

## End of Project Evaluation

### Bringing the Community on Board (BCoB):

“Strengthening the role of Civil Society Organisation’s (CSOs) in increasing the economic resilience of communities”

#### Background and objective:

██████████ and World Vision Lanka (WVL) designed the BCoB project in response to the EU’s Call for Proposals to “*enhance CSO’s contribution to governance and development processes*”. Both partners realised the limited capacities CSOs had to participate in development planning at community level, while local authorities and provincial level decision makers lacked systems and procedures for including the voice of rural populations in decision making. The project aimed at addressing this two-fold disconnect, ensuring that both, CSOs and local authorities would be capacitated.

The 36-month project started in 2016. The overall objective of BCoB was *to strengthen CSOs as leading stakeholders in promoting inclusive and sustainable local economic development*.

#### Evaluation methodology:

The evaluation combined the review of project documents, the analysis of quantitative monitoring data, including results from the end of project report, with highly participatory qualitative learning and reflection methodologies. The participatory, reflective data collection process in Sri Lanka started with a workshop for national staff from both implementing partners and the project staff. An entry workshop with key stakeholders and local actors helped to identify potential challenges and successes of the project to be investigated in more detail. FGDs were facilitated in a reflective, visualised workshop style. They covered guided capacity self-assessments of the CBOs, an identification of project

achievements and its contributors, challenges, and the future potential for sustainability. Site visits and daily informal conversations with staff and stakeholders have further contributed to the evaluation.

#### Key Findings

**Relevance:** ██████████ and WV have both worked in the intervention area before and have designed the project based on the understanding of local needs. The project mostly focused on farming related activities, since the vast majority of the target population of the three Districts are farmers. Across all FGDs, BCoB was identified as the most relevant external actor in the areas of change it was supporting the community to achieve. The project covered several activities, ensuring its relevance by facilitating three assessments: one focusing on CSOs and their capacities, the second focusing on future production opportunities by analysing value chains, and a third study facilitating a vulnerability assessment producing a risk map of the intervention area.

The project managed to reach the most vulnerable, e.g. by creating a wide variety of economic opportunities and by transforming the CSOs charity-based approach to people living with disabilities to an empowerment approach.

**Effectiveness:** One challenge in determining the effectiveness of BCoB were ill-defined or unmeasurable higher-level indicators, which do not reflect the actual success of the project. BCoB has been successful despite facing significant unpredictable external challenges, including the non-presence of

Local Authorities throughout most of the project life, resulting in the delay of critical activities.

The project was successful in developing CSO's capacities, the project managed to put Development Implementation Frameworks (DIFs) in place as an institutionalised mechanism. CSO federations were formed, registered and enabled to engage in policy dialogue during the final months, due to the earlier absence of LAs. Economic activities for the most vulnerable households have been initiated or strengthened. Significant levels of relevant knowledge have been transferred to CSOs and local actors. In summary, despite facing significant external challenges, the project has been highly effective in achieving its defined changes.

**Efficiency:** An earlier audit and the evaluation have shown that BCoP has been very efficient in using its funds. Implementation has been extremely close to the project design, despite the challenges faced.

**Impact:** A major impact of the project has been to enable and strengthen local CSO to take an active role and drive local development. The mandate of Farmers' Associations (FAs) has been transformed towards a proactive role in local development.

BCoB has enabled higher levels of economic activity among CSO members and specifically vulnerable families (e.g. through introducing households to dairy farming).

Access to information has increased through establishing an Management Information System (MIS).

BCoP has contributed to the empowerment of women and people living with disabilities, visible in new roles and with new responsibilities within the local context.

**Sustainability:** Determining the sustainability of changes at the time of the evaluation is challenging because external factors had resulted in the delay of critical activities, as the establishment of the CSO federations or the MIS.

Overall, prospects are positive for two reasons: the continued presence of both implementing partners in the project area will allow providing continued follow-up support in critical areas as the newly established federations. Even more important, the project has had a very sound design in integrating critical components for sustainability: a broad spectrum of capacities have been developed among CSO members and their thinking has been changed, defining their own role and potential in development more proactively.

### Key Recommendations:

- The set-up of the project with its multi-layered approach is a positive example to learn from for future interventions targeting CSOs.
- Before finalising a Logical Framework, sufficient attention should be given whether major project components have been included in a consistent way.
- Mechanisms should be in place between donors and implementers allowing to address externally induced delays to reduce risk and potential harm.
- For ensuring that a CSO or federation will have a system in place to continue learning and be accountable towards its stakeholders, CSO owned DME system should be included from the beginning. Equally, an exit strategy should be jointly developed with local actors early on.
- In a power sensitive context, a do-no-harm analysis may be helpful at the onset to ensure that involving and relating to different stakeholders will not cause challenges, create opposition or potentially threaten long-term sustainability.
- Measuring change, there is often pressure or perceived pressure to set unrealistically high targets to satisfy the donor. However, these will always lead to problematic evaluation results, a strong project may even seem to have failed. It is important to find ways to be realistic, f. e. in terms of indicators.

