

**Preface and Executive Summary**

**Kingdom of Morocco  
Rural Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz**

**PROJECT PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**





# Preface

The aim of the Rural Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province in the Kingdom of Morocco was to improve the livelihoods, incomes and food security of the poor rural people by building their capacity to use their natural resource base in a sustainable manner.

Overall, the project made a considerable contribution to improving the livelihoods and production conditions in the mountain areas. Of central importance to these results was the use of a participatory approach intended to enable the beneficiaries to develop their own planning and management capacities by creating a *douar* (hamlet) development plan – thus strengthening capacity in local development planning and rural management. A number of grass-roots associations and organizations were established and the capacity of the local technical services to engage in a participatory approach and in dialogue with local stakeholders was built.

Other important achievements included establishing roads and tracks that opened up the

selected *douars*, and providing access to drinking water for households by installing drinking-water supply systems. Small- and medium-scale irrigation schemes and improvements in crop and livestock production helped to increase people's food security and household income. Income-generating activities and micro-enterprises created by the project also contributed to increasing the population's incomes.

In Morocco, the project has become a major point of reference for the Government, IFAD and other donors with regard to interventions in mountain areas, using the *douar*-level participatory approach. Despite these achievements, the project performance assessment observes certain weaknesses with regard to overambitious targets, the lack of knowledge management related to the *douar* development plans, non-implementation of forest resource conservation activities and inadequate resources dedicated to achieve the targets set for gender equality and women's empowerment. The sustainability of certain interventions also remains fragile.

The present assessment was led by Catrina Perch, Evaluation Officer, with the contribution of Professor Ali Abaab, agriculture and rural development consultant. Internal peer reviewers from IFAD's Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) – Ashwani Muthoo, Deputy Director, Anne-Marie Lambert, former Senior Evaluation Officer, and Miguel Torralba, Senior Evaluation Officer – contributed comments on the draft report, while Maria Cristina Spagnolo, Evaluation Assistant, provided administrative support.

The Independent Office of Evaluation is grateful to IFAD's Near East, North Africa and Europe Division and the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco for their insightful comments and their support throughout the assessment process.

I hope the results of this evaluation will contribute to the improvement of ongoing and future IFAD operations in Morocco.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oscar A. Garcia', with a large, stylized initial 'O'.

Oscar A. Garcia  
Director  
Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

Project activities supported the women's association "Tamount", by helping women to improve their living conditions and strengthen their technical and economic capacity. Activities included literacy and technical training.



# Executive summary

1. This report presents the findings of the project performance assessment (PPA) of the Rural Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province (PDRZMH) in the Kingdom of Morocco.
2. **Objectives.** The PPA's objectives were to assess the project's overall results and to generate findings and recommendations for the implementation of ongoing - and the design of future - operations in the country.
3. **Methodology.** The PPA followed the IOE Guidelines for Project Completion Report Validation and Project Performance Assessment<sup>1</sup> and builds on an extensive desk review of the project completion report and other relevant documentation. In addition, it includes findings from a mission to Morocco, with interviews taking place in the capital and in the field. During the field work, data were collected to verify the information collated in the desk review and to reach an independent assessment of the project's performance and impact.
4. Given the limited level of resources IOE allocates for undertaking PPAs in general, no quantitative survey was undertaken. The information gathered was therefore mainly of a qualitative nature and focused on a restricted set of topics identified during the desk review and in consultations with the Country Programme Manager.
5. In this regard, particular emphasis was given to the relevance and application of the participatory approach at the *douar* level (equivalent to a hamlet), the development of the *Douar* Development Plans and the sustainability of project activities.
6. **PPA process.** The PPA mission was undertaken in September 2013, in close cooperation with the Government. The mission included field visits to project sites, and meetings and

<sup>1</sup> IFAD. Guidelines for Project Completion Report Validation and Project Performance Assessment: [www.ifad.org/evaluation/process\\_methodology/doc/pr\\_completion.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/process_methodology/doc/pr_completion.pdf)

interviews were held with government officials, members of project-supported groups, individual farmers and other key stakeholders. The final PPA report has benefitted from a detailed internal peer review within IOE, and comments by IFAD's Near East, North Africa and Europe Division and the Government of Morocco.

7. **Limitations.** In the absence of *quasi-experimental* evaluation methods to assess results “before and after” and “with and without” the project, and given that other donors, such as the World Bank, the Millennium Challenge Cooperation and government agencies led projects that were contributing to general development in the region, it was challenging for the PPA to distinguish the respective impacts of the various interventions.
8. In addition, a follow-on IFAD-financed project (the Agricultural Value Chain Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province) was approved in December 2011, and the current situation was likely to have been influenced by this project as well.

