

Niger

Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development in Aguié

Project Completion Report Digest

Niger - Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development in Aguié

Item	Assessment Remarks	
Country & Project Name	Niger - Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development in Aguié	Ratings
Loan No.:	597-NE	
Project Id.	1221	
Board Date	11 December 2002	
Entry into Force	05 May 2005	
Completion Date	30 June 2013	
Final Closing Date	31 December 2013	
Total Project Cost US\$(M)	37 450	
IFAD loan& Grant US\$(M)	29 893	
Cofinanciers (if any)	Belgium (BSF): US\$3 775; Government: US\$2 555; Beneficiaries: US\$1 227	
Cooperating Institution	IFAD/IFAD	
Implementing Agency	Ministry of Agricultural Development	
Principal Components	The project has five components over eight years: (i) support to local innovation; (ii) capacity-building of REOs and other partners; (iii) establishment of a local innovation and initiatives support fund (FAILL); (iv) strengthening of local service-delivery capacity; and (v) project management.	
Project Performance		
Relevance	The project was well integrated with the country's existing policies and strategies, incl. the PRSP and the decentralization policy. It also fits with the Initiative 3N approved in 2011, which supersedes the former rural development policy. It was aligned with the IFAD COSOP of 1999 and remained coherent with other policies and strategies adopted at a later stage, such as the IFAD SF (2007-2010 and 2011-2015), IFAD's corporate gender strategy, and its targeting and innovation policies. The PCR states that project design responded well to the expectations of the beneficiaries and took into account the experience and lessons learned from past IFAD-financed interventions. Particular attention was given to IFAD's experience in the region of Aguié in the identification and support to locally initiated agricultural development approaches and sustainable natural resource management methods. Project design was sound and did not need major adjustments in the course of project implementation. Also, it was sufficiently flexible to allow integration of complementary activities (GEF financing, WFP contribution, emergency response to the droughts of 2005 and 2009, testing of new land tenure arrangements, support to farmer's organizations, introduction of improved housing constructions, etc.).	5
Effectiveness	Despite initial implementation difficulties due to the size of the project area, the weakness of local partners and the many capacities that needed to be developed, the project successfully reached all major outcomes. The project also demonstrated great flexibility by adapting to changing circumstances such as the food crisis of 2005 and 2009 (droughts, locust attack). A critical factor in the project's success has been the direct involvement of beneficiaries in the identification, development and dissemination of innovations ("name targeting") as well as in the monitoring of project achievements. Most physical targets were reached or even surpassed (Comp 1=126%, Comp 2= 119%). In the rare cases when physical targets could not be reached (mostly Comp. 3), this was because the activities had not been requested by the beneficiaries, did not show any development potential or because the PCU intentionally slowed down the implementation pace for greater sustainability. The project had a visible impact on food security and poverty alleviation among the poorest households in the project area and also in terms of social and technical assets, agricultural intensification, regeneration of the vegetative coverage and income diversification. The project had a sound gender strategy and contributed to improving the living conditions of women. On the administrative side, the project suffered from the fluctuation of its staff (4 administrative & financial directors and 4 accountants in 8 years), which led to temporary cash flow problems. Implementation was also affected by the limit set to the special account, which was lifted in 2012 only. Soaring prices of construction material have negatively impacted on the project's capacity to reach its physical targets in terms of community infrastructures (schools, health care centers).	5
Efficiency	Following a slow start-up combined with a low disbursement rate during the first 2-3 years, the implementation pace eventually gained momentum allowing the IFAD loan to be fully disbursed by the end of the original implementation period (99% for the IFAD loan and 100% of the BSF grant disbursed at completion). The project was completed on time. A reallocation of funds from "unallocated" to other disbursement categories allowed the loan to be fully disbursed. It also allowed the project to respond to the price increase of construction material and to the deterioration of the exchange rate. The average cost per beneficiary was estimated at 484 US\$ which is lower than the estimated at appraisal. The shift from CI supervision to direct supervision by IFAD has eased project implementation and hence, increased its efficiency. As such, the project is considered efficient.	5
Project Performance		5

