

Ghana: Northern Region Poverty Reduction Programme

Item	Assessment Remarks	Rating
Country & Project Name	Ghana: Northern Region Poverty Reduction Programme	
Loan No.	571-GH	
Project Id.	1183	
Board Date	06 December 2001	
Effectiveness Date	30 January 2004	
Original Closing Date	30 November 2010	
Final Closing Date	31 March 2012	
Total Project Cost US\$(M)	US\$59.6 million	
IFAD loan US\$(M)	US\$12.3 million	
Cofinanciers (if any)	None	
Implementing Agency	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	
Principal Components	Programme components include two broad lines of support: (i) operational support and capacity building to ensure that processes, services and resource flows function effectively; and (ii) a Community Development Fund to finance community-driven action plans.	
Project Performance		
Relevance	The project (NORPREP) was aligned with IFAD's overarching poverty reduction objective and was relevant to Ghana's Poverty Reduction Strategy. NORPREP was also highly relevant for the MLGRD (Ministry of Local Government Rural Development) and Decentralization strategy and had an important role in mainstreaming community action planning into the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) guidelines for decentralized planning. NORPREP called for investments in potable water, schooling, and sanitation facilities in the community, which was relevant because it would satisfy beneficiaries' basic needs. On the other hand, NORPREP had serious design flaws, concerning its institutional as well as implementation arrangements. Above all, the IFAD loan was about 12.3 million but the overall programme was designed as a US\$60 million multi-donor effort, most of which was expected to be mobilised from other donors, with the Government of Ghana (GoG) contributing to US\$5.7 million. IFAD went ahead with the project despite an unclear picture of the co-financing commitment, which did not in fact materialize, either from GoG or from other donors. This factor alone paralyzed implementation during the first two years and was to have major implications for the achievement of programme objectives. Moreover, the project suffered from the lack of a dedicated PMU, as there was only a small Programme Support Team (PST) whose task was to provide advice to the RPCU (Regional Planning Coordination Unit), which conversely was entrusted with the main responsibility for project's implementation. Finally, NORPREP was expected to be "fully integrated into the government decentralization policy and institutional framework". However, although Ghana's Constitution had promulgated decentralization in 1992, the Government had not implemented a decentralization policy framework when the project was appraised in 2001.	3
Effectiveness	Initially the project made little progress and was classified by IFAD as a "problem project" in November 2006. It took eighteen months to complete the restructuring. It was only from mid-2008, when the World Bank (WB) took over as Cooperating Institution that momentum picked up. After an 18-month extension, the programme eventually disbursed 100% of the IFAD funds and completed nearly all of its planned outputs. It largely achieved its objective of deepening and broadening rural development services and community self-help capacity in the Northern Region. It helped government to transform the decentralized planning process from top-down to bottom-up. It built capacity at District Assembly (DA) level to plan and implement public infrastructure sub-projects responding to community requests from Community Action Plans (CAPs). It enhanced capacity in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and participatory planning, procurement, financial management and support for facility user groups. It made a substantial contribution to increased access of the wider population to public infrastructure and services, with an emphasis on the poorest communities and on women and vulnerable groups. It contributed to the introduction and institutionalization of policy and operational changes that enhance the efficiency and sustainability of institutions and service providers in Northern Region.	4
Efficiency	The project suffered from huge delays between loan approval and effectiveness, amounting to 26 months. These delays were due in part to several contentious issues in project design—in particular, giving project implementation responsibility to the Regional Coordinating Council/Regional Planning Coordination Unit (RCC/RPCU). There was only a small Programme Support Team (PST) whose task was to provide technical advice to the RPCU and to account for programme funds during the first 3 years of implementation. As a consequence, during the first three years, programme implementation at regional level was sluggish, with knock on effects at district level. The result was low disbursement, with only	3

