

'New Strategies for Transformational Development'

Introduction

Governance, Ecosystems, Livelihoods (GEL) is a three-year program funded by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), World Vision Canada (WVC) and Manitoba Council of International Cooperation (MCIC) aimed at improving community resilience in four African countries. GEL was developed to address the capacity of WVC staff and community leaders to deal with the changing and complex nature of poverty and development. It is designed to be integrated into the current WC area development programs (ADP) and to enhance our current design, monitoring and evaluation process (DME).

Principles of the GEL Program

The need for this program emerged from a growing awareness that, despite the best of efforts, many poverty and health indicators in sub Saharan Africa are actually getting worse. Traditional sector based approaches were not fully addressing the complex underlying causes of poverty. Development assumptions have been made and strategies developed, on the fact that the needs of people were based on a homogeneous and essentially static knowledge of communities and environments. The situation of individuals within communities varies temporally, spatially and socially at a variety of scales. Attempts to "sector" peoples lives have often ignored important external problems, influences and feedback loops that affect poverty. The current challenge is the need to develop tools and frameworks to deal with this complexity. New strategies for transformational development are needed.

The GEL program proposes the use of complex adaptive systems (CAS) approach as an effective and sustainable framework for WVC and its partners to promote good governance, advance environmental sustainability and create a better environment for economic development. CAS are an adaptive, holistic and multi-scalar approach to better understand and act within the complexity of poverty and development. In the GEL program, three existing frameworks or themes are being introduced as a practical way for communities and staff to introduce systems-based approaches into their planning, implementation and monitoring of community projects; these are: Governance, Ecosystems and Livelihoods. Each of these themes are being introduced as a "lens" with which communities can describe and better understand the complex socio-environmental-economic systems in which they exist.

Complex Adaptive System Theory

Complex adaptive systems become complex through the variety of structures and interactions within them, which creates non-linear and dynamic behaviour and therefore cannot be described by a single perspective. As a result, this uncertainty and unpredictability should be accepted and embraced. Complex adaptive systems will self-organize into properties that are resilient in nature (Gunderson and Holling, 2002¹, Holling, 2004², Berkes, 2003³).

¹Gunderson, L.H. and Holling, C.S. (2002). *Panarchy: Understanding Transformations in Human and Natural Systems*, Island Press, Washington.

²Holling, C.S. (2004). "From Complex Regions to Complex Worlds." *Ecology and Society*, 9(1), 11.

³Berkes, F., Colding, J., Folke, C. (2003). *Navigating Social-Ecological Systems: Building Resilience for Complexity and Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK

WV is a learning organization and the GEL program is an important component of our commitment to understand, describe and respond to the complexity of poverty and development in Africa. This new and innovative program is closely linked to WV's African regional initiative to mainstream livelihoods security into National Office and project planning processes. GEL is also designed to support and enhance the organization's current shift to longer-term and more comprehensive approach to DME (see below).



United Nations Millennium Development Goals

The GEL approach for World Vision addresses four Millennium Development Goals

Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

The GEL program will use as one of its three foci the concept of sustainable livelihoods. Through improved household livelihood outcomes it is hoped that both family incomes and food security will be increased.

Promote gender equality and empower women

As a cross cutting issue in the program, gender issues will take the forefront in all stakeholder processes as well as in institution and individual capacity building.

Reduce child mortality

The linkage to child health is something that is implicit in all World Vision programs. As a child-focused organization, World Vision works to ensure that household and community development results translate into benefits for the children.

Ensure environmental sustainability

With an emphasis on soil loss/fertility and water quality this program will attempt to reverse environmental degradation from the grass roots levels first.

The Program

The goal of GEL is to increase community resilience so that communities may be less vulnerable to changes in political, economic, social and environmental systems. The focus areas are on the integration of governance with ecosystem sustainability while improving livelihoods. The expected outcomes are:

1. Increased and or diversified household incomes and assets
2. Enhanced decision making processes at the community level as well as gender equity and/or equality
3. Improved awareness and evidence of behavioural change with respect to environmental issues.

GEL addresses sound governance, integral ecosystems, and sustainable livelihoods are the underlying systems that explain



Governance

'Sound governance is a fundamental prerequisite for any of the MDG's to be achieved in a sustainable manner' (CIDA, 2005¹).



Ecosystems

'Community based approaches to the management of natural resources and ecosystems are an essential element for poverty reduction' (CIDA, 2005¹).



Livelihoods

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living (Chambers and Conway, 1992²)

1 CIDA, 2005, "A role of Pride and Influence in the World, Canada's International Policy Statement", Ottawa

2 Robert Chambers and G. Conway, 1992, "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century: IDS Discussion Paper 296" Brighton

Gender Equality

Gender is a crosscutting theme that has implications in the three focus areas of GEL, but with an implicit focus on the governance theme. World Vision has had past experience in working alongside communities and other NGOs to increase women's representation participation, and access to services. These efforts have obtained good results in some communities, but women in general continue to be excluded from many decision-making processes.

The central belief is that women and men are different but equal, and that women play a central role in the development process. Specific gender issues that will be addressed will focus on the equity and empowerment of women. This will be done by working to increase the capacity of women to manage organizations and meetings, increase the role of women in institutions, more advocacy on their rights to land and other resources. Through GEL we can continue learning from past lessons and will pay attention to appropriate and consistent gender analysis training for staff and community leaders.

Strategies

World Vision Canada launched the beginning of the three-year GEL program in October 2007 with a training workshop for all partner staff in Arusha, Tanzania. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the concept of CAS and the specific components; governance, ecosystems and livelihoods and how this relates to actual ADPs that WVC currently works with. The overall goal of reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience in communities was incorporated into the strategic planning cycle. Following this workshop was a training of facilitators in each of the four participating countries. All these participants were left with the task of using this information to engage in community assessment processes that will identify key processes that help or hinder the development of community resilience. Additionally, advocacy and Canadian public engagement plan was launched. Young people from Canada were facilitated to engage with other youth and leaders in Tanzania, and Tanzania "youth ambassadors" leaders were supported to learn more about Canada and international development.

There is also a continual need to review the concepts of CAS on an annual basis and how this applies and is incorporated into WVC planning, implementation and monitoring processes. Every year this process will be repeated so as to increase the impact of community initiated projects. The GEL program strategy is also targeting changes in the 'way of thinking and knowing'. As a result GEL will continually analyse and document learning so as to engage in knowledge sharing. This is done through two strategies of (1) action research and (2) exchange visits.

Integration with LEAP

The GEL strategic planning process does not replace the Learning through Evaluation with Accountability and Planning (LEAP) process. The emphasis of GEL is in facilitating or improving the community

LEAP's Six Components



planning process through systems analysis using the same methods. Current modes of planning will be supplemented to improve community results. In other words, GEL has been designed to be adapted and collaborate with the way that community development

programs are initiated, planned for and implemented. There will be continual compliance with all of LEAP's principles of DME.

Partnership with the CIDA

This partnership between CIDA and WVC is a three-year relationship that will implement projects in Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritania, Rwanda, Tanzania and Canada. Staff, community representatives and local government will be trained on systems based approaches, sustainable livelihoods framework, ecosystem health, governance, gender assessments and adaptive management. CIDA has committed to funding 75% of the direct program costs (CAD \$4.2 million) while WVC and MCIC will cover the remaining 25% (CAD \$1.2 million).

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