

Evaluation of the Start-up and Initial Implementation of the Congo Livelihood Improvement and Food Security Project (CLIFS)

Peter T. Ewell, USAID/REDSO/Food Security
Raymond Lumbuenamo, USAID/DRC/Livelihoods

The USAID Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo is implementing a Strategic Objective, *Livelihoods Improved in Targeted Areas*, as part of its new Integrated Strategic Plan, FY 2004-2008. To launch field activities an RFA was issued in 2003, and two transitional two-year projects were funded. The Congo Livelihood Improvement and Food Security Project (CLIFS) is implemented by a consortium of 17 international and Congolese organizations led by Innovative Resources Management, Inc. (IRM), a U.S.-based NGO that has been working with USAID-DRC on anti-corruption and forest management projects. CLIFS has targeted selected areas in Bandundu and Equateur Provinces, in the center of the country. The Market Approaches to Livelihoods Improvement Project (MALI) is implemented by PACT working with two major partners, and operates in selected communities in Katanga Province, in the southeast.

One year into the implementation of both projects, the Mission decided to organize an internal review of their start-up and initial implementation. One year is not enough time to evaluate progress against expected results, so this has not been designed as a formal mid-term evaluation. The goals of the exercise are as follows:

1. Review the start-up process in each of the major areas of activity against what was planned in the original workplans. If any major delays or changes in plan are found, identify the causes and suggest remedial measures. Evaluate the prospects for the completion of planned activities by September, 2005.
2. Review the financial condition of the grants, to see if funds are being drawn down at an appropriate rate and are being used effectively and efficiently.
3. Discuss the logic of the activities being implemented in terms of the selection of pilot sites, the targeting of potential beneficiaries, and methodologies and tactics being used to provide inputs, training, and other services.
4. Review any internal management issues among the international and Congolese partner organizations.
5. Discuss how well the pieces are likely to fit together to make a significant difference in the livelihoods of the rural people in the targeted communities, and then in the larger areas of impact, as laid out in SO5,
6. Discuss how well progress towards the objectives and intermediate results are being captured by the indicators in the Mission's Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP), and suggest any modifications.
7. Discuss possible and/or improved linkages with other programs implementing activities in the same project areas:
 - Activities wholly or partially funded by USAID, including public health programs, anti-corruption and other projects in the area of democracy and governance, the SECID/IITA cassava project, food aid distributions through the WFP, natural resource management through CARPE, etc.
 - Activities supported by other donors, including the FAO support for seeds and tools, support by the World Bank and Belgian Technical Cooperation for the rehabilitation of roads, etc.

- Community-level projects implemented by local NGOs, church groups, international NGOs. etc.
8. Summarize lessons learned, to provide feed back to the partners, and to guide the next steps in the implementation of the livelihoods strategy,

The field work to look at the CLIFS project took place between September 15 and 25, 2004. The team from USAID consisted of Peter Ewell from the Food Security Office of REDSO, the regional office in Nairobi, and Raymond Lumbuenamo from the Livelihoods team at USAID-Kinshasa, who is CTO of the Cooperative Agreement with IRM. We first visited activities in Bandundu province, accompanied by Dale Rachmeler of IRM-Washington, Mergo Mbeya of IRM-Kinshasa, and members of the IRM field office in Kikwit. We then visited activities in Equateur Province accompanied by Norbert Yamba and Philippe Ngwala of IRM-Kinshasa and members of the field offices in Mbandaka and Bikoro. We met in Kinshasa with Lyse Pilon, Chief of Party for IRM in the DRC. The IRM team in the DRC took this as an opportunity to go through a systematic self-evaluation of their own progress, and provided a very useful, comprehensive checklist of issues and questions¹, as well as the two quarterly reports submitted to USAID to date. There were no opportunities to meet with any management or supervisory personnel from the partner organizations other than the Vetiver Network, which is coordinated by Dale Rachmeler on a part-time basis. Diane Russell of ICRAF, the lead scientist in the ICC consortium, was consulted by e-mail.

Summary of the CLIFS Project Activities and Implementing Partners

The strength of IRM as a NGO is its track record in intensive participatory community development. The founders have developed a methodology called the Community Options and Investment Tool (COAIT). It is designed to build capacity of communities to assess their own resources and to decide on their own plans for economic development. The project is organized to provide a kind a-la-carte menu of improved inputs, productive enterprises, and support activities from which communities can select elements that promise to substantially improve the livelihoods of rural households. Target villages are selected in groups along road and river links with provincial market towns called *axes*. Larger villages are chosen as “lighthouses” (*phares*), where seminars, field schools, and other training activities are organized. Improved techniques are spread to other villages, which act as *antennae* to pick up the messages. Each community is asked to select facilitators, usually young people, who are linked to the project, receive regular training, and encouraged to pass on messages and to organize activities in their villages. They do not receive any salaries or stipends from the project; they are supposed to be supported by their communities. This is a cause for discontent among some of the facilitators who some times have to leave their own work behind and tour the villages to get the communities mobilized.

