

profile

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Indigenous peoples' self-determination and drive to succeed

As designed, the main objective of the Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project was to reduce poverty in the Abra, Benguet and Mountain Provinces of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) through increasing agricultural productivity and improving natural resource management in a sustainable manner.

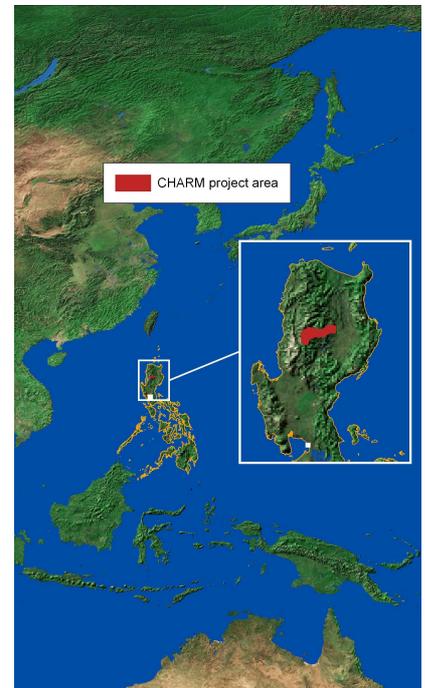
Poverty in the Philippines mainly affects the rural areas and, while levels vary from one region to another, it is pervasive in the mountainous region of Cordillera. Recent official poverty statistics estimate the nationwide annual poverty threshold at US\$1 157 per capita. Measured against this benchmark, 31% (about 420 000 people) of the total population of the target areas live below the poverty line. In particular, Abra and Mountain Provinces have shown poverty incidences of 59% and 58%, respectively.

Project activities were concentrated in 82 *barangays* (villages), where some 92% of the population is made up of indigenous people. Implementation took place while the Government was striving to operationalize the Indigenous Peoples' Republic Act of 1997, which provides the legal framework for indigenous peoples' self-determination. All CAR communities were involved in communal/individual land titling and decentralization and in addressing the trade-off between sustainable natural resource protection and agricultural productivity.

Main evaluation findings

Key achievements. The project succeeded in reaching almost 50 000 households (its appraisal target), most of which benefited indirectly from road rehabilitation in the targeted *barangays*. With the support of implementing partners, each community developed *barangay* natural resource development plans that were later adopted by the project as a basis for project interventions. In some cases, the plans provided input into the development of comprehensive ancestral domain development and protection plans. With project assistance, more than 120 000 ha of ancestral land was surveyed, 1 106 land ownership certificates were awarded to communities and/or individuals, and six ancestral domain titles were issued – thereby ensuring the long-term protection of community assets. Forestry activities resulted in the replanting of 6 580 ha of forest with almost 10 million seedlings. In addition, infrastructure in the *barangays* was improved through construction of 151 km of roads, 645 metres of spillway, 95 metres of bridges and 359 metres of footbridges. The evaluation team noted that the income levels of some participating households had risen by 20-66%, thanks to employment in forestry activities, improved irrigation and agriculture-related technology training. However, much of this increase accrued to only a small number of beneficiaries.

Project impact could have been greater had the design taken account of a number of important feasibility study recommendations. As a result, performance was hampered by the inappropriate rural credit subcomponent, the restricted menu of infrastructure activities and limited community participation in activity planning and implementation. Similarly, despite the fact that the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) was both the cofinancier and cooperating institution for the project, IFAD could have been more involved in implementation, especially with regard to ensuring stronger dialogue and cooperation with AsDB in project supervision and implementation support – particularly in areas such as rural finance and participation.



