

Mauritania: Poverty Reduction Project in Aftout South and Karakoro

Item	Assessment Remarks	Rating
Country & Project Name	Mauritania: Poverty Reduction Project in Aftout South and Karakoro	
Loan No.	563-MR	
Project Id.	1179	
Board Date	12 Sep 2001	
Effectiveness Date	31 Oct 2002	
Original Closing Date	30 Jun 2010	
Final Closing Date	30 Jun 2010	
Total Project Cost USD(M)	USD 22.93 million	
IFAD loan USD (M)	USD 11.33 million	
Cofinanciers (if any)	USD 3.49 (OPEC Fund for International Development)	
Implementing Agency	Commissariat for human right, poverty reduction and insertion (<i>Commissariat au Droit de l'Homme, à la Lutte contre la Pauvreté et à l'Insertion</i>)	
Principal Components	The project aims to contribute to the broad objectives of the PRSP of reducing rural poverty, enabling access to basic social services and fostering institutional development at the local level. More specifically, the project aimed to improve (i) the capacities of CBOs, decentralized institutions and local service providers; (ii) access of the rural poor to basic infrastructure and services; and (iii) the incomes of the poor, particularly the most vulnerable. It has four components: (a) support to organizational and managerial capabilities; (ii) basic rural infrastructure; (iii) support to income generating activities/ IGAs; and (iv) project coordination, monitoring & evaluation.	
Project Performance		
Relevance	The project was considered highly relevant but suffered from some conceptual weaknesses which prevented it from reaching all of its objectives. It was designed based on the IFAD Country Strategic Opportunities Programme (COSOP) of 2000 and conceived to contribute to the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), in particular to reduce the incidence and severity of poverty, to improve the living conditions of the populations and to improve human and institutional development and people's participation. According to the PRR, it was considered as Government's first major instrument for the implementation of the PRSP and was co-financed using the windfall from the debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt initiative. The PCR confirms that the activities carried out by the project respond to the most immediate needs of the populations while at the same time contributing to a long term local development process. Also, the participatory approach adopted allowed to identify and address the needs of the most vulnerable. Finally, the project is in line with several sector strategies such as the Rural Development Strategy of 2001(which includes also the development of public/private services, IGAs and improved land use planning), Decentralization Policy (1986) and the National Gender Strategy (2006).	5
Effectiveness	In qualitative terms, the project has reached two of its main objectives: (i) it has contributed to reducing the physical, social and economic isolation of the target populations/area, through the construction of roads and the provision of water supply and schooling facilities; and (ii) it has initiated an important local development process whereby the CCCs (Consultative Communal Committees), representative of the civil society, have become a recognized partner of the municipal council at local level. The project's positive benefits have, however, been lessened by two major design weaknesses: (i) the need and hence the demand for socio-economic infrastructures were largely underestimated at appraisal; as a result, the funds earmarked for this purpose were largely insufficient and did not allow the project to address all needs expressed; and (ii) the third component related to the development of IGAs was ill designed and efforts to re-orient it failed. As a result, the project's objective to improve the incomes of the rural populations could not be reached, neither in qualitative nor in quantitative terms. Project administrative & financial management and M&E were weak. No baseline was conducted.	4
Efficiency	The project became effective 13 months after approval which (probably) corresponds to the average effectiveness lag of projects within the region. Also, the project was closed on schedule. Several factors have, however, negatively affected project efficiency. On the administrative and financial side: (i) the country's cumbersome procurement procedures; (ii) a generally slow processing of WAs; and (iii) difficulties in mobilizing the OFID loan (lack of clarity of the financing and procurement procedures). On the technical side: (i) the underestimation of project costs in particular for the socio-economic infrastructure (roads, water supply network and school buildings in particular) and equipment; and (ii) the fact that some activities were conditioned to the completion of others, slowing down overall implementation. Two factors have helped balancing the situation: (a) a reallocation of funds after MTR to the benefit of civil works, vehicles, equipment and training categories; and (b) the fact that Government's counterpart fund were paid on time and often used to pre-financed infrastructure works under the IFAD and OFID loans. The IFAD loan disbursement rate reached 87%. Activities under the OFID loan are still ongoing.	4

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Project Performance		4
Partner Performance		
IFAD	The PCR provides only general information about IFAD performance, but it appears that IFAD played its role appropriately and that its support has improved in the course of implementation. Nevertheless, IFAD is responsible for major design weaknesses which have prevented the project from reaching all of its objectives: (i) the project costs were not in line with the objectives set; (ii) the projected costs for infrastructure works had been largely underestimated at appraisal; and (iii) the microfinance/ IGA component was not given enough attention at appraisal and hence, could not be implemented as designed.	4
