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In a Nutshell

Ex-Post Evaluations of SDC-funded Projects:

Water for Livelihoods (W4L), Pakistan 2011-2020

Ex-post evaluations of SDC-funded projects, including W4L

Ex-post evaluations of development cooperation projects are done several years after they close, with the aim of assessing their long-term impact and sustainability for accountability and learning purposes. A mandate to conduct a series of such evaluations, each randomly picked by SDC from projects funded by them and closed 3-6 years ago, was issued to Nordic Consulting Group. One of these was for the Water for Livelihoods (W4L) project, which was implemented by Helvetas in 2011-20 in four districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. It sought to demonstrate new ways to improve water systems at local level through interventions to instal small-scale infrastructure and enhance water governance. By doing so, it aimed to inform and help shape higher-level policy and capacity in the water sector.

Map of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province of Pakistan with highlighted project districts

(from Sarfraz *et al.*, 2017). In 2018, the FATA agencies and frontier regions were absorbed into KP Province and Chitral district was split into Upper Chitral and Lower Chitral



A rigorous approach in the ex-post evaluation of W4L

The evaluation employed several methods to yield complementary findings that could be triangulated and compared. Records of W4L's design and implementation were used to reconstruct what it sought to do and did, and why, and this 'theory of change' was compared with known principles of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). Twelve key knowledge-holders were interviewed, and two stakeholder workshops were conducted in Pakistan, the latter involving a total of 45 project beneficiaries. Abundant information on long-term impact and sustainability from interviews and workshops supported analysis and allowed before-and-after 'contribution stories' to be prepared. The evaluation also analysed household socioeconomic survey data and remote biophysical sensing data to test the hypothesis that impact could be confirmed at higher than local level, while also examining constraints and influences on impact and sustainability over time.



Findings of the ex-post evaluation of W4L

By installing small-scale drinking water and irrigation infrastructure, W4L directly benefitted local communities by making their livelihoods more secure and their lives easier, healthier and more prosperous. The

process also provided entry points for establishing inclusive water user groups and associations within and across communities. The user groups undertook effective long-term operation and maintenance of physical infrastructure, while the groups and associations strengthened communities' solidarity, ability to solve problems, and capacity to engage with government on their own development priorities.

The net effect was to improve equity, access and efficiency in water management and use locally, with transformative results for target communities that were fully compliant with IWRM expectations. Major long-term and sustained benefits came: (1) from drinking water supply schemes that eliminated the drudgery of water-collection and reduced waterborne diseases such as childhood diarrhoea; (2) from irrigation schemes that increased farmland area and productivity, with particular benefits for smallholders; and (3) from protective infrastructure that enhanced environmental security, especially against flooding hazards that are becoming more severe with global heating and climate change.

Across the four target districts, W4L's irrigation works improved farming conditions over about 5% of irrigated land area, and its drinking water interventions reached some 8% of the rural population. Although transformative at local level, the limited spatial and social reach meant that neither socioeconomic nor biophysical changes were detectable in district-level data. By demonstrating IWRM solutions at local level, however, W4L contributed to the development of improved water governance policy and practice at province level.

In the latter role, W4L helped to inform and build partnerships to promote IWRM through policy, strategy and capacity development, while showing government officials how the approach would help them deliver on policy commitments. Knowledge-holders considered these effects to be potent, durable and positive. But when the project ended in 2020 there was a loss of momentum in the transition to IWRM in the province, since Helvetas then had fewer resources with which to maintain its intensive dialogue with government. The existing water user groups continued to maintain water infrastructure, however, and the associations continued to liaise with government. Moreover, ideas on water governance that had already been introduced by W4L, including that community-led models offered relatively cost-effective ways to implement policy, continued to influence provincial institutions. The evaluation found both of these to be important indicators of W4L's long-term impact and sustainability.

Overall conclusions of the ex-post evaluation of W4L

In confirming that W4L achieved all its key objectives, the evaluation concluded: (1) that it was a very effective and impactful intervention at local level; (2) that it made exemplary arrangements for sustainability of its impacts at local level; and (3) that it offered many insights, examples and lessons of value to promoting IWRM at all levels and scales of governance. It also concluded: (4) that it would be appropriate to use W4L as a learning resource for adapting to the effects of global heating and climate change; and (5) that W4L's loss of momentum after closure highlighted the

need to anticipate and mitigate such effects through post-project arrangements with governmental and non-governmental institutions.



Reference:

Caldecott, J., Oxe, L.C., Knudsen, E., Khan, A. & Khan, H.Q. (2026).

Ex-post Evaluation of the SDC-funded Water for Livelihoods (W4L) Project in Pakistan. Copenhagen and Bern: Nordic Consulting Group (NCG) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Imprint:

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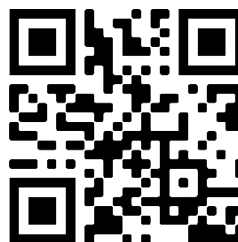
Pictures:

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Fotographer: Tahir Saleem

Helvetas, W4L-Project, Pakistan

Full evaluation report



Bern, September 2026