

AMREF Summary Responses to Katine External Evaluator's July 08 Trip Report

AMREF acknowledges the evaluator's second trip report on progress 9 months into the 3-year Katine Community Partnership Project (KCPP). We will endeavor to prioritize the recommendations that are practical and can enhance the delivery of this groundbreaking project which aims to improve the quality of lives for households and communities in Katine. We are pleased with the significant progress achieved against the stated project goals and objectives within every project component, including health, education, water and sanitation, livelihoods and community empowerment. Community structures are now fully functional and are driving the project forward and this is the foundation of AMREF's approach to Community Based Development (CBD).

While we recognize the expertise of the independent evaluator, it must also be appreciated that AMREF, in implementing the KCPP, has been informed by its 51-year history (25 in Uganda) working with communities in Africa. Therefore, while we take serious note of the recommendations, we reserve the right to hold a different opinion on some of the evaluator's comments, especially when we consider them against our experience in community-based development.

Since its creation as the Flying Doctors of East Africa 51 years ago, AMREF has prided itself on being a learning organisation. As one of 23 AMREF projects in Uganda alone, KCPP and its outcomes are linked to AMREF's wider country and global strategic aims. KCPP is a unique and complex project and a good opportunity for AMREF to learn and to test our community development approach under public scrutiny. We would like to thank the whole AMREF team for their energy and commitment; the district stakeholders; the Katine communities; FARM-Africa's technical support; the Guardian, their readers and Barclays. The project continues to grow despite the challenge of catalyzing development in a setting where poverty is pervasive.

AMREF's RESPONSE TO THE EVALUATOR'S COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

ARTICULATING AMREF'S DEVELOPMENT MODEL, DEVELOPMENT IMPACT AND OUR ADVOCACY APPROACH

AMREF's Community Based Development approach focuses on working with and empowering communities to ultimately demand and claim their rights. We believe this is how developmental impact can be achieved. We also believe in working with government to sensitise them to the needs and concerns of communities. By working with both groups, AMREF acts a living contact between community and government to promote development. Importantly, AMREF draws on research from this work to influence both health and development policy and practice. Again, our experience tells us that this is a process that takes time, bearing in mind the power dynamics between communities and their leaders, the high levels of illiteracy, gender inequality and the impact of conflict on their capacities. In the context of the agreed project design, and in response to the evaluator's comments, the community empowerment component will include a rights-based approach.

AMREF's role is to empower communities and increase their capacity to engage government at various levels. AMREF operates a two-pronged advocacy strategy which we regard as a long-term process that includes promoting meaningful community participation and empowerment while at the same time strengthening the capacities of governments to effectively respond to the needs and interests of communities. It is important to note that AMREF can and, when appropriate, does, critique governmental action. Over its 51-year history AMREF has expressed different views from those of local and national governments. However, this is always framed constructively and intended in the spirit of partnership with the best interests of the community in mind. Again, we proactively encourage communities to meet with their leaders, to discuss issues that affect them, to raise awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and to identify, revitalize, strengthen and support community advocacy action.

The result of all this is our commitment to closing the gap between communities and public services. We believe we are on the right track, and that stronger links between government and community,

coupled with increased awareness among communities about their rights will ultimately lead to greater action on claiming their rights to clean and safe water, quality health care etc.

In response to the evaluator's comments on our development model, we would like to point out that operations research and advocacy as a strategic AMREF approach is very much a part of the KCPP, and the logical evolution of a new project means that it follows on from our other two strategic priorities – capacity building and community partnering. The project's necessary first priority was on awareness building and the enhancement of community participation. Although this activity is ongoing, the next phase will place more emphasis on formalizing how the project will gather evidence from its various components and how this evidence will be documented, shared and utilized to influence policy and best practices at the local and national levels.

PERCEIVED DELAYS TO PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

While some of the delays outlined in the evaluator's report may have been avoided, it is important to note that all the partners in the project had underestimated the lead time needed to ensure genuine community participation. This was dealt with in the project work plans, which outlined a sequence of activities with inbuilt flexibility to ensure the participation of the community. The evaluator's recommendations must take into consideration the environment in which the project is taking place. AMREF believes communities need to lead the development process to ensure sustainability and the pace of project implementation is driven by community priorities and capacity. Activity deadlines therefore should respect this and allow time and space for review and amendment. However, as the capacity of communities increases, AMREF will continue to push for tighter timelines.

