Women’s Empowerment Program Evaluation
Department of Social Responsibility, Diocese of Grahamstown, South Africa
An Executive Summary: December 2016
EVALUATION REPORT

Executive Summary

GRAHAMSTOWN DIOCESE

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

2014-2017

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Evaluation Consultant: Anna Szava Phd
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

The Grahamstown Diocese Women’s Empowerment Program is implemented in rural and urban areas of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, with the aim of addressing gender-based violence through capacity building in leadership and advocacy skills, and improving the livelihoods of vulnerable women and communities through capacity building in household food production.

The program is funded through a partnership between Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA) and the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government. It is implemented by the Department of Social Responsibility in the Diocese of Grahamstown, South Africa, in partnership with Anglican Overseas Aid.

The current three-year phase of the program operates through a two-pronged structure: community and individual capacity building in leadership and advocacy skills to prevent and respond to violence, including gender based violence and violence against marginalised people (Safe Persons program component), and building individual and community capacity to improve food security through food production and preserving, utilising Permaculture principles and practices (Permaculture program component).

The design of this evaluation responds to the evaluation objectives and methods outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR). It employs mixed methods approach, with data and method triangulation. The evaluation focuses both on the processes and outcomes of the program, utilising participatory methods that engaged the community of beneficiaries and program staff.

Qualitative data was generated in group discussions and in individual interviews with community members, community leaders and key program staff. Secondary data consisted of program documents, provided by DSR and AOA, and of publicly available information.

1.2 Key Findings

The program design is based on a Theory of Change, which supports activities in a participatory, reflexive and flexible approach. While the program’s goals are aligned with government policies and priorities, it also aims to influence and change the practice and processes of government agencies such as police and justice systems.

The program implementation is based on development theories and practice which emphasise the critical role of facilitation of a process that enables people to solve their own problems. The program responds directly to community-identified issues, such as violence against women, children and the elderly, and food insecurity and women’s livelihood.

The sustainability of the program is facilitated by several factors, which DSR works towards deliberately. These include the extensive and well-operating network of social structures within and beyond the communities, the program’s strong community ownership, and the multi-prong approach that allows mutual support and correction between the components. DSR leadership is aware that they have to create sustainability for program staff as well. As their staff members’ capacity develops – a stated goal in the program design – their ‘market value’ also grows, and ensuring competitive salaries and working conditions may become a challenge.
1.2.1  **Safe Persons program component**

This program component relies on community-based volunteers, selected for this role by their community. Its structure is largely informal which allows for responsiveness to variations in priorities and flexibility and efficiency in the program delivery.

The so-called Safe Persons - mostly women but some men as well – receive training with specific emphasis on advocacy and counselling skills. Training topics include, but are not limited to, human rights, advocacy, governance, child protection, sexual and reproductive rights, gender based violence, domestic violence and counselling of children.

Underlying the program design is the understanding that gender based violence affects everyone, and so lasting positive change is not possible without involving the entire community. The program makes effective strategic efforts to include men, traditional leaders as well as community members. Many of the training opportunities are open to interested members of the community, to traditional and non-traditional community leaders, and those who provide social services.

Approximately 250 Safe Persons have been trained; some of these are working alongside the established SPs, providing support and are ready to take over if needed. There are 16 SP leaders and extensive SP networks exist in 14 rural and two urban communities. The Safe Persons training enables and empowers them to be actively involved in various community forums such as the citizens’ committee, the police forum, clinic committee, school committee and the community council. SPs move the victims away from threatening situations, notify the authorities, record the details of the case and prepare the victim for opening a case and for court.
External stakeholders, for example, various other government departments, non-government organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), traditional leaders and church organisations, are considered important program partners and are invited to participate in training and to collaborate with the program. The evaluation found wide support for the program by these stakeholders and the program’s increasing reach in terms of external stakeholders is evidence of the recognition of its relevance. An outstanding example is the Dimbaza Victim Empowerment Centre of the South African Police Service, which was set up in consultation with DSR.

The effectiveness and positive impact of the Safe Persons program was emphasised by many of the respondents: women felt safer in the villages and knew where to turn when they needed assistance or advice. Women stated that the communities felt safer and more gender fair than before, and attributed this change to the SP program. Traditional leaders saw much positive change in the community. The number of cases of violence that were reported increased, and examples of changes in procedure as a result of advocacy included drivers’ education and the establishment of the Victim Empowerment Centre.

