



Impact of Food Security and Resilience in Transitioning Environments Project in Cueibet, Gogrial East, Twic and Jur River Counties of Lakes Warrap and Western Bahr el Ghazal States, South Sudan

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This is an impact brief of the FORESITE Project. The brief highlights the key impacts of the FORESITE project. The brief is written using findings from the final evaluation of the project conducted in March 2023.

I. Introduction

This is an impact brief of the Food Security and Resilience in Transitioning Environments (FORESITE) project. The project was a 44-month intervention implemented from July 1, 2019 to March 25, 2023. The project was financed by the European Union (EU) and match-funded by World Vision Australia (WVA). The project was implemented by a consortium of three international humanitarian and development agencies comprising; World Vision South Sudan (Lead partner), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Association of Volunteers in International Service (AVSI).

The design of the FORESITE project was rooted within an analytical framework that postulated that conflict directly undermines livelihoods and resilience through its effects on people's assets, on the systems upon which their livelihoods depend and even directly such as on their ability to reach their fields safely. Therefore, FORESITE has been working towards peace-building and gender equality goals not only as key enabling factors for food security and livelihoods but also as vital and essential goals for this context in their own right. In any community, peace and equity are the cornerstones of local economic, social and cultural development. On a related note, women's position on the lower rung of South Sudanese society is illustrated and compounded by different factors such as high illiteracy rates, early and forced marriage, lesser access to information and resources, inequitable gender division of labour, and limited participation in decision making. The project, therefore, puts women's empowerment at the centre of its activities in order to reduce barriers to the engagement of women in resilience-building, food security and income-generating activities.

FORESITE's project design and implementation was aligned to the Government of South Sudan's Comprehensive Agricultural Development Master Plan (CAMP), which sets out the country's framework for agricultural development. FORESITE contributes to the CAMP goals by supporting households in the project locations to recover from the shocks experienced due to violent conflict, improve their food production and strengthen their livelihoods. The project worked closely with government such as the County Agriculture Department in executing its mandate to provide extension services to the community as well as with traditional structures in their dispute resolution and natural resource management capacity. The action is also aligned with and leverage concurrent and recent investments in Greater Bahr El Ghazal (GBeG) particularly, EU investments in rural development and food security¹, as well as in health, education and complementary humanitarian actions.

Project Objectives: The overall objective of FORESITE was to contribute to strengthening resilience of communities, improving governance and conflict prevention and reduced forced displacements due to loss of livelihoods. FORESITE's specific objective was to improve food security of rural smallholders in Greater Bahr el Ghazal and to empower them to cope with environmental volatility and insecurity. This will be achieved through the following expected results:

1. Reduced barriers to engagement in resilience building, food security and income generating activities especially for women and youth;
2. Increased anticipatory, absorptive, and adaptive capacity with respect to climate change and disruptive events including natural disasters and conflict; and
3. Improved longer-term food security and income especially for women and youth.

¹ Previous EU investments in the region include South Sudan Rural Development Programme (SORUDEV), Zonal Effort for Agricultural Transformation Bahr el Ghazal Agriculture Development Programme (ZEAT BEAD), and Food Security Thematic Programme (FSTP)

Target Group: A total of 21,826 rural smallholders were reached by the project through different interventions. The action targeted both smallholder farmer households (primarily through Farmer Groups) and more vulnerable households (landless, female-headed, youth, persons with disabilities IDPs/returnees), with the intent to “balance the vulnerable with the viable.”

Project Locations: The Project was implemented in four counties comprising: Cueibet County in Lakes States; Gogrial East and Twic Counties in Warrap State; and Jur River County in Western Bar el Ghazal. The project was implemented nine Payams and 24 Bomas across the four counties.

Interventions: The project used different approaches to deliver project outcomes and create desired change. These included group methodology, Climate Smart Agriculture, inclusive market systems development, financial inclusion through Saving for Transformation (S4T), gender male champions, peace development committees and Youth Peace Clubs. More capable farmer groups, consisting of smallholder farmers, were targeted with intensive support in order to “launch” them to high-volume, market-oriented production, stabilizing community-level food availability. More vulnerable households were supported primarily through seasonal Cash for Assets activities, reducing negative externality-causing coping behaviours and creating demand for Farmer Group-produced food.