The project chose *axes* according to a number of criteria: passable road or river links as a starting point for improving market linkages, relatively high population density to encourage interaction among villages, a history of programs with IRM and its partners so that this short-duration project could get up and running quickly, potential to scale up the adoption of technologies and lessons, etc. Across the two provinces they chose four zones in which to concentrate 60% of their activities: the Mbandaka-Bikoro and Kikwit-Idiofa axes that we visited, plus Gemena-Akula in northern Equateur and Mushio-Kiri in northern Bandundu.. The other 40% of their activities are spread among six other sites.

The menu of activities chosen for CLIFS is as follows:

¹ Résumé de la vérification des activités réalisées dans le cadre du Projet CLIFS. ms. IRM-Kinsahsa, Sept. 2004.

I. Improve the functioning of private sector markets

1. Create partnerships with the private sector to encourage investments
2. Surveys of markets and market chains, to identify constraints to improved agricultural technologies
3. Create model road and river users' associations, to encourage good maintenance, create alliances against corruption, etc.
4. Rehabilitate selected strategic segments of market feeder roads
5. Demonstrate appropriate village-level processing and storage technologies
6. Baseline data collection on socioeconomic conditions and nutritional status

II. Increase sustainable productivity of agricultural lands and freshwater fisheries in the targeted communities

1. Implement the Community Options and Investment Tool (COAIT) in selected villages
2. Demonstrate and promote improved agricultural and agroforestry technologies
3. Demonstrate and disseminate technologies for the diversified use of Vetiver grass
4. Set up nurseries for fruit trees and other perennial species
5. Enhance market opportunities for non-timber forest products
6. Promote community-based seed multiplication of improved varieties of important crops
7. Create video and radio programs for marketing and extension
8. Strengthen institutional and technical capacity of associations of fishermen and women
9. Enhance market opportunities for sustainably harvested fish
10. Disseminate improved village-level fish preservation technologies and practices
11. Monitoring and evaluation of improved fisheries, to enhance lessons learned

III. Strengthen rural credit and micro-finance

1. Assist community-based organizations to construct and manage input supply stores
2. Organize savings and micro-credit associations

IRM has sub-contracted 16 different partners to supply these inputs and services. Table 1 lists them with their approximate budgets and share of their total budget, cross referenced with the activity budgets in Table 2. Our visits focused on those activities that were up and running after about nine months of active project implementation.

The largest single partner, known as ICC, is a consortium of three international agricultural research centers (IARCs) of the CGIAR system: ICRAF (the International Center for Research on Agroforestry, or the World Agroforestry Center), based in Kenya; CIAT (*El Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical*) based in Colombia, with decades of research experience on beans and natural resource management in Africa; and CIFOR, (the Center for International Forestry Research), based in Indonesia with a regional office in Cameroon. The ICC consortium is responsible for a baseline survey of 700 households, plus village groups and key informants in markets and among traders -- in the target *axes*. As chronic and widespread under-nutrition is characteristic of livelihood systems that are not meeting basic needs, the School of Public Health of the University of Kinshasa was brought in to survey nutritional status to provide a baseline against which to measure progress. The field interviews for both surveys were completed, but the analysis and write up were delayed. A draft report of the ICC survey (which we were not able to see) was returned for significant revisions. One problem was that the lead investigator for ICC focused on demographic variables (the area of his own professional expertise), and did not pay enough attention to the economic indicators in the PMP. Preliminary results from the nutritional survey indicate levels of malnutrition in the target axes lower than those often cited by international agencies for rural areas of the DRC. The results of these surveys, once analyzed and discussed with the partners and other experts, will be very important for re-thinking and improving the focus of the livelihood strategy. The ICC group is also responsible for setting up

demonstrations of improved agricultural production and processing technologies, the establishment of nurseries of fruit trees and other perennial crops, and for improving market channels for non-timber products harvested from the forests. They have established demonstration nurseries in Kikwit and Mbandaka at which they have run training courses. These nurseries however, do not seem to be up to standards as they need to be better kept and expanded to meet the growing demand and interest in the communities. The trainees have in turn set up nurseries in some of the "lighthouse" villages. ICC has sourced seed from INERA through CIAT and were just getting ready to set up the demonstration plots at the time of their visit. Adaptive research and training on the processing technologies will start early in 2005.

ICC has hired one full-time person based in IRM's office in Kinshasa, plus field technicians in both Kikwit and Mbandaka. Start-up problems getting vehicles purchased, cleared through customs, and out into the field has reduced mobility and has delayed some field operations. The ICC consortium has no administrative presence in the DRC, and issues of communications and coordination with the three IARCs for detailed planning and delays in the disbursement of funds has caused frustrations. Pressure to get activities started quickly, to show results within the two-year time frame, meant that IRM selected the facilitators in the villages following their own criteria, and there was no time to organize participation by ICC. The consortium has its own methods and experiences from other parts of Africa in participatory technology assessment, methods for scaling up, and approaches for choosing and training community facilitators. Once there has been time to sort out the operational details, it should strengthen the project to have experienced professionals from different institutions discuss, contrast, and compare their different approaches and experiences.

