

Final evaluation of Tufaidike Wote

Addendum to the Final Evaluation report

Sarah Hughes, Consultant

1. Introduction

This addendum is written as a selective observation on the final evaluation report of Tufaidike Wote in light of the circumstances which curtailed my greater involvement in the evaluation process as had been planned.¹ Time constraints have meant that it is largely a collection of observations, questions and comments which are drawn from my own experience in community-based recovery in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere, together with the insights I can bring as designer of the project 5 years ago. Had time allowed I would have backed up these personal findings with appropriate academic reference material. Nevertheless limited as they are, I hope they will provide some food for thought alongside the evaluation report. It has been a privilege to engage in even such a limited way with such an important and interesting exercise.

2. Comments on Findings/Approach

The Randomised Control Trial method used for the evaluation has been far-reaching and thorough. These few comments and questions attempt to add a more qualitative dimension to the findings. It is observed at the outset that the change recorded between baseline and endline data in the target communities is more striking than that recorded between treatment and non-treatment community data. This will be discussed below.

Confirmation that conflicts in the target communities are predominantly land-related is useful as this was pre-supposed in the project design. A key component of the overlapping combined approach used in the design was the ability to use conflict resolution structures' and skills' building at community level to identify and address these conflicts, as well as the many issues related to access to land. Land issues constitute an overriding barrier to security and economic development in the communities concerned. It is therefore a significant project result that more than 50% of land conflicts were resolved but questions in this important area remain. Questions such as : Are the remaining significant proportion of land conflicts/land access issues too complex and deep-rooted to be addressed at community level by community actors ? Was there a follow through from the resolution of a conflict to material support from the agricultural support component of the project in order to reap the benefits ? Are other stakeholders (local/international NGOs and/or traditional and state authorities in the project areas already sufficiently engaged in these issues for further community level effort to be unwise or unnecessary ?

¹ Cf. Note 5, p13 final report. I am very grateful for everyone's patience, support and understanding in this regard.

The resolution of the armed conflict between the Mavivi and Ngite communities in the insecure Batanga-Mbau groupement of N. Kivu stands out as an impressive result for a community level structure.

Yet the impact of the peace committees' otherwise concentrating on civil conflicts should not be underestimated. The capacity to address these conflicts will contribute greatly to strengthening citizen responsibility and social cohesion. The intervention of the peace committees to resolve conflicts arising from project activities is also an area of synergy which was looked for in the project design.

The further snowballing effect of different community structures reinforcing each others' work in terms of establishing a practice of social accountability is worthy of note. The same is true in relation to individual empowerment where an individual's acquiring several positions of responsibility reinforces their commitment and standing in the community – especially where the individual concerned is a woman. Of course the community structures must at the same time ensure that there are checks and balances in place to address abuses of position and power which may ensue.

The success of the community savings and credit schemes (AVEC) is singularly impressive, particularly in enhancing women's empowerment, and in the multiplication of spontaneous AVEC groups. The dangers of non-repayment and fraud encountered are only to be expected and capacity building of committees to address them must be built in to these committees' duties from the outset.

Despite certain achievements most notably in the market gardening area, the overall results of the agriculture component of the project are disappointing. It must be concluded that this has reduced the overall impact of the project given its combined approach.

The flexibility of the rapid response component to address very diverse needs in different communities has achieved impressive results. It would be interesting to know if this entailed any disruption to the conduct of core project activities, particularly since the rapid response interventions took place in non-core project areas ?

3. Discussion

Tufaidike Wote has had many positive results but in many cases it is observed that the scale of the impact is limited. First, this is true geographically. The project was designed for implementation in 70 communities, it was actually implemented in 15. This striking fact is food for thought for all those (USAID, consortium partners and so on) who were involved in decision making at the highest levels. Second, only limited change appears to have occurred in many areas of comparison between treatment and non-treatment communities. While this is frequently the case in community-based projects it still deserves further investigation and discussion.² How much change for instance could be attributable to general environmental evolution in a given context ? How could this be assessed across a number of variables ?

Another highly critical aspect is that concerning the sustainability of results and outcomes. There are several relevant points of discussion.

² IRC has embarked on a major piece of research in this area; cf. Beyond Critique. Revised approaches to community-driven development : An inception paper ; Sheree Bennett and Alyoscia d'Onofrio, April 2014.