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	2% disbursed in Nov. 2006. When the WB took over as cooperating institution from mid-2008, disbursement rapidly accelerated by the time of mid-term review (2009), it reached 30%. At the time of the original programme completion date (March 2010), disbursement was 53%. An 18-month extension of the closing date and the cancellation of foreign exchange gains enabled NORPREP to achieve 100% loan disbursement and to complete 99% of all community subprojects. Total expenditure on the IFAD loan was US\$13.2 million, or US\$900 000 above the original US\$12.3 million. Nearly half of programme funds (47%) were disbursed in the last 18 months. According to the PCR, the actual cost per beneficiary of NORPREP was US\$105 per individual and US\$524 per households, which is deemed to be in line with appraisal expectations and reasonable by IFAD standards. In terms of unit costs, average unit costs of NORPREP subprojects were similar to those of the World Bank-financed Community-based Rural Development Project (CBRDP), but NORPREP's cost-efficiency was lower than CBRDP's due to frequent time overruns on contracts stemming mainly from cash flow difficulties that led to delayed payment for certified work progress.	
Project Performance		3.6
Partner Performance		
IFAD	IFAD has been responsible for serious design flaws, above all the design of a US\$60 million programme with only a US\$12.3 million in place, before the government was ready and before it was clear whether donor cofinancing would be found. This hindered the project's implementation. On the positive side, as soon as NORPREP was classified as a problem project, IFAD sent a team to restructure the programme. IFAD is to be commended for its willingness to extend the completion date by 18 months, without which the programme would not have achieved its objectives.	3
Cooperating Institution	The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the World Bank have been the cooperating institutions. The performance of UNOPS has been unsatisfactory. In spite of the evident crisis faced by NORPREP, UNOPS only sent 3 supervision missions to NORPREP between the programme launch workshop in July 2004 and the supervision handing-over mission of November 2007, with an 18 month gap between May 2005 and November 2006. Time required for withdrawal application (WA) processing by UNOPS was a minimum of 12 weeks compared with 2-3 weeks for similar processing by the WB. Communication between UNOPS and NORPREP on the status of WA processing left much to be desired. Performance of the WB as cooperating institution has been satisfactory. As soon as WB took over responsibility for supervision, NORPREP implementation status rapidly improved, as a result of faster WA processing, more rapid turnover of funds, and involvement of several staff from the WB office in Accra in the supervision and implementation support process.	4
Government	The GoG failed to deliver on its promise of counterpart funding, as it only contributed US\$166,000 in 2003 as a condition for programme effectiveness and since then, no significant government financial contribution has been made to support programme implementation. During the first four years of implementation, NORPREP experienced frustrating delays at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP) in processing outgoing WAs and in authorizing the transfer of incoming funds replenished by IFAD to the programme accounts on the various levels. The delays eased somewhat when WB took as CI, but NORPREP still experiences some delays at MoFEP. MLGRD as the lead implementing agency can be faulted, inter alia, with allowing a 26 month delay between IFAD Board Approval and loan effectiveness; failure to meet its obligations to provide counterpart funds; not taking prompt action to address NORPREP's lagging performance in the areas of procurement, contract management, financial record keeping and reporting; weak vigilance and oversight of NORPREP's financial commitment in relation to remaining IFAD funds. The design assigned overall responsibility for programme coordination to the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) and responsibility for day-to-day management to the Regional Planning Coordinating Unit (RPCU), which however was understaffed, weakly motivated, and overloaded with other tasks. This arrangement proved to be non-viable and resulted in slow implementation until the programme was restructured and implementation responsibility was transferred to the Programme Support Team (PST). Performance of NORPREP's PST became satisfactory toward the end of the programme. Collaboration between the RPCU and PST flourished during the latter years of the programme.	3
NGO/Other	Performance of contractors who collaborated with NORPREP through the DAs was generally satisfactory.	5
Cofinancier(s)	There was no cofinancier.	NA
Combined Partner Performance	<i>There is a sense that partner performance somehow improved after project's restructuring, which contributed to the project's going back on track.</i>	

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Rural Poverty Impact		
Household Income and Net Assets	The PCR mentions that NORPREP has provided income opportunities through better access to roads; moreover, other investments (such as market infrastructure and storage facilities) are likely to have contributed to increasing income directly. However, no systematic data have been collected and there is no specific information to rate this impact domain.	NA
Natural Resources and Environment	There is no information of NORPREP's impact on this domain.	NA
Human, Social Capital and Empowerment	NORPREP had a notable impact on beneficiaries' human capital, by increasing access of the population to water and sanitation, education and health facilities. Access to protected water sources increased from 47% in 2005 to 77% in 2011. There was a 99% reduction in the number of cases of Guinea worm. The amount of time that women (and girls) have saved in fetching water during the dry season (down from 2–6 hours to 20–30 minutes) has freed up time for them and their families. NORPREP also contributed to increase the percentage of adult women who could read and write, from 11% to 14% and in the age group 15-24 years, it increased from 22% to 27%. Severely vulnerable, socially excluded groups—the disabled, lepers, and alleged witches—have benefited from the construction of facilities. They can participate in community activities and have an opportunity to make their way out of social discrimination. The social capital of beneficiaries has been strengthened, with an improved capacity of communities to identify and prioritize their needs, implement community sub-projects and operate/maintain the facilities. The project has also trained and supported the capacity of users to operate and maintain the structures and facilities — building a sense of self image and self-reliance that has the ripple effect of greater social cohesion in the local community. The capacity of district-level staff has been also enhanced in the areas of participatory planning, procurement, disbursement and financial management.	5
Ag. Productivity	Although it can be assumed that NORPREP has had an indirect effect on agricultural productivity (mainly through dam's construction), there is not enough information in the PCR to rate this domain.	NA
Food Security	There are no much information on this domain. The PCR only mentions that, although it cannot only be attributed to NORPREP's intervention, chronic malnutrition in children aged below 5 declined from 35 to 28 percent. In addition, the percentage of households experiencing a hungry season decreased from 87% in 2005 to 61% in 2011.	4
Agricultural Productivity and Food Security		4
Inst. & Policies	NORPREP has promoted decentralisation and local governance. NORPREP has enhanced the institutional capacity of the District Assemblies (DAs), in particular, and, in some cases, the Area Councils and Unit Committees. The participatory planning and improved governance processes have been well accepted by the participating DAs and are now being implemented even in towns not covered by the project. Training in computer systems, procurement, and other governance procedures have also built institutional capacity, and the new processes are benefiting all district towns and villages, not just those supported by NORPREP investments.	5
Markets	The PCR mentions that one butchery facility, 1 grinding mill, one crop-storage and one covered market place were constructed. 339 persons used the market and post-harvest facilities in 2010 in comparison with 10 persons prior to the NORPREP subprojects. Thanks to the project, there has been an increased access of the population to markets, as through roads' construction average time spent to travel to nearest market centre reduced from 1140 minutes at baseline (2008) to 38 minutes in 2010.	4
Project Impact		4
Overarching Factors		
Innovation	NORPREP's most important innovation was to move the decentralized planning process down to the community level as the starting point for district plans. However, NORPREP was not the only protagonist, since the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Community-Driven Initiatives for Food Security (CIFS) also promoted community-based approaches. Other innovations that spread widely across districts include the actualization of the expanded District Planning Coordinating Units (DPCUs) and the introduction of a "full package" approach to the financing of education facilities. Another promising innovation has been the direct involvement of community members in the construction of simple education and health facilities on force account with support from the Area Councils.	4
Replicability and Scaling-up	The NORPREP-led decentralized planning process has been mainstreamed into National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) guidelines for decentralized planning throughout Ghana. Thus, it is now a national policy that the preparation of district medium-term development plans should start with the participatory needs assessment and preparation of Community Action Plans (CAPs) and Area Council Plans.	4
Innovation, Replicability and Scaling-up		4