2. Methods

The impact series is written using data from the final evaluation. The final evaluation used a mixed quantitative and qualitative method, while the design was non-experimental involving pre-post comparison without a control group. The mixed evaluation approach also involved a one-shot (case study) design to gather experiences of women and men who directly interacted with the project. In addition, a literature review was conducted to inform the evaluation design as well as generate secondary data to support a robust documentation of impact plus other issues of inquiry. The pre-post investigations were also supplemented by a reconstruction of a counterfactual using Counterfactual Self-Estimation of Program Participants (CSEPP)² approach, which entailed asking programme participants to estimate what the situation could have been without the intervention.

A longitudinal data set comprising the baseline (1681 households), Mid-term Data (1710 households) and endline data (1551 households) was used to generate findings. A total of 33.2% or 515 participants of the final evaluation sample had participated in either the baseline or the mid-term evaluation of the project. This data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Qualitative data was also generated during the endline to validate and explain quantitative results, and to provide feedback and experiences of participants on different project interventions and impact. A free-format approach was used to analyse qualitative data. Data was organised according to evaluation questions and corresponding themes and direct quotes of choice were identified for reporting.

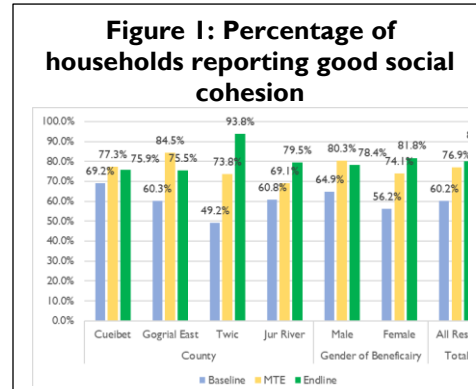
3. Project Impact

The final evaluation documented different results of the project in line with the project’s specific objectives and outcomes. This impact series shares key results linked to FORESITE project. The results are structured around key themes as presented below:

1. *Working through groups has enhanced Social Cohesion in communities*

² Mueller, C. E. (2014). The Counterfactual Self-Estimation of Program Participants: Impact Assessment without Control Groups or Pretests, American Journal of Evaluation 2014, Vol. 35(1) 8-25. DOI: 10.1177/1098214013503182aje.sagepub.com

As per FORESITE problem statement (theory of change), conflict is caused by fragmented society. A fragmented society is indicative of lack of social cohesion within society and communities. Similarly, conflict also leads to lack of social cohesion. By building social cohesion, FORESITE tried to address one of the causes of conflict. Social cohesion is a pre-requisite for community engagement in resilience building activities such as crop production for household food security and producing for markets or income generation. The project used a group methodology approach to build social cohesion among targeted beneficiaries. The different groups included: seed production, vegetable production (mother group), Savings for Transformation (S4T), Peace Development Committee; Youth Cattle Camp Clubs, general farmer groups, gender-male champions and Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) groups. All project beneficiaries belonged to at least one group.



Final Evaluation results showed significant improvement in households reporting social cohesion. This social cohesion entailed community members helping and trusting each other, and taking care of the poor, weak and marginalised persons (elderly, people with disabilities and extremely vulnerable persons) in the community. Figure 1 contains improvements in percentage of households reporting social cohesion. A 20-percentage point increase was reported on the percentage of households reporting social cohesion between the endline (80.2%) and baseline (60.2%). Positive changes were noted among different categories of direct project participants as per location and gender of beneficiaries. A regression analysis revealed that increase in membership to farmer groups led to a statistically significant positive shift on the scale of reporting social cohesion (a rise of 0.084, $t=3.30$, $P<.002$).

*Before FORESITE project everyone was on his or her own. But after NRC/FORESITE came to our community, we are now able to solve any problem. We work together, eat together and share challenges and solve them before they turn into serious problems. Even if NRC left, we are able to continue since the spirit instilled in us remains with us. **Female Beneficiary, Marial Baai***

*The project has helped us to use ox-ploughs and other ways of earning income makes us able to help each other when in need. **Beneficiary, Gogrial East***

The counterfactual estimate also highlighted the positive contribution of FORESITE to improving good social cohesion among targeted communities and households. The counterfactual for the indicator was estimated to be an average of 43.6% (male=43.7%; female=43.6%) compared to that with the project being an average of 80.2% (male=78.4%, female=81.8%). This implies that by prioritizing beneficiary participation in the project, communities became more united, trusting and supportive of each other. This led to less conflict within and between households. Households were more united and could work together to address common challenges of

access to food or water, to cattle raiding and managing shocks (like flooding). This observation is further confirmed by qualitative feedback from direct project beneficiaries.