The second major partner is the Canadian NGO SOCODEVI (Société de Coopération pour le Développement International), which has been operating successful micro-credit operations with women in urban Kinshasa. The NGO has been contracted to organize savings and credit operations in the product areas. We were able to visit MUCREFEKI (*Mutuelle de Crédit et d'Épargne des Femmes de Kikwit*) a savings and loan association in Kikwit; our appointment with the corresponding office in Mbandaka fell through. We learned however, that at the time of our visit, MUCREMBBA (*Mutuelle de crédit de Mbandaka*) had not held their inception workshop. Credit and capital accumulation are major problems in the DRC, the record of success of micro-credit schemes is poor, and most rural people have lost faith in banks and cooperatives. SOCODEVI has focused on small loans to women, supported by intensive training and consciousness-raising to build *esprit de corps* among the members of credit groups. The goal is to issue 4,000 short-term credit contracts (not necessarily all to different people). In Kikwit, the first round of loans have been made to urban market women for merchandise credit. The initial limit for any one loan is CF 25,000, or about US \$60, repayable in three months with interest at a rate of 48% per year. In the case of default, the family, or failing that the group of guarantors, must repay the loan. The members appreciate the opportunity to deposit small savings in a safe place. In Bandundu, the plan is to open a second office in the smaller provincial town of Idiofa. The partner is focused on getting micro-credit systems established with a good track record in places where the probability of success is high. The linkages with other elements of the CLIFS project raise questions that are discussed at greater length below.

FOLECO (*Fédération des ONG Laïques à vocation Economique*) is a consortium of Congolese NGOs. They have been brought in for activities of two types: the rehabilitation of key sections of roads and bridges on selected farm-to market roads and the construction of rural input stores (*cantines*), as well as support and training of village cooperatives to set up and operate them. On the roads work, we saw a bridge that they had reconstructed in Ibongo, opening up direct access between a group of villages and the market town of Kikwit after a hiatus of 18 years. CLIFS is a small player in the area of road rehabilitation and maintenance compared to the World Bank, Belgian Cooperation, and other donors. The project identifies key bottlenecks for the villages they are working with. FOLECO will collaborate with other partners on the formation of users'

associations for maintenance, but this is only just getting underway. On the *cantines*, we saw several small (4.5 x 7 meter) buildings that had been constructed, but the stock was yet to be purchased and the training of the local village officers in small business skills, pricing, record keeping, etc. was yet to be organized. The FOLECO staff are all based in Kinshasa, so regular follow-up and effective coordination are issues.

The next major partner is the Vetiver network, organized to promote the use of Vetiver (*Vetiver zizanoides*), a very deep-rooted grass native to India. It establishes rapidly where it is planted, even in infertile or water-logged soils, does not spread, and is unpalatable to grazing animals. When planted properly as lines like mini-hedgerows along the verges of roads and drainage ditches, it dramatically restricts the movement of soil and silt and thus inhibits erosion of the structures, reducing the frequency and costs of maintenance. It can also be used in hedgerow/alley cropping systems with crops, and can be used for thatch, handicrafts, and a variety of other uses. A range of potential uses of this species are new to the DRC. The CLIFS project is working with the Vetiver network to identify pilot sites to demonstrate its value in reducing erosion and protecting road structures, and plans experiments on intercropping systems in Equateur. To supply the demand they expect to generate and which seems to be materializing, multiplication plots are being up with individual farmers and with associations who will be able to sell rootstock for cash income. The network provides starter material for vegetative reproduction, training and technical support for multipliers through the network of facilitators in the lighthouse and antennae villages. Over 50 plots had been established by September. Nevertheless, the process of working with the other partners to set up demonstrations of the efficacy of Vetiver for erosion control in road maintenance was lagging behind expectations, and the experiments on agricultural intercropping had not yet been established.

INERA (*Institut National pour l'Etude et la Recherche Agronomique*) is the Congolese national agricultural research institute. Like all national institutions in the DRC, its operations have deteriorated over the past decades for lack of maintenance of buildings, laboratories, and other research facilities, non-payment of salaries, severe shortage of operational funds, and a series of related problems. Nevertheless, the institution has continued to function at a minimal level, and in cooperation with partners including the sub-regional organization ASARECA and the international agricultural research centers of the CGIAR, has continued to test new varieties of crops and to maintain collections of improved seeds. Plans have been developed with the FAO and the European Union for rehabilitation and strengthening of INERA as a key element for rebuilding the agricultural sector.²

