



Eradicating rural poverty is one of the first steps to fighting desertification

Programme, incorporating a farming system that helped to reconcile the conflict between immediate food needs and soil recovery.

The system entailed replacing traditional monocropping with techniques known as “relay-cropping” and “intercropping”. These successful techniques involved growing varieties of crops in tandem, for example, seeding one crop in the same field before another had been harvested. Soil fertility was improved by using wood ash and farmland manure. The programme emphasized intensive farmer-to-farmer training, a high level of participation and empowerment of small landholders.

Support for Farmers in Venezuelan Drylands

The semi-arid region of the Lara and Falcón States in Venezuela covers a vast area of some 12 300 square kilometres. More than 83 000 people, or about 15 000 families, live in the area. Half of them

survive on incomes well below the poverty line. Extremely harsh climatic, agricultural and ecological conditions have always placed great limitations on agricultural production in the region. One of the biggest stumbling blocks has been the availability of water.

In 1993, an IFAD project began work on improving water supplies for residents, for their goat herds and for the irrigation of small areas under intensive cultivation of cash crops. Technical training was provided, and credit and financial services were introduced. The idea was to raise both income levels and living standards. Organizing local people was key. Now, a decade later, the project has exceeded many of its original targets, including improving the supply of water for human and animal consumption, increasing production and organizing local people. Where no groups had previously existed, there are now more than 900 organized groups dedicated to managing water sources.

Land degradation – often caused by human activities such as overcultivation of soil, deforestation, overgrazing and population growth – affects more than one billion people and 40 per cent of the Earth’s surface. When this degradation occurs in the drylands where the earth is particularly fragile, rainfall is minimal and weather is harsh, desertification results.

Desertification directly affects the lives of more than 650 million people in 110 countries. Contrary to popular belief, desertification is a process that can often be reversed. There are many ways of combating desertification, including applying appropriate land-use technologies and water-use strategies. However, one of the most effective methods of combating desertification is by eradicating poverty.

The link between poverty and desertification

The majority of the world’s poorest people – 900 million men, women and children – live in rural areas of developing countries. Because they depend on agriculture and related activities for their survival, these rural poor people are often the hardest hit by land degradation and desertification.

Poverty and desertification are closely linked. In dryland areas poor people are often forced to take extreme measures as a means of survival. Many such actions, such as cutting trees for fuel, contribute to a spiral of destruction that ultimately twins increased land degradation with increased poverty.

Without access to productive resources, institutional services, credit and technology, most poor farmers are forced to farm already degraded land that is increasingly unable to meet their needs. Constant pressure on the land – through deforestation, overgrazing and overcultivation – causes a decline in soil fertility and production that further aggravates poverty.

As land and water resources grow more scarce, many among these poor populations become environmental refugees, migrating to neighbouring lands and urban centres.

Twenty-five years of experience

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has a unique and ongoing commitment to addressing poverty and land degradation in rural areas around the world. Over the past 25 years, IFAD has

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committed over USD 3.5 billion to support dryland development in developing countries.

IFAD's commitment to investing in areas prone to land degradation pre-dates the establishment of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which grew out of the Rio Summit in 1992.

In response to severe droughts in Africa in 1986, for example, IFAD launched the Special Programme to Combat Drought and Desertification in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the ten years that followed, 47 projects and programmes totaling more than USD 750 million were initiated in 24 countries. At the end of 1995 the Special Programme was absorbed into IFAD's regular work.

IFAD's experience in sub-Saharan Africa has helped to strengthen the organization's ongoing response to the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable land management around the world.

Implementing the Convention

Combating land degradation and its causes is a central issue in IFAD's work, as reflected in its investment programmes, grants and policy initiatives.

- Roughly 70% of IFAD's rural poverty reduction projects are in ecologically fragile, marginal environments.
- All IFAD projects are screened for potential adverse effects on the environment, natural resources and local populations.
- Approximately 7% of IFAD's lending programme goes to land degradation activities linked to national action plans.