2. Peace-building leads to reduction in hunger, food security and builds resilient communities

A peaceful environment is a pre-requisite for reducing hunger (improving food security) and building resilient communities. As per the FORESITE programme theory, conflict and insecurity leads to hunger. Households affected by insecurity do not have the time or labour to engage in a timely way with farming activities or access inputs from market due to instability. In addition, insecurity also leads to depletion of livelihood assets due to destruction of crops by livestock and looting of food stock reserves and livestock. Conflict therefore reduces the amount of food produced and available in the community. The FORESITE project therefore sought to directly address insecurity in targeted communities. The project facilitated

communities to form 24 peace development committees and 36 Youth-led peace clubs (Cattle Camp Peace Clubs).

Of the four counties, the most conflict-affected county was Cueibet, where there was widespread cattle raiding, revenge killings, and conflict between farmers and pastoralists. Feedback from the community shows a very significant reduction of conflict in this community. The reduction was characterised as, “reduction in revenge killings”, “reducing inter-community cattle raiding”, “reduction in destruction of crops by cattle” and “reduced domestic violence”. Final evaluation results revealed a 12.2% percentage point reduction in the percentage of households reporting conflict within the community between

Recently, there were 230 heads of cattle raided from Tong South by our youth. We approached the youth and discouraged them from distributing them among themselves. We got in touch with Government and informed them about the raided cattle and how we had secured them. The government in turn informed authorities and communities in Tonj South to take back the cattle. **FGD Peace Committee, Cueibet**

FORESITE taught us how to live at peace. The peace development committee has been able to discuss with people from different communities to live in peace, especially people of Toch West allowed Sudanese (Dafur) to live with them. Before, they were not allowed to freely live with us. **Beneficiary, Gogrial**

FORESITE trained a peace development committee who have moved around to promote peaceful means of resolving conflicts. For instance, there is a man in our community who has been able to get a piece of land in another community and has planted and gained a lot. This practice has not been possible before the project. **Beneficiary, Wunrok**

the baseline of 26.1% and endline of 13.9%. The endline value of 13.9% reflects a 52-percentage point reduction compared to the MTE value of 29.1%. The highest reductions in conflict were in Cueibet (-52.3%) with a large effect size ($\phi=0.543$, $P<.001$). Further analysis revealed a positive correlation between social cohesion and peacebuilding ($\chi^2=8.30$, $P=.004$). This means that improvement in social cohesion leads to improvement in peace in the community.

The significant reduction in percentage of households reporting conflict in Cueibet was largely attributed to the project’s peace development committees and youth-led peace clubs, in addition to the government effort. The new Governor in Lakes State also worked hand in hand with AVSI to hold peace conferences but also made it clear to the community that conflict is not encouraged. The overall results show a reduction in the number of conflicts in the community between the baseline and endline. Targeted communities were more food secure at endline, which corresponded to reduction in conflict. The percentage of Cueibet households in moderate or severe food insecurity dropped from 44% to 26.6%. Conflict is negatively correlated to food security. Qualitative evidence also revealed a concurrent reduction in conflict and food insecurity among households. Cueibet County had a large effect size in percentage of households reporting reduction in conflict ($\phi=.543$). The same county registered the second highest effect size in reduction of households in moderate or severe food insecurity ($\phi=.182$). A cross tabulation of the indicator on food insecurity and reporting of conflict revealed how the two indicators move into the same direction. In Cueibet County, the percentage of households reporting no conflict who were food secure increased from 19.9% at baseline to 62.6% at endline. This reflects a 43-percentage point increase in percentage of households reporting no conflict that are food secure. This means that in the presence of peace, farmers can safely access their field, plant crops and produce food to feed themselves and their families. FORESITE has practically illustrated that peace building is a key enabling factor in addressing food insecurity in conflict affected communities.

