

EVALUATION PROJECT ASIA I

Evaluation of Kolping India's activities in South India

June 2016



Income generating project in the Kolping region of Madurai

Provided by:

Susanne Neymeyer

Educationalist and expert on evaluation, Germany

Deepika Nair

Masters in Sociology, India

Mary Abraham

Masters in Social Work, India

Executive Summary

Since 1990, Kolping India has been supported by the Social and Development Aid of the Kolping Society e.V. (SEK) with funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). By today, the organisation has established and assisted more than 1,900 self-help groups (SHGs) through 30 regional partner organisations located in the South Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. Support is provided through entrepreneurship and business training as well as by disbursement of loans. In addition, workshops and awareness sessions are conducted in topics such as leadership, sanitation, and on the human rights based development approach. The direct target groups are Kolping members who have joined together in self-help groups (SHGs). The big majority of the target group are women (currently about 85%) and thus they have a priority role. The two projects under scrutiny have been implemented in the years 2011 till today. The overall objective of both projects (the current and the previous one) is to improve socio-economic conditions of target groups /the Kolping members. The strengthening of Kolping India and its partner organisation as well as the participation of beneficiaries (representatives of SHGs) in the monitoring of the project activities are additional stated outcomes. In this regard institutional capacity building has taken place. The purpose of the evaluation was two-fold, analysing: 1) the structures and cooperation mechanisms of Kolping India (National Office and regional partners) and its administrative capacity, and 2) the relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, and sustainability to the stated objectives and outcomes of the project. The evaluators applied a mix of methodologies during their visit to the Kolping regions of Alleppey, Punalur, Madurai, Thanjavur, Dharmapuri, and to the Kolping India office in Chennai. In total, 34 individual or group interviews, and 43 focus group discussions with members of SHGs/Kolping families were held. Moreover, a survey was conducted among the regional partner organisations, and the self-assessment tool “Pentagon” allowed participatory analysis of the organisation’s capacity and profile.

The context of the evaluation in India is of importance with regard to the relevance of the interventions. Kolping India engages in important areas such as economic and social empowerment of women. India ranks 130th in UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index (UNDP 2015: 226). Higher female earnings and bargaining power translate into greater investment in children’s education, health and nutrition (DFID 2010).

With regard to the organisation’s capacity and profile it can be noted that the administration of financial resources has very much improved in recent years. The newly established Management Information System (MIS) allows a better overview about the use of transferred funds. Also the human resource policy that was introduced some years ago enhanced staff capacities in a more structured way. The quality of training sessions at national level is in general good, but the further mediation of knowledge and skills is a challenge, as there is hardly any training of trainer provided. Room for improvements exists particularly when it comes to the follow-up of the regional activities by the national team, as national staff currently limits itself on checking accounts and books. The learning from work done is in consequence also weak and learning events for staff are neither institutionalised at regional nor at national level. Moreover, the project uses a one-size fits all approach, even though the target group is a mix of very poor and better-off people. There is no gender balance when it comes to planning and implementation of project activities.

The specific findings in terms of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria are as follows:

Relevance: The interventions are highly relevant as they are in line with the Indian government's poverty reduction strategies and with the SDGs 1 and 5. The project is also relevant as it is linked to expressed needs of the regional partners. However, in some regions the criteria of becoming a Kolping member contradicts "inclusiveness" (SDG 10), as access to Kolping families is difficult at some places for some target groups (e.g. disabled persons or elderly people). The provision of not context-specific skill trainings to Kolping families is an indicator for too little participation of target groups. Whether the business activities of Kolping members are relevant or meet the market needs is doubtful, as no systematic local market analyses have been conducted. At least at some places there are marketing problems.

Effectiveness: Kolping India and its regional partner organisations have been organisationally strengthened. Regional staff has benefited from various training sessions that have been useful and was shared with colleagues. Interviewees were able to provide examples of how project interventions have improved the capacity of a partner organisation. Positive organisational development is also visible by the increased number of Kolping families and members, wherein the ratio of women has increased from 82% in 2011 to 85% in 2015. According to staff self-assessment and the survey among regional partners, the weakest point is the relation with external stakeholders (other organisations working in the same field of intervention and relevant authorities). Less successful is the self-financing of project activities. Four out of five regional Kolping directors communicated that the financial situation of their organisation is more difficult than in 2011. The National Office has not yet achieved its targets towards self-financing due to the delay in constructing the Kolping Resource Centre close to Chennai. The Kolping Resource Centre is a planned fundraising business venture. Once it is in place, it is expected that it will significantly increase the organisation's income.