Cooperating Institution	The UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) supervision missions were timely, effective and responsive. They took place annually. The recommendations were found constructive and were followed by the project. According to the mid-term review (MTR), UNOPS has helped mobilizing the OFID loan. As the only weakness, the PCR highlights the generally slow processing of WAs.	5
Government	Government was highly committed from the beginning. It was closely involved in the design of this project which was considered as Government's first major instrument for the implementation of the PRSP. Also, it directly contributed to its co-financing by using the windfall from the debt relief under the HIPC debt initiative. The GoM was commended in different reports for its deep commitment and continuous support towards the project. This was shown i.e. by the regular and timely payment of counterpart funds, and the release in 2009 of a special budget (USD 190 000) to bridge the gap between the completion of the present project and the start-up of the follow-up project, in particular to allow finalization of important infrastructure works. The PCR however mentions that frequent political changes since project start-up, including changes of the implementing agency have negatively affected project implementation. This is, however, not further explained.	5
NGO/CBOs	Project partners include the main operating partner NGOs (responsible for the sensitization, implementation of the participatory development processes, etc.), specialized partners (implementation of IGAs, vegetable gardens etc.), small enterprises and local consultancy firms. Partner performance has been uneven, ranging from very satisfactory (main operating partners) to weak in terms of implementation support and follow-up of operations, civil works in particular. Partly, this is due to the complexity of the tasks and the large distances between the villages and sites to supervise. The quasi absence of qualified civil engineering companies and the weak capacities of technical services have, however, been identified as a major obstacle towards the implementation of infrastructure works.	4
Cofinancier(s)	OFID funds were earmarked to specifically finance road constructions (8 road sections to be financed by OFID and 2 by IFAD). The loan became effective in April 2003 and was to be closed on 31 December 2006. However, due to initial difficulties in mobilizing the OFID loan (lack of clarity in the financing and procurement procedures), the loan agreement had to be revised to introduce a separate cost category for studies and follow-up. The first pre-studies had been carried out prior to the MTR (Nov 2006). The OFID loan needed to be amended twice again to undertake a reallocation of funds and to extend the loan closing date.	4
Combined Partner Performance	The PCR, MTR and supervision reports give the feeling that communication between partners was difficult at the beginning of project implementation but has improved in due course. During the second half, partners have cooperated and communicated well.	
Rural Poverty Impact		
Household Income and Net Assets	The project has contributed to improving access to water (120 new wells, 2 drillings; rehabilitation of 20 drillings), roads (21 out of 33 works completed) and markets (7 market outlets). The quality of housing has slightly improved between 2006 and 2009 and the agricultural equipment could be increased. 32% of households have an ox cart in 2009 compared to 25% in 2006 (RIMS). Also, cars and motor bikes have started to appear in the villages while there were none in 2006. By contrast, the project's direct impact on improving the incomes of the populations must have been low. Only 65 IGAs could be initiated out of the 1027 identified in the community development plans (CDP). Project design was based on the assumption that IGAs would be financed on MF loans. By providing support to the emergence of an MF network, the project would boost the development of IGAs. This assumption was unrealistic and not adapted to the local conditions. An independent MF study (2006) concluded that it was too late to try a different approach and the MF sub-component was dropped. On the positive side, the project has brought about 107 veterinary helpers. More than 85% earn a substantial income. Animal diseases were reduced by 65%.	3
Food Security	Despite the difficult agro-ecological conditions of the project area (increasing land degradation and desertification, climate change), the project was not designed to directly contribute to improving household food security. The project's impact on both agricultural production & productivity (see below) and on enhancing household incomes has been low and has not contributed to improving household food security. On the positive side, it	3

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	can be assumed, however, that improvement of the road network and the support provided to 252 vegetable producer groups (see below) has had a positive effect on food availability and diversification of the diet. A RIMS study carried out in 2009 highlighted that the percentage of households having experienced a food shortage period could be reduced from 71% in 2006 to 63% in 2009 and that chronic child malnutrition has slightly dropped from 33.8% to 31%. It is not mentioned, however, to what extent this results could be attributed to more favourable climatic conditions in 2009 than in 2006.	