The evaluation found a high level of confidence about the sustainability of the program. Ongoing training workshops are considered a key to the continued empowerment of the community. The monthly SP leader meetings provide professional and personal support and reduce the risk of isolation, communication breakdown or rift between the program workers. As well, they provide a forum for activity and workshop planning. The inadequate documentation of the processes and results, however, is a threat to the sustainability of the program.

1.2.2 **Permaculture program component**

Central to this program component is the understanding of the importance of improving food security and nutrition for the households, many of which are headed by women, and that applying Permaculture methods ensures additional environmental, social, economic and health benefits.

The Permaculture program component is formalised around the Masimanyane Permaculture Association (MA), which was launched in 2007. Masimanyane has presence in six community areas and a large membership base, organised around resource units. Each resource unit contains a number of households and is led by a volunteer trained in Permaculture practices, who in turn is supported by the four Core Persons, trained in Permaculture theory and practice. The Core Persons work as contractors to DSR and their duties also include nursery and school support and managing the demonstration garden.

Three nurseries and a large demonstration garden had been established. The demonstration garden is a place of learning as well as of experimentation with and showcasing of different methods and practices. Five schools are involved with the program; a group of students in each school engage in gardening several hours each week and school lunches use what the garden produces at least once a week.

The program reaches a broad range of external stakeholders, such as relevant government departments as community based organisations, as well as many households beyond the Masimanyane membership. In some villages many, in some cases up to half of the households have received some training in horticultural production and a growing number of households adopt Permaculture methods.

The result of the PC program is not only more food but a more diverse diet. Permaculture methods promoted by the program increased the gardens’ productivity and variety of produce. The gardens also produce social benefits such as opportunities for role modelling for youth and increased community cohesion. There is a

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1 *Let’s unite in Xhosa*
growing positive attitude towards Permaculture and the program changed people’s perceptions regarding food aid.

Image 2 Masimanyane’s leader, members and school students in the demonstration garden during the evaluation

The wide volunteer base and the train the trainer approach increase the efficiency of the delivery of this program component, as well as the strategy of relying on a well-established organisation (MA), and on external contractors (the Core Persons) as opposed to staff. The program is well established and the dissemination of information and the growth of the movement seem unstoppable considering the widespread enthusiasm about its achievements and methods. The program entered the schools and, aligned with the environmental and health and nutrition curricula, it engages the future generation of gardeners and farmers.

The partnership between DSR and MA was considered essential for the continuation of the program: MA needs support to expand nurseries and school gardens. The greatest challenges identified to sustainability are business development skills and climate change and, related to the latter, water insecurity.

1.2.3 Cross-cutting issues

The program effectively addresses the following cross-cutting issues: gender equality and the empowerment of women, child protection, vulnerable groups, environmental management, and strengthening civil society organisations.
1.3 Lessons Learnt

1.3.1 Strengths

It is an exceptional strength of the program that it is founded on **community-identified priorities and community-invited and led engagement** from the start. The program’s expansion into new geographical areas and issues is also founded on the community’s expression of priority and inquiry. This ensures that both the SP and PC components ‘start where the people are’ and build on their strengths.

Due to the emerging character of the program design, **adaptability and flexibility** are key characteristics of the program components, allowing the program content and delivery to respond to changing context and emerging issues and be responsive to change in community priorities.

A well-articulated strategy of the program is its **investment into social infrastructure**, yielding increased community cohesion, positive recognition of the program’s achievement and growing collaboration with external stakeholders.

The inclusion of men in a women’s empowerment program is a particular strength of the program. It is based on the recognition that gender issues cannot be solved unilaterally, and that the whole of society needs to agree about traditions and rights to avoid the escalation of conflict.

Both components of the program are **specific to local opportunities and circumstances** in terms of content and delivery. This is particularly visible with the PC component where a great emphasis is put on appropriate technologies and using resources at hand.

The **many-pronged approach** that allows the program components to complement and enhance each other is a strength that is further augmented by the strategic linkages with other community and agency-based programs operating in the area, either by DSR or other organisations.

**DSR’s ongoing mentoring and their support of community-based networks** encourage individual growth and the sharing of information with the wide community, beyond the circle of direct stakeholders or, in the case of the PC program, the Masimanyane membership.

Impacts have **reached many people at individual and community level**, and at various agencies and organisations. Women and men feel empowered and supported in advocacy roles as well as in food production.

