

Progress

In May 2009, CIDA evaluated the GRID/NEA projects in Ghana. Here is a summary of the findings and recommendations from the evaluation.

Key Findings

Relevant

GRID/NEA projects are meeting real needs of people who otherwise would not receive assistance.



Holistic

The many interconnected components of GRID/NEA projects work together to achieve sustainable development.

Effective

GRID/NEA projects are stewarding resources well so that the best possible changes can happen in project communities.

Authentic



GRID/NEA staff have integrity, credibility, and commitment.

Sustainable

GRID/NEA projects are built with an exit strategy in mind. Development results are locally-based and lasting.

Exemplary

GRID/NEA successes can be used to help other organizations around the world.



About the Evaluation

Background

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has been a major donor of GRID/NEA projects in Ghana for years. CIDA routinely evaluates the projects of organizations that receive its funding, so in 2009 it launched an evaluation of GRID/NEA projects.

Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation was threefold:

- to assess the development results of CIDA-funded projects implemented by GRID/NEA
- to assess the capacity of GRID and NEA to implement development initiatives; and
- to provide information on lessons learned and best practices



NEA Board Members participated in the evaluation of GRID/NEA projects in Ghana. All were greatly encouraged by the evaluation findings.

Evaluation Methodology

As per usual practice, CIDA contracted an external consultant to conduct the evaluation. Our staff appreciated the evaluator's professional, capable approach and the recommendations that were given.

The evaluator visited GRID/NEA project sites in February 2009. While there she conducted interviews, focus group discussions, reviewed project documents, and observed project activities and results. She also interviewed Canadian representatives of GRID.

Evaluation Report

The evaluator's comprehensive evaluation report contains a wealth of information for project planners. The following pages summarize the main elements of the final report so that you, too, can celebrate these successes and be informed of the challenges ahead.

Learn More
grid-nea.org

Findings



The project is relevant.

Ghana's Northern Region, home to GRID/NEA projects, is the poorest and most remote region in the country. It is characterized by extreme poverty, food insecurity, and conflict. Prior to NEA's arrival in Carpenter, there were no schools or clinics in the project area.

From the report:

"The GRID/NEA program purpose is therefore relevant to the needs of the people of the region."

NEA project components work together as a consistent whole.

The roots of poverty are interconnected, and thus NEA's integrated approach to development is appropriate. The different project components are interdependent, working together to achieve lasting development results.

From the report:

"Each aspect of the program is enhanced and supported by the other in a virtuous cycle of development."

The project links environmental degradation and poverty

NEA staff are trained in issues related to the environment and integrate them into their work. They encourage beneficiaries to adopt long term sustainable habits that will ultimately increase food security and income.

Holistic and practical approaches to gender equality are integrated throughout the project

NEA begins its work with the poorest of the poor: widows and women without men to support them and their children. The staff understand the deeply held social, economic, political and cultural constraints that women and men face. They develop opportunities and strategies to overcome these constraints.

From the report:

"Women and men consistently reported improved peace at home and good will among themselves."



GRID and NEA bring complementary skills and strengths to the partnership

GRID and NEA are unique in that their relationship is a long-term, committed partnership. Both have benefitted from the twenty-five years that they have worked together.

From the report:

"They [GRID and NEA] complement each other, each bringing unique strengths and skills to sustain one another and the challenges of the shared work."

Staff are committed to the vision and know the local culture

NEA has strong people working at all levels of the organization. Wherever possible, local people are hired, ensuring NEA's awareness of and sensitivity to local customs.

From the report:

"Competent and motivated staff is deployed throughout the organization with clearly defined roles and accountabilities."



GRID/NEA links to local networks

GRID/NEA connect with local government bodies to expand the impact of development initiative. Projects also strengthen the capacity of government services in the region.

From the report:

"One of the key success factors for the GRID/NEA work is its skill in tapping into local resources."



Resource utilization is appropriate, effective, and efficient

GRID/NEA carefully use all of the resources available to them -- human, physical, and financial - to effect positive changes in the communities they serve.

From the report:

“One aspect that stands out is the extent to which the project has consistently met and exceeded its intended targets. GRID/NEA is making a difference according to community stakeholders.”

All programs have an exit strategy

GRID/NEA programs are designed with an exit strategy in mind. Nonetheless, NEA is committed to staying in the project area for many years to come. Their plan is to continue to expand their outreach into the poorest communities in Northern Ghana until local populations can provide for their basic needs, a sustainable local economy is present, and public services are adequate.

From the report:

“The GRID/NEA partnership results in a successful project which plays a vital and invaluable role in contributing to sustainable development in the Northern Region of Ghana. The project’s boards, staff, and stakeholders should be commended for their dedication to their cause. Their faith and lasting relationships with one another, and with their beneficiaries, sustain them.”

Success Factors



The following practices were identified as fundamental to the success of the GRID/NEA program:

- A vision set at the top and shared by every board and staff member.
- Good leadership.
- Credibility and integrity of staff.
- Building on positive cultural values, such as responsibility and self-sufficiency.
- Patience and a willingness to learn from beneficiaries.

Key Lessons

The evaluator raised a number of key GRID/NEA practices that should be shared with other organizations:

- Have a deep understanding, respect, and compassion for the beneficiaries and their way of life.
- Get the community to fully accept the issue as their own.
- Do not fix things with money; let the communities understand the problem and find a way to deal with it.
- Provide appropriate inputs (seed, money, training) in a timely manner.
- Link to local services and networks and train all stakeholders in the network.
- Address all aspects of the problem - cultural, governmental, and economic - to ensure sustainability.
- A model site, such as the Carpenter project, is invaluable. When chiefs and villagers come there for training, they see the new way of doing things in action and they ask to join the programs.

Challenges Ahead

Some remarkable successes have been experienced by GRID/NEA, but the two partners face some challenges and constraints:

- The needs of the Northern Region are deep and serious. NEA and GRID face the risk of burnout and loss of staff.
- There is always a potential for beneficiaries to revert to old habits, a very discouraging event for all involved.
- Tribal conflict is a continual threat to development in the region. Peace building activities are needed on an ongoing basis, and will be for some time.
- Extended drought could threaten gains made by the project. While GRID/NEA are mitigating against this as much as possible, the area is so poor that it remains very vulnerable.
- A large hydro electric dam is being built close to the project. The future of the area development is yet unknown.
- Funding is an ongoing priority for GRID/NEA. NEA is successfully incorporating income generation into much of its work, but it is not yet fully self-sufficient.
- It is time for GRID/NEA to share their experience and methodology with others. This will bring an exciting set of challenges.



From the report:
“The GRID/NEA program successes will be of value to many organizations around the world.”