3. Diversifying Income as a strategy for strengthening resilience through use of integrated programming approach

The FORESITE project core objective was to build resilience of communities through integrated programming. Integrated programming entailed using mutual reinforcing development approaches proven to support livelihoods such as climate smart agriculture, inclusive market systems development and savings groups (using the S4T model). Through these approaches, smallholder farmers accessed different

interventions which enabled them to diversify their income sources. The analysis revealed all direct project participants belonged to at least one group from which they accessed different interventions (project services). On average, direct beneficiaries accessed four interventions from the project and 85.1% of the beneficiaries accessed at least two project services/interventions. The diversification of income ensured that direct project participants increased and will be more likely to sustain these improvements in incomes. Project beneficiaries derived income from more than one income source (average of three sources of income per household). In addition to sale of crop produce, they also were engaged in vegetable production; cash transfers from seasonal work (cash for assets); offering of basic services to the community through application of vocational skills; and initiation of small businesses by women using funds borrowed from S4T groups. The diversification of income generating activities accounts for the increase in household incomes even when crop harvests did not perform well. This is an indicator of resilience in communities. Even when a climate shock like flooding affected performance of crops, the targeted households in Counties of Gogrial East and Twic still registered an increase in incomes. Households undertake production and sale of vegetables and borrowed funds from S4T groups to initiate micro-businesses such as selling tea/coffee and collective trading in livestock as a way of mitigating loss in crop revenue

Final evaluation results (Table 1) revealed a USD 41.95 increase in quarterly median incomes at endline over a baseline of USD 62. This improvement has happened amidst high inflation rate and exchange rate depreciation which continue to occur in South Sudan. For example, the South Sudan Pound depreciated from SSP 171 in 2019 to 834 SSP per USD in March 2023³. The inflation rate for a period of four years (2019-2023) is estimated at 150.4%⁴. Resilience is demonstrated by beneficiary segments which registered significant improvements in incomes due to diversification of income sources. For example, female beneficiaries registered a higher increase in income of USD 68.94 compared to a slight decline of USD 9.59 for male beneficiaries. This is because women were engaged in more income generating activities (three activities) than men (two activities). Women were engaged in income generating activities such as micro-businesses, vegetable selling, value addition to ground nuts and selling of crop harvests. S4T groups were a good platform for getting business ideas (64.3%), getting business startup capital (57.9%); purchasing assets (cattle, goats, ox-ploughs)-45.0% and purchasing agricultural inputs such as seeds (36.5%). Membership in S4T groups therefore provided a good way of initiating businesses and increasing household incomes and most importantly promoting a culture of savings.

The improvement in incomes for women is linked to project strategy of deliberately targeting women in programming as well as addressing gender biases. Women constituted at least 50% of direct participants of FORESITE project. In addition, women were involved in multiple project activities such as vegetable mother gardens, seed multiplication groups, S4T groups and general farmer groups. Peace-building efforts in the community and promotion of peaceful co-existence between marrieds also enabled women, youth and men to go about economic activities without interruption from conflicts. These interventions created a good platform for engaging in productive activities which translated into an increase in incomes.

Youth also registered a very significant increase in income of USD 81.57 over the baseline of USD 61.67. This increase was more than twice that of older respondents (+USD 81.57 vs +USD 39.13). This is partly due to youth establishment of vocational trade businesses such as tailoring, metal fabrication, carpentry workshops, and catering businesses. Overall, vocational trades addressed priority needs of the community. There was high demand for services and goods offered by trained youth in project areas. Activities such as making of mosquito nets, providing catering services and welding of construction materials (doors and windows) were on high demand and commanded good profit margins.

³ <https://tradingeconomics.com/south-sudan/currency>

⁴ <https://www.worlddata.info/africa/south-sudan/inflation-rates.php#:~:text=The%20inflation%20rate%20for%20consumer,rate%20was%2071.2%25%20per%20year.>

Table 1: Percentage change in Median Household Incomes (US \$)

Characteristic		Baseline	MTE	Final Evaluation	Effect	% Change
Sex of Respondent	Male	111	134.58	101.41	- 9.59	-8.6%
	Female	40.08	90.54	109.02	68.94	172.0%
Disability Status of Respondent	Disabled;	52.42	243.47	101.41	48.99	93.5%
	Not Disabled	62.9	110.11	103.95	41.05	65.3%
Sex of Household Head	Male	80.17	111.09	103.95	23.78	29.7%
	Female	37	95.74	102.68	65.68	177.5%
Age group	14-24 Yrs.	61.67	91.76	143.24	81.57	132.3%
	≥25 Yrs.	62.28	110.11	101.41	39.13	62.8%
Total	All	62	110.11	103.95	41.95	67.7%

Source: FORESITE Final Evaluation Report

4. Positively influencing gender attitudes towards women

Exclusion of women from participation in livelihood activities deprives them of their rights and contributes to household food insecurity. The exclusion is entrenched in cultural biases, stereotypes and structural barriers such as biased interpretation of laws in the traditional court system. Insecurity affects the engagement of women in productive activity as it increases risks to women moving to their farms.