The CLIFS project has contracted INERA to provide certified seed and to organize and train community-based seed multiplication plots for key crops – cowpea, peanut, soybean, maize, rice, and beans, as well as both local and exotic vegetables. The potential output of this activity in the two axes we visited is summarized in Table 3. Although this seed multiplication act accounts for only a small proportion of the budget (about 2 percent), it is highly visible in the villages as it represents a tangible response to a keenly felt need. INERA has had difficulty supplying good quality seed, in sufficient quantity, when and where it is needed. Seed quality control at INERA's own stations is very uneven, and the CLIFS project has not had the capacity to monitor quality closely enough. Through the international center CIAT which has ongoing scientific programs with INERA, the ICC has been able to source high-quality seed from some stations for their separate demonstration plots. These logistical difficulties, plus technical problems with pests and diseases, unfavorable rainfall patterns in many cases, and organizational problems in the communities have meant that the quantities and quality of the seed produced have been below expectations. INERA's field technicians have provided good training at individual events, but they have not been able to provide adequate follow-up or quality control. Wider issues relative to the sustainability of community-based seed programs are discussed in more detail below.

² Rapport de Mission: Evaluation des capacités opérationnelles des stations de l'INERA. FAO/EU, August, 2003

This report can only comment specifically on the programs and partners that we were able to visit or about which the team was given documentation. The other partners and some major components of CLIFS – the development of road users associations; the work on sustainable fisheries; the promotion of improved productivity through improved varieties, practices, and micro-irrigation; and storage and processing to add value at the community level were either not yet underway or were not active in the areas we visited. We will now focus on a series of more general questions and issues about the CLIFS project and its promise to achieve the objectives of the Livelihoods program. The idea is to raise critical questions for discussion, but not to be unfairly critical of a project that is just getting under way, and which is making very good progress in a challenging environment.

Issues and Questions

1. Do the axes make sense? Are the targeted villages tied together by common links with markets and by common constraints on productivity and profitability?

Both areas we visited are characterized by small farmers growing basic subsistence food crops in villages surrounded by the ruins of commercial plantation agriculture: primarily oil palm, but also rubber, cocoa and others. The factories have been abandoned; the trees have been left to grow wild, and the roads and other communications infrastructure are just beginning to be rehabilitated after many years of neglect and deterioration. In Bandundu, the Kikwit-Idiofa project area is more two clusters than an axis. Lusanga, Idiofa, and surrounding villages in the southern part are linked economically with Kikwit. Then driving north there is a wide band of sandy, sparsely populated savannah before the band of forested land along the Kasai river, on which the towns of Dibaya-Lubwe and Mangai are ports. This northern sub-zone depends administratively on Kikwit, but was included in the project area primarily because of NRM's ongoing work on anti-corruption had already established links with the community structure – perhaps it should have been considered as a separate axis. . In Equateur, the dead-end road between Mbandaka and Bikoro on Lake Tumba ties the villages along its length together into a more convincing geographical and economic axis.

2. Are efforts spread among too many small activities, implemented by too many partners?

We appreciate the achievement of CLIFS in launching a number of activities in a short time. Nevertheless, there is a risk that small activities scattered through a large area where the population has many critical needs will not pull together and catalyze the desired synergies between increased productivity, improved market access, and improved livelihoods and incomes. A constant dilemma faced by CLIFS is the need to move quickly to show results within the initial two-year funding horizon, and yet maintain a convincing strategic objectives. Target areas were chosen and work began before the results of the baseline surveys were available. Other sources of reliable secondary data are sparse and uneven. There is a risk that IRM and its 16 partners will work hard to implement the many diverse activities that have been planned, but that the benefits will be hard to identify in the context of the many problems that the target villages and axes face. The scope and scale of results that can be achieved in two years need to be defined as steps towards medium- and longer-term objectives, within the target villages, within the axes, and eventually within larger domains of potential impact. For the moment many of these objectives lie outside of the manageable interest of CLIFS. The results of experience of the project itself will need to be combined with the analysis of data as it becomes available to learn as much as possible about what works and what doesn't, to guide USAID's Livelihoods program and other development partners along clearly defined strategic paths.

Visiting the project less than a year after it was launched, it is not hard to find examples of disarticulation. Crop seed is being multiplied with INERA and perennial crop seedlings are being produced with ICC before improved production systems or processing methods have been defined and tested. Vetiver nurseries are being established before widespread demonstrations are in place or specific markets for the output are identified. Structures for input shops (*cantines*)

have been built before the community cooperatives they are supposed to serve have been organized and trained, and before the basic decisions about what to stock at what prices have been made.

3. How effectively are the target communities organized, and is the project working closely enough with existing community-based organizations and NGOs, and other projects?