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Partner Performance		
IFAD	IFAD's performance is considered satisfactory, especially since introduction of the direct supervision. This move has had a very positive impact on the overall performance and implementation pace of the project. The flexibility of IFAD's approach and its responsiveness to changing circumstances was highly appreciated.	5
Cooperating Institution	UNOPS' support was only moderate. The workload did not enable its staff to follow closely enough project implementation. Delays in the processing of WAs was another hindrance to the CI's performance.	4
Government	Despite some flaws, Government's performance is considered moderately satisfactory. This can be seen as a major achievement since historically, its performance has been inadequate. In this specific case, Government actively participated in all supervision missions. Also, the Ministry of Agriculture organized its own follow-up missions, which proved to be beneficial to the project. At local level, the project involved various technical services (agriculture, livestock, water, health, education and environment). Their performance was variable. Support provided by the department of agriculture was satisfactory. It took over a large range of responsibilities, involving staffs at various levels, which has helped the project reach considerable results. Support provided by the other ministries was less effective. They largely failed to internalize the approach of the project. While they provided the necessary technical support, they did not adequately support the empowerment approach advocated by the project. Difficulties were encountered in trying to change their attitude to become more service oriented and respond to the needs and requests expressed by the beneficiaries as opposed to implementing a pre-determined set of activities. A major obstacle in trying to change behaviours was the frequent change of staff within the services. Another problem was the difficulties faced by most services in keeping track and monitoring results as opposed to keeping record of output figures. Government's financial contribution was limited. In actual terms, it surpassed the amount set at appraisal. In USD terms its contribution was only 32%, due to changes in the exchange rate.	4
NGO/Other	Cooperation with CBO established under the project was mostly satisfactory. The Apex organizations established in the course of project implementation have a top-down approach. Interaction with them was found rather difficult. Performance of services providers other than Government was variable. Some performed satisfactorily while other have seen their contracts discontinued (mainly construction firms).	4
Cofinancier(s)	The project received additional financial resources from the BSF (pari passu financing with IFAD and parallel financing of health related activities). BSF performance is considered highly satisfactory. No issues mentioned. The grant was fully disbursed.	5
Combined Partner Performance	No issues mentioned.	
Rural Poverty Impact		
Household Income and Net Assets	The project has had a positive impact on household incomes and assets through: (i) improved agricultural production and productivity which has improved access to cereals and reduced food expenditures; (ii) fuel wood production and sale (natural regeneration); (iii) seed multiplication and sale; (iv) support to small livestock development; (v) promotion of IGAs such as sewing, knitting, carpentry, and masonry; and (vi) sale of medicinal and forage plants. These activities have however not benefited all beneficiaries equally. The better offs have benefited more than the most vulnerable, given the weaker capacities of the latter to leverage the effects of the project. Also, adverse external conditions have altogether lessened the project's impact on incomes and assets. The food crises of 2005 and 2009 have depleted household incomes. Other factors that have negatively affected household incomes are expenditures for festivals and ceremonies (weddings, wedding gifts, dowries, baptisms, funerals, etc.). These represent a heavy and uncontrollable financial burden to the households, and undermine the effort made through their participation in the project's activities. It was estimated that about 25-34% of the income from the sale of livestock was spent on ceremonies.	4
Food Security	Given the particularly harsh conditions prevailing in large parts of the country, food security was at the core of the project's interventions. The project successfully improved food availability, access and diet, as shown by several indicators. Among the beneficiaries interviewed in 2008, 54% stated that the project had contributed to the diversification of their diet, 75% have indicated being able to eat 2 meals a day compared to only 30% before the project and 86% have mentioned having enough to eat during the lean period. Child nutrition has improved too, according to an impact survey conducted in 2013. In 65% of the households, infants below 6 months are exclusively breastfed. 87% of the children below the age of 6 receive 3 meals a day, 90% of the households mention feeding their children fruits and 64% make sure pregnant women get a balanced diet. There are no figures to compare with, but all households mentioned this as a considerable improvement compared to the situation before the project. Factors that have contributed to a positive impact include: (i) increased production and productivity (food availability); (ii) grain banks (availability and access);	6