With regard to other expected project outcomes, it can be positively noted, that Kolping families manage their own group. They have a committee in place; each group has a bank account, and they meet regularly once or twice a month. All the surveyed Kolping families save money. The training in leadership and close monitoring and mentoring have contributed to that success. Based on statements by Kolping members, the most beneficial training for many was the one on organic farming. However, the financial administration (accounting and bookkeeping) within the groups is not always good. In some Kolping families it is done well whereas in other groups the books and accounts were not maintained properly. Some Kolping members are not able to calculate accurately their profits. In terms of Kolping families' businesses, the project interventions are less effective. The discussions with Kolping members revealed success stories but also stories of failure in every Kolping region. The reasons for failures or less successful businesses are limited technical business support from regional or national Kolping staff once the business is in place, limited mobility of women, and too little entrepreneurship and marketing training. What has helped the Kolping members/beneficiaries was the information provided about government schemes. The total amount of state subsidies for 3,209 Kolping members was Rs. 76,1 million in the year 2011 to 2015. In addition, there is evidence that because of training sessions (particularly the leadership training contributed to that) some Kolping families act independently on public issues and concerns. For instance, when drinking water was a problem Kolping groups sent a letter to the local Panchayat and solved the problem. Some Kolping members became also members of Panchayats, and thus participate on public issues and concerns. Various Kolping members mentioned increase of confidence and independence because of training provided. A few of the Kolping members were also

trained in monitoring of project activities. Such volunteers are involved in almost every Kolping region to verify savings and repayment of loans. This is in general well done. More training in result-based monitoring would enhance the teams' performance, but this would be more time consuming and the extra time might be an issue.

Impact: Kolping India contributed to some extent to the reduction of poverty and to the empowerment of the South Indian women. During focus group discussions Kolping members provided various examples on how their living conditions have improved. In particular, many beneficiaries mentioned improved access to education for their children due to increased incomes or better access to government schemes. Improved health conditions in target communities have been created by the construction of toilets. Women have particularly benefited out of project interventions. Among others, women communicated about a higher social status within the community because of project interventions. Moreover, project interventions have been scaled-up to other regions and villages. Investing in organic farming supports the environmental sustainability. But, no impact can be observed with regard to the development of a viable civil society. This would have required more interaction and networking with other actors working in the same field of intervention and a closer contact with the government.

Efficiency: Training and awareness sessions on leadership skills as well as on sanitation and agricultural farming are efficient, as good results have been achieved with relatively small financial means. However, the least efficient trainings are the trainings imparted on product making/marketing skills, since many do not use these skills. Those who do, apply them often on a household level. All in all, apart from comments on organic farming and sanitation, the Kolping members' feedback on the training has been often rather disappointing. Regional staff makes better use of provided training than Kolping members. They do not only apply the skills acquired, but also share them with direct colleagues, and spread them within the organisation. Planning has proved to be exact and efficient as no important delays have been observed. Cooperation and sharing of resources with other organisations working in the same field of intervention can be improved, even though many Kolping partner organisations share resources for particular training events.

Sustainability: There are favourable conditions for sustainability of achieved results: Since its inauguration in 1981, Kolping India has been constantly improving its capacities. The organisation and its regional partners are recognised and cooperate with other Christian or Christian related organisation such as Caritas India or "Karl Kübel Stiftung". In addition, the organisation's visibility has improved in recent years. There are also good chances that Kolping families will last in future. The unity and solidarity among Kolping members boost the continuation of the groups. The positive feedbacks in terms of training in organic farming suggest that these skills will be also applied in future, and long-term behavioural change in terms of sanitation is likely as the beneficiaries of toilets seem to be very happy about the innovation. Another favourable condition is the financial contribution of Kolping members which demonstrates commitment and dedication towards the group and its activities. However, there are also obstacles: Still, more technical skills are needed to strengthen Kolping members' income generating activities. Many businesses are shaky and often not based on proper market analysis and profit calculations. Even though, Kolping India National Office has probably good opportunities of increasing its income once the Kolping India Resource Centre is in place, the financial prospects are not that favourable as donors withdraw or change their focus. In addition, Kolping India's activities take place in an environment that has made life difficult in particular for many foreign-funded NGOs.