The community process to define priorities, identify the facilitators, and select the particular activities to be started seems to have been variable. In Bikoro and some of the villages along the road to Mbandaka, IRM had already applied its COAIT method systematically as part of a separate USAID-funded project on natural resource management. In Dibaya-Lubwe and Mangai, the on-going anti-corruption project also provided a context of prior community mobilization. In other areas, much less organizational work has been done.. Specific activities have gotten underway as the partners and get their people into the field to implement their plans. On brief exposure, the facilitators generally seemed well-motivated and committed to the goals of the projects. Nevertheless, some of the group discussions highlighted the pressures they are under. As representatives of their communities their success -- at least in the short term -- is measured by the externally funded resources that they can bring into the villages. The resources of CLIFS are spread out over many activities in a number of areas, so the tangible benefits available to an individual village are limited. Other projects operating in the same areas, such as, for example, seed multiplication by the FAO and other projects linked to the World Food Program provide more “free” goods than CLIFS. Some villages do not provide much depth of support to CLIFS, so that if the promoter goes away for a few weeks to a training course, the demonstration and multiplication plots sometimes don’t get weeded, which gives a poor impression. Perhaps CLIFS should put less emphasis on building an identity as a stand-alone project, and work more through existing community-based organizations and NGOs.

We visited one well-established local NGOs that is linked with CLIFS. ALFD (*Association de Lutte contre le Faim et pour le Développement*) in Bikoro brings together over 40 community-based organizations, and has been able to coordinate projects of the FAO and the WFP as well as CLIFS. They appreciate the intensive training and follow-up that IRM, with staff right there in the village, has able to provide out of more than one project. In other meetings the farmers expressed appreciation for what the project is contributing, but presented long lists of other needs. Linkages with other projects were very limited. The program for the multiplication of disease-free cassava planting material that is funded by the USAID Mission and implemented by IITA and SECID operated in both Kikwit and Bandundu. The field staff know each other and interact to some extent, but there has been very limited collaboration in planning, and no sharing of resources or coordination in target villages as far as we could see. Collaboration with the FAO, the WFP, and other donor-funded projects in the same target areas has not yet been systematically addressed. IRM has understandably been focused on implementation and coordination with their own partners, but sustainability of efforts will depend on better linkages. Reciprocal field visits and honest exchange of experiences and methods with the staff of the MALI project would benefit both sets of partners, as well as the Livelihoods project as a whole.

4. Is community-based seed multiplication focused on clear enough objectives?

The development of viable seed systems is a major challenge for programs supporting small-scale farmers, particularly in situations of transition from emergency relief to development assistance. In many parts of the DRC, including the CLIFS project areas in Equateur, the FAO, the World Food Program, and other relief agencies and NGOs distribute “seeds and tools” to needy households. Food-for-work and other programs linked to food aid often include support to villagers for seed multiplication. The importation, regional and local purchase, multiplication, and distribution of seed is a major, large-scale activity, and yet in surveys most small farmers still cite the lack of good quality seed as a major constraint. Local communities produce most of the seed that is planted by small farmers. Some NGOs promote “Seed Fairs” to encourage

production by subsidizing demand, rather than providing external supply. There are many problems with old, degenerated varieties that yield poorly, which are susceptible to pests, diseases, and post-harvest losses, and which do not have the quality characteristics demanded in key markets.

The CLIFS project, in collaboration with INERA, has so far focused on supplying improved varieties of the major crops. The starter seed is first multiplied in primary sites that are also used as field schools for the facilitators. Seed from these sites is further multiplied in secondary sites out in the villages. This may well prove to be an effective short-term mechanism for getting improved varieties into the hands of farmers, and as a focus for training them in improved techniques. Nevertheless, experience from elsewhere in Africa suggests that this will probably not evolve into a sustainable system. The primary plots managed with INERA are likely to pick up the common problems of parastatal enterprises: problems with supply and transport may lead to delays so that seed is not available at the right time when the rains begin, quality may be uneven and unpredictable, etc. Plots managed by community groups seldom evolve into viable businesses because of uncertain and variable market demand; difficulties in collecting revenue; unclear decision-making on issues such as grading, bagging, and pricing; lack of critical facilities for storage, etc.

The figures on potential seed production calculated by the CLIFS staff and presented in Table 3 show that seed volumes should build up if everything goes well, but the total volume that can be produced within the short project time horizon is small relative to local needs. The estimates of potential beneficiaries assume that small areas – between a tenth and a quarter of a hectare – will be planted with improved seed by each household. Additional participatory analysis should be done to see if farmers really can take advantage of the improved varieties at this scale to increase their productivity, and if their adoption begins to open up new markets and economic opportunities.

5. Are commercial crops and new commercial enterprises being introduced on a scale that will really take off?

The CLIFS project has planned a number of activities to promote increased economic activities and value-added in the villages and axes. Most of these have not yet gotten underway. One that can be discussed as an example is the project bring run with ICC to introduce fruit trees and other perennial crops. Table 4 shows the current and planned numbers of seedlings in both of the axes visited.