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	(iii) investment into small livestock (safety); and (iv) increased incomes (purchasing power). The various interventions have had interrelated effects. For example, the introduction of grain banks has improved the food security situation during the lean period. This in turn has reduced the dependence on agricultural wages, providing more time for farming activities and hence, improving production and productivity, which has further contributed to improving global food security. The project's main merit was to improve the beneficiaries' resilience against food shortage during the lean period and periods of drought.	
Ag. Productivity	The project has significantly contributed to improving agricultural production, productivity and livestock production through its focus on the identification and implementation of innovative technical solutions and their large-scale dissemination by local level organizations. Most of the activities concerned agricultural intensification (introduction of improved seeds (millet, sorghum, niébe), field trials and tests, support to farmer's initiatives, diversification, extension, small livestock improvement, collection of organic fertilizer, fodder storage, etc.) .The PCR states that the project induced a genuine transformation of production systems in the region through soil improvement techniques, conservation agriculture and assisted natural regeneration. The intensification of agro-sylvo-pastoral production systems has allowed to diversify agricultural production while maintaining soil fertility and reducing vulnerability to the negative effects of climate change. Yields by hectare could be increased by 40-65%, depending on the crop. This is considerable given that soils are poor and depleted. Technical capacities of about 3500 households (or 10500 individuals) could be improved. Harsh climatic conditions, droughts, poor harvests and pests (locust attack) have limited the results and impact of the project in this area. Nevertheless, and despite these limitations, the project's impact on agricultural production and productivity is considered satisfactory. The project further contributed to developing a local extension service run by the farmers themselves to help the most vulnerable. This is one of several small but successful innovations identified and implemented by the beneficiaries themselves.	6
Agricultural Productivity and Food Security		6
Natural Resources and Environment	The project has strongly promoted assisted natural regeneration of the vegetative coverage. A total of 65 villages were reached between 2006 and 2010, and an estimated 13000 ha have been regenerated. Monitoring and oversight committees have been established in all 65 villages. All of them are operational. During the first year, most villages have reached a density of 35-100 trees/hectare. In some of the first villages that have been targeted, the density reaches 100-150, sometimes even 300 trees/hectare. The positive effects of this technique include: (i) reversing the desertification trend in the Aguié Province; (ii) reducing the number of sowings from 3-5 to 1-2, and thus reducing the amount of seeds needed and minimizing seed losses; (iii) higher yields (30-220 kg/ha for millet, depending on the area); (iv) improving the amount of fodder and fuel wood; (v) increasing household incomes through the improved production and sale of wood and wood-related products. Regeneration of degraded soils has contributed to improving fodder production for livestock rearing and sale. These activities have contributed to diversifying the beneficiaries' income basis and thus to strengthening their resilience against external shocks (droughts, food (price) crisis) by helping them to build up their capital to face future crises or to compensate for losses incurred in previous years.	5
Human, Social Capital and Empowerment	Capacity strengthening is a major development thrust of IFAD in Niger. An entire component of the project was therefore dedicated to strengthening the capacities of rural organizations and individuals in various areas: local administration, (FOs, local authorities), agriculture (water points, inputs store), food security (diversification, cereal bank, grain banks), NRM (tree nursery, land tenure, fuel wood market, land rehabilitation, herd passage development (pastoral corridors), health and nutrition (training of midwives, village nutrition advisors, development, distribution of mosquito net, development of village health care centers and health care capacities), small livestock rearing, gender aspects, infrastructure maintenance and management capacities of local committees. Training and sensitization activities definitely contributed to strengthening overall capacities in a region with weak human capital. It is worth mentioning that a total of 1080 rural organization (ROs) benefited from some sort of capacity strengthening compared to 493 originally envisaged, surpassing by far the physical target set. 32% deal with local development, 31% with food security, 24% with livestock development, 6% with agricultural intensification and 7% with NRM. Also, between 40-50% of the beneficiaries in the target villages have joined a local rural organization compared to only 20% in non-target villages. The project has also provided support to the emergence and strengthening of agricultural services support groups or FAROL (Special Fund to Support the Local Supply of Services) which now provide support to the municipality, NGOs and other projects. Women have particularly benefited from capacity strengthening. Access to water could be improved too. The projects also had an impact on access to health and education with the construction of several school (30) and health	5