AMREF's MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

AMREF has standard management guidelines and procedures that are applied across all AMREF projects in order to ensure consistency across projects and for quality assurance; this applies to KCPP. These guidelines provide efficiency through scale as well as accountability. It would be more expensive and burdensome to have separate management guidelines for all 23 projects managed throughout Uganda. Moreover, these processes have been developed to support implementation across AMREF.

AMREF senior managers at the country level and within AMREF UK have responsibility for the integrity of KCPP and direct responsibility for project monitoring, quality assurance and overall compliance with donor agreements. The way we operate is through systems-wide, team and matrix based management processes.

AMREF calls attention to the need to put into perspective the purchasing power of £33.50, which may not be much in the UK but which has significant purchasing power in Katine. Further, there are standard procurement procedures that apply across all AMREF projects. An understanding of these standard procedures would help bring the evaluator's comments into perspective.

In relation to participation of AMREF Kampala in local project steering committees, it was agreed with our local partners that senior management would participate in the on-site project committees. The Project Management Committee (PMC) and the Project Steering Committee (PSC) were established through participatory discussions with all the stakeholders. Regarding accountability, all AMREF programmes/projects are routinely audited regularly and AMREF does regularly undertake risk based audits.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER ACTORS

We acknowledge the fact and are committed to ensuring that we deliver a cost-effective project and we recognize that there will naturally be comparisons to other projects. We take note of the cost comparison with NUSAF and believe that in the evaluator's report, a comparison should be done upon agreed criteria and undertaken rigorously and formally for it to be a fair analysis.

PROGRESS AGAINST YEAR 1 ACTIVITIES

PROGRESS ON HEALTH

We are pleased that the evaluator noted progress in immunising children against tuberculosis and other diseases, quicker diagnosis of malaria, distribution of mosquito bednets, antenatal care and better sanitation. There have been no reported deaths from childbirth since the project started as a result of

quick referrals from Traditional Birth Attendants. All of these advances are the result of the training of 66 village health teams, community groups and health workers to address the health of households in Katine and can be attributed to the community's engagement and commitment.

AMREF was fully aware of the typical drug shortage issues at the design stage of KCPP. It is a national problem that is not unique to Katine. Drug shortages and supply chain problems are operations research and advocacy issues that AMREF is addressing through its wider operations in Uganda. The evidence we generate through the work we do with Village Health Teams and from our knowledge of community challenges will be used to advocate at the national level. As KCPP becomes increasingly integrated within the wider AMREF programmes, it will benefit from evidence-based advocacy generated from other projects. We see a role for the media here to bring attention to such a critical issue.

PROGRESS ON EDUCATION

Both AMREF, the local partners and the community are proud of the advances so far in educating young people in Katine. Two new community primary schools have been constructed in close partnership with the community, with new classrooms and 13 toilet blocks built, five schools have so far received rainwater harvesting tanks, three schools are also undergoing significant refurbishment of classrooms, 2,000 books provided and 102 teachers have been trained in creating teaching resources from local materials. The additional resources and new developments will encourage children to attend and stay in school. We are pleased to see parents and teacher associations working together with school management committees to decide on what should be prioritized to give their children a good education. A real achievement so far has been when the community went to Soroti to inform the district education officer of the lack of female teachers in Katine schools. This resulted in the posting of permanent female teachers in schools. It is an example of how AMREF uses project-based evidence and partnership with district leadership to introduce new changes that benefit communities.

PROGRESS ON WATER & SANITATION

Five PVC water storage tanks have been provided to the most water-scarce schools. Eight new boreholes have been installed and the eight existing boreholes have been successfully rehabilitated, bringing clean water to more than 5,100 more people and reducing the incidence of diarrhoea and water-borne diseases, particularly among children under five. The improved hygiene and improved water sources closer to homes means that more young girls can go to school rather than be required to walk for long distances each day to fetch clean water, and women can focus on agricultural activities as increasingly men are willing to fetch water from these cleaner, nearer sources.