However, specific PDRZMH physical outputs can be identified and to a large extent project participants can recall the PDRZMH support.

9. **Project background.** PDRZMH was approved in 2000 and implemented between 2002 and 2011. It was conceived as a pilot intervention to support the development of a particularly impoverished mountain area. It aimed to pilot various approaches that could then be scaled up and replicated in other mountain areas in the country, to encourage beneficiary participation through decentralization, and to support the creation of productive socio-economic infrastructure accessible to beneficiaries.
10. The project's main objective was to contribute to the sustainable socio-economic development of the disadvantaged rural population of the mountain zones of the Al-Haouz Province. Specific objectives included to: (i) strengthen the self-management capacity of formal and informal grass-roots organizations; (ii) improve production conditions and increase and diversify the agricultural and non-agricultural income

of the target groups; (iii) improve the living conditions of populations by facilitating their access to basic socio-economic infrastructures; (iv) facilitate the sustainable access of poor people, especially women, to financial services; and (v) promote sustainable management of natural resources.

11. The objectives were to be achieved through interventions in four components: (i) capacity-building and promotion of local development; (ii) implementation of local development programmes; (iii) support to rural financial services and to micro-enterprise development; and (iv) institutional support and project coordination and management.
12. The total project costs at design were US\$30.2 million, of which IFAD's contribution was US\$18.0 million. The remaining project costs were provided by the Government of Morocco (US\$10.9 million), beneficiaries (US\$800,000), and the United Nations Development Programme, the municipalities and the non-governmental organization selected for the microcredit activities (Caisse Nationale de Crédit Agricole) (US\$500,000).

The project's main executing agency was the Ministry of Agriculture, with the provincial department of agriculture responsible for overall management of activities. Project supervision and implementation support was conducted by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) until 2007, after which IFAD took over direct supervision.

13. **Project performance.** The project was in line with IFAD's strategic objectives for Morocco and the Government's strategies, including the strategy for rain-fed agriculture and the programmes aiming to provide basic infrastructure. It is generally considered as one of the first real attempts to implement the Government's 1999 Strategy for Rural Development (Stratégie 2020). The focus on infrastructure, as well as the other activities, was relevant to the needs of the target group as evidenced by the coherence between the priorities formulated by the population itself, through the participatory planning exercise, and the project components. In addition, the subcomponent on gender issues responded to the needs of rural women, whose situation was characterized by high levels of illiteracy and lack of access to income-generating activities.

14. PDRZMH was conceived as an integrated rural development project. The major investments in roads and small-scale irrigation supported the Government's thrust to improve accessibility of the poor rural population. A necessary consequence of the heavy investment in infrastructure was that the resources available for some of the other components were relatively limited, which in turn led to some implementation challenges. Likewise, the decision to target 17 communes spread over a large area in the province necessarily translated into a less intensive targeting than would have been the case in a smaller project area.
15. The most important approach introduced through PDRZMH was the participatory preparation of local development plans at the *douar* (hamlet) level. The "*douar* approach" and subsequent plan was to be the focus of a significant shift in power towards the inhabitants of the *douars*. This process included the participatory identification of beneficiaries' priority needs, the establishment of numerous grass-roots associations and organizations, and the strengthening of the capacities of district technical services. Based on the documentation reviewed and the field visits made, there is evidence that important achievements have been accomplished through this process. A high number of *douar* development plans were prepared, and as such the participation of the population in defining their needs and priorities and in maintaining small-scale irrigation, water points and other productive assets through grass-roots organizations has increased. It is also clear that the knowledge and understanding of the provincial administration and its technical departments in dealing with mountain areas have increased substantially.
16. In addition to the participatory local development process, three other investment areas (socio-economic infrastructure, rehabilitation of small-scale irrigation schemes, and soil and water conservation) achieved important results. Specifically, 92 *douars* were provided with access to drinking water and 83 *douars* with rural roads. As a result, the distance to schools, health clinics and other social services was reduced. The rehabilitation of small-scale irrigation schemes, including repairs to diversion

channels, resulted in the extension of irrigated areas. This in turn led to diversification of crops cultivated and increased yields. The soil and water conservation measures taken (e.g. construction of ridges to control gullying) have helped to reduce erosion and protect basic infrastructure.

