EX-POST EVALUATION SUMMARY

LEARNING FOR GENDER INTEGRATION IN NICARAGUA

As an organization committed to learning, Lutheran World Relief (LWR) commissioned Global Insights to conduct an ex-post evaluation of our *Gender in Production Development and Food Security* project in the Matiguás Municipality in Nicaragua. The project was implemented in 2013-2015. This evaluation was conducted in June 2019, more than four years after the end of the project, to assess its sustainability and lasting impact, especially during the country's political turmoil in 2018. Other evaluations of this project, including its mixed methods final evaluation, are available on our website: indepth.lwr.org/technical-resources.

Project Name: Gender in Production Development and Food Security
Start Date: April 2013
End Date: March 2015
Location: Matiguás, Nicaragua

PROJECT SUMMARY

With funding from Foods Resource Bank (FRB)[1], Lutheran World Relief and ADDAC (Asociación para la Diversificación y el Desarrollo Agrícola Comunal) worked with 266 men and 143 women members of *La Flor de Pancasán* cooperative from 15 communities to improve their food security. The project aimed to increase the agricultural productivity of marketed crops, diversify farmers household food supply, expand income sources, strengthen the cooperative's administrative and business capacity, and establish strategies for equitable management of household economic resources for both men and women.

This project was a part of Learning for Gender Integration (LGI), a global initiative of LWR to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities to benefit from LWR's work. Cultural Practice, LLC provided technical support to the initiative.

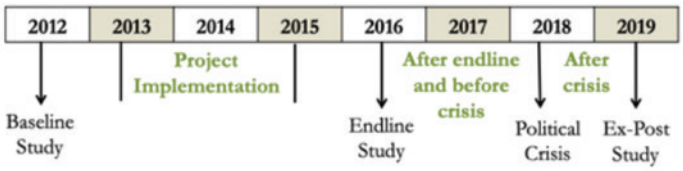
Lutheran World Relief
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. LASTING PROMISE.

1 Since project implementation, FRB has changed their name to *Growing Hope Globally*.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team collected data in target communities in June 2019. The study included two sets of survey participants: a treatment group — members of the cooperative that participated in LWR's project; and a control group — similarly situated individuals that are part of the same communities but have not gone through the project and are not members of the cooperative. By comparing the two groups, the evaluation team could tease out project outcomes and impacts on cooperative members as objectively as possible.

The evaluation leveraged several types of quantitative and qualitative data: (1) existing LWR datasets and reports; (2) original quantitative data from household surveys, and (3) original qualitative data drawn from key informative interviews and community workshops. For qualitative data collection, community workshops based on the Democratic Indicator Selection methodology were held. The household survey had 88 members and 91 nonmembers respondents. Key informant interviews were held with a total of 29 individuals, including employees of the local implementing organization (ADDAC) and local LWR staff.

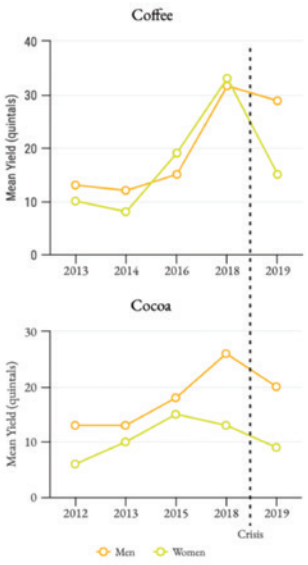


SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

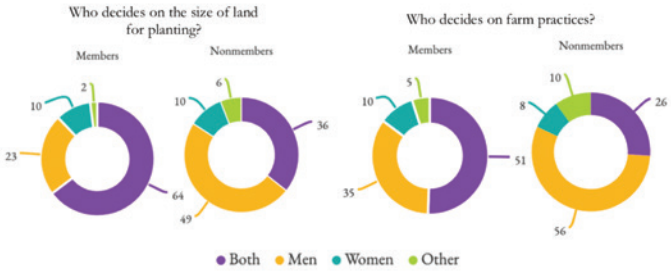
This project was well-received by implementing partners, participants, and target communities. Although participating in activities was time consuming, participants indicated that the project was helpful. Many members wished to participate in a similar project in the future.

COFFEE AND COCOA PRODUCTION

Nearly half of the sample population cultivates coffee, cocoa or both. The ratio between men and women producers is closer to being equal for members — 1.2 male for each female coffee and cocoa producer member. Values were less equal for nonmembers — 2.6 men for each female coffee producer and 1.3 men to each female cocoa producer.



End of project (endline) production levels for coffee were maintained. For cocoa, a small increase for men and a small decrease for women in production was observed between endline and April 2018 (the year before the political and economic crisis in Nicaragua). For coffee, members had higher production levels than nonmembers. The reasons for the lower production performance of women member cocoa growers are unclear. **A year after the start of the crisis, yields decreased by an average of 24 percent for everyone: male and female coffee and cocoa members, and nonmember growers.**



GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality and shared household decision-making improved over time. On average, the number of households engaged in gender equitable decision-making changed from 91 percent at baseline to 90 percent at endline and to 98 percent at ex-post. Training on gender equality encouraged female members to take part in farm management, to grow their own coffee and cocoa fields, to take out loans, and to start other

small initiatives. Male members with a high 'shared household decision-making index' (SHI>75) were the most productive coffee and cocoa producers. Although not statistically significant due to small sample size (n=6), for female members, a positive linear correlation between yields and SHI was observed, suggesting that as household decision-making becomes more gender equal, coffee production increases.

