

Enhancing sustainability of development benefits in Sudan

The Sudan country programme evaluation (CPE) of 2008-2009 flags the lack of sustainability as a major issue for IFAD operations in the country. The fragile and volatile environment, weak execution capacities and recurrent conflicts increase the exposure of project benefits to risks that may hinder the continuation of benefits after completion of IFAD support. Recognizing the contextual realities of Sudan, where conflict over natural resource is an integral part of the daily reality of farming and pastoral communities, the CPE urges that sustainability be incorporated in the broad framework of the strategic elements of the country programme in terms of design (e.g. clarity of exit strategies), and partnership (e.g. stakeholder ownership) at the outset of the new country programme.

Concerns for sustainability should be shared by all stakeholders

The concerns for sustainability arise partly because no tangible measures of sustainability have emerged in the recently conducted country programme evaluation; this can be attributed to the fact that the COSOP did not provide a comprehensive strategy for ensuring sustainability of IFAD-financed activities. The evaluation found that there needs to be a common agreement among all partners on expected benefits and how they will be sustained. In a fragile and politically volatile environment such as Sudan, the resources and efforts needed to establish a common agreement on attainment of sustainability at different levels can be substantial. If such agreement is reached early in the design process, it would then be easier to monitor progress towards achievement of sustainability goals.

Institutional and governance context influence sustainability

In the country programme in Sudan, the issue of sustainability is closely related with the choice of activities in a context characterized by weak institutional capacity and high exposure to risk (including conflict). The multifaceted nature of the sustainability issue requires that it be addressed outside the simple project structure and captured in the broader framework of the strategic elements of the country programme, in terms of targeting, portfolio development, partnership and policy dialogue.

Political and social ownership is important but not enough for sustainability

Institutional support received a substantial share of IFAD assistance, implicitly as part of the

sustainability strategy. The aim is to build political and social ownership of the interventions and to create an institutional framework to deliver and sustain services. The rationale involves building the institutional capacity of the community organizations, user groups and self-supporting institutions to become focal points for provision of project services and tools for participatory rural development. At the same time, strengthening the institutional capacity of the government at the State and local levels would help ensure they provided the necessary services and technical back-stopping to rural communities. The evaluation noted, however, that a high level of political and social ownership is important but not sufficient to achieve sustainability. Although strengthening local self-help organizations has increased their capacity to exploit potential economic opportunities, more work is required to increase and sustain farm-level production. Communities must also increase their capacity for income generation if they are to contribute to community initiative funds and have the ability to meet their needs through the market.



Harvest time in North Kordofan
Source: IFAD Photolibrary

Sustainability at Locality, State and Federal levels is particularly problematic

The limited technical and financial capabilities of the Locality and State governments prevent them from consolidating many of the successes of the IFAD-supported projects. The elaborate management structures created for the programme demand considerable resources that are not always readily available. The envisaged framework involves institutionalization of the programme into the existing government operations. Therefore, assuring a budget for project operations is usually not an issue, but rather ensuring that institutions continue to provide the services that generate benefits year by year is required. The underlying assumption in institutional support was that the revenue base of Locality governments would increase sufficiently for them to take over financial responsibility for projects. This assumption suffered from two obstacles. Firstly, within the decentralisation process, an effective and transparent mechanism for revenue transfer from the centre (federal) to the States and Localities was not enforced. Secondly, although the COSOP envisaged local government revenue reforms, no specific plan of action was incorporated in the programme to realize the reforms. Fiscal decentralisation has therefore had negative consequences on the capacity of local authorities to generate and mobilize the financial resources needed to support the investments undertaken through IFAD operations. The key lesson here is that a coherent national policy framework with an inbuilt social equity system that is supported with a robust

budget is a prerequisite for ensuring political commitments, ownership, institutional and policy support in Sudan.

Technical aspects tend to be taken for granted

Issues of technical design of projects have tended to be the exclusive domain technical teams, while those of policy and governance are left to the Government. The technicality of managing the projects is left to project implementation staff – often projects are assumed to be technically sound if the technical solutions envisaged are appropriate. This raises two sustainability issues. Firstly, projects are complex entities that do not always lend themselves to easy comprehension and technical management. Significant training efforts were therefore carried out to impart different types and levels of skills to carefully selected staff. The retention of technical personnel in project units and existing organizations has become an issue in IFAD-financed projects, since the economic drive to quit existing low paid jobs is high following acquisition of new skills that are required elsewhere. Frequent loss of qualified staff in projects to other institutions undermines technical sustainability of projects. Secondly, the technologies envisaged in projects may not quite match the reality on the ground. For instance, while the mechanisms identified to promote sustainability in the agricultural sector are appropriate and, with further consolidation and support, could prove effective, the mechanisms intended to continue after programme closure (seed banks, certified seed production, financially viable paravets and extension workers) remain weak.

Further information:

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