The FORESITE project undertook interventions aimed at addressing negative attitudes and biases against women, addressing the rights of women and improving the safety of women and youth in the community. The project conducted training and awareness sessions targeting women, traditional leaders and the general community to change their attitudes towards women. A key strategy for influencing attitudes towards gender was training and deploying male-gender champions in the community. Male-gender champions regularly conducted awareness sessions on key topical gender issues at the community level.

Final evaluation results indicated the emergence of positive gender attitudes towards women in targeted communities. The traditional justice system was starting to dispense justice to women and respondents indicated their community was safer for women, which supported engagement in productive activities. The key final evaluation findings include:

There was an increase of 20 percentage points in the percentage of respondents who feel that their community is a safe place for women and youth between the baseline (53.5%) and endline (73.7%). The difference of 20.2 percentage points had a statistically significant small effect size of ($\phi=0.202$, $P<.001$). The endline indicator value of 73.7% (male=70.2%; female=76.7%) on the above indicator is above the reconstructed counterfactual of 37% (male=33.6%; female=39.9%) by 36.7% (male=36.6%; female=36.8%).

Compared to the baseline (6.9%), 25.9% (male=29.0%, female=23.1%)

*My husband now looks at me as a partner and not just some dependant as it used to be. **Female Beneficiary, Aweng***

*There is peace in the community. Without peace women cannot leave home for the market which is located many kilometres away from home. **Female Beneficiary, Jur River***

*Before FORESITE project, we used to quarrel with our husbands to the extent of going to court for things as simple as food thinking the husband has diverted money to another wife but now, we are able to look after ourselves and even pay our children's fees and meet other needs of the household without complaining. **Female Beneficiary, Aweng***

of respondents believed that the majority of their friends and community members currently agree with key gender attitude statement. This reflects a 19-percentage point increase on the indicator between the baseline and MTE. The change reflects a moderate effect size ($\phi=0.538$, $P<.001$). The counterfactual was estimated at 17.5% (male=20.6%, female=14.7%), implying that the project result is 8.4 percentage points (male=8.3%, female=8.4%) above the counterfactual.

The percentage change in the measure of the likelihood of traditional court rulings on Housing, Land and Property (HLP) being made in a woman's favour increased by 7.5 percentage points between the baseline of 62.0% and endline of 69.5%. The counterfactual for the above indicator was estimated at 53.1% (female=53.8%, male=52.2%). This means that the situation with the project is significantly above the counterfactual by 16.4% (female=18.9%, male=13.5%). When a paired samples test was conducted on a categorical variable for the HLP indicator, the mean difference between the counterfactual and project scenario was statistically significant ($t_{1550}=-18.33$, $P<.001$). This means the chances of traditional courts passing a ruling on HLP in favour of women were much higher with the project intervention compared to its absence.