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	care centers. Nevertheless, management capacities in the area remain very low and deserve further support, despite the positive results achieved.	
Inst. & Policies	The project's overall approach was based on strategic partnerships with technical support services. As such, it has directly and indirectly provided support to various institutions and policies dealing with agriculture, livestock, local development, health and education. The experience and lessons of the PPILDA have been widely discussed at national level during preparation of the "Initiative 3N". Its good practices in the area of agricultural intensification, food security and improving resilience against external shocks have been incorporated into this strategy. The project has further contributed to the institutional strengthening of many of its partners: rural organizations, technical services and municipalities. Its most visible impact has been the creation, strengthening and consolidation of several rural organizations, of which some have evolved into recognized development partners at local level. The project has had a noticeable impact on local governance through its support to the preparation and implementation of communal development plans, and the training of elected members and municipal agents. These activities reached unequal achievement rates (fewer CD plans implemented, more people trained), but altogether, their impact was positive. The project also worked with 6 rural communities and 10 land development commissions at departmental, communal and local level with the aim to support the implementation of the rural code, to facilitate land titling procedures and to secure pastoral corridors.	5
Markets	The development of markets was not part of the project's objectives. The project contributed to the development of markets through its support to IGAs and the construction of 34 km of feeder roads.	4
Project Impact	The project was approved in 2002. No baseline study was carried out. Instead, the M&E system used statistical data as key reference. Efforts were made in due course to fill the gaps, in particular with regard to the 1st and 2nd level RIMS indicators. This was more difficult with regard to the 3rd level indicators. As a result, the impact assessment carried out at the end of the project relied heavily on various, non-comparable survey data and beneficiary interviews. Furthermore, the PCU failed to analyze the data collected from the 21704 households, which benefited from name targeting. These data could have provided useful insights into the actual impact of project operations on the beneficiaries. Nevertheless, rural poverty impact is considered satisfactory, since the project has induced notable changes in an adverse environment, in particular in the areas of agricultural production and intensification, food security, capacity strengthening and NRM. Also, it has positively influenced national strategies and policies.	5
Overarching Factors		
Innovation	The project's main innovation was its targeting approach. The "name targeting" ("ciblage nominatif") was developed specifically for this project, in direct partnership with the beneficiaries themselves. It aims to strengthen their capacities in identifying the most vulnerable amongst them and to jointly develop, implement and assess activities that would help them reduce their vulnerability, improve their food security and ultimately, their livelihoods. Most of these activities and approaches were developed for a specific target group and were thus considered innovative as well. Altogether, the project identified 30 replicable innovations in the area of agriculture, decentralized NRM, food security, IGA development, and social & institutional development.	5
Replicability and Scaling-up	The PPILDA was designed to replicate and scale up the technical, economical and organizational promising innovations developed and tested by the former PAIIP. Furthermore, its targeting mechanism enabled the participatory identification and implementation of activities adapted to the needs and financial capacities of the poor and the most vulnerable. Recommendations were formulated for 5 key areas: (i) self-targeting (name targeting); (ii) agricultural intensification; (iii) support to rural organizations; (iv) opening up of remote areas through appropriate infrastructure development; and (v) M&E for capitalization and scaling up. These recommendations and best practices have been taken into account in the preparation of the COSOPs 2006-11 and 2013-18, while the new PASADEM project financed by IFAD, has been specifically designed to (i) scale up several good practices of the PPILDA and (ii) implement 4 out of 5 development thrusts of the Initiative 3N. Finally, the innovation-based local development approach of PPILDA has been replicated in other IFAD projects in the region (e.g. Benin, Chad, Mali).	6
Innovation, Replicability and Scaling-up		6
Sustainability and Ownership	Important efforts were made to maximize sustainability of the project's achievements and of the processes initiated. The exit strategy was prepared well in advance (2008), enabling necessary measures to be taken on time. Supervision missions have always given due consideration to the question of sustainability and a separate evaluation of rural organizations was conducted in 2013. Social sustainability is high since the project has strongly emphasized beneficiary participation and hence, ownership of activities and processes. Economic sustainability is assessed as satisfactory. Agricultural activities are considered sustainable since the innovations supported by the project have	4

