthiest 10 percent of the people in these communities. Of the 13 development irrigation sites visited, only 5 sites had new beneficiaries, and the balance of the sites assisted existing (wealthier) farmers.

Other FFP programs displayed similar trends at their irrigation sites. The implementer responded that they felt that the Economic Growth Office supported this strategy and that the activity was in its startup year, and the implementer was picking “low hanging fruit” to try and reach first year goals and targets. Another explanation was that “the poorest benefited during the hungry period since they were doing the labor and receiving the ration.” Are these acceptable responses for programs funded with FFP resources targeted to the poorest of the poor?



The site above is a beautifully engineered cattle dip tank, but it appears that only cattle owners in the community will benefit. Poorer people in rural Zimbabwe own goats. Program designs



should take into account these types of stratifications within communities to ensure that targeted beneficiaries are the ones gaining the most benefit.

To the left and contrary to the above examples, implementers gave the steep slope of this ongoing land reclamation activity in Ethiopia to landless beneficiaries, while the canal visible in the lower left-hand corner provides irrigation water for better off Ethiopians downstream. The landless beneficiaries will manage this land for the production of crops and fodder on the

steeper slope to sell to the better off cattle owners in the community. Under the landless’ management, this land has started to blossom. They have developed agreements for protection, use and maintenance of the land and will make significant money off of land for the first time in

their lives. The canal will simultaneously benefit land-owning families downstream and landless beneficiaries. This activity presents a win-win and a great example of out-of-the-box thinking that benefits the poorest of the poor and the better off community.

ADEQUATELY BUDGET FOR ASSET CREATION ACTIVITIES

Field work conducted over the past five years consistently revealed that many components of asset-creation activities implemented by FFP's partners are under staffed, under equipped and frequently lacking in the correct skill mix to successfully integrate, protect and maintain the activity. All of these gaps can be tied to the budget. The most repeated recommendations were for these FFP partners to:

1. Review the internal budget for realignment, cost savings, in-kind or cash contributions from the implementer, partner with another implementer to possibly find synergies and finally, as a last resort, discuss with their Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) to explore the potential of increasing the resource request for assets in the Pipeline and Resource Estimate Proposal (PREP) to ensure new assets achieve maximum impact and are sustainable in future years;
2. Hire more experienced personnel (which links to the budget) and
3. Budget accordingly for resources to revisit asset sites to ensure the work is completed, maintained, functioning and integrated.

The areas of program design and budgeting that need careful review are:

- a. **Number and Types of Assets:** For more accurate budgeting, implementers should estimate the number and type of assets they expect to create year by year, to include the geographical area. In addition, the estimate should include the amount of materials and supplies needed to do the job in an integrated fashion.
- b. **Equipment:** If an implementer is proposing road rehabilitation, they should budget for the proper equipment and fuel to do it correctly. Programs can use manual labor to augment the equipment, but the appropriate grade and compaction is essential for extending the life of a road. If an implementer states they will use government equipment, the partner should provide the maintenance status of the government's equipment and get a letter of commitment from the government.
- c. **Maintenance, repair, and operational plan and expenses:** The budget and narrative should detail the costs for future repair and operational expenses. A maintenance plan should be described and budgeted for. Applicants should detail where these resources are coming from.

d. Staffing: It is critical that projects have the correct number of trained and experienced engineers and skilled laborers. Some implementers do not have engineers on staff, while others may have one. One engineer cannot design, supervise construction and monitor a large number of sites simultaneously spread over a wide geographic area. A lack of oversight by the implementer's engineering staff is a major cause for substandard work that can lead to environmental degradation. In other cases, implementers rely on government engineers. While a good practice to engage local government engineers, some may have limited construction experience due to a host country's lack of financing, equipment, resources, and/or on-the-job training opportunities. Lastly, an often overlooked detail, quality skilled laborers such as masons and carpenters are also required. Frequently, these skilled laborers will not work for food, and, therefore, cash resources must be planned for early in the design process budgeted appropriately.



Staffing is critical! Notice the above ground, elevated PVC pipe which leads from a storage dam to supply irrigation canals. PVC pipes deteriorate rapidly when exposed to the elements. The pipe is running down hill and is gravity fed therefore this pipe should have been buried to protect it from the elements, animals and children. The more than 20 cement and brick pillars supporting the pipe were a waste of valuable resources. A lack of checks and balances by the implementer allowed this poor design.

e. Private Sector: In countries that may have a shortage of qualified personnel to design, supervise construction and monitor implementation of assets, a private sector firm experienced in asset creation may be an alternative. In Malawi, the development programs have utilized this method with success: such a firm helped turn the implementer's inexperienced engineers into engineers with a great deal of practical, hands-on experience.

ASSET MAINTENANCE

The photo to the right shows more than one meter of sediment that has rendered a community dam useless. Now the community must walk five extra kilometers for water. Why did the community not maintain this asset?

