LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND
Harvesting first experiences

Online learning event, 16ᵗʰ of October 2020
Additional Questions and Answers

This document contains all the answers to the questions that were raised during the event, but could not have been answered due to time limitations. To maximize the learning effect of the webinar, we decided to collect the answers to these questions and share them with the audience
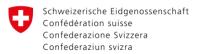
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Solidarity Groups (SGs) approach:

1. **In the solidarity groups approach, are the groups doing additional activities together to increase the impact?**

    In the presentation, we only briefly touched upon this. The financial activities (savings and lending) mainly serve as a means for building strong groups. They are not the groups' raison d'être, but rather are a starting-point. Eventually, they are wrapped up in a much wider range of communal activities, which drive more far-reaching change processes. What these activities are is often context and situation-dependent. For instance, some groups may have a particular service which they want to lobby for, or an improvement they want to create for themselves, such as upgrading irrigation or gaining a community health center. Others have a more urgent need for secure land titles for their village. In an emergency situation, groups help members – sometimes even needy non-members – with free food or rebuilding after a natural disaster. So the idea is that SGs enable members to undertake whatever collective action their community specifically needs, in a spirit of solidarity. Within this diversity, we found particular patterns. In Senegal, groups often act as a cooperative buying-and-selling organization, getting better collective prices for what villagers want to buy or sell. In Madagascar, groups often organize that members help each other with planting and harvesting crops, which saves money and increases incomes. In India, groups exchange seeds amongst each other, to increase the biodiversity and yield of traditional crops.

2. **Solidarity groups are often pre-existing in villages, at least in Senegal. Have the groups studied in the impact assessment been specifically created to include people who were previously excluded?**

    In general, the groups studied in the impact assessment have been specially mobilized by the program to include everybody who wants to join, especially people with no means. But there is a multitude of "solidarity groups" (depending on the definition) in Senegal and Fastenopfer's approach is indeed based on pre-existing traditions and cultural values. There are often several groups in one village and a person can be member of various groups. The rules vary from group to group and some have started to take up the same name "calebasse de solidarité", which can add to confusion but can also be taken as a sign of the success of the approach.

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3. How long do you "normally" work with a group, be it a solidarity group or another organized group of vulnerable persons?

This depends on several factors and varies from country to country as does the intensity of accompaniment of groups. At the initial stage of the first few years, partner organizations provide trainings and most importantly very close accompaniment through local animators. While the groups' self-confidence is increasing, the level of accompaniment is decreased step by step and at one point phased out completely. This may take 6 to 15 years, depending on the context. As groups also form networks which are accompanied by the partner organizations, even "phased out" groups are still monitored to a certain extent and in case of severe issues, accompaniment can be started again.

4. The "leaks in the bucket" do exist at all levels (not only with the poorest/most vulnerable). Does external funding still make sense at all?

As a general rule, with external funding, one can always achieve more, but one risks losing local ownership and control of the process. So it is smart to use the resources that a community has, grow them over time, and then cautiously add more. The stronger the collective is, the better it can use anything given from outside, as for instance the WASH policy community has found in decades of work with community management of water and sanitation resources. So, for example, transferring resources for a communal seed threshing machine – as we found some groups in Senegal requesting from local government – could make a huge difference to members' incomes if it helps them move up the agricultural value chain. But the machine has to be looked after and managed, which it takes a strong group to do. A well run group can sustain and multiply the gains.
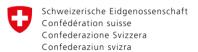
Power relations in the communities:

5. Did you also look at communities/villages that are divided by conflict, religion or ethnicity?

The impact evaluation done by IDS did not specifically focus on this, although many of the communities that we sampled had experienced conflict. In Madagascar in particular, villages often suffer from a lack of rule of law, such that local conflicts and national politics can escalate into serious violence. We asked all survey respondents a battery of questions about mutual assistance being and able to resolve problems and speak with one voice as a community. Overall, we found moderate to large impacts on measures of mutual assistance and having a collective voice. These were larger for mutual assistance in Senegal and larger for collective voice in Madagascar, which is particularly meaningful given the prevalence of social strife in the country. The improvements toward solidarity and greater trust in others were often explained by interviewees as "a return to traditional Malagasy social values". Outside of the study, we noticed in Senegal that the solidarity groups have a very strong impact on the regulation of these conflicts. This is one of the main benefits of the approach, also visible to external people (imams, village chiefs etc.). Sometimes generation-old conflicts between groups or families have been solved. We would like to do more research about this topic with a scientific study co-executed by Senegalese and Swiss researchers. For now we had to postpone the study for an "after-Corona-period".