Table 4: Perennial crop species, Kikwit-Idiofa and Mbandaka-Bikoro axes

Species	Seedlings produced to date	Projected number of Seedlings by Sept. 05
Oil Palm	400	2,450
Safoutier (<i>Dacryodes edulis</i>).	200	1,165
Avocado	100	1,930
Oranges	200	740
Mango	20	330
Ramboutan (<i>Nephelium lappaceum</i>)	40	700
Others	468	695
Total	1428	8,010

The nurseries have been set up and facilitators have been trained. Broadly speaking, perennial tree crops like these have three possible uses. First, they can form the basis of viable small-scale enterprises. When the project was first designed, there was some discussion of rehabilitating some of the oil palm plantations that forty years ago were a major agro-enterprise in both provinces. It was decided that success would depend on so many factors, including a radically changed world oil palm economy, and so this was dropped. Nevertheless, there is both interest in and potential for support for small-scale (one to two hectare) plantations for the national market. The ICC project has imported improved dwarf species from Cameroon, (these species can be obtained in Kinshasa). Small-scale processing technologies have been developed in other parts of the world. Another idea that has been discussed are small scale commercial fruit orchards, either with standard exotic fruits like citrus, or with indigenous species like *Safoutier*. The second possible use is to promote back-yard orchards with a few trees of several species, to diversify and improve household nutrition and to serve as an occasional source of supplemental income. The third is to train and encourage the villagers to domesticate fruit species and other non-timber products that they are used to collecting in the forest, for local experimentation and possible market development.

From what we learned, the project is involved in all three of these, and may not be adequately focused to achieve significant results. The numbers of oil palm and fruit species reported in Table 4 for both axes do not seem to be high enough to support the development of commercial enterprises, even on a small scale. The small nurseries in the “lighthouse” villages are suitable for promoting the diversification of back-yard gardens, and IRM has developed a poster on the multi-purpose *Safoutier* tree, but the nutritional goals are not clearly defined and do not seem to be coordinated with the activities of health and nutrition programs in the same communities. It is likely that there is significant economic potential for the domestication of various forest species in the DRC, but its realization will require close attention to the identification of markets, quality control, productivity and other factors. The balance between longer-term research issues and short term economic opportunities for the project participants not defined clearly enough.

6. Are the micro-credit programs and the input supply shops clearly linked to a strategy to support investments in intensified, market-oriented agriculture and rural enterprises?

From our discussions on the field visits, the micro-credit program of SOCODEVI will be limited for the foreseeable future to operations in provincial towns, not in the rural villages that are the target of the project. So far, they are serving urban market women and are not supporting investments in rural livelihoods. The input shops program of FOLECO is managed entirely separately. To be successful, the managers and members of these shops will need intensive training in the kinds of attitudes and *esprit de corps* being promoted by SOCODEVI. We discussed the possibility of a direct linkage, which would benefit both activities, and could lead to the formulation of a more comprehensive strategy for financial support to the broader objectives of the project in the axes.

7. Is the public information program too oriented towards a broad audience through video, and are other opportunities for rural radio, SMS through mobile telephones, and more conventional extension materials being short-changed?

We did not see anything of CLIFS activities in public information, although we did hear that a video has been filmed. Not to criticize those efforts, but we did hear of demand for rural radio and other kinds of information in the villages. Mobile telephones are spreading incredibly rapidly in the DRC. In east Africa, SMS has been used very effectively to transmit accurate market information. We suggest a re-evaluation of CLIFS’ outreach and information activities.

8. Is the Monitoring and Evaluation system providing useful feed-back to USAID and all of the partners?

It is unfortunate that the baseline study was delayed, and will not be used to guide the planning of activities in the two years of the project. We suggest that when the nutrition surveys becomes available, a round-table seminar should be organized with experts from USAID, SANRU, UNICEF, etc. to discuss how best to interpret them.

The M&E group is doing a good job collecting and reporting information on implementation, tracking the various activities and their outputs. A dilemma of the two-year time frame is that it will be very difficult to demonstrate people-level impact in the targeted areas, or to judge whether the strategies for scaling up and scaling out are effective. Particularly as the first baseline was delayed, it does not make sense to do a second round of surveys in 2005, and try to measure impact in terms of changes in income, nutrition, and other indicators in the PMP. As CLIFS is an experimental project in its pilot stage, we suggest that any additional resources available for field studies be planned carefully to answer strategic questions to inform the planning of the next steps after September, 2005, and to draw lessons for Livelihoods interventions in other areas of the DRC.

9. Is the project expending funds according to the workplan? Is the financial management system working effectively? Are funds likely to be left unspent at the end of September, 2005 and if so, do we expect that a no-cost extension will be recommendable to achieve the objectives?

In spite of the challenges implementing a complex project with so many partners, IRM has been able to launch CLIFS successfully, and most of its activities are more or less on track. Nevertheless, it is important that a closer cash flow monitoring system be put into place, to reduce delays in the implementation of specific activities, which are very frustrating for the field staff and their partners. If the project can hold to the projections made in September, 2004, most of the funds will be expended by the end of the project period.

