

Introduction

Improving healthcare access is one of the major challenges faced by governments and NGOs working in the developing world. Interventions should not only be well-targeted and appropriate to the local context, but they must also have a long-lasting impact. In 2015 Ghana Medical Help (GMH), an NGO operating in northern Ghana, decided to develop a project which could meet these needs. Poverty is a major barrier to accessing healthcare in Ghana, especially in rural communities where the distance to the nearest healthcare centre may be far and most families make a living from subsistence farming and small trading businesses. Possession of larger livestock, and in particular ruminants like sheep and cows, is relatively uncommon.

Project Summary

For these reasons, and in collaboration with local stakeholders, GMH developed SHEEP, a livestock lending programme where families in the rural community of Kadema, a village in the Builsa North district of Ghana's Upper East region, were each given one pregnant Burkina sheep. This type of sheep (see above) are larger and of greater economic value than the more common local breed. The donated sheep and its offspring are the property of the female head of the household, meaning that the intervention also has potential



to empower women. After the sheep gives birth, they breed the offspring with other sheep in their community and so on, until they reached the fourth generation, where they would be required to give one female lamb back to GMH. GMH then redistributed these sheep to others in the community, creating a sustainable growth in the project. Unfortunately, before the first redistribution, disease spread among the sheep killing many of them. This coincided with the outbreak of covid-19, making it harder both to monitor the programme and to provide veterinary services for the remaining sheep. For these reasons, the Kadema pilot project was ended. This year, GMH began the SHEEP project again, in the nearby village of Goldema. This is where my LIA comes in – before buying and distributing the first round of sheep, GMH wanted to develop monitoring tools, collect baseline socio-economic data from locals, and collect feedback from previous project beneficiaries. My role was to have work remotely with Dr Millicent Akaateba to develop a survey instrument, carry out the research on the ground, clean the data, and prepare it for analysis.

My first week consisted of travelling to the project site, meeting Dr Akaateba, and preparing to develop the survey. As part of preparation for the project, we held a round table meeting in Wa with the GMH co-director Dr Dominic Akaateba, my research supervisor Dr Millicent Akaateba, and other academics who could advise on the best way to move forward with the research and with the project more generally. I arrived in Goldema on the 15th May, and quickly got to work developing the survey instruments. In the third week, I worked with my research partner, Joshua Ayang, and the Goldema village chief Nab Emmanuel Akaateba, to adapt the survey instruments to the local context and translate them to Buli, the local language. Later that week we held a focus group to pilot the survey questions, where we adapted the wording and structure of some questions. The fourth week was our first round of data collection, where we conducted in-depth surveys of socio-economic conditions among the twenty-five first round beneficiaries.

Our plan had been to spend the next two weeks conducting similar surveys in Kadema among beneficiaries of the initial S.H.E.E.P. project for comparison and preparing the data for analysis. However, after discussing the preliminary results of our first study with GMH co-director Dr Kelly Hadfield, we noticed some issues with the initial sampling process. Also, Kelly was able to secure more funding for this project allowing us to increase the number of beneficiaries. To select these beneficiaries, we decided to develop a shortened assessment instrument based on questions from the in-depth survey. We then spent the next two weeks visiting and surveying a further 55 households to assess their eligibility for the programme. To facilitate this, we decided to reduce the time spent in Kadema by carrying out five semi-structured interviews with past project participants instead of the in-depth project evaluation we had initially planned. Over the fifth and sixth weeks we completed these goals, eventually surveying 55 houses and carrying out five interviews in Kadema. The data I have collected and cleaned will now form the basis of a more detailed research and project report. While the report itself is not within the remit of my LIA, I will continue working with GMH as a volunteer to produce the report for the benefit of the organisation, local stakeholders, and donors.

Reflection

This project presented some technical challenges. Data collection itself was not easy – questions which both Joshua, Nab, and I initially saw no problem with turned out to be some of the most complex and hard to answer questions for participants. For instance, many of the more elderly respondents did not know their age and had no ID with a reliable record of their age. The definition of a household was quite important for determining the ratio of working adults to dependents in the family, but this was often complicated by the fact that multiple households normally live in the same compound together. A further complication was that some families were polygamous, with men sometimes having multiple wives. In one instance, two wives of the same man lived in the same house, but operated as two separate households. To deal with these issues, we developed definitions and prompt questions for respondents, and in exceptional cases we consulted with Nab. My upcoming work will involve developing documentation based on these experiences to aid future use of the survey instruments.

Beyond the practical skills of data collection and analysis, the most important skill I learned from this project was the importance of communication and flexibility in leadership. For instance, my research partner Joshua was working with GMH part-time and with an unpredictable schedule, meaning we needed to communicate well to co-ordinate the translation and data collection. Often, in the morning we weren't sure what our plan for that day was. Completing the data collection goals therefore required both flexibility and determination. Flexibility is important not only in day-to-day work, but also at the level of project management – I learned the importance of this when I redesigned the research goals of the project along with Kelly. This involved strong communication with the rest of the team. Digital communication was also particularly important given that Nab, Joshua, and I were the only three team members on the ground during the research period of the project.

Impact

There are two main ways this LIA has achieved a sustained impact on the community in Goldema. The first is through the survey instruments and documentation I have developed along with Joshua. These will assist Joshua's future work in carrying out repeated data collection on outcomes for the GMH sheep and for project participants. Currently, GMH plan to administer a shortened sheep production and health survey on a quarterly basis alongside an annual or biannual socio-economic outcome survey of the whole family. The second sustained impact will be through the project report, which will be based on the data collected through my LIA. This report will provide a description of the community before the project begins, provide recommendations for the structure of this project based on

feedback from project leaders and the Kadema interviews, and an overview of how the project might need to be adapted in order to expand to other villages.

Conclusion

I am exceptionally proud of the outcomes of my LIA project, and I'm particularly thankful to GMH for taking me on, and to Laidlaw for making this work possible. I believe the work I did will contribute to improving lives in Goldema, and hopefully in the wider community too. I look forward to working with GMH again in the future!