

profile

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Ensuring realistic design: learning from experiences in Niger

The Niger Special Country Programme - Phase 2 (PSN-II) aimed at restoring conditions, in a sustainable fashion, based on the optimal use of natural resources. To reach this goal, the project had four objectives, namely: (a) increasing agricultural production and ensuring sustainable production systems in small-scale irrigation areas; (b) improving food security and helping to increase the incomes of small-scale producers through a land use (*terroir*) management approach; (c) improving living conditions for populations in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas; and (d) enabling women, youths and small-scale producers supported by the project to access working credit to raise their living standards.

Niger is often compelled to resort to food imports and international aid, as in the most recent crisis of 2005 given recurring food insecurity in parts of the country. Approximately two thirds of the population live below the national poverty line. This situation is attributable to a combination of factors such as draught, limited soil potential, strong demographic pressures, limited access to inputs and equipment, and inadequacies in basic services and infrastructure.

Main findings

The PSN-II objectives and approaches were found broadly relevant to the country context, fitting well into the Niger's governmental policies and IFAD's country strategy at the time. The project produced interesting experiences, particularly in the fields of agricultural extension, participatory land-use planning methodology applied to pastoralist communities and rural finance. However, compared to the programme's aspirations and the substantial human and financial resources used, PSN-II had limited impact. This was diminished by the difficulties encountered: a low level of effectiveness caused by interruptions in financing by IFAD due to non-repayment of outstanding loans by the Government, weak design and implementation quality in many instances, the lack of sound measures to reduce vulnerability among target groups and the absence of a strategy to empower the supported organizations.

Small-scale irrigation. PSN-II has improved access to irrigation water for farmers on 20 rehabilitated collective perimeters in the Niger and Komadougou river valleys. Agricultural extension activities on useful technical topics reached 800 to 900 farmers and adoption rates were high. Promotion activities for producers' organizations reached a larger number of groups than planned. Farming on collective irrigated perimeters has increased greatly as a result, although it is gradually being abandoned because of land tenure insecurity, limited access to markets and lack of capacity to repair motorized pumps.

Land use (*terroir*) management. An investment was made at the outset in designing *terroir* management methodology. Following participatory appraisals, 70 *terroir* development plans were prepared in farming and pastoral areas. Fewer than half the plans were implemented. Among physical accomplishments, soil and water conservation and land reclamation were most significant and the impact is apparent in biodiversity, reforestation, erosion control and crop and livestock productivity. Spontaneous dissemination of certain techniques by individual farmers was observed. Thanks to significant yield increases on treated plots, cereal availability has increased for those households with access to land. While in pastoral areas social networks were strengthened by consultations and exchanges, impact on natural resource management systems overall was negligible.

Rural finance systems. Total credit granted, through three area-specific credit facilities, attained close to US\$600 000, was mainly short-term and reached about 6 000 beneficiaries. The mutual fund in the Diffa area successfully recovered the full amount of credit provided through rigorous and regular follow-up, but elsewhere repayments were modest because of the lack of follow-up after the service provider contracts ended at mid-term.



PROJECT DATA

Lead Ministry: Ministry for Agricultural Development

Project cost: FCFA8.4 billion (out of FCFA11.4 billion planned)

IFAD loan: FCFA7.2 billion (US\$14.8 million)

Government contribution: FCFA514 million (out of FCFA762 million planned)

WFP co-financing: FCFA348 million (out of FCFA736 million planned)

Cooperating Institution: UNOPS

Project start-up: August 1998

Loan closing: December 2004

Key recommendations

Several recommendations can be drawn from this evaluation, relating to: project targeting based upon a better understanding of the socio-economic context;

- the outsourcing (*faire-faire*) approach and the strengthening of local stakeholders;
- the development of irrigation potential; and
- the development of grazeland zones

Rural development projects should be better targeted in terms of area and sector. Programme preparation should integrate a clear understanding of socio-political issues and the causes of poverty/vulnerability. In a difficult socio-political context such as that in Niger, with limited local capacities, it seems vital to set up projects that are (i) geographically better focused, (ii) flexible, so that interventions can evolve and be progressively scaled up as experience is gained, and (iii) confined more narrowly to sectors considered priorities for rural development and the reduction of poverty and inequalities.

The outsourcing (*faire-faire*) approach and the strengthening of local stakeholders' capacities. The decentralization process has generated new public players at the regional, departmental and communal levels. At this key stage, the *faire-faire* concept must evolve and move from the improvement of services to projects towards a real transfer of responsibility to decentralised government structures and farmers' organizations. Two categories of service providers, preferably local, should be supported: the first category to carry out local investment works and the second one to assist the investment owners with planning and managing local development. The *faire-faire* approach would thus allow not only to develop and put to good value service providers' capacities, but also to empower decentralized government structures and farmers' organizations, and to boost their capacities. However, the evolution of such concept into an approach would require; (i) effective support and advice mechanisms to build capacity for decentralised local investment ownership and (ii) a higher autonomy for decentralized structures in the choice of service providers with a strong involvement of beneficiaries.

Three major challenges must be met to further develop irrigated farming. The first challenge concerns land access that should always be guaranteed for farmers in the long term before hydro-agricultural investments are considered. This could be accomplished through support to a negotiation and formalization process for long-term land tenure agreements. The Government should give priority to the registration of land ownership with the land commissions, which would then allow the establishment of a formal tenant farming system. When designing projects, IFAD should make provisions for prior studies and technical support with regard to land security in order to complement local knowledge and experience. Market access for irrigation farmers is a second challenge to tackle. Inasmuch as the intensification of irrigated farming leads to major costs for farmers it depends highly on marketing opportunities for produce at remunerative prices. The third challenge relates to the incorporation of the development of irrigated farming into a broader local planning and management framework for natural resources. The development models adopted for irrigated farming must be based on a participatory process of local diagnosis and planning, taking into account all the production systems found in the village, and in coordination with the formal land development plans.

The development of grazeland zones is a key element for the country's future and two central thrusts must be pursued in this connection. Improving the governance of grazeland resources is a key factor for more sustainable management of natural resources, but also for the prevention of conflict. Initiatives to bring users and local actors together must be promoted by the Government of Niger and IFAD. Such consultations among stakeholders should lead to a definition of generally accepted, appropriate rules in connection with the formal land development plans. Secondly, with a view to reducing the effects of recurrent droughts and facilitating the reconstitution of household financial assets, the Government and livestock development projects should give priority to helping herders to draw up strategies for the security of their herds, advance marketing to prevent crises, individual cereal storage, livestock feed stores for small-scale herders, support to innovation by herders with regard to restocking the herds of the poorest at the end of crises and so on.

Further information:

Republic of Niger, Special Country Programme - Phase 2, Completion Evaluation Report #1920, October 2007, Office of Evaluation, IFAD, Via del Serafico 107, Rome 00142, Italy. The full report and profile are available online at www.ifad.org/evaluation; email: evaluation@ifad.org.

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