

## **Nepal Country Programme Evaluation**

**Type of evaluation:** Country programme evaluation

**Evaluator:** Alliance for Development and Research Services Ltd. (ARDS)

**Time of the evaluation:** February-August 2023

### **List of abbreviations**

CP	Country programme
CBD	Caste-based crimination
CM	Child marriage
CS	Conflict sensitivity
CSO	Civil society organisation
DNH	Do no harm
FCA	Finn Church Aid
FGD	Focus group discussion
GESI	Gender and social inclusion
GBV	Gender-based violence
GI	Group interview
GP	Global programme
II	Individual interview
LG	Local governance
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MFA	Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NEPCO	Nepal country office
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OH	Outcome harvesting
PNGO	Partner NGO
PwD	Person with disability
R2QE	Right to quality education
R2P	Right to peace
R2L	Right to livelihoods
RBA	Rights-based approach
SAC	FCA Service and Accountability Center
TG	Target group
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
WB	Women's Bank

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction to the Programme**

FCA has been supporting work in Nepal since the 1980's and has had an in-country presence since 2013. Nepal's Country Programme (CP) (2018-2022), guided by the FCA Global Programme and the need of the country, embraces the Right Based Approach (RBA). FCA's three strategic themes viz. Right to Livelihood (R2L), Right to Quality Education (R2QE) and Right to Peace (R2P) are central to sustainable positive change. In Nepal's context, much focus was on R2L during the CP period of 2018-2022. R2P is integrated into all the interventions, focusing on addressing the root causes of conflict such as exclusion, and discrimination and building on transformed relationships. The CP focuses on the following 3 priority issues.

1. Support to rights, economic activity and independence of women, Dalits, former bonded labourers, and other marginalised groups
2. Support different kinds of business enterprises.
3. Support to local civil society organisations and structures

The CP goal (impact) has been adopted from the GP, which is: ***People in fragile contexts are empowered to act for positive and sustainable changes in creating resilient and just societies.*** By closely working with 8 Partner NGOs (i.e. implementing partners) in the past 5 years, CP has been operational in 69 Wards of 24 Rural/ Municipalities of 12 Districts: viz. Siraha, Mahottari, and Dhanusha in Madhesh province; Sindhuli, and Lalitpur in Bagmati province; Surkhet, Jajarkot, and Kalikot, in Karnali province; and Kailali, Kanchanpur, Dadeldhura, and Baitadi in Sudur Paschim province. The CP has directly benefitted 125,426 people with most women (90,371). CP was able to secure and spend funds equal to Euro 6,255,042, mainly (95%) from two Finland-based funding partners viz. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Women's Bank (WB).

FCA selected working areas and target groups (TGs) for the programme in Nepal, based on the criteria of vulnerability and deprivation. Those groups are characterised by limited options of livelihood, inadequate access to facilities and services, and discrimination in society.

Nepal is extremely sensitive to climate change and other hazards. FCA is also renowned as a humanitarian organisation and has worked in Nepal to respond to the disasters and pandemic.

### **Evaluation Purpose, Method, and Process**

Conducted from March through August 2023, the purpose of the evaluation was to assess (1) the relevance and coherence of CP; (2) the effectiveness of modalities and interventions in development, humanitarian assistance, and advocacy; cross-cutting themes; partnership; and (3) impact of the CP (2018-2022); and (4) drawing up a conclusion and pragmatic recommendations. The three priority issues upheld by NEPCO were used as programming tracts in the inquiry.

Eight districts (Baitadi, Dadeldhura, Kanchanpur, Kailali, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sindhuli, and Lalitpur) were taken as the sample of the study. Evaluation applied predominantly qualitative methods with the use of participatory techniques. The evaluation team interacted with 324 people through 110 interactions, viz. focus group discussions (FGD), group interviews (GI) and II (Individual Interviews). The method also included the outcome harvesting (OH) technique, which helped to identify, prioritise, substantiate outcomes, and assess the factors leading to the change. Altogether, 58 outcomes were agreed upon for substantiation. Additionally, some facts and figures from the previous works have been analysed, verified, and used during the evaluation process.

### **Evaluation Findings**

**Relevance:** Placing the target group (women from Dalit, ex-Kamaiya<sup>1</sup>, ex-Haliya<sup>2</sup>, deprived Indigenous groups; PwD; deprived youth) at the centre of the programme, the activities designed with regards to socio-economic empowerment, enterprise promotions and CSO strengthening were found highly relevant.

Nepal CP adjusted to the changes in the external context to meet the emerging needs of the right holders during the time of COVID-19, landslides, windstorms and fire disasters. NEPCO demonstrated its readiness to respond to such external changes in the programming.

Likewise, NEPCO demonstrated its agility in taking a tough decision about partnership on the issue of serious non-compliance.

**Coherence:** CP highly adheres to FCA's GP and WB's strategy. MFA is committed to promoting human rights, which the CP is highly aligned with. Furthermore, the CP is aligned with 9 goals of SDGs and other human rights instruments. In addition, CP contributes to achieving 7 out of 10 national goals of Nepal. It adheres to the 15<sup>th</sup> periodic plan, Cooperative policy, Agriculture Strategy 2015-25 and so forth. Additionally, CP has not only addressed the priorities of local governments (LGs) but also sensitised LGs to work for the excluded people.