The first is once more geographical. Of all the Tufaidike Wote (TW) communities, I have only been able to identify the following as probable target communities in the preceding Promoting Stabilisation and Community Reintegration Programme (PSCR) : Kamuronza, Bwegera, Kaniola, Nyakabere.³ It is gratifying to know that the water situation was addressed in Bwegera as this was an expressed need at the time of PSCR intervention. Was the community development plan (2011) referred to at all by TW in establishing this as a priority with the community ? Apart from these few cases (where the continuity may not even have been noticed or exploited) opportunities for consolidation and sustainability are likely to have been lost by not considering some other PSCR communities as targets for TW.

Second is to ascertain whether there a clear link between material benefits gained by a community during the project and their motivation to continue to sustain their voluntary commitments to the community structures they have established ? Evidence from TW and elsewhere suggests that this is the case. It would appear to be so in the project findings particularly where the link is direct as in the case of the AVEC. In contrast it is noted that participation in the valuable community forums was dropping off after the end of the project. It would be useful to know whether the reduction in motivation is equally shared by community members and traditional/local authority stakeholders or predominantly one or other group ? It is indeed suggested that women's involvement is affected where the latter groups are opposed to it (p24).

At the same time it is clear that establishing committees and structures on a legitimate footing with basic accommodation and equipment is necessary for their sustainability. Sadly this is not often very adequately carried out either in TW or elsewhere.

Third is the importance of building on success to enhance sustainability. Again the AVEC are maybe the clearest case where it is recommended that their success be built on by expanding their capital and membership and linking them where possible to banking facilities.

Overall, the importance of creating spaces and opportunities for information sharing and dialogue both horizontally between communities, and vertically between communities and actors with authority (including importantly at groupement level), is proven by the project results. All the many different initiatives which took place during the project contributed, even if often only in small ways, to addressing the many asymmetries in access to information, knowledge and power at community level, thereby building social accountability and cohesion. This is perhaps particularly true with regard to working with traditional structures ie. local chiefs. Chiefs can be both allies and adversaries depending on their judgement and position viz a viz other powerful actors. It was a positive feature that the project involved chiefs in community fora and other initiatives. The report written for the project by Hélène Morvan entitled Through the Citizen Lens : Local Involvement in the Management of Public Affairs, 2016 is a very eloquent exposition of these issues and makes important recommendations based on Tufaidike Wote project evidence.⁴

A gap in the evaluation report is any reference to the 6 social contracts (SARP) which were negotiated. These were to have been a particularly innovative feature of the project and it would be useful to understand better the process undertaken and the result achieved.

³ I have been unable to verify these against PSCR documents which are no longer in my possession.

⁴ Cf. Also Réinventer le Quotidien, Hélène Morvan, 2005, Life and Peace Institute.

There is also little mention of the involvement of local partners in the project. While usually needing considerable investments of time and effort, local partners are overwhelmingly a positive vehicle for sustainability of project knowledge and results. Difficulties with one or two partners are mentioned in the report, but a fuller description of the positive contribution that other partners made would help give a more balanced picture of their role in the project.

The combined project approach seems to have once more proved its worth. However there were certainly capacity imbalances, lack of harmonisation, differences and disagreements between the consortium partners which caused day to day difficulties and probably compromised project results. The importance of a well planned start up period for a project of this complexity cannot be overstated, together with investment in field staff training and strong and transparent management throughout the life of the project.

Tufaidike Wote has brought about real change in its target communities. Women and children have improved their well-being and increased their opportunities for knowledge and citizen involvement. At the very least the foundations in good practice and the pre-conditions of accountable governance and social cohesion which will eventually challenge the prevailing paradigm of war and insecurity have been strengthened. This much community-based initiatives can do, much more depends on the wider context and many other actors.

4. Final Comments

The report contains many interesting case studies which warrant being well documented and disseminated.

The report's recommendations are clear and strong. Many of them are not new. This makes them more rather than less important.

It is good news that there is a successor to Tufaidike Wote : Solutions for Peace and Recovery - 'Achieving Peace for All by Including All.' From what I have learnt the new project builds well on Tufaidike Wote particularly as regards peace building and community dialogue, and to a lesser extent principles of good governance. For instance there is a positive accent on research into root causes of conflict, and communicating community level initiatives and successes vertically to local, provincial and even national actors. Women's involvement will remain a priority. It is to be hoped that there will be some continuity of target communities to learn lessons and build on success.

Of course it is impossible for one new project to take on every issue. But it is to be hoped that the opportunity to further explore the links between sustainable livelihoods, peace building and good governance will be returned to at another occasion. And that the investment in local partners will remain a firm pillar of project design and implementation.

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