An unintended positive outcome is the growing interest in **sports for older women**. It is an element that has the potential to positively impact on women’s physical and emotional health and further unify the community.

1.3.2 Challenges

**DSR’s framework of documentation** of training modules and methods, methods of approaching and responding to communities and stakeholders, and of the progress and achievements of the program, is inadequate, considering that the program may lose critical expertise and corporate memory should key staff members leave.

The **informal nature of collaborative relationships** between DSR, the programs and the external stakeholders is a point of vulnerability considering potential staff turnover or break down of personal relationships.

Beyond schools, **youth is only engaged to a limited extent**.
The resources of the SP program which can be utilised to assist SP leaders and SPs in managing their duties are limited. The main challenge reported by all SPs was access to and the cost of transport to visit the women and their families in the communities.

The limitations of the resources of the PC program allow little support for participants with water harvesting and storage equipment, plant material and fencing. The tangible effects of climate change further exacerbate water insecurity. Shortcomings that may affect the growth of the PC component and MA’s development also include difficulty to access to up-to-date information and inadequate computer and business development skills.

Reliance on a small number of key staff members may become a challenge in particular if the program continues to grow as it has been.

The sources of funding (AOA and DFAT) for the program and DSR’s role with it are not always understood by the community. While this demonstrates community ownership, it is important that the community is able to identify the organisations that make the delivery of the program activities possible.

1.4 Recommendations

Some of the recommendations below intend to address the challenges discussed in the previous section, others respond to the issues raised during the evaluation fieldwork by the respondents.

1. A general recommendation is that the next phase of the program builds on the strength of the previous phases:
   a. the community-led approach of the program is to continue,
   b. its adaptable and flexible approach and emerging nature is preserved, and
   c. DSR’s role in mentoring individuals and organisations is maintained.

2. The establishment of current baseline information that covers the critical socio-economic indicators and priorities of the target population would be useful for the design of the next phase. Baseline data would be also important in evaluating the next program phase and would allow the generation of measurable evidence.

3. Strengthen the framework of documentation of training modules and methods, of the methods of approaching and responding to communities and stakeholders, and of the progress and achievements of the program.

4. Create a framework for formalising the collaborative relationships between DSR, the programs and the external stakeholders, to manage the risk of over-reliance on personal relationship and of their potentially transitory nature.

5. Further growth of the program and the implementation of these recommendations are limited by staff numbers. Therefore it is recommended that DSR and AOA explore the possibility of expanding the department’s staff. The employment of new staff members would be considered as part of the succession planning strategy.

6. Investigate the opportunities for youth specific engagement strategies and activities; for example, training a cohort of young SP activists (girls and boys) who could become role models and support persons specifically for young people, supporting youth in sport competitions, creating local visual and performing art
clubs, engaging youth in MA's work through gardening competitions and supporting training opportunities that help them with employment.

7. Investigate the feasibility of additional training and workshop subjects for SPs, CPs and community members. This would include computer skills, bookkeeping, business development and business management, substance abuse and counselling, improving the inclusion of people with disabilities in PC training.

8. Investigate options regarding support for market opportunities for women's crafts such as sewing, bead work and knitting as well as for garden produce and value-added products such as preserves.

9. Investigate the options for further mentoring Masimanyane leadership and members in order to acquire additional skills that are necessary for sustainable operation.

10. Explore the options of extending the engagement of men in the SP program, focusing on areas where their participation is critical or hesitant.

11. Explore the options of extending the engagement of Church leaders in the SP program, focusing on areas where they are unsupportive or questioning.

12. Explore the possibility of supporting SPs and CPs with their use of information and communication technology. This includes computer and internet training and assisting with the cost of communication necessary to fulfil their duties.

13. Access to specific climate change adaptation information is essential for farmers. It is recommended that DSR explores the avenues that can assist MA to access up-to-date, science-based and pragmatic information.

14. AOA and DSR to explore, with community participation, a 'branding strategy': options in regards to ensuring that program activities and achievements are associated with the agencies and funding sources involved.

15. It is recommended that critical resources to be translated to Xhosa. The assessment of which resources are considered of critical importance is a subject of community consultation.

In conclusion, DSR staff and contractors, volunteer program workers, community members and organisations are strongly motivated to continue and support the program and expressed confidence in its effectiveness and sustainability. The evaluation results suggest that the program has great growth potential and the recommendations listed above aim to ensure that this potential is maximised.