

The Millennium Villages Project: What was the impact on agriculture?

This Briefing Paper is the seventh in a series to communicate key points from the independent impact evaluation of the Millennium Villages Project (MVP). The MVP aimed to demonstrate that rural Africa could address poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through low-cost, science-based interventions at the village level.

This mixed method impact evaluation of one MVP site in Northern Ghana took place over more than five years. The evaluation consisted of a statistically representative survey of over 2,000 households within 35 villages in the project site and 68 comparison villages. It also included three longitudinal qualitative studies that collected evidence on institutional change, a range of welfare measures and local perspectives (see MVP Briefing Paper 8). Undertaken by Itad, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Participatory Development Associates Ltd (PDA Ghana) and commissioned by DFID, it is anticipated that the findings will be of interest to a wide range of people in the development sector.

Millennium Villages Project

Beginning in 2005, the MVP aimed to overcome the 'poverty trap' facing some countries by applying an integrated strategy for health care, nutrition, education, water supply and sanitation, infrastructure, agriculture and small business in clusters of villages. The idea was to achieve the MDGs by undertaking simultaneous investments, rather than the usual sectoral or step-by-step efforts. The synergies from these multiple interventions were intended to have a greater impact than that of separate interventions.

By 2016, the project had been implemented in 14 different sites in 10 African countries, reaching approximately half a million people in 79 villages. The MVP sites cover different agro-ecological zones and together represent farming systems used by 90% of the agricultural population of sub-Saharan Africa.

How did the MVP invest in agriculture?

MVP interventions in agriculture aimed to improve food and nutrition security, as well as the development of the agricultural food chain. By improving food production and non-food crops, it was expected that the project would increase incomes of farming households in the project site.

The MVP provided farmers with agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertiliser, tractor services and land preparation (e.g. clearance for rice cultivation). The project also helped hire agricultural extension agents, provide training and basic tools, and worked through 'lead farmers' and organised farmer groups and cooperatives. The project also rehabilitated warehouses or constructed new storage facilities to help reduce crop losses.

The MVP in Northern Ghana

From 2012–16, the £11 million MVP in Northern Ghana targeted a cluster of 35 villages of up to 30,000 people in the West Mamprusi, Mamprugu Moagduri and Builsa South districts. This is an area of extreme poverty, with 80–90% of the population living below the national poverty line. The project was spearheaded by the Earth Institute (Columbia University), with operations overseen by the Millennium Promise and the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA), a semi-autonomous Government of Ghana agency.

Key messages about agricultural achievements

Changes in land use: The MVP encouraged farmers to cultivate larger plots of land, and there were changes in land use and cropping patterns. The size of cultivated land has increased in the project village areas compared with comparison village areas, although as self-reported data, this needs to be interpreted with caution. The land dedicated to maize and beans (cowpeas, soya beans, etc.) increased.

Agricultural productivity: Productivity in the project villages rose 38% over the MVP period in relation to comparison villages. The improvement is partly explained by increased use of inputs, including fertilisers, good quality seeds, land and tractors. The introduction of a second crop through the planting of maize followed by cowpeas also helped. Women and poorer groups in the project area particularly cited the better availability of tractor services, as being instrumental in the increased use of land.

Agricultural incomes: In both the project and comparison villages, more than 80% of income is generated in the agricultural sector. There was a positive impact on the household incomes in the MVP site, which was generated by the agricultural sector, particularly farming. There was very little impact on alternative sources of income outside the agricultural sector.

Food security: The MVP had a large impact on project households that reported not having enough food in the previous 12 months: food security substantially increased in the project area.



The MVP Endline Summary Report and MVP briefings can be accessed from www.itad.com/knowledge-and-resources/MVEval

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Credits

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