Agricultural Productivity	According to the PCR, funds allocated to the agricultural sub-component did not enable to reach significant results. The project's main achievement are: support provided to 252 horticultural groups (27 000 women in total) through the distribution of seeds, small material, pesticides and the fencing of a limited number of plots, and the training of 458 village focal points. The project also provided training to 440 farmers on 2 subjects that have emerged during the participatory planning processes. There was however no follow-up at field level so that the actual effect of these training activities (adoption rates of new techniques) remains unknown.	3
Food Security and Agricultural Productivity		3
Natural Resources and Environment	Based on beneficiaries' demand, several activities were carried out aiming at natural resource management and environmental protection. This includes essentially sensitization/training sessions on bush fire protection, sustainable management of forest resources and promotion of new energy resources, such as the introduction of butane gas to replace fire wood and charcoal (Around 16 000 individuals reached of which 12 000 women). As a result, more than 83% of the beneficiaries who were sensitized mentioned that the use of butane gas had helped them to save time usually spent on collecting wood. More than 97% of them have introduced bush fire protection measures and 59% of the environmental management committees established at village have become operational and have started sensitizing the village population on protection measures.	4
Human and Social Capital and Empowerment	The projects main achievement in the area of capacity building was (i) literacy training; and (ii) IEC on health, education, sanitation, etc. About 10 240 individuals have benefited from literacy training which corresponds to 73% of the initial target. Also, RIMS indicators have shown that while only 16% of women and 25% of men know how to read and write either in Arabic or French, this percentage share reaches 30% and 38% for girls and boys between 15 and 24, respectively. IEC activities have reached 246 villages out of a target of 150. Besides, the project has given 21 000 beneficiaries access to health care. More than 60% of the moughataa (group of communes) had access to health care at completion. Weaker aspects include: (i) the community development plans (CDPs) are not yet perceived as a living document. Most have been established once, for the purpose of the project. The communes still need to learn to update these CDPs and to share them with other partners; and (ii) the project tends to substitute itself to the commune in establishing contacts with services providers. The CCCs need to be further empowered during the follow-up phase.	4
Institutions and Policies	The project's main achievement has been the creation of 21 CCCs which is an organization of the civil society at local level. These CCCs have given the possibility to the different sections of the population to take part in a participatory planning process and to produce 21 Priority Action Plans (PAP). Even if these PAPs still show some weaknesses (see above), the CCCs have an important role at local level both as partner and as complementary institution to the municipal council (1/3 of member from the municipal council). The PAPs are shared with the municipality. Also, since the CCCs are the representative of the civil society, they contribute to the "checks and balances" within the decentralization process at local level. The communal development agents (CDA) supported by the project (21=1 for each commune) play an important role in linking up the commune with the municipality. At the end of the project, these CDAs were largely financed by the communes. Besides, the project has supported the emergence of 252 horticultural cooperatives and 166 CBOs responsible for the management of community issues. The project has also contributed to the implementation of the PRSP and other nat. policies	5
Markets	The project's impact on access to markets was rather weak. The construction of 8 essential roads sections has probably had a positive effect on transportation opportunities within and out of the project area. On the negative side, the PCR mentions that the construction of 7 market outlets has not reached the expected effect as: (i) their location was not well identified, and (ii) the surplus production to be marketed within the project area is still small and usually bought directly from the farmers. It seems that unless agricultural production can be significantly increased and diversified, market outlets are not needed.	4

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Rural Poverty Impact	<i>According to the PCR the project has significantly contributed to improving the living conditions of the populations through the improved access to schooling facilities, health care, water and sanitation. Impact figures are missing and impact is mixed. Its main achievement has been its support to creation, organization and management of CCCs.</i>	4
Other Performance Criteria		