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	been identified in close participation with the beneficiaries. Most of these innovations use locally available inputs and need little financial means. Sustainability of small enterprises could be threatened by the lack of training e.g. in basic management and the absence of a real demand, enabling these businesses to grow and develop. Technical sustainability is satisfactory. All infrastructure works were officially handed over to the rural communities and municipalities. Agreements were signed with the municipalities to ensure their maintenance until this is included in the regular budget. In terms of institutional sustainability, some RO are now fully recognized as partners in the local institutional landscape, such as the seed union of Maradi. Others have not been developed with the aim to last beyond the project. Most private structures are sustainable as they have emerged from a real demand. Some structures such as the grain banks, the retail shops for farm inputs and WUAs seem more fragile, due to the direct involvement of funds. Their long-term sustainability is not given at this point in time. They need to be linked up with existing and sustainable institutions. Environmental sustainability is high since the techniques supported by the project are based on local knowledge. They directly address aspects of climate change.	
Targeting	The importance to directly involve the beneficiaries in the targeting process is one of the key lessons learned from the project. The targeting approach was developed jointly with the beneficiaries and aimed to ensure the project would benefit the most vulnerable. The poor were divided into 4 groups of vulnerable, by the beneficiaries themselves (extreme, high, medium, slight). This enabled a large number of households to be reached and to tailor the activities to the needs of each specific sub-group, incl. women and the youth. Since the beneficiaries, including the poorest were directly involved in the targeting process, they also participated in the ex-post evaluation of the targeting methodology, the relevance and quality of the support provided for each sub-group, and the identification of the next target households (ex-ante evaluation). As such, the targeting mechanism was perceived as highly satisfactory. Nevertheless, the mechanism showed some flaws. While it enabled to reach the most vulnerable, the latter benefited less than the better-offs, given the low level they are starting from, including the weak capacities they dispose of.	5
Gender	Gender aspects were given due attention and benefited from additional financing through a TAG (2003-05). In terms of gender aspects, the project has mainly targeted women representation and their active role in village level decision-making bodies. A survey conducted in 2013 concluded that more women than men were part of local management committee (60% against 40%). Women were involved in many different activities such as small livestock rearing, grain banks, professional training, food crop production, etc. Women have become socially and financially more independent and self-confident. Interviews have shown that women appreciate the social recognition they have gained within their households and the village society. As such, the project has successfully induced in change in their status, which is remarkable in a context where the status of women has remained unchanged or has worsened in terms of access to education, land, means of production, markets and freedom of decision. Capacity strengthening in the areas of health, nutrition and education (literacy), which the project has strongly supported, has mainly benefited women. As a result, health care services (prevention of malnutrition, midwife services, nutritional services, malaria treatment) have increased with the training and implementation of female village focal points, health committees, health workers, etc. Women represent 61% of the direct beneficiaries of the project. All of them have had access to the grain banks. Some 40% have benefited from technical training and 35% of the trainees on demonstration plots were women. Professional training has benefited more young women (70%) than men (30%). 117 female nutritional focal points have been trained, and 100 matrons/midwives have been equipped. The project also administered 524 training sessions in nutrition.	5
Overall Performance		5
Estimated number of beneficiaries	39 896 households or 139 635 individuals have directly benefited from the project. Considering that the average households size counts 7 individuals (children included), it can be concluded that the number of actual direct beneficiaries is 279 272.	
PCR Quality		
Scope	The guidelines are fully respected.	6
Quality	Very well written and analytical, despite limited availability of figures to sustain the findings and conclusions. Very well structured too. Few repetitions, despite its length. Very informative.	5
Lessons	Very good analysis of lessons learned (activities and approaches) and recommendations	6
Candour	No issues to rise. Very objective, slightly too positive compared to other reports.	5