AGENCY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

La Flor de Pancasán is still very active and supportive of its members. The cooperative takes a leading role in coffee and cocoa post-harvest treatment, marketing, and negotiation on international prices, and provides loans to members. **At the beginning of the crisis in 2018, the cooperative was essential in maintaining the livelihoods of its members.**

Currently, only two out of seven board members are women. Board members spend many volunteer hours each week on activities related to the cooperative. Since endline, the number of cooperative members decreased by nearly half – from 409 to 224 members. The ratio between women and men did not change. Most members were aware of the cooperative's gender and credit policy and have reportedly increased their involvement with the cooperative since endline. Further research is required to understand the reason for the drop in cooperative membership. As both ADDAC and *La Flor de Pancasán* continue to be active organizations in communities long after LWR's activities have ceased, some confusion exists regarding responsibilities and collaborations. This is especially true regarding loans.

RESILIENCE

The main shocks and stressors with the potential to lead to food and income insecurity are climate change, fluctuations in international coffee prices, and the country's ongoing economic and political crisis. **Members are more resilient to these shocks and stressors than nonmembers and show a capacity to accumulate wealth over time despite the stressors.** Members have more access to savings and resources that could be used during crisis (76 percent for members and 58 percent for nonmembers). More members invest a part of their budget in improving their living conditions (68 percent for members and 58 percent for nonmembers).

'Organized communities' consistently came up as important during focus group discussions. This relates to community support of the sick and elderly, community funds, seed and tool banks, good communication and sharing of information. The cooperative played such a role in the 2018 crisis. It hired drivers to deliver products between communities and markets, operated a local store, and distributed information. Overall, members felt the cooperative supported them during the crisis.

Although not a focus of this project, the evaluators observed some community members, particularly poor single mothers, had far less capacity to benefit from the project activities due to profound scarcities, such as lack of assets, land, and time.

CONCLUSION

LWR's *Gender in Production Development and Food Security* project was remembered as a successful and helpful project in the communities. Activities were versatile in nature; members with different needs, gender, ages, and so forth found the project relevant. The project applied a holistic approach aimed at addressing many multifaceted issues that impeded growth in the communities. LWR and ADDAC employed monitoring and evaluation protocols throughout the project and adjusted activities based on learnings, such as adding local gender promoters and masculinity components to the program during its second year. These attributes likely contributed to the communities' positive perception of the project.

Four years after completion, project outcomes were generally still sustained. For most indicators of agricultural productivity (i.e. crop yields, crop diversity, knowledge and practice of agricultural management), current results matched or surpassed initial project goals and endline results. Although favorable, these indicators did not vary greatly between the groups of members (treatment) and nonmembers (control). Because of this, impact of the project on agricultural productivity was somewhat unclear.

In terms of gender equality of households and shared decision-making, member women were significantly more active on their farms, and men and women members led households where decision-making was shared more equally when compared to nonmembers. There is some evidence that this caused an increase in the coffee yields of female members, and there was strong evidence illustrating that female members felt empowered, more independent, and valued.

There was evidence that the project contributed to the building of participants' resilience. Cooperative members reported feeling supported during crises. They also had accumulated more wealth and had access to savings and other resources than nonmembers during crises.

Though the project achieved and sustained many positive outcomes, the evaluation found that the cooperative requires more continuous support to enhance fair governance, gender equality, communication and collaboration with members, and overall capacity building. Additional capacity building around climate-smart agricultural approaches in future programs is strongly encouraged. Similarly, future projects would benefit from capacity building around household budget management, saving groups, and financial techniques to cope with economic shocks.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND LEARNING

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Production performance should be more frequently collected and more carefully evaluated during project implementation in order to identify gaps in production. Quantitative and qualitative data should be collected from farmers (self-reported) and from the cooperative (bulk product received).

GENDER EQUALITY

It is recommended that future projects incorporate approaches that monitor and evaluate women's empowerment in agriculture and leverage existing tools to do this. LWR should provide more training for women on how to use loans and more follow up on how to cope with changes in the household power relations after the receipt of loans. LWR should encourage women to form groups where they can share lessons learned and provide moral support to one another. LWR should consider further research on the unique needs and vulnerabilities of single mothers.

AGENCY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Because of their critical contribution to rural communities, LWR should provide more support to cooperative board members, including training on governance, accountancy and budget, inter- and intra-organization coordination, and communication with members. Additionally, LWR should work with board members to target members' needs better. Introducing stipends for cooperative board members may attract more members, especially women, to apply for board positions.

RESILIENCE

Efforts to strengthen cooperatives should be enhanced, especially in terms of organization, management, and communications with members. Trainings on household budget management and the importance of accumulating savings to be used during crisis should also be included. Couples should participate in such trainings together to reinforce the need for shared decision-making and equitable household management.

LWR MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

The recommendations presented in this evaluation, including those more detailed in the full report, have been discussed among LWR's regional and technical teams. Both teams have reflected on the relevance and feasibility of implementing them and have flagged specific recommendations for other stakeholders in the organization. This is especially true for those recommendations that must be incorporated during project design, such as deep assessment of board members' capacities and well-coordinated data collection approaches.

EVALUATION ACTION ITEMS

LWR has identified other projects in the Latin America region that can incorporate specific lessons from this evaluation. For example, a project just beginning implementation is incorporating the recommendation to use qualitative methods to better understand why interventions work better for some participants but not others.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

LWR continues to refine its Rural Economies and Agricultural Livelihoods (REAL) Strategy. Many of these recommendations provide insight into how best to enhance the agency's work in building resilience within and through cooperatives.

Lutheran World Relief
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. LASTING PROMISE.
800.597.5972 | lwr.org