



Intersector strategy

The IFAD/BFFS partnership for food security



The added value of an intersector strategy

It is widely recognized that a holistic, or multisector approach to poverty reduction gives the best results. Poverty reduction is effective and lasting when interventions address a wide range of needs – social, economic and institutional – rather than focusing on a single sector. A multisector approach is considered essential to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Development must be multi-dimensional in its quest to meet the varied needs and build the capabilities of households and communities.

But multisector strategies have often fallen short of their goals because sectoral interventions have not been closely coordinated to fully complement one another.

An intersector strategy responds best to the multidimensional nature of poverty by ensuring that initiatives in each sector, whether economic, social or institutional, become part of a mutually supportive foundation for poverty reduction.

The intersector approach requires careful synchronicity. When sectoral interventions are implemented and coordinated in a timely fashion, they can help accomplish lasting change. Together, over time, they reinforce one another and form a broad base from which the poorest people – those habitually excluded from many development initiatives – can move out of poverty towards better living conditions and better incomes.

Investments in social infrastructure and services make people stronger, healthier and better educated. When people's basic needs are met, when they feel fitter and more confident, then they are in a better position to invest in and profit from their economic enterprises. Once production levels begin to stabilize and incomes are improving steadily, improvements in living conditions can follow. When facilities and quality services are available and accessible, people can invest in better health care and schooling for their children and begin to build functioning social networks.



The BFFS Joint Programme

Since 1983 the Belgian Fund for Food Security has partnered with IFAD in pioneering and refining its intersector development strategy for poverty reduction.

The Joint Programme (JP) is a complementary exercise in development in which BFFS and IFAD each offer unique expertise. Their individual strengths create synergy and bring added value to rural poverty reduction initiatives. While IFAD supports rural economic development, BFFS provides grants that address basic needs such as health, sanitation and family nutrition, access to water and land, and education and credit.

Over the last 25 years, the JP partnership model has acquired a vast amount of field expertise in combining economic and social support in rural poverty reduction programmes of considerable scale.



Clear advantages

The JP programme has proved a successful formula. So much so that in 2008 the JP commissioned a study from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium to capture the benefits of the intersector development model with a view to replication and scaling up. The study focuses on three JP programmes in Mali, Mozambique and Kenya, comparing data gathered from JP interventions to results from other IFAD programmes in the same countries in order to evaluate the additional benefits of the intersector strategy.*

The research undertaken provides remarkable insights into the concrete benefits of the intersector development approach:

Reaching the poorest and most vulnerable

JP interventions are particularly successful in reaching the poorest and most vulnerable households, ensuring that they also benefit from agricultural support components. Including the very poor is a major challenge in development. Under the JP intersector strategy a consistently higher percentage of the poorest groups are able to benefit from the agricultural support components of the programme as compared to IFAD-supported projects.

Comprehensive health care

The intersector strategy practised by JP programmes goes beyond one-dimensional investments in health infrastructure. Institutional capacity development and efforts to address issues influencing the motivation of health care staff, are some of the important aspects of JP health care interventions.

The positive results of this approach are evident from the study. In the JP Kenya programme 30 per cent of households have better access to medication and health care compared to 4 years ago, and the figures are particularly impressive for the poorest category of households.

A higher proportion of the population feels fitter. Feeling fitter and more protected enhances people's confidence and spirit of enterprise. This correlation is supported by the statistics. The fitter households have also been able to increase their income from agriculture.

Women and water

Improved access to safe drinking water, when combined with nutritional and agricultural training, has a significant impact on food security and nutrition levels among impoverished households. Hygiene is also improved through better access to water, combined with community training.

* For further information please consult the research report, available at www.ifad.org/bffs.

All the JP programmes include a water access component. Since women are responsible for fetching water, they are the chief beneficiaries of this component. By ensuring that communities have greater access to safe water supplies, the Kenya programme was able to significantly reduce the amount of time women spend fetching water; from an average of more than 3 hours, to an hour or less. Time gained is invested mainly in farm work and tending kitchen gardens, but also in childcare and wage work.

When communities have access to water for agriculture and kitchen gardens, as well as adequate training and extension services, there are significant positive effects on productivity, poverty reduction, food security and nutrition.