6. How were local governance structures involved and unequal power relations in the community addressed (structural drivers of exclusion)?

This really depends on the context and it requires responsible duty bearers having the wellbeing of the target group in mind and being able to act. Of the three countries, this is only the case in Senegal at a larger extent. There, the local traditional and governmental governance structures are involved from the beginning, as well as religious leaders and other decision makers. They are informed and invited to join and have a look. At the beginning when the amounts saved are still small, they are often not very interested. But they become more aware of the groups as soon as their means increase, which is often also the moment when the groups have gained enough self-confidence to demand certain actions of the governance

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structures. The peace-building effects are often appreciated by the elders and religious leaders, traditional and governmental leaders appreciate the easy mobilization of the groups, they use them to pass information or to consult the population. In general the collaboration is very good, especially with religious leaders who are active supporters of the approach as it is in accordance to Islam (no interest, solidarity).

7. Is there not the risk that such SGs are taken over by local party members and misused for political purposes?

There are always risks in that relation and thus partner organizations really need to be very close to the groups and networks to be able to monitor this and intervene in time. In some countries, politicians also actively try to align themselves with groups or networks in order to increase their pedigree, thus groups as well as networks and at last instance partner organizations actively try to manage such dynamics so they do not get instrumentalised. Constant awareness raising and close accompaniment are crucial here and it requires very committed actors at all levels. A different issue is members becoming politically active themselves and getting elected into local government to defend the interests and rights of their groups. In some countries, this becomes quite common once people are empowered. Another important facet in this question are the networks of solidarity groups. They are essential for forming a movement from grassroots and the members/representatives of the networks are usually the most engaged members of the solidarity groups. They defend their values strongly, even publicly and identify strongly with the approach. This also contributes to reducing the risks of networks being misused for political purposes.

8. Regarding the solidarity networks, how do you make sure that they do not recreate or evolve into new structures of power inside the community and thus lead to new forms of exclusion?
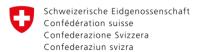
As a principle, networks shall not be politically aligned to any party but represent the group members. But a certain risk cannot be denied, of course, as does the risk of already existing power structures in communities in groups and thus just be a different form of exploitation of the most vulnerable ones. Both risks are inherent with any group approach and need constant monitoring, follow-up and if needed intervention by Fastenopfer's partner organizations. During the impact evaluation, the evaluators were repeatedly told by local program animators that it is key to sensitize people early on for the importance of working together as equals, and this seems to be reflected in both the Senegalese "everyone contribute what you can" and the Malagasy "everyone contribute as much as the poorest person can afford" models. Nonetheless, in the evaluation, we probed strongly for risks of internal inequality or new exclusions. What we found was generally encouraging, with some caveats. For instance, the statement "It is often the better-off who join SGs" was answered negatively by 96% and 92%, respectively, in Senegal and Madagascar. We also found that non-members in the control group, as outsiders, broadly thought the same, though a higher percentage of "not sure" responses also suggested that SGs should make their inclusive messaging clearer. In our focus groups, members generally insisted that their groups were open and welcoming to all – albeit with some exceptions, in that individuals must have good moral fiber, willingness to accept the rules, and share the group's vision. This can lead to groups not including, or expelling, neighbors who are seen as difficult to work with or not trustworthy.

Advocacy:

9. Can those self-help groups be a starting point for mobilization for advocacy with some extra support and what exactly should that be?

Yes, they are, and it is an explicit objective of Fastenopfer to empower people so they can claim and defend their rights. See also answer to next question.

Common question:

1. **I heard a lot of enriched experiences and approaches on working with community and targeted groups. Are there any concrete examples where you have worked with governments and bureaucracy in changing the rule of game/behavior of the duty-bearer? What were the challenges and successes?**

Fastenopfer:

Groups and their networks have indeed a large potential for advocacy and lobbying if the context is facilitating this. But in the programmes we insist on letting the solidarity groups and their networks (if existing) do this themselves rather than our partner organizations acting on their behalf. They are closely accompanied, though. In Senegal, most demands are at village level (access to land, a new school, street, school kits, health kits etc.). They are often successful as the decision makers are impressed by the mobilization and the bottom-up movement of the (mostly) women. At national level, the calabashes are now recognized by state actors, symbolized by the participation of the Minister of microfinance and social and solidary economy at the third national day of Solidarity Calabashes in 2019. In India, groups and networks are also quite active in A+L activities but in more subtle ways considering the rapidly shrinking space for civil society. In Madagascar, there were strong initiatives in the past to lobby the government to establish desks to claim land titles and this was quite successful for a while. But it has almost collapsed in the wake of the long lasting crisis.