PROJECT DATA

Total Cost: US\$28.20 million

IFAD Loan: US\$9.20 million

Cofinanciers: AsDB - loan of US\$19 million

Cooperating institution: AsDB

Main executing agency: Department of Agriculture

Other key implementing partners:

National Irrigation Authority

Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Department of Agrarian Reform

National Commission on Indigenous Peoples

Local government units in Abra, Benguet and Mountain Provinces

Loan approval date: December 1995

Loan effectiveness date: June 1997

Loan closing date: September 2004

Evaluation fieldwork: June-July 2006

Innovations in support of legal self-determination and policy dialogue.

Advocacy for indigenous people was not a specific objective of the project. However, such action contributed to promoting recognition, within the CAR, of indigenous knowledge systems and practices (IKSPs) such as the *lapat* land management system in Abra, a century-old system of regulating natural resources by indigenous communities. The project executing agency helped ensure that the right of indigenous people to own land was recognized at the national level, and worked with different government agencies to ensure that national policies and programmes included IKSPs, especially when it came to developing activities to enhance the livelihoods of indigenous people.

Quality of life defined. Efforts were made to ensure that all partners in project implementation, including IFAD and the Government, recognized that the general definition of rural poverty and quality of life needed to be adjusted in accordance with the environment involved. For instance, for indigenous people living in CAR, efforts to increase their incomes had to be balanced against the need both to respect their cultural integrity and protect the land and natural resources providing their livelihood. As well as boosting their incomes, the project helped indigenous people to protect other aspects of their heritage, such as land, culture and social systems.

Key recommendations

The evaluation recommended that IFAD should consider financing a second phase of the project with a view to ensuring sustainability of the benefits so far accrued and extending project activities to other communities in the target area. To that end, the following should be taken into account.

Improved partnerships. The partnership between the Government, AsDB and IFAD should be further strengthened, especially as far as communication and coordination between IFAD and AsDB is concerned. The Fund should involve itself more in project implementation to ensure that sufficient attention is paid to issues of special concern to it, such as participation, empowerment, poverty targeting and policy dialogue.

Recognition of the unique environment involved. The topography of the CAR is unique within the Philippines, inasmuch as it is a distinctive watershed environment that supports 13 river basins and the farms of millions of lowland residents and farmers. Some two thirds of the region is covered by slopes of more than 30%, often giving rise to land slides and extensive erosion. Therefore, when deciding on the objectives and activities to be financed under a second phase, special attention should be paid both to the topography and prevailing agroecological conditions. For example, because the area is often hit by typhoons that destroy roads and irrigation infrastructures, road construction requires special engineering considerations that involve higher costs than the national average.

Definition of project objectives to ensure greater sustainability. IFAD should follow a holistic, integrated approach to defining clear objectives from the outset so as to balance out any potentially conflicting activities while pursuing social, economic and environmental objectives. Specifically, IFAD should:

- (i) develop and adopt environmental best practices, such as placing a value on environmental services (rewarding upland farmers for their conservation efforts);
- (ii) improve environmental assessment for infrastructure construction;
- (iii) strengthen the link between sustainable agriculture and forest management;
- and (iv) institute sustainability measures at project design so as to build up processes that contribute to promoting sustainability once the project is completed.

Improve participation and capacity-building processes. IFAD should promote broader community participation in order to arrive at a more equitable spread of benefits throughout the *barangays*. For example, the Barangay Development Council should be accorded greater prominence as a focal point to ensure broader community participation.

The Fund should also pursue a capacity-development focus with the specific purpose of synchronizing the training activities of different agencies with those implemented under the various project components. This would ensure that they clearly contribute to achieving both the overall project objectives and institutional development.

Further information:

Republic of the Philippines, Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project, Completion Evaluation Report #1886-PH, July 2007, Office of Evaluation, IFAD, Via del Serafico 107, Rome 00142, Italy. The full report and profile are available online at www.ifad.org/evaluation; email: evaluation@ifad.org.

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in the map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IFAD concerning the delimitation of the frontiers or boundaries, or the authorities thereof.



Loading carrots for markets in Benguet Province



Rice terraces in Mountain Province



Working in the rice fields of Abra Province