Literacy and childcare

JP programmes tackle the issue of education from different angles. Not only do they set out to improve access to primary schooling, but they also seek ways to motivate parents to send their children to school, and convince them of the importance of ensuring their children receive an education.

Supporting literacy for women is an essential element of the intersector strategy. Young women are better informed, more confident and more receptive to innovations as a result of having become literate. They join groups and discuss marketing with their husbands on an equal footing. And their children benefit because they practise better nutritional and preventive health measures in the home.

Nutrition and food security

Climate change, fluctuating food prices and diminishing natural resources constitute a growing threat to food security. The JP increases the ability of poor rural women and men to deal with external shocks.

The intersector strategy approach demonstrates important results in terms of food security and nutrition. In Mali, improved access to water for agricultural purposes allows farmers to diversify crops. Combined with health care measures, this has led to a significant improvement in children's nutritional intake. In Kenya during the persistent drought of 2008 and subsequent food crisis, the production of food crops plummeted for 80 per cent of families. Yet for those households receiving combined social and economic support, the decline was less severe than for those benefiting from agricultural support alone. Significantly more beneficiaries of the JP programme continued to introduce new cash crops during the drought.



Refining the intersector model

Combined support to social, economic and institutional sectors can increase synergy and add value to a poverty reduction programme. The research shows that overall poverty reduction is greater in JP programmes: in Kenya 17 per cent of households had shifted up one poverty category as opposed to 9 per cent of households in the sample IFAD programmes.

The findings indicate ways in which the intersector model can be further refined and replicated for greater impact in the coming years. It is crucial to capture and nurture the wealth of expertise and best practices acquired by the JP over the last two and a half decades in implementing intersector approaches. These are some of the key lessons learned:

- Attention is needed at the design stage. Each specific context requires that mutual influences between sectors are prioritized differently according to context.
- Projects take a certain amount of time – often eight years or more – to consolidate the mutual effects between sectors.
- The added value of the intersector strategy for the poorest households is more important in institutionally weak contexts, but is also relevant in poor parts of countries with stronger institutions.
- Institutional coordination needs special attention from the start of the programme, so that strategies are coordinated and implemented in a way that will enhance the mutual benefits between sectors.

Future goals for the partnership

The partnership between IFAD and BFFS has demonstrated the significant potential of the intersector strategy for poverty reduction. Working together, the JP helps people increase their food production, raise their incomes, improve their literacy, secure rights to land water and other natural resources, and ultimately gain power to shape the decisions and policies that affect their lives.

The JP partnership is uniquely placed to address poverty and vulnerability through its intersector approach.

The intersector model is ready to be replicated and scaled up. The JP is seeking donors and partners to help establish an expanded facility that will support future projects in the poorest countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. If you are interested in collaborating, or have questions about this approach, please contact us.





Key findings of the external evaluation

- ✓ JP interventions consistently reach more of the poorest households than traditional single-sector development programmes.
- ✓ Twenty-five per cent of households targeted by the JP register improved family health and are now cultivating new cash crops for improved incomes.
- ✓ In Kenya the JP has more than halved the amount of time women spend fetching water.
- ✓ Women who are literate take a more active role in reducing poverty and adopting preventive health measures in the household.
- ✓ When individuals are fitter and more productive, they are more likely to invest in health, education and forging stronger community organizations.

The IFAD/BFFS Joint Programme

The Belgian Fund for Food Security (BFFS) was created in 1983 by the Belgian Government in response to the more than one million drought- and famine-related deaths in East Africa. BFFS provides grants for rural development projects with a focus on food security and nutrition in some of the poorest countries in Africa, helping the most vulnerable households become healthier and more productive and lowering the risk that they will face starvation.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialized United Nations agency, was established as an international financial institution in 1977; one of the major outcomes of the 1974 World Food Conference. IFAD is dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries. Through low-interest loans and grants, it develops and finances programmes and projects that enable poor rural people to overcome poverty themselves.

The IFAD/BFFS Joint Programme was formed in 1983 to pursue a common goal: helping poor people in rural areas to overcome poverty. Since then, BFFS and IFAD have designed and funded 57 projects in 16 African countries for a total amount of more than US\$200 million.



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