17. The PDRZMH has become an important point of reference in Morocco, not only for the Government and IFAD but also for other donors, on how to work in a participatory manner in mountain areas.
18. On the less positive side, the PPA noted that, while the preparation of *douar* development plans exceeded targets in terms of numbers, in many cases they did not result in comprehensive integrated annual plans of action, as originally intended, but rather in individual activities. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the comprehensive plans did not include an annual budget and it quickly became apparent that there was insufficient budget to cover several years of activities. For this reason the plans could not include a set of interventions covering social services and basic infrastructure as well

as income-generating activities but had to focus on separate activities. There were also a number of methodological problems (e.g. lengthy time it took from preparing the plans to implementing activities on the ground, leading to a loss of momentum). Hence the plans did not become the tool for planning, management and maintenance as intended. However, the development of the plans enabled the beneficiaries and technical staff to identify their needs and provided important baseline information of the area. The project also faced challenges with respect to certain partnerships with the Regional Department for Water and Forests and the National Institute for Agricultural Research which in turn had an impact on the activities to be carried out.

19. In terms of efficiency the calculated Economic Rate of Return (ERR) was 13.41 per cent, slightly lower than the appraisal estimate of 15 per cent. If community investments, such as rural roads and water supply, are not considered, the ERR amounts to 28.2 per cent. Given the disadvantaged region in which the project took place and the fact that the ERR does not take into account a number of social benefits such as diversification of

income, improvement in sanitation, etc., the PPA considers the ERR of 13.41 per cent as reasonable. According to the project documentation, project management costs were kept low. However, there were a number of delays during the project period (e.g. it took 13.5 months for the loan to become effective). In addition there was a slow-down at mid-term due to staff constraints (voluntary retirements and high turnover) resulting in weak management and budgetary constraints and consequently a 2.5 year extension of the project.

20. On the whole, however, the project was considered as having satisfactorily contributed to the overall objective of sustainable socio-economic development of the disadvantaged rural population in the area. The PPA assesses project relevance and effectiveness as satisfactory, whereas efficiency is considered as moderately satisfactory.
21. In terms of **rural poverty impact**, sources of income were diversified, in particular through small ruminants and beekeeping,

but also through the introduction of fruit trees (e.g. cherries, plums, apples). The expansion in irrigated areas led to higher yields and incomes. Additionally, the supply of drinking water helped improve sanitation and resulted in time being saved. Capacity was built, and the evaluation confirmed that a new type of leadership was emerging, which differed from that of the traditional elite. It represented youth and the leaders of grass-roots associations who were gaining experience in community work and were able to enter the local political arena. Some of the challenges faced by the project related to reaching high targets in terms of agricultural productivity (e.g. an increase of 50 per cent on irrigated soil for cereal, an increase of 25 per cent on rain-fed soils). In addition, and despite some real improvements in the productivity, the PPA noted that the impact could have been higher and more widespread had more support and guidance been provided to the farmers, particularly concerning the planting of trees (e.g. choice of species, density, size). All in all, however, the project achieved a satisfactory impact on rural poverty.

Farmers standing on the roadside awaiting for middlemen who will buy and market their boxes of apples. Asni.



22. With regards to **sustainability**, the overall institutional environment appeared to be favourable for the continuation of some of the benefits streams. For example other programmes, such as the “*Plan Maroc Vert*”, the National Initiative for Human Development and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, were active in the area and are likely to build on some of the results achieved so far. Furthermore, a new national strategy for the mountain areas is being formulated, which will add to the momentum created by the PDRZMH, and some activities will be continued through the Agricultural Value Chain Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province. However several benefit streams remain fragile. The sustainability of the grass-roots associations was weak, with only 50 per cent remaining functional. The sustainability of the *Douar* Development Plans was very weak as it had been superseded by the communal plan with what appeared to be little reference to the work undertaken through the *Douar* Development Plans process. Maintenance of some of the basic infrastructure (tracks and diversion channels) deserves special attention as their upkeep and renewal appears to be beyond the means of the associations established for that purpose. The PPA assessed the sustainability of benefits as moderately satisfactory.
23. **Gender**. Efforts were made to increase gender equality by providing literacy training, encouraging women’s participation in groups and associations, and enhancing women’s involvement in income-generating activities through training and provision of access to financial services. Women benefitted from access to drinking water and literacy training, but insufficient resources were allocated to achieving the ambitious targets set in a conservative environment. Although there were several good examples of women’s cooperatives that were working well, the documentation shows that very few of the trained women have access to stable revenue and overall the participation of women in associations and groups did not reach the originally intended levels. With respect to the literacy training, the project faced challenges in relation to lack of premises made available and lack of budget for the teachers. The PPA assesses gender equality and women’s empowerment as moderately satisfactory.