5. Inclusive Market Systems Development has contributed to access to agro-inputs, increased crop production and markets

Agricultural markets in South Sudan remain under-developed (NRC, 2022). Farmers find it difficult to sell produce at attractive prices and farmers also face challenges accessing quality farm inputs. This is due to poorly developed local agricultural market systems in different parts of South Sudan. Agro-input dealers hold doubts on the viability of markets to support establishment of agro-input businesses away from regional business hubs such as Wau or Rumbek. In addressing these challenges and due to the occasional presence of conflict, humanitarian agencies often resort to providing free inputs to farmers. This approach has fostered a dependency system and discouraged local traders from participation in the agro-input market. The FORESITE project challenged this norm and facilitated establishment of agro-input dealers who will provide vital agricultural inputs and services on a commercial basis. This approach, which also relied on a cost-sharing modality, increased a sense of ownership by farmers and agro-input dealers, reduced the farmers' dependency mindset and paved the way to sustainability. This was meant to interest and demonstrate the viability of agro-input markets and attract agro-input traders to the agro-input business. The project promoted Inclusive market systems development by adopting a multifaceted approach. The project worked with market actors to support them to better engage poor households in economic interactions. At the same time, the project worked with poor households towards developing the skills and capacity they may need to be able to engage in markets better and more equitably. This approach sought to transform the market system by working at both ends of the value chain. Farmers were organized and trained in how to link with agro-input traders who were similarly engaged by the project and facilitated to actively link with farmers. Two activities were facilitated: firstly, the project collaborated with agro-input dealers, offering subsidies for each ox - plough unit sold and facilitating buying linkages with wholesalers. This incentivizes dealers to stock ox- ploughs and ensures a steady supply in the market. Concurrently, it focused on cultivating customer demand by using lead farmers as role models. They demonstrate the benefits of ox ploughs and showcase alternative financing options. By simultaneously addressing supply and demand challenges, FORESITE has established a functioning local market for ox ploughs... Secondly, contract farming was facilitated by the project between seed multiplication farmer groups formed by the project and a selected seed company. These interventions registered significant results and promise to have sustainable impact even after FORESITE project has ended. The key results include:

There has been a remarkable change in attitudes towards cost-sharing approach. Farmers embraced acquisition of ox-ploughs on cost sharing basis where they paid 50% and the project also paid 50% of ox-plough cost. A total of 1565 ox-ploughs were accessed through cost-sharing arrangement. Initial access to ox-ploughs through cost sharing arrangement triggered demand for ox-plough. This led to further purchases of ox-ploughs without cost-sharing or subsidy. Survey data revealed that 56.9% of targeted farmers had their own ox-ploughs and occasionally provided ox-ploughing services to community members. By March 2023, one agro-dealer at Marial Baai, Jur River had sold 610 ox-ploughs since 2020, out of which 130 ox-ploughs were sold by farmers without project subsidy. This is a clear case of demand generation for agricultural input and

*When NRC came to Marial Baai, we used not to cultivate using ox-ploughs. The cost sharing enables us to acquire ox-ploughs and almost everyone here has an ox-plough and we are able to cultivate big land. This has made us to have much harvest and address food insecurity in our households and community. **Female Beneficiary, Marial Baai, Jur River***

*There are other persons who usually buy ox-ploughs from me who are not FORESITE beneficiaries. They pay a full price of ox-ploughs. **Agro-input dealer, Marial Baai, Jur River***

*The seeds that we were given have on average encouraged large scale farming. The local farmers have increased or doubled compared to the period before the project. Initially, they could cultivate one or less feddans but currently, they cultivate 5-10 feddans due to the seeds that were provided. It is only that last year that gardens were affected by floods. **Beneficiary, Aweng, Twic***

making agro-input businesses attractive to the private sector.

Accordingly, land under cultivation of sorghum increased by 106% between the endline (3.7 hectares) and baseline of (1.8 hectares). Similarly, land under cultivation of groundnuts increased by 73% between the endline (1.9 hectares) and baseline (1.1 hectares). The increase in acreage has also resulted into improvement in yield of 27% for sorghum over a baseline of 524 kg/ha and eight percent for groundnuts over the baseline of 432 kg/ha. Final evaluation results on crop yields were lower than MTE findings. This was due to 2022 seasonal flooding which negatively affected crop performance.

Contract farming involving a seed company (Pro-seed company) and local farmer groups in Jur River have enabled farmers to access markets for their produce and earn extra income. The Pro-seed company based in Juba entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with community groups to purchase groundnut seeds produced by FORESITE seed groups. Accordingly, 51.7 tonnes of seeds were produced, out of which 36.2 tonnes worth SSP 20 Million (Approximately USD 45,000) were sold to Pro-seed Company under contract farming. One farmer group at Marial Baai sold seeds worth SSP 7 million (USD 16,000) to the pro-seed company in one season. This has been one of the most successful innovations and models introduced by FORESITE project in the programming landscape in South Sudan.