Difficulties in cash flow regime are most acutely felt by the ICC consortium where it seems funds are not centralized and are therefore difficult to channel and track. Many activities, especially those involving International partners i.e. CIAT and CIFOR are starved for funds. Nurseries lack labor to carry on routine operations, field staffs lack basic supplies and equipments to effectively monitor and implement the program. Nonetheless IRM is confident committed to allocating the entire budget within the allotted time frame. As of December 31st 2004 budget allocation, finances and accruals were as follows:

1. Partner advances by month (\$ US) for Calendar Year 2004

	JAN '04	FEB '04	MAR '04	APR '04	MAY '04	JUN '04	JUL '04	AUG '04	SEP '04	OCT '04
Avocats										
Verts		10,000.00								
IDE		20,000.00								
TVN	40,000.00	5,000.00						40,000.00		
VH	17,100.00		24,400.00				9,000.00			
ICC		175,000.00								
SOCODEVI			150,000.00					170,000.00		
ERGS	12,500.00						11,000.00	3,000.00		
GACC		15,000.00						15,000.00		
Ecole		15,000.00								
PEMARIM	15,000.00								9,403.00	
INADES		10,000.00								
ABC										
SEM	15,000.00						20,000.00			
INERA	31,000.00			2,760.00			6,200.00			4,520.00
FOLECO		50,000.00							50,000.00	
	130,600.00	300,000.00	174,400.00	2,760.00	0.00	0.00	46,200.00	228,000.00	59,403.00	4,520.00

Activity	1st year	1st year	five quarters	five quarters	This Quarter	This Quarter
Budget	944,638.13	44%	977,658.13	42%	33,020.00	17%
Staff	211,568.30	10%	277,768.21	12%	66,199.91	34%
Support	526,556.21	25%	569,862.34	25%	43,306.13	23%
Fringe	52,792.19	2%	67,106.39	3%	14,314.20	7%
Overhead	393,970.94	19%	429,573.68	19%	35,602.74	19%
TOTAL	<u>2,129,525.77</u>		<u>2,321,968.75</u>		<u>192,442.98</u>	

This issue should be evaluated again in March, 2005, when the decision about any no-cost extension should be made.

A Final Point

IRM and all the partner organizations in CLIFS deserve a great deal of credit for their vision and diligence in getting an ambitious and complex project launched successfully. The rural people of the D.R. Congo struggle for their livelihoods under a wide range of constraints, and nobody expects easy progress. Economic development will depend on increasing the productivity and improving the market access of hundreds of thousands of smallholder farmers, as well as providing livelihoods for returning IDPs, ex-combatants, and others whose lives have been disrupted in recent decades. USAID's Livelihoods program is supporting CLIFS and MALI to learn what kinds of interventions are most effective, and how they can be implemented efficiently with sustainable local institutions. These lessons, as well as the direct benefits to the people in the pilot areas, will be extremely valuable.

Table 1: CLIFS Project: Partner organizations in order of budget share

Partner	Activities (see Table 2)	Sub-contract total	% of Total Budget
ICC (ICRAF-CIAT-CIFOR), agroforestry and agriculture support	I.5, I.6, II.2, II.4, II.5	701,000	31.3
SOCODEVI (Canadian Society for International Development), microcredit for women	III.2	600,000	26.8
IRM itself, for implemnetation of COAIT tool for community mobilization in Equateur	II.1, II.8	200,000	8.9
FOLECO (Federation of Congolese NGOs) for construction and training in business skills	I.4, III.1	150,000	6.7
The Vetiver Network	I.3, II.3	110,000	4.9
IDE (International Development Enterprises)	I.2	80,000	3.6
Visible Hand (U.S.-based private sector network)	I.1	56,000	2.5
INERA (Congolese National Institute for Agricultural Research)	II.6	50,000	2.2
SEM (Save the Environment through Media)	II.7	45,000	2.0
GACC (Great Apes of Congo Center)	II.9	40,000	1.8
PEMARIM (Association of women vegetable and rice producers)	II.10	40,000	1.8
ERGS (Environmental science group, University of Kinshasa)	II.11	40,000	1.8
ABC (Africa Business Channel)	II.7	40,000	1.8
Avocats Verts (Green Lawyers, a legal aid group)	I.3, II.8	30,000	1.3
School of Public Health, University of Kinshasa	I.6	30,000	1.3
INADES (African Institute for Economic and Social Development)	I.3	30,000	1.3
Total		2,242,000	100.0