24. PDRZMH was assessed as being **innovative**, as it was based on the participation and empowerment of beneficiaries, which were new concepts in the project area at the time of the project's design – even though IFAD was not the only agency applying this approach. The *Douar* Development Plans in particular constituted real progress towards beneficiary-led integrated development plans. Despite some challenges, the *Douar* Development Plans enabled the collection of important baseline data and introduced participatory approaches to both the beneficiaries and provincial staff. The introduction of improvements to the productive system through new species, extension, processing units, and organization of producers can also be considered as innovations in certain *douars* where some very old agricultural practices were still dominant.
25. In terms of **scaling up**, certain approaches have been replicated in other projects, such as the Irrigation Based Development Project managed by the World Bank. The follow-on project is also expected to scale up certain innovations that the project introduced, in particular in relation to value chains. It is not clear to what extent resources through the *Plan Maroc Vert* will be channelled towards scaling up innovations promoted by the project, but some public resources will need to be assigned if this is to take place. All in all, the PPA assesses innovation and scaling up as satisfactory.
26. **Partner performance.** IFAD took over direct supervision from UNOPS in 2007. This was perceived as an improvement, as guidance by UNOPS was seen as overly focused on administrative and financial issues rather than providing technical support. In general, the support provided through the IFAD supervision missions which took place at least once a year was assessed as useful in supporting the implementation of the project and providing relevant recommendations. However, it was highlighted that diversifying the composition of the teams could have been beneficial. The importance of ensuring that team members had an understanding of and expertise in mountainous areas was also emphasized.
27. Overall, the Government operated effectively. The project encountered some challenges

in terms of the partnerships with certain institutions and departments. Examples included the relationship with the Department of Forestry on some of the pastoral and sylvo-pastoral activities, and the partnership with the National Institute for Agricultural Research on activities to support the Provincial Agricultural Department's technical services in setting up crop trials. These difficulties were linked to a lack of control over financial resources on the part of the partner institutions. There also appears to have been some difficulties in ensuring the timely allocation of funds, which had implications on the execution of the project. IFAD's performance is considered satisfactory, whereas the Government's performance is assessed as moderately satisfactory.

28. The **overall project achievement** for the PDRZMH is rated as satisfactory. The objectives were relevant given the enormous challenges facing farmers in the mountain areas of Al-Haouz. The choice of a pilot approach was justified because the project was complex and involved an integrated multi-sector approach to rural development. The project contributed to an increase in living standards (due to

provision of access roads, irrigation and potable water). The PDRZMH also contributed to capacity-building in planning and management, through the application of the *Douar* approach at both *Douar* and provincial levels. This was a pilot project that introduced a number of innovations, and a follow-on project is currently being implemented.

29. The minor shortcomings related to targeting of too large a geographic area and to a very high diversity of activities. Likewise the project faced some challenges with respect to the gender activities as well as the activities related to range management and sylvo-pastoral resources. Despite a favourable institutional environment, sustainability remains fragile for a number of benefits.

## Main recommendations

30. **Incorporate a participatory process into communal planning.** In order to ensure that the participatory process is sustainable, a similar process should be incorporated into the current communal planning process. The adoption of a new local planning instrument – the Communal Development Plan –

represents a significant step forward on the path to decentralization, and the systematic integration of a participatory process into this plan would add to the ownership and sustainability of development activities.

31. **Provide support to the Sustainable Development Strategy for Mountain Areas.**

The mountain areas in Morocco will soon have a sustainable development strategy. This strategy could benefit from IFAD's experience in these areas with specific project design approaches, styles of intervention, etc. Building on this, and experiences of others, would be extremely useful, particularly for the new directorate responsible for rural and mountain zones, and could make a direct contribution to the planning of the strategy and relevant policies.

32. **Establish sound and functioning partnerships for project execution.** The development of partnerships between the institutional players involved in the project's implementation should be carefully analysed and planned during project formulation in

order to minimize any potential dysfunctions. Methodological, administrative and financial aspects must be correctly considered and prepared in order to avoid delays in establishing agreements and, consequently, the project activities.

33. **Give special attention to agricultural extension.** Sustainable diversification and intensification of cropping systems requires support and training for farmers over an extended period of time so that they can acquire solid technical skills and know-how. It also entails scientific and technical support from research centres with a view to improving the technical knowledge of the provincial administration as well as farmers in mountain areas. Therefore, the agricultural extension component should receive special attention in projects operating in areas that employ fairly traditional farming practices.



## About the Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE)

IOE conducts evaluations of IFAD-financed policies, strategies and operations to promote accountability and learning. The main purpose is to contribute to improving IFAD's and its partners' performance in supporting rural transformation in developing Member countries. IOE's independent evaluations assess the impact of IFAD-funded activities and give an analysis of successes and shortcomings – to tell it the way it is – as well as identify factors affecting performance. Based on the key insights and recommendations drawn from evaluation findings, IOE also communicates and shares IFAD's knowledge and experience in agriculture and rural development with a wider audience.

It is since 2003, when the first Evaluation Policy was approved by IFAD's Executive Board, that IOE is fully independent from the Management and reports to the IFAD Executive Board.