The evaluation findings led to the following recommendations.

Recommendations to Kolping India National Office:

- ✚ *Continue with the semi-annual meetings, but review if more learning and dialogue among the Kolping regions can be promoted. There are a few indications that learning between the Kolping partners can be improved.*
- ✚ *Continue to provide staff training of good quality. In order to make it even better, all training sessions should be conducted as far as possible in the local language.*
- ✚ *Continue to encourage the regional partner organisations to provide equal access for eligible target groups.*

Recommendations to the regional partner organisation/ Diocesan Social Service Societies (DSSS):

- ✚ *Establish relations with other stakeholders in order to maximize use of resources. Priority should be given to identification of institutions and resource persons in the fields needed to provide training.*
- ✚ *If possible, seek contact with other organisations that also disburse loans, and check if there are any possibilities for cooperation.*
- ✚ *Minimise as far as possible the disadvantages and risks of volunteers (e.g. walking far distances at night).*

Recommendations to Kolping India National Office and to the regional partner organisation / DSSS:

- ✚ *Identify possibilities on how to include and cooperate with other organisations who work in the same field of intervention. The inclusion of an expertise board (consultative body), as proposed by one interviewee, seems to be an interesting option that needs to be further explored.*
- ✚ *Stronger involve boards and Diocesan Level Kolping Federations (DLKFs) in the planning of training and workshop activities. The degree of involvement should be discussed and agreed among the partners. Once it is decided members should be systematically involved.*
- ✚ *Install semi- or at least annual learning workshops, where staff (including the volunteer monitoring staff) reflects on achievements and gaps, strengths and weaknesses. The planning should then be revised according to workshop results.*
- ✚ *Ensure that all boards of Kolping families will be trained in leadership.*
- ✚ *Discuss on how to improve the gender balance in project planning and implementation.*

Recommendation to Kolping International, Kolping India and to the regional partner organisations/ DSSS:

- ✚ *Discuss if and how project monitoring can become more result-based, and if and how internal evaluation can be periodically conducted at national and regional level.*

Recommendations related to the promotion of small scale enterprises:

- ✚ *Continue the promotion of savings.*
- ✚ *Define more clearly the target groups. If it is also the very poor then it needs further reflections on how this target group can be better reached.*

- ✚ *Set-up clear criteria for granting IIGP and CIGP-loans that consider beneficiaries' commitment, capacities and skills as well as the profitability of a proposed business. One criterion should be the successful participation in relevant training events.*
- ✚ *Conduct feasibility studies of potential businesses and reckon the profitability of the proposed IIGP and CIGP.*
- ✚ *Help the Kolping groups to assess the skills of its members, and to study the market, the competition, and resources needed, as well as start-up and operating costs. Discuss the risks with the Kolping members.*
- ✚ *Identify training needs on staff level with regards to business promotion. If possible, this should be done with the help of an expert in self-employment promotion. Once gaps are identified, relevant staff needs to be trained systematically.*
- ✚ *Training on management should not be reduced. There is a constant need as new groups and members are included. Other Kolping members might need refresher courses on management skills.*
- ✚ *Include training of trainer sessions for those who are supposed to train others.*
- ✚ *Identify those Kolping members and groups with a genuine interest of becoming entrepreneurs. Once this is done the training programme should be established with a stronger participation of beneficiaries. Probably this will also need a more decentralised approach.*
- ✚ *Continue to monitor strongly savings and repayments of Kolping members but also monitor the state of the various businesses.*
- ✚ *Partner Support Officers (PSOs) should assist the regional partners in monitoring and evaluation of the Kolping families and the IIGPSs and CIGPs.*