Innovation	The project has introduced 3 innovative features that can be replicated and scaled up: (i) the participatory planning process was successfully introduced in the project area and highly appreciated by all stakeholders, including the municipalities; (ii) the creation of the Consultative Communal Committees (CCCs) which have become a direct partner of the municipal council at local level and have therefore contributed to filling in important gap in the country's decentralization process: the link between the villages/communes (which in Mauritania is a geographical determination), representing the civil society, and the municipality, which represents the Government; and (iii) the veterinary helpers, which have emerged as a new, needed and very profitable profession. These veterinary helpers are likely to fill an institutional gap that has emerged following the liberalization of the livestock sector (quasi absence of veterinary support incl. vaccination services at local level and the lack of access to veterinary products).	5
Replicability and Scaling-up	The 3 above mentioned innovations have a high potential for replicability and scaling-up (see "Innovation"). They will be further developed and strengthened in PASK II project currently being designed.	5
Innovation, Replicability and Scaling-up		5
Sustainability and Ownership	The participatory planning process adopted by the project has significantly contributed to improving chances for sustainability of the activities and structures implemented. Sustainability is however threatened by the following factors: (i) a weakly structured society, given the large distances between and the small size of the villages; (ii) difficulties in ensuring maintenance of the large infrastructure works due to the geographical distance between the sites; also, only 25% of the infrastructure management committees are operational; (iii) weakness of some of the decentralized public structures and hence, lack of cooperation between the CCCs and the municipalities. On the positive side, the communes have started taking over 70% of the salaries of the community development agents, introduced to provide support to the CCCs.	4
Targeting	The project applied two complementary targeting methodologies. Geographical targeting: In line with the PRSP and the IFAD COSOP the area of intervention was identified as one of the poorest rural areas in Mauritania where more than 80% of the population live in poverty at the time of appraisal (mostly former slaves and other marginalized populations). Also, this area had never benefited from any major donor intervention before. Self-targeting: through the participatory planning approach, all sections of the populations were included in the decision-making process and jointly identified activities to be carried out to the benefit of all.	5
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	The gender aspect in only weakly analysed in the PCR as the project did not systematically follow-up on gender aspects. It appears however (in combination with information provided in the MTR and SR) that the project has had a significant impact on women participation and empowerment. The gender approach was strengthened at MTR through the introduction of a "gender and targeting" sub-component. Also, a mixed team of 1 man/1 women was put in charge of the participatory planning process at commune level. Further to this, the project imposed a minimum of 3 female members within the CCCs. Finally more than 80% of the literacy trainers were women which greatly contributed to women participation in these training sessions. Women have largely benefited from the IEC sub-component. A total of 4500 women (out of 7000 beneficiaries) attended IEC on hygiene, health, education, early marriage, etc. Also, 101 women focal points were trained. This has had a felt impact on family health in particular. The MTR mentions that 30 women cooperatives had been created strengthened which has contributed to improving their image at village level.	5
Overall Performance		4
Estimated number of beneficiaries	Beneficiaries: an estimated 150 000 beneficiaries which corresponds to the total population of the area of intervention (3 departments: M'Bout (Gorgol), Kankossa (Assaba) and Ould Yengé (Guidimaka). There is no ex-post evaluation of the number of beneficiaries reached.	
PCR Quality		
Scope	The PCR covers all the sections required. Most but not all annexes are provided (disbursement tables and the financial & economic analysis are missing)	4

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Quality	Even though all aspects are covered, a deeper analysis of the results and their causes is missing. Also, the report provides few figures to substantiate its conclusions. Many figures are on contradiction with the last Supervision Report (some outputs figures are higher in the Supervision Report, even though the PCR is more recent...). This is true in particular for the impact analysis which gives the feeling that a lot more could have been said, especially compared to the supervisions report and MTR.	3
Lessons	Design weaknesses have been duly analysed to feed into the preparation of the follow-up project. Furthermore, the PCR has drawn 7 relevant lessons (which are rather development achievements) on which the follow-up project will capitalize. The PCR also makes a number of detailed recommendations for the design of the follow-up project, related in particular to the approval of a new land use law and its practical implications for future rural development projects (also mentioned in the IE).	5
Candour	Relatively self-critical	4