



Participation: from words to action

Haiti: Small-scale Irrigation Schemes Rehabilitation Project

With a population of approximately eight million, Haiti has one of the highest population densities in the Americas. It is also one of the poorest countries in the region. Over sixty percent of its population works in farming. A mountainous country, its irrigation potential is limited to approximately 150,000 hectares (representing ten percent of cultivated land), 15,000 of which are on small-scale plots of between 30 and 500 hectares – most in an advanced state of degradation.

Over a period of seven years, the project carried out rehabilitation work on the irrigation schemes attached to the small plots of land, put in place local structures for management and maintenance and upgraded rural production techniques. These interventions emphasised stakeholder participation and encouraged farmers to get involved in services upstream and downstream of production. In spite of a challenging political context – absolution of parliament, civil unrest, and the fact that the international community did not recognise Haiti's 2001 election results – the project was able to achieve a significant number of objectives. Moreover, insights emerging from the project will also feed into the process of defining an appropriate irrigation sector policy.

With a view to ensuring the success of the project's second phase, key insights from the evaluation include:

- **Implementing a truly participatory** approach to project activities is a challenge. Moving from words to action is a slow process but will guarantee sustainability. To increase the chances of sustainability, participatory management and decentralisation practices are essential.
- **Innovative solutions**, particularly with regard to hydro-agricultural development, contributed greatly to project performance, and when based on a concrete analysis of local realities, will ensure that future interventions are effective and efficient.

Project data

Total project cost	USD 22.3 million
IFAD loan	USD 10.6 million
Government contribution	USD 2.9 million
Co-financing institution	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund, French Development Agency (USD 8.8 million but 7.2m of this was suspended)
Main partner	Government of the Republic of Haiti
Project dates	May 1996 to December 2003

Main results

The project involved 26 small-scale irrigation schemes, covering nearly 5,000 hectares in four different areas of Haiti: Port-de-Paix (6), Saint Marc (11), Petit-Goâve (5) and Côteaux (4). Water Users' Associations (WUAs) were established in each scheme and have the potential to assume self-management, although a support mechanism for WUAs will initially be needed in the second phase of the project. By mid-2002, approximately 2,000 hectares had been rehabilitated and new cropping techniques likely to bring about a sustainable increase in yields broadly disseminated. Over 2,000 farmers had attended training seminars on how to manage the irrigation schemes and ways to improve crop techniques. Stores selling inputs (such as seeds, fertilisers, harnesses for draught animals and mechanised ploughing equipment) managed by farmers were set up in two regions, providing autonomous structures for the supply and distribution of inputs. The project made a significant contribution towards defining sector policy and up-dating approaches to hydro-agricultural development. Physical infrastructure, however, was often prioritised over development activities and development initiatives suffered further from delays in putting infrastructure into place and from a lack of consultation with the producers.

- ▶ ● **The profitability of investing** in the costly rebuilding of irrigation systems depends upon the design quality of new irrigation solutions. Applied research and adequate financial resources for the implementation of new ideas are needed.

Participation: a long-term process

From the beginning, the project set out to revitalise irrigated production and strengthen support services for farming in Haiti. The withdrawal of state support for farming went hand in hand with increased accountability and empowerment of the producer organisations on matters such as input supply, irrigation scheme management and access to credit. For long term viable solutions to succeed, permanent dialogue with and between farmers is crucial but this failed to happen to the extent originally planned. Effective communication channels and adequate time is needed for traditional top-down management practices to evolve into a more effective, equal exchange of information, knowledge and experience between farmers and other producers. Newly-established Water Users' Associations (WUAs) are now responsible for organising the sharing of water, collecting irrigation fees and for maintaining the irrigation systems. Most WUAs stand a good chance of sustainability but need to continue receiving outreach support and to establish transparent information channels and decision-making processes. Importantly, insights from the project have contributed to the national policy on organising irrigation-scheme users and by feeding into draft legal documents governing users' associations.

The need to innovate

Project activities included an ongoing search for new solutions to administrative and technical problems. Slow and costly competitive bidding procedures, for example, were improved considerably with new innovative methods for sharing site management between state and private companies. On a technical level, the project capitalised on past failures in hydro-agricultural development and used more sustainable water catchment techniques that fit the torrential nature of watercourses in Haiti better, where sediment displacement is especially extensive. The agricultural research sector, on the other hand, is weak and under-funded, offering little in the way of proposals that are suited to the realities of production. Research and development should prioritise the control of diseases affecting banana plants, production of corn (maize) seeds and the development of appropriate techniques for herbicide use. The control of black Sigatoka and Erwinia (diseases), for example, is a necessary pre-condition to deriving value from investments in Port-de-Paix and Petit-Goâve, where bananas are a key crop.



IFAD photo by Andreas Gerrits, May 2002



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A dam at Fort Royal/Petit-Goâve built by the Small-Scale Irrigation Schemes Rehabilitation Project. The dam is used not only for water distribution, but also as a public swimming area for young people.

Making investment pay

The evaluation process sparked several queries concerning the necessity of making the costly investments, needed to finance the irrigation schemes, more profitable. Profitability is only ensured if certain conditions are met in order to achieve optimal water management by the users. An effective applied research mechanism will be essential in the project's second phase to test and propose new varieties of seed, fertiliser or pesticide, effective soil-spraying techniques or better and more appropriate methods for combating crop pests and diseases. At the same time, the economic constraints facing agricultural activities need to be taken into account, such as the limited access to credit for farmers, the availability and cost of labour, and market conditions ■

Further information

République d'Haiti: Projet de réhabilitation de petits périmètres irrigués (PPI), Évaluation intermédiaire, Report N° 1391-HT, April 2003, Office of Evaluation, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Via del Serafico 107, 00142 Rome, Italy. The Profile (also in French) and the full report are both online at www.ifad.org/evaluation. Email l.daniel@ifad.org or telephone +39 06 5459 2526 for further information.