The maintenance of assets is an extremely difficult aspect to address, especially if the asset is not creating income. Implementers should make a significant effort to explain how the community will be involved in asset selection and plans for maintenance. In many cases, persuading beneficiaries to maintain an asset is a behavior change. How is an implementer going to change the beneficiaries' behavior? What BCC materials are they going to develop? What BCC training are they going to conduct? Is this BCC effort clearly supported in the budget? There is no one answer. Programs require local solutions to behavior change and implementers should include these solutions in their budgets.



UTILIZE BUILDING CODES

In the absence of utilizing building codes, “finished” assets can be both embarrassing and hazardous. Not only is the building to the right lopsided, but it had substandard and incomplete construction with no trusses or purlins for the roof. This photo clearly shows that the implementer did not have qualified staff or adequate supervision by an engineer.

Inefficiencies in the design and implementation of an asset will reduce its viability and sustainability, decreasing the value to a community and negatively impacting the community's resolve to maintain it. Implementers should state what building codes, construction guidelines or standards they will be following for the various types of construction or rehabilitation they intend to carry out. In almost all cases this is the host government's standards, plans or sketches. For actual buildings (schools, health clinics, etc.), if in the rare case the host government does not have standards, the program can utilize U.S. Government or International Code Council codes or standards. All monitors should enquire which codes are being utilized.



THREE MONITORING LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIELD

Mapping, purposeful selection and use of an engineer are three monitoring lessons learned and best practices that can lead to a better understanding of a development or emergency programs' strengths and weaknesses.

Require that projects include asset mapping: During implementation, field based monitors and their supervisors may have a difficult time monitoring asset creation (and all interventions) if the implementer does not have maps. A plan for mapping that displays both the GPS location of each asset and the road network within a given geographic area is a best practice. FFP should encourage the implementers to budget for a mapping plan.



Map the assets: A map of all assets in this area in Zimbabwe allowed a joint team of FFP and implementer staff to purposefully select this cattle dip tank for a visit. The implementer's Chief of Party and senior technical staff thought this cattle dip tank was completed. All were surprised to see that it required additional work. Without a map this asset may have never been completed. By ensuring implementers have mapping capabilities, FFP will help improve our monitoring as well as our partners' monitoring. This can ultimately lead to greater and more consistent program impacts by both identifying shortfalls and positive observations that stakeholders can share with other interventions in other geographical areas.

Purposeful selection of field sites – beneficial for implementers and FFP staff:

Purposeful selection of sites to visit during a monitoring trip allows FFP and senior partner staff monitors to effectively select the sites that they want to visit. Without a map, as described above, both senior partner and FFP monitors are at the whim of the local staff guiding them in a geographical area which perhaps neither FFP nor senior partner monitors are familiar. The local staff may drive FFP and senior partner monitors past any number of sites to one that the implementer wants the monitors to see because the site is in good condition, working, dynamic, and typically “staged.”

However, this course does not allow the monitors to see what is really going on in the implementation of the program. Monitors should notify the implementer's office when they are planning to visit, but should then identify the specific sites to be visited (using purposeful selection with a map) on the morning of the trip, or as close to the date of the trip as security, or other factors, permit. This course allows the FFP monitors and implementer's leadership to see the true picture and share both lessons learned and best practices that may not have been identified if monitors, both from FFP and partners, did not purposefully select sites.

A Chief-of-Party from a DFAP in Southern Africa noted, after a trip utilizing purposeful selection for the first time, “I never knew we had such a variation in implementation quality from region to region and I would never have known if we hadn’t used purposeful selection.” Purposeful selection can be utilized by both FFP on M&E site visits and implementing partners can utilize it as one way to help ensure proper checks and balances for their interventions, and as a way to share learning across geographical areas.

Utilize an engineer for monitoring trips: Because assets creation is technical, each monitoring trip would benefit from the presence of an engineer. Most implementing partners did have engineers and, when visiting assets, these staff members contributed significantly by explaining the technical details and commenting on potential additional engineering works that could be added to better integrate the asset, as discussed above.

However, at the time, most FFP offices in USAID missions do not have engineers. For FFP monitoring staff, there are several ways to deal with this. First, check within the USAID Mission. Often one of the technical offices or executive office will have an engineer on staff. Second, check with the Embassy. The Embassy’s facilities offices often have at least one engineer. The USAID or Embassy engineer can help guide on the engineering aspects of a monitoring trip and provide a second set of eyes for our implementing partners. Additionally, if the Mission does not have an engineer, the FFP Regional Office may be able to assist. Finally, the implementer partner may be able to provide a seasoned engineer to accompany a FFP monitoring team on selected field visits. FFP may also want to consider staffing up engineers, perhaps in the regional offices.