Kooperationsgemeinschaft (KoGe):

The KoGe members and their partner organisations are involved in policy dialogues with national or multilateral stakeholders for various reasons, one being that projects and programmes can only develop their full potential and be sustainable in an enabling policy environment. The KoGe partner organisations, be it alone or together with other stakeholders, very often fight successfully for improved political and economic conditions for their left behind target groups.

Some examples from the KoGe network include the following:

- Horyzon's Rehabilitation Programme engages in advocacy activities using a rights-based approach to promote better respect of the rights of people with disabilities (PWD) and trauma in the oPt. It addresses stakeholders at the different levels: on the national level, the project aims to upgrade legislations and policies to provide proper protection mechanisms for PWD. On the meso and micro level, the project works in mainstreaming disability issues within civil society organisations, municipalities, etc. through the organisation of meetings, awareness raising campaigns and capacity building. Additionally, the project facilitates community initiatives on topics such as rights of PWD and gender justice. Thanks to the experience and lobbying capabilities of Horyzon's partners, its Rehabilitation Programme in the oPt has achieved changes in policy frameworks on several levels, including laws on national level and disability-inclusive policies among public entities (e.g. barrier-free access for persons with disabilities).
- In South Sudan, a multi-stakeholder initiative (including Mission 21, the FDFA and other governments as well as other NGOs) supports the South Sudanese Council of Churches to realize its peacebuilding efforts on track 1, 2 and 3. This joint initiative created promising spaces for dialogue reconciliation and peace building.
- In order to address structural gender inequalities, cfd's programmes are engaged in advocacy activities for more protective laws and regulations on municipal and/or national level (such as Amendments to the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in Bosnia Herzegovina). Besides the positive impact on the level of the target group, cfd thus creates a fertile soil for interventions of other NGOs working in this area and contributes to an enabling environment for CSOs.

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- Policy Dialogue on alcohol laws is a main goal of International Blue Cross' programmes. In Chad, a draft alcohol law has been finalized as a result of Blue Cross Chad's action in line with WHO principles and is now with the Legislature for final adoption. Actions are carried out with the representatives of the various public ministries involved in the follow-up of the implementation of the law as well as with the deputies to bring the proposed law to the National Assembly.
- Steps undertaken by the handicap consultation framework in Burkina Faso, of which Mission Evangélique Braille (MEB)'s Buco is a founding member, has led to the adoption of decrees for the application of the law 012-AN-2010 by the Government on the rights of persons with disabilities. The coordinator of the MEB was an observer at the National Assembly during the adoption of this law.
- In the new programme of Salvation Army (SAID), legal rights of children will be an important focus: In Kenya, children in schools will form Rights of Children groups that will be linked to respective Area Advisory Councils that are legal institutions formed in every area to support children at risk of abuse. The SAID programme will also sensitize children, adolescents and caretakers and increase the advocacy work, e.g. through the participation in platforms and municipal councils.

Lessons learnt:

- The KoGe counterparts are primarily state authorities at provincial or municipal level. Rarely do the KoGe partners play a major role at the national level in terms of legislation or development plans, although this also happens.
- The KoGe partners advocate for favourable legislation and specific targets in the specific niches where they are prominent, e.g. in the area of alcohol abuse prevention or disability rights in the case of IBC and MEB partners.
- KoGe organisations place special importance on involving the target groups. For instance, they support the creation, development and strengthening of Community Based Organisations (CBO), Self-Help Groups and neighbourhood/parents/women committees who are strengthened to demand their rights and encouraged to participate actively in local platforms, networks and councils that are working towards demanding the rights of their communities towards the duty-bearers.
- To allow for a better involvement of target groups, it is a good practice to include the empowerment of people left behind explicitly in the results framework including corresponding outcomes. KoGe's SDG 16+ framework is designed to contribute, among others, to SDG Targets 10.2 and 16.7 (social and political empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups & participatory decision making). Outcomes defined by the KoGe relating to these targets are the "social and political empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups" as well as "increased awareness on and respect of rights".