Table 2: CLIFS project activities and budget

Activities	Budget	% of Total Grant	Partners	Status, Sept. 2004
I. Improve functioning of private sector agricultural markets	417,000	18.0		
1. Create corporate communities and partnerships	56,000	2.4	Visible Hand	Web site operating
2. Analysis of constraints to promote improved agricultural technologies	80,000	3.5	IDE	2 market chain surveys done, reports pending
3. Create a model for functioning road and river users' associations	60,000	2.6	INADES with partners	Some studies and training done, not yet taken off on ground
4. Rehabilitate selected segments of market feeder roads	75,000	3.2	FOLECO, Vetiver Network	Work launched
5. Demonstrate village level agricultural processing/storage technologies	56,000	2.4	ICC	No activities yet started
6. Participatory baseline data collection and training	90,000	3.9	ICC, School of Public Health	Fieldwork done, final analysis underway
II. Increase the level and sustainability of production of targeted agricultural lands and freshwater fisheries	1,095,000	47.4		
1. Implement COAIT in selected villages	200,000	8.7	IRM, with CIFOR	Training, Equateur only
2. Demonstrate and promote agricultural and agroforestry technologies	375,000	16.2	ICC with Vetiver Network	Crop seed for demos distributed
3. Demonstrate and disseminate vetiver grass technology to enhance food and livelihood security	75,000	3.2	Vetiver Network	Nurseries & demos established
4. Set up fruit tree nurseries	50,000	2.2	ICC	Nurseries & training
5. Enhance marketing for non-timber forest products	100,000	4.3	ICC	?
6. Introduce community based seed multiplication	50,000	2.2	INERA	Systems established
7. Provide radio and TV programming for marketing and extension	85,000	3.7	SEM, ABC	Videos made on Vetiver, no outreach yet
8. Strengthen institutional and technical capacity of fishing associations	40,000	1.7	Consortium on responsible, higher return fishing: IRM, PEMARIM, GACC, ERGS, and INADES	Training, diagnostic studies, no progress yet in forming active associations or processing enterprises
9. Enhance marketing and transport of sustainably harvested fish	40,000	1.7		
10. Disseminate improved village fish preservation technology and practices	40,000	1.7		
11. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of fisheries	40,000	1.7		
III. Strengthen rural credit and micro-finance activities	800,000	34.6		
1. Assist community based organizations in construction and management of input supply stores	100,000	4.3	FOLECO	Some buildings built, stocking and training in operations and management pending
2. Implement targeted village level agricultural savings and loan mechanisms	700,000	30.3	SOCODEVI	Savings and microcredit groups set up in 2 major towns
Total	2,312,000	100.0		

Table 3 Projected output of crop seed multiplication in two CLIFS project areas by September, 2005

Project Axes	Crop (variety)		Seed in Kilos				Seeding rate Kg/Ha	Projected Area, Sep. 05 (Ha)	Mean field Size (Ha)	Projected No. Beneficiaries Sept. 05
			Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Projected Sept. 05				
Kikwit-Idiofa	Maize (Samuru & Kasai 1)	Primary sites	59	1,824	5,000	6,824	25	273	0.25	1,092
		Secondary Sites	32	750	2,590	3,750	25	150	0.25	600
		Total	91	2,574	7,590	10,574		423		1,692
	Groundnut (JL24)	Primary sites	177	462	2,400	2,862	150	19	0.20	95
		Secondary Sites	100	300	1,200	1,500	150	10	0.20	50
		Total	277	762	3,600	4,362		29		145
	Soybean (Afya)	Primary sites	183		9,300	9,300	80	116	0.10	1,163
		Secondary Sites	228		9,900	9,900	80	124	0.10	1,238
		Total	411		19,200	19,200		240		2,400
	Cowpea (Vita 5)	Primary sites	80		720	720	60	12	0.05	240
		Secondary Sites	147		1,319	1,319	60	22	0.05	440
		Total	227		2,039	2,039		34		680
	Rice (IRAT 112)	Primary sites	235	2,260	6,960	9,220	60	154	0.10	1,537
		Secondary Sites	278	2,710	7,440	10,154	60	169	0.10	1,692
		Total	513	4,970	14,400	19,374		323		3,229
		TOTAL						1,049		8,146

Project Axes	Crop (variety)		Seed in Kilos				Seeding rate Kg/Ha	Projected Area, Sep. 05 (Ha)	Mean field Size (Ha)	Projected No. Beneficiaries Sept. 05
			Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Projected Sept. 05				
Mbandaka- Bikoro	Maize (Samuru & Kasai 1)	Primary sites	275	7,500	26,250	33,750	25	1,350	0.20	6,750
		Secondary Sites	187	5,110	17,500	22,610	25	904	0.20	4,522
		Total	462	12,610	43,750	56,360		2,254		11,272
	Groundnut (JL24)	Primary sites	600	2,100	9,000	11,100	150	74	0.10	740
		Secondary Sites	300		10,800	10,800	150	72	0.10	720
		Total	900	2,100	19,800	21,900		146		1,460
	Soybean (TGX88- 49D)	Primary sites	60		6,000	6,000	80	75	0.10	750
		Secondary Sites	40		4,000	4,000	80	50	0.10	500
		Total	100		10,000	10,000		125		1,250
	Cowpea (Vita 5 & 7)	Primary sites	263		2,362	2,362	60	39	0.05	787
		Secondary Sites	100		900	900	60	15	0.05	300
		Total	363		3,262	3,262		54		1,087
	Rice (IRAT 112)	Primary sites	180	2,640	12,000	14,640	60	244	0.10	2,440
		Secondary Sites	60	480	12,000	12,480	60	208	0.10	2,080
		Total	240	3,120	24,000	27,120		452		4,520
	TOTAL							3,032		19,589