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Sustainability and Ownership	Sustainability of benefits appears likely for education, health and drinking water facilities, due to the establishment and training of user groups for operation and maintenance, whereas it is already eroding for dams and spot-rehabilitated feeder roads. However, the relevant line departments need to budget for emergency repairs because community user groups cannot be expected to do everything. The greatest challenge is to sustain the enthusiasm, commitment and initiative of communities, as well as their capacity to continue to update their Community Action Plans and to implement items from the plans. The capacity built in facility user groups is reasonably well consolidated and is likely to remain with the community. On the other hand, the capacity built in local government is sensitive to erosion due to high rate of staff transfers. The sustainability of policy and operational changes such as that of integrating community-level participatory planning in the decentralized planning process depends on government's commitment to allocate sufficient resources to the DAs to enable them to facilitate CAP preparation as an input to every new district Medium-Term Plan.	4
Targeting	Although NORPREP was designed to cover all districts of Northern Region (thus applying a geographical targeting), its priority target group was poor rural communities. To facilitate targeting of extra resources to the poorer communities and to complement and avoid duplication of external support, Area Councils were to be categorized according to the incidence and depth of poverty and available support. At community level, use of participatory planning techniques was expected to allow communities to identify the more vulnerable categories of their population. The programme was successful in targeting of vulnerable groups such as the deaf, disabled and women banned from witches' camps, and spent approximately US\$800,000 (12% of the community development budget) exclusively for vulnerable groups.	5
Gender	The project's design included a detailed gender strategy, which, however, was only partly implemented. The gender strategy in the design document did not entirely fit with the programme's emphasis on public infrastructure and services, most of which were intended to benefit the entire population of both sexes. The elements that fit well with the overall thrust of NORPREP were implemented: integration of gender in participatory rural appraisal training; efforts to ensure that women's priorities were adequately reflected in CAPs; representation of women on WATSAN (water/ sanitation) committees, parent teacher associations (PTAs), community health committees and dam water user associations; gender disaggregation of training outputs; and targeting of a borehole, a grinding mill and a service centre for income generating activities to ultra-vulnerable women who had been accused of witchcraft and banned from their communities to a "witches camp". In connection with community infrastructure, it can be commended for financing drinking water subprojects, which benefit women more than men, and for strong emphasis on girls' school attendance in the training of PTAs at all education facilities. Several items in the gender strategy were not implemented because there was no demand for them in the CAPs (functional literacy training, labour saving technology, nutrition education, and income generating activities).	4
Overall Performance		4
Estimated number of beneficiaries		
PCR Quality		
Scope	This is a very good PCR, which is fully in line with the guidelines for Project Completion. It benefits from several accurate well-made annexes.	6
Quality	This is a well done PCR. Although it suffered from a poor monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, which has undermined the assessment on the impact section, it has benefitted from an in-depth as well rich analysis of the project's main achievements and shortcomings.	5
Lessons	The lessons learned are relevant and well rooted in the project's implementation history.	5
Candour	The PCR is objective and critical about its main strengths and weaknesses.	5