**Effectiveness:** The OH process has proven that there was a key role of FCA/PNGOs in bringing transformation in the communities. Most of the listed outcomes are associated with priority issue no. 1 and objective no. 1, and it also corresponds with the programme focus. The modality of CP - development, advocacy, and humanitarian response - was found to be perfectly blended. The integrated approach was found remarkably effective to empower the most marginalised women. The effective work approaches were: (a) Selection of target groups with predetermined procedures and involving the LGs (esp. Ward Committee); (b) REFLECT model to sensitise, empower and 'animate' the target groups towards fulfilment of their rights; (c) Cooperative capacity building and mobilization for the benefit of the most vulnerable; (d) Business Development Services, including training, start-up support, access to finance; (d) Cash programming for livelihood recovery.

The coordination and collaboration with LGs have also resulted in funding collaborations through cooperatives and agricultural groups. Although the soft advocacy through PNGOs and local CSOs resulted in positive outcomes, much more effort may need to make the duty bearers further accountable for service delivery and following the participatory planning process ensured through policies, structures, and practices.

Based on some key facts and figures, it is estimated that 80-90 per cent of entrepreneurs are making a profit after training and business support. Furthermore, the vast majority (over 80%) of the TVET graduates have got employed/ self-employed after completion of the training.

A vast majority (96%) of the participants were found to be satisfied with the quality of the programme, which also indicates the quality of the programme and the accountability of the FCA and PNGOs. Although the current M&E efforts are appreciable, the evaluation has observed some gaps, which also present opportunities for improvement in future programming. These include: digitalising M&E processes; tracking income/expense; – at NEPCO level; and enhancing CPAR template for target-achievement comparison and multi-year cumulative analysis – at FCA global level. Furthermore, the evaluation has identified the need for improving PNGOs' M&E capacity through digital technology; and strengthening PEARLS monitoring system of cooperatives to foster governance and mitigate fraud or misappropriation risk. The evaluation also has emphasized the importance of collecting and documenting evidence of good practices and learning to improve the programmes, and boost learning, visibility, and credibility.

**Cross-Cutting Issues:** Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) has materialized well; Do No Harm (DNH) and Conflict Sensitivity (CS) principles have been needfully applied. The 'Peace' theme has been contextualised well. Climate actions have been initiated well, and there is much scope to work on this theme.

**Partnership:** FCA chooses local NGO partners who share its vision and values through a rigorous selection process and commits to building their capacity on the priority issues. The

local partners appreciate FCA's flexibility and friendliness in adjusting the programmes based on the field needs, and its quick responses. NEPCO is willing to partner with local NGOs who have weaker programme management skills but are committed to addressing the relevant issues of the target groups. The local partners valued FCA's ability to identify the needs and problems of the marginalised women, translate them into programming, and implement a comprehensive package of development, advocacy, and humanitarian response. Likewise, FCA's strong value addition was to ensure good ownership of the programme and to leverage the budget and programmes from LGs.

**Efficiency:** Annually more than 95 percentage of the activities have been implemented against the plan, except for those years with COVID-19. The overall burn rate is 97 per cent. Having a dedicated country team under proactive leadership and supportive FCA-SAC has been found as the enabling factor in the delivery of the outputs. COVID-19 and staff turnover has been the undermining factors to provide technical backstop to PNGOs. Providing thematic specialised backstopping to the PNGOs is one of the areas of improvement.

The target to increase and diversify funding was underachieved due to external and internal challenges, which are mainly: the absence of people solely allocated for grants acquisition and management portfolio, changes in the funding landscape and funding modality for Nepal.

**Impact and Outcomes:** The program has made a significant contribution to improving the well-being and resilience of the target groups. According to the well-being rating using a ladder tool on a 10-point scale during FGD and GI, the mean level has increased from 3.8 before the intervention to 6.4. Changes have occurred at the individual, family, community, and CSO levels. OH, the process has shown that outcomes have been achieved leading to the impact. Among ratified 58 outcomes, all have significant contributions from FCA/ PNGOs.

The TGs are now socially and economically empowered, as evidenced by increased self-efficacy, improved family harmony, increased self-reliance, increased ability to provide well for the families, and increased feeling of dignity. Due to economic empowerment, they have better resilient to financial shocks. Children from vulnerable communities now have better access to education. The groups have also demonstrated active citizenship by running campaigns against harmful practices such as gender-based violence (GBV), child marriage (CM), and caste-based discrimination (CBD), and by engaging in local development processes. Furthermore, there has been an increased ability to reach out to duty-bearers to claim their rights and leverage program funds. Cooperatives have been empowered to grow and provide better services, with improved access to LGs. However, there are still areas for improvement in the program. Market linkages for the current and future production scale need to be strengthened. Additionally, the saving groups in early phased-out program areas in Dhanusha and Mahottari were found to be weakly functional.

**The niche of FCA Nepal:** "Socio-economic empowerment of marginalised women through group approach and linking to cooperatives" is a niche of FCA Nepal. By adhering to this niche, FCA Nepal can enhance its adaptability and innovation to achieve wider and deeper impacts, secure donor funds and maintain its credibility.