

insights

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FROM THE MALI COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Crises, conflicts and rural development in the north of Mali

Since the start of its operations in Mali in 1982, IFAD has financed five projects in the Sahelo-Saharan belt (the north of the country), four in the Sahelian belt, one in the Sudano-Guinean belt (the south) and two with a thematic focus that straddle several zones. IFAD responded to the Malian Government's request to intervene in so-called sensitive regions. However, the poverty rate in the north is lower than in other regions and there are fewer inhabitants. The zone is susceptible to drought and risks of conflict, and until the start of 2013 it was out of the Government's control. What conclusions may be drawn from the interventions in these zones?

In the north: paucity of basic services, vulnerability, but low population density and prevalence of monetary poverty below the national average

For the country's 15.2 million inhabitants, the average density is 12 people per square kilometre, with huge regional disparities: in the region of the capital, Bamako, density is 2,400 people per square kilometre and in Sikasso, Mopti and Ségou regions it is about 30 per square kilometre, but in the northern regions (Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu) it is only 0.5 to 3 per square kilometre.

The poverty rate (in monetary terms) is lower (29 per cent) in the northern regions (Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal) than in the Sahelian belt (Mopti and Ségou with 47 per cent, and Kayes and Koulikoro with 36 per cent) and the southern Sikasso region (84 per cent according to official statistics). The north is not totally lacking in economic opportunities: water is abundant in the Timbuktu region and there is a major livestock tradition in the Kidal region. The main problems are, rather, vulnerability to climatic fluctuations (drought) and the paucity of basic services.



Discussions with a women's association cultivating a 1 ha vegetable garden in Fia (Commune de Temera, cercle de Bourem, Région de Gao) during a supervision mission of the Northern Regions Investment and Rural Development Programme

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Conflicts in the north between Tuareg factions and the central government have existed since independence. A Tuareg rebellion dominated the scene from 1990 until the 1996 peace accords, when the State drastically reduced the presence of army and security forces in the north, which made effective control of the area more difficult. Attacks in the north of the country have increased since 2006, with the participation of groups of fighters linked to Al-Qaida and the return of soldiers and mercenaries from Libya. It should also be noted that northern Mali is a transit zone for the traffic in arms, drugs and people. In March 2012, discontent in the Malian army, associated with the combat conditions in the north and the lack of resources, led to a coup d'état that overthrew the President of the Republic, Amadou Toumani Touré. In April 2012, power was returned to the civil authorities. Following the withdrawal

of the army, rebels (Tuaregs and Islamist groups) took advantage to seize control of the north, until the intervention of international armed forces at the start of 2013.

The social and political unrest of the north have had repercussions on IFAD-financed projects: in the 1990s, the Tuareg rebellion disrupted implementation of the first phase of the Development Project in the Zone Lacustre in the Timbuktu region and the Food and Income Security Programme in the Kidal region, while two programmes more recently launched in the same regions (the Northern Regions Investment and Development Programme and the Kidal Integrated Rural Development Programme) have had to curtail their activities drastically and then, after the 2012 crisis, relocate their teams to Bamako.

Main results of IFAD-supported interventions in the north

With regard to earlier IFAD-financed operations in the northern region (from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s), the main results were seen in the sphere of action to make agricultural production more secure. Instead, in the past five years, the development activities of IFAD and its partners have laid more stress on providing infrastructure and basic services, together with capacity-building for local governments.

According to the 2012 country programme evaluation, attention to community planning and the training of representatives and staff of local governments and decentralized State technical services have allowed projects to be anchored in the framework provided by local government bodies, acting as permanent, legitimate authorities. Projects have hence been effective in helping in the formulation of community economic and social development plans and development plans of the rural communes. The importance of activities in the spheres of health and nutrition (early detection of infant malnutrition, weighing sessions and community awareness-raising) should also be noted.

However, implementation of these projects has had to cope with delays and an increase in the cost of some elements. Particularly affected are new small-scale irrigation schemes, tracks and some types of social infrastructure (for example, family latrines and water points). These investments will not be finalized before the projects end, which casts doubt on their sustainability. Several factors have contributed to this situation, including:

- somewhat optimistic estimates at the time of project design;
- some State administrative procedures – especially with regard to procurement – that are ill-adapted to the situation in the north; and
- conflicts in project intervention zones since 2006.

Some reflections for the future

The 2012 evaluation stresses the importance of a more strategic approach in planning and coordinating interventions in the north of Mali. The following factors may assist future reflection:

- *No strategy without an analysis of risks and risk-reduction measures.* Experience shows the importance of a thorough analysis of risks (climatic and conflict-related), estimating the likelihood of their occurrence, their impact and anticipated counter measures, for example by drawing up different scenarios. This would allow preparedness plans to be set in advance.
- *A thematic rather than geographic focus.* Concentration on one sector or theme rather than on a geographical region can constitute a risk-control strategy, inasmuch as it would allow activities and resources to be reallocated to zones where operations can continue under conditions of security.
- *Emergency interventions, but to be carried out more through partners.* From the strategic point of view, it is valid to envisage emergency interventions in case of crisis. For a donor such as IFAD, the most appropriate option would seem to be to forge an alliance with specialised international agencies such as the World Food Programme or NGOs, rather than becoming directly involved.
- *Socio-economic development is only one of the elements in conflict prevention.* Other fields of intervention, such as good governance, support for security institutions and justice, and the culture of justice, truth and reconciliation are crucial areas, but lie outside IFAD's sphere of action. Without a commitment on the national side to developing a holistic strategy for peace and security, there is a risk that the results of rural development initiatives will be only temporary.
- *Monetary poverty and population density are concentrated in the south,* so that a refocusing of the strategic thrust on this region seems justified, not only because of the recent crisis in the north but also because of the opportunities for income generation and the number of poor people in the south.

Further information:

Republic of Mali, Country Programme Evaluation, Report N° 3011-ML, May 2013, ISBN 978-92-9072-389-9, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD, Via Paolo di Dono, 00142 Rome, Italy. The full report, Profile and Insights are available online at: www.ifad.org/evaluation; e-mail: evaluation@ifad.org.