

insights



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KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA COUNTRY STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Considerations when targeting the rural poor and using a group-based approach

Starting from the second project approved in 1999, a series of IFAD-financed projects have supported agricultural training and extension services, often combined with group revolving funds, as a way to improve the agricultural productivity of poor rural households. Coming out of almost two decades of wars and destruction, many rural households in Cambodia faced poverty and food insecurity, and the agricultural productivity of smallholder farmers was in general extremely low, especially in the initial period. Rural infrastructure was rudimentary, local service delivery was scarce, and there was hardly any public agricultural extension service. The country and rural context have changed considerably and rural poverty reduced during the past two decades; the project approach to identifying and supporting the target group has also evolved.

Identifying the rural poor for public support and services

The IFAD-financed projects, particularly in earlier years, generally focused on poverty using a similar approach to identify prospective beneficiaries. The projects typically combined geographical targeting (selection of poor provinces, districts, communes and villages) and social targeting (wealth ranking exercise to identify poor households within selected villages). This approach was refined over time, becoming more participatory and consultative, which increased transparency and contributed to strengthening democratic values in communities.

With support from other development partners, the approach and methodology for identifying the poor was developed so that certain public support could be channelled to these households as part of the Government programme. This process resulted in a “most vulnerable family” list in each locality. In 2006 the approach was institutionalized as the “Identification of Poor Households Programme (IDPoor Programme)”, under which the households identified as “poor” are provided with ID cards or “priority access to service cards” that allow them to have free (or lower cost) access to some public services such as health services and education. Two categories are “IDPoor 1” (the poorest - considered as the most vulnerable) and “IDPoor 2” (poor but somewhat better off). The list of

most vulnerable families in earlier years and the IDPoor data have been used by various development partners to better target geographic areas and households for support.

Identifying appropriate interventions

Using the “most vulnerable family list” in the past and later the IDPoor card- holding status as tools to target development assistance can be useful. However, identifying needy households is only the first step. How to assist them is another, especially when it comes to support related to economic and productive activities.

While the intention of targeting the rural poor was clear and reflects positively in the IFAD-financed projects, the identification of the poor (i.e. prospective beneficiaries) and then separating them into different categories of groups based on poverty status (i.e. one category with the most vulnerable households, another category with still poor but not the most vulnerable households) was not necessarily followed by appropriate interventions. In addition, the separation could prevent the better-off, literate and educated farmers from being drivers of change and leaders and managers of groups, for example by serving as treasurers of group revolving funds.

The approach in the earlier projects of placing households of fixed numbers (25 in most of the projects) into different categories of groups was rather rigid, project-driven and artificial. There was also little clarity as to whether the groups were to be a temporary project service delivery mechanism (e.g. for training) or a longer-term vehicle for development and empowerment. Nonetheless, the concern about how to sustain groups established (and group revolving funds where provided) tended to emerge during project implementation.

In more recent projects at a mature stage, separating households into distinct categories of groups based on poverty status was discontinued. In spite of the differences in the proportion of the poor or very poor, the groups in both projects include non IDPoor card-holders, possibly also because of the declining poverty rate. The evaluation also confirms the importance of having the better educated and socially better-off as members of the groups, especially when it comes to management, technology development, market access and sustainability.

Other improvements have been made in terms of relevance of interventions to the target population. Support to demand-driven agricultural extension services has consistently run through the portfolio, but the earlier projects tended to offer a standard menu of training and, for example, expected all members of the same revolving fund group to participate in the same trainings. The agricultural training in the recent projects has become more specific and demand-driven. There is now a wide array of topics, and training is provided to smaller groups

of farmers who share an interest in certain topics or joint marketing activities. Furthermore, two ongoing projects at a mature stage have also introduced, albeit on a limited scale, support to non-land-based activities such as poultry and handicrafts, which are particularly relevant for the land-poor and women.

Tailoring approaches to different profiles of the target group in an evolving rural context

Attention in the recent projects to supporting market-oriented agriculture with relatively advanced smallholder farmers is relevant in the changing rural context. Massive outmigration from rural areas due to salary-earning opportunities (e.g. garment factories) has reduced the importance of agriculture as a main income source and also resulted in labour shortages in rural areas. This points to the importance of supporting commercially oriented and profitable smallholder agriculture that will also attract the younger generation of farmers. At the same time, the portfolio should also support the coping strategies of poor households. For many of these households, the emphasis may be on income-generating agricultural activities that are complementary to non-agricultural or off-farm activities.

It is important that such a two-pronged strategy not be pursued by separating households into different groups, but rather by defining different flexible support menus, which would also need to be tailored to the contexts of different geographic locations (e.g. agricultural potential and market opportunities) and the profiles of the target group.

The experience so far also points to the importance of giving due consideration to the main purposes and roles of different types of beneficiaries’ groups/organizations and of building a realistic exit strategy into the project design so that these groups can sustain themselves and continue to benefit.



Women engaged in mat making, Prey Veng province. The Project for Agricultural Development and Economic Empowerment (PADEE) has supported non-land-based income generating activities – both non-agriculture (e.g. mat making, handicrafts) and agriculture (chicken-raising) – which have been mostly taken up by women.

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Further information:

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