4. Conclusions

The FORESITE project performed well and offers many lessons for designing and implementing similar interventions in the future. The project has strengthened resilience of smallholder households. Through integrated programming, addressing gender biases, building social cohesion and facilitating the development of inclusive market systems, resilience has been achieved. The project has demonstrated that it is possible to phase-out hand-outs in form of free agricultural input to smallholder farmers. Focusing on more progressive farmers and addressing needs of vulnerable groups enables farmers to embrace market solutions to improving crop productivity and access to markets. The integrated approach to programming enables farmers to diversify their sources of income and withstand any shocks which may affect single sources of income.

The project has strongly demonstrated the linkage between peace-building (conflict), food security and resilience. The Community in Cueibet is reaping the dividends of peace-building. These peace dividends are in form of prevention of loss of livelihood assets due to cattle raiding, more engagement in livelihood activities and better access to markets to address food needs and raise incomes due to free movement and elimination of fear linked to revenge killings.

5. Lessons Learnt

- a) A structured engagement with youth through peace clubs and youth farmers and linking them to other community-based peace structures and production is a good catalyst for peacebuilding and conflict resolution and economic transformation within and between communities. In this way, youth are great agents in terms of peace and socio-economic development;
- b) With the right approach, communities which have been exposed to and depend on long-term emergency support can be self-reliant. The cost recovery approach the project employed turned around the dependency thinking or the assumption that farmers are poor and cannot pay or contribute and need to receive handouts always. This approach however works best where there are no other co-located agencies offering the same inputs for free.
- c) An effective collaboration between partners with unique expertise complimenting each other lays a good foundation for and facilitates project effectiveness. The strong performance of FORESITE project is significantly attributed to the synergy between AVSI, NRC and WVSS and Government of South Sudan departments (Gender, agriculture, and cooperatives).
- d) Climate change risks are ever present and pose a big danger to food security intervention. This is clearly demonstrated by the negative effects of the 2022 flooding of targeted farmers. In this regard, FMNR interventions are an appropriate package of Food Security and Livelihood interventions.
- e) Input-output market linkage initiatives (between producer groups and the private sector) introduced by the project can be cited as a role model in shifting the mindset of smallholder farmers from subsistence farming to commercial farming (market-oriented production).
- f) Gender Male/Female Champions approach employed by the project showed remarkable results in shifting/changing the mindsets, mentality, attitudes and behaviours of men and women including entire community members. The MTE and Final evaluation gender indicator can tell the significance of this approach;
- g) Project approach to group formation (S4T, Farmer Groups, Mother Groups etc.) brought different people from varied ethnic backgrounds to work together with common goals. This has immensely contributed to promoting networking, experience sharing between members and most importantly strengthened social cohesion for peaceful coexistence.
- h) A market-based approach involving documentation of community needs and identifying corresponding vocational trades to address them addressing such needs and training youth on such trades increases skills application (employability) by trained youth and directly contributed to improving the economic situation of youth as community needs are addressed.

6. Recommendations

- a) In the context of South Sudan, resilience building needs longer-term, multi-year and well-integrated multi-sectoral investment. Given the depth and breadth of poverty and challenges in the area, a longer-term and multi-sectoral investment helps to achieve the desired change in scale.
- b) South Sudan in general and the project area in particular, have a huge untapped potential in agriculture. Therefore, market-oriented agricultural production can make a huge difference not only in the lives and livelihoods of smallholders but also to the economy of the country as a whole.
- c) Given the potential, strengthening and scaling up value chain initiatives is important- this helps to facilitate linkage between producers and buyers and to add value along the food systems.
- d) Considering the high level of unemployment and under-employment, it would be very important to engage and support youth led socio-economic activities. Specifically, a proper market assessment of youth economic empowerment interventions is recommended to ensure alignment of interventions and community demand or needs. Doing so helps not only to empower youth but also contributes towards ensuring stability and peace in project areas.
- e) Climate change risks should be considered systematically in planning at all levels in order to build on adaptation measures in future designs, which may not be limited to climate-smart agriculture and natural resource management but may include other interventions such as establishment of woodlots, planting and preserving trees on farms, protection of forest areas and any water and soil conservation interventions.
- f) In light of the impact of climate change and growing conflicts over natural resources (especially water and pasture) on smallholder farmers, it would be advisable to further strengthen the climate-smart agriculture approach including natural resource management. The FORESITE initiatives in this region are commendable but need to be further strengthened and scaled up. Approaches such as learning visits to Climate Smart Agriculture Sites or trial sites are recommended. In addition, farm radio can also be explored to provide information and train farmers on improved farming practices.

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