PROGRESS ON LIVELIHOODS

We are pleased that trials of a new variety of disease-resistant and higher-yield cassava crop are underway. The first harvest of this new variety is due to arrive in March/April 2009. Eighteen farmer groups and VSLAs Village Savings and Loans Associations have been successfully launched some of which have already secured capital from their members in excess of 300,000 Ugandan Shillings. These groups comprise of 30 people each with two-thirds female representation. Training for farmers in growing the new crop has been important in engaging Katine communities in this project, since availability of food and the chance to support themselves through crop production is so important to them. We are committed to continuing our partnership with FARM-Africa and the technical support they provide to improve income generating opportunities for farmers in Katine.

PROGRESS ON COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The project design was focused on core aspects of community empowerment as a means to improve governance. Time is a key element in the process of community empowerment. We will produce an articulated strategy which we shall share with project partners which we hope will clarify our intended outcomes.

AMREF's understanding and knowledge of community empowerment has evolved over a 51-year engagement with diverse communities in Africa and this is the basis on which the empowerment component was designed. AMREF believes it has the required capacity and competence to develop and manage the empowerment component. 100 community structures are now fully functional with diverse representation. These include Village Health Teams, Parent Teacher Associations, School Management Committees in all 6 parishes of Katine sub-county.

Awareness raising and community empowerment is a key component of governance, and we should not dismiss the use of Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials. Communities need to understand their rights, roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis those of government as a basis for the assertion of their rights. AMREF agrees with the evaluator over the importance of developing a governance strategy in conjunction with the communities. However, this needs to be done as a process if they are to own it and contribute meaningfully to its implementation.

M&E processes

Since a comprehensive M & E framework for KCPP exists, it will be updated periodically based on new project information and in response to community priorities. AMREF is always keen to ensure that its monitoring data is reflective of community priorities. Periodically monitoring changes in the parish, sub-county and district planning process, for signs that the KCPP project activities are having an impact is part of the focus on the Project Management Committee meetings and district committee meetings.

Documenting desired changes to people's lives and their community organisations is a good suggestion by the evaluator. This will be explored when updating the M&E framework. Periodically monitoring changes in the parish, sub-county and district planning process, for signs that the KCPP project activities are having an impact is part of the focus on the Project Management Committee meetings and district committee meetings.

Tracking expenditure without reference to project results does not carry much value. We believe that specific results will be shown against the stated project objectives during the midterm evaluation.

CLARIFYING AMREF'S THEORY OF CHANGE

AMREF is pleased that the external evaluator sees the KCPP as a rich source of material for exploring various evaluation theories. In conjunction with our communities and our local stakeholders, our own focus will remain on implementation and results in the field. The evaluator is welcome to pursue further application of alternative evaluation models and AMREF will continue to learn from that dialogue.

The project is currently maintaining a database of the key partners, groups and their relationships which are updated regularly. We do agree that this will vary from time to time and component to component. The team will continue to keep the updated database which shows all the relationships and will use the software to do this better.

TRANSPARENCY

AMREF agrees with the need to encourage transparency with our stakeholders and is pleased that the evaluator has commended our ongoing commitment to this. Transparency comes with responsibility within the partnership and AMREF has agreed that the best way to pass on such information responsibly is through representatives at the Project Management Committee, the Steering Committee and the various community committees. We believe that the diverse local representation, as well as the various sector community structures (Village Health Teams, School Management Committees, etc), offers the best opportunity for more structured feedback and increased engagement with the wider community. We believe these committees should make their own decisions about the choice and manner in which information is publicized.

The AMREF development model focuses on the regular analysis of value-for-money as a key strategy for sustainable development. We are confident that our development model is rigorous enough to enable us to engage in informed development debates with other, like-minded organisations.

Almost a year into the project, AMREF is happy with the progress so far and is committed to learning from our experience on what works best. We thank the evaluator again for his valuable comments on refining our monitoring and evaluation processes, which we will learn from, and for his continued engagement with us in Katine.