Collaborating in global initiatives

In addition to its ongoing work in combating land degradation and rural

poverty, IFAD takes part in a number of important partnerships with global institutions and initiatives.

The **Global Mechanism** (GM) was conceived as an international broker to help UNCCD member countries, especially the poorest ones, find the resources needed to halt the downward spiral of land degradation and the poverty it causes. As the global agency at the forefront of tackling land degradation and rural poverty reduction in the countries most affected by desertification, IFAD was selected to host the GM in 1997.

In addition to its relationship with the GM, IFAD is an executing agency of the **Global Environment Facility** (GEF) and is thus uniquely placed to link projects addressing land degradation (which have global environmental benefits) to poverty reduction and development concerns. IFAD is currently working to mobilize additional funds through the GEF to strengthen existing poverty-reduction initiatives in dryland areas throughout the world, e.g. in Brazil, China, Kenya, Mali and Venezuela.

IFAD also hosts the **International Land Coalition**, established after the 1995 Brussels Conference on Poverty Eradication. The Coalition aims to increase rural poor people's access to land and other natural resources by building alliances with development partners, including non-governmental organizations, civil society and international organizations.

IFAD and the GM – an evolving relationship

The GM is a key mechanism for implementing the Convention. It possesses the means to improve the lives of hundreds of millions of rural poor people in dryland areas around the world.

From 1998 through 2002, the GM raised and received USD 16.6 million from a range of sources that included bilateral and multilateral agencies, regional development banks and the core allocation for the Conference of the Parties (COP). Of that amount, IFAD's Technical Assistance Grant Programme contributed USD 5.05 million in direct support.

IFAD has also provided direct support to national, subregional and regional action programmes, mobilizing substantial grant funds, actively supporting selected governments in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and mobilizing resources from bilateral and multilateral donors.

Two recent evaluations of the GM, initiated by the World Bank Development Grant Facility and the COP respectively, have recommended better integration of the GM within IFAD and stronger partnerships with other members of the GM's Facilitation Committee (FC).

In consultation with its FC partners, IFAD is currently exploring the potential for further integration of the GM, particularly in the areas of resource mobilization, communication and advocacy, and project design and preparation. Better integration of the GM within IFAD will open the way to seize new opportunities for accessing innovative financing mechanisms in support of the rural poor.

Lessons learned

IFAD's investment programmes and collaboration in global initiatives are a reflection of its underlying belief that people living in dryland areas must take a lead role in combating desertification if lasting solutions are to be found.

What follows are just three examples of the more than 628 rural development projects that IFAD has initiated in 115 countries and territories around the world.

Livestock and Pasture Rehabilitation in Eastern Morocco

Seventeen years ago, a group of sheep herders in eastern Morocco went to their government to ask for help. A persistent drought had severely degraded their rangelands, while areas around water sources, such as wells and small lakes, had become overgrazed. The herders' flocks were being decimated, and their incomes had plummeted. Various solutions had been tried but all had failed. None adequately considered the complex social organization of tribes and lineage and kinship groups. When asked to offer its assistance, IFAD designed a project that brought all the herders together in ways that respected their tribal structures.

After years of negotiations, virtually all the sedentary, semi-nomadic and nomadic herders in a region of over three million hectares were joined together under 34 cooperatives, and a total of 450 000 hectares of degraded rangeland was rehabilitated. Empowered and self-reliant, today the herders' cooperatives are a model for sustainable land management in dryland areas.

Soil and Water Conservation in Lesotho

Six years ago, high concentrations of rain, fragile soils, and human and livestock population pressure were contributing to dramatic losses of fertile soil in dryland regions of Lesotho. Over a 20-year period, arable land had shrunk from 14 to 9 per cent of the country's total area. Food insecurity was a growing concern. Yet poor farmers had no choice but to farm increasingly degraded land in a desperate bid for survival.

In 1997, IFAD launched the Soil and Water Conservation and Agroforestry