

profile

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Philippines: Helping indigenous people and the poor in upland, coastal and agrarian-reform lowland areas

Poverty in the Philippines is a predominantly rural phenomenon. While varying from region to region, it is particularly pervasive in the southern part of the country, especially Mindanao. More than 40 per cent of all poor families live in rural areas, with poverty worsening as one moves away from the lowlands to the uplands and from irrigated to rainfed farming areas. In spite of concerted efforts by the Government in recent years, the incidence of rural poverty remains high and the country's approximately 17 million poor upland farmers have been classified amongst the poorest of all.

With a poverty rate significantly higher than the national average, Western Mindanao is one of the poorest and least developed areas of the Philippines. The overall objective of the Western Mindanao Community Initiatives Project (WMCIP) was, therefore, to increase the subsistence production and incomes of up to 16,000 farm and fishing households in selected areas of Western Mindanao, thereby improving the quality of their lives. Project components were designed to emphasize participatory planning and implementation, community development and institutional capacity-building, natural resource management and enterprise development. To that end, activities were aimed at boosting the area's food security, incomes, assets and natural resources and bringing about better social mobilization, partnership-building, convergence of services, participation and empowerment.

Main findings

The project focused on areas with the most disadvantaged populations – upland, coastal and agrarian-reform lowland areas – and involved 81 villages in 21 municipalities of the four provinces covered. A number of key environmental concerns having an impact on people's livelihoods were addressed, such as: land degradation; loss of soil fertility; and the depletion of fish stocks caused by over-fishing and injudicious, destructive methods and practices that have seriously damaged marine and water resources.

The project achieved or exceeded practically all its quantitative targets, with the exception of some water supply systems; also, the inclusion of vulnerable households in 2003 significantly enhanced its outreach and benefits. More than 9,300 poor farmer households and almost 2,400 poor fishing households benefited directly from the project, including approximately 3,400 vulnerable households. According to a 2007 project survey, the average annual income of beneficiaries had increased by about 38 per cent since 2005, largely thanks to higher farm incomes, which may be partly attributable to the beneficiaries adopting new agricultural technologies under the project.

While these gains have led to significant improvements at the household level, poverty remains prevalent. Better crop and fisheries production has led to diversification, which in turn has improved food security and nutrition. Much has been achieved with regard to capacity-building at the village and local government unit (LGU) levels, and valid partnerships have been forged for supporting development activities. However, the small enterprise development component cannot be considered a success because it had a limited impact in terms of developing small enterprises, business advisory services and a sustainable credit delivery system.

The project made a good attempt to 'work from head waters to blue waters'. Although the targeting of some municipalities was based on an ecosystem approach, the actual village sites were spread out, meaning that the interconnectivity of upland-lowland-coastal ecosystems was not adequately captured. Thus, environmental disturbances beyond the control of the project had an adverse effect.



PROJECT DATA

Project cost: US\$18.15 million

IFAD loan: US\$14.70 million

IFAD grant: US\$0.75 million

Government and beneficiaries: US\$2.61 million

Implementing agencies and partners:

Department of Agrarian Reform (lead agency)
Department of Environment and Natural Resources
National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
Land Bank of the Philippines
Local Government Units (LGU):
Zamboanga del Norte,
Zamboanga del Sur
Zamboanga Sibugay
Basilan

Cooperating institution: United Nations Office for Project Services

Loan effectiveness date: 25 March 1999

Loan closing date: 31 Dec 2007

The sustainability of project initiatives will depend on the ability of individual beneficiaries, village communities, and people's organizations and cooperatives to sustain the community-initiated activities. As capacity-building takes time, it will need continued support from municipal and provincial LGUs and from other agencies. The mainstreaming of activities into regular provincial and regional undertakings, and continued provision of support activities are important for ensuring project sustainability. The project's participatory planning and social empowerment processes were critical in terms of generating the ownership of project activities by

communities and beneficiaries, which will help to promote sustainability.

It is noteworthy that, although parts of the project area fall within a conflict zone, the various communities living there, such as indigenous peoples, Muslim ethnic groups and migrant settlers from Visayas and Luzon, all have managed to co-exist for a considerable length of time. The focus on indigenous peoples and the willingness and the project staff's ability to work in conflict areas and develop partnerships with stakeholders across all groups were seen as admirable.

Key recommendations

Integrate the principles of a watershed approach to natural resource management. In this regard, it is recommended that:

- In order to ensure better control and accountability over activities that could damage natural resources and to speed up the flow of benefits between communities (e.g. less siltation and improved water quality) in the project area, future interventions should cover a more limited geographic area. Such interventions should be concentrated in headwater areas, with due consideration to downstream effects.
- Within the upland areas, project sites should – to the extent possible – be contiguous, thereby ensuring greater environmental benefits. In addition, a landscape approach should be incorporated in order to integrate social, cultural and environmental concerns with land management.
- With regard to geographic coverage and beneficiary needs, the project area should be clearly identified during the design of a potential second phase, backed up by corresponding institutional arrangements for developing improved monitoring, supervision and implementation support.

Specify the target groups more accurately. Aligned with government development efforts and directions, it is recommended that project design should: be in line with IFAD's targeting policy; clearly set out the poverty level of the proposed target groups; and indicate whether both the enterprising poor and vulnerable groups should be included. The first-phase project made use of guidelines for the selection of vulnerable households, which were integrated with the KALAH (Linking Arms to Fight Poverty) programme priorities of the National Anti-Poverty Commission at the village and municipal levels. Following the success of that approach, consideration should be given to using it in the design of any future projects.

Project management in conflict zones. In view of the unstable security situation in the region, flexible support mechanisms for project execution/supervision and implementation will be needed. For example, one option could be to rely on local agencies for these activities. Project management staff must be able to work with, and communicate across, the different groups in conflict areas: at the local level, being indigenous to the area or of the same ethnic group would be clearly an advantage.

The Mindanao conflict and regulation of resource use. Problems regarding the control and development of the region's land and natural resources have contributed to the Mindanao conflict, particularly because of inequitable use/control. WMCIP took a number of initiatives to remedy the situation, such as promoting the formation of peace zones in Basilan, setting up a series of consultations between the Government and a splinter local rebel group from the Communist Party of the Philippines, and providing training in conflict sensitivity and peace building. This practice should be continued, as conflicts regarding the use of natural resources are intrinsically anchored in the diversity of ethnicity, religion and socio-economic and cultural knowledge, structures and practices.

Increased IFAD visibility. The Fund should make its presence felt more widely during project execution, e.g. by ensuring that its policy priorities and declarations, including those relating to indigenous people, remain clear areas of focus throughout the life of projects. It should also strive to undertake direct supervision, preferably with the participation of the country presence officer.



Mat weaving, Zamboanga Sibugay

Source: Graham Walter

Further information:

Republic of The Philippines, Western Mindanao Community Initiatives Project, Interim Evaluation, Report No. 2027-PH, October 2009, ISBN 978-92-9072-095-9, Office of Evaluation, IFAD, Via Paolo di Dono 44, 00142 Rome, Italy. The full report and profile are available online at www.ifad.org/evaluation; email: evaluation@ifad.org.

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