



RESEARCH AND IMPACT BRIEF

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Bolivia (Plurinational State of)

Economic Inclusion Programme for Families and Rural Communities in the Territory of Plurinational State of Bolivia (ACCESOS)

About the project



Objectives

Improve the quality of life for around 60,000 poor rural households in Bolivia by increasing their incomes, food and nutrition security, resilience to climate-induced shocks and social capital. To achieve this, the project worked through community-based sustainable natural resource management initiatives and support small-scale business enterprises, as well as cooperatives and producer groups.



Timing

Implemented from 2014 until 2020, ACCESOS operated in 52 municipalities that covered all 9 of Bolivia's departments.



Financing

IFAD funded 47 per cent of ACCESOS' US\$58.97 million budget, while the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia accounted for 16 per cent, the Government of Spain for 25 per cent and beneficiaries for 10 per cent.

The project Theory of Change

ACCESOS had three main components. The first called for sustainable management of natural resources, while the second promoted financial inclusion and literacy by providing training and support to access credit and other financial services. The third component provided funding aimed at developing capacities for climate risk management and promoting adoption of climate adaptation practices.

Natural resource management

This component focused on the sustainable management of natural resources including land, water and natural vegetation, and also promoted reforestation and agroforestry. It worked to achieve livelihood improvements through building capacity and supporting investments in assets, and small agricultural and non-agricultural businesses. Also, within this component, the project worked with territorial organizations, producer associations and other social and productive associations aimed at sustainably managing natural resources. This included, for example, introducing control mechanisms to reverse soil erosion and vegetation degradation that would, in turn, increase the productivity of plots and common land, and the quality of ecosystem services.

Access to financial services

In order to improve financial inclusion and literacy, this component provided training in accessing credit which, in turn, would facilitate poor rural families' access to diversified financial services, such as savings, credit and micro-insurance. This allowed participating families to better manage their financial

resources, increased their opportunities to invest in human, physical and social capital, and improved their capacities to generate and diversify income and protect their assets.

Climate risk management

Implemented under IFAD's Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP) funding, this component provided training to develop capacities for climate risk management and adaptation. It also provided financial and technical support to introduce climate-resilient infrastructures. This included agro-meteorological and geo-referenced information to develop "talking maps," which are geographic maps with an embedded narrative to guide planning and implementing climate change adaptation and mitigation practices. This included introducing crop irrigation systems that employ micro-irrigation, adopting drought- and frost-resistant crop varieties, constructing greenhouses and promoting the use of bio-digesters to reduce deforestation. The component also promoted development of social capital by including community-level participants in ACCESOS' consultations, reference studies and decision-making activities.

Project outreach and outputs

Determining the overall impact of the project requires first understanding who the project reached and what outputs it generated. These are noted in the figure below.



Beneficiary household members
209,815

Communities
1,815

Project impact

ACCESOS was subject to a rigorous impact assessment.

Data and methods

The appraisal of ACCESOS' impact was based on an ex-post quasi-experimental design that covered 229 communities in 4 geographical domains and 2,620 households of both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Surveys collected detailed livelihood data from January through March 2021. Two levels of matching – at community and household levels – ensured a valid counterfactual, which allows determination of impacts attributable to the project: i.e. what would happen to treated households had they not received the ACCESOS interventions.

The impacts presented below are Average Treatment Effects on the Treated based on Inverse Probability Weighted Regression Adjustment methodology.

Key impact estimates



Income

ACCESOS had a positive impact on participants' gross income, increasing it by 13 per cent per capita. The positive impacts on overall income were the result of good synergies from multiple sources of income for beneficiaries vis-à-vis the comparison group. As a result of participation in ACCESOS, livestock assets decreased by 16 per cent while agricultural assets increased by 25 per cent. This was probably related to the high opportunity cost of beneficiaries keeping livestock compared with crop production, which was a key focus of ACCESOS.



Production

ACCESOS had no impacts on the value of beneficiaries' crop production per hectare or on yield for selected major crops. This suggests that the benefits of adopting the project-promoted activities such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) take time to materialize.



Market

ACCESOS households were 7 percentage points more likely to sell their crops but their participation in the project had no impact on crop and livestock sales revenues. This suggests that ACCESOS households were not taking advantage of higher prices in concentrated markets due to restrictions in movement of people and products during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project also focused more on sustainable management of natural resources and less on increasing market access.



Resilience

The impacts of increasing the resilience of ACCESOS beneficiaries in the face of climate and non-climate shocks are strong. The reported ability to recover from climatic shocks was 4 per cent higher while for non-climatic shocks it was 5 per cent higher among beneficiaries than the comparison group. Looking at strategies to increase resilience, the 5 per cent greater number of income sources for beneficiaries than the comparison group suggests that beneficiaries are better equipped to react to shocks.

The positive impacts on climate resilience were also driven by adaptation to climate achieved through increased adoption of adaptation practices such as use of erosion control measures, agroforestry, and small-scale irrigation. ACCESOS beneficiaries were also more likely to receive technical assistance on suitable adaptation practices such as fertilizer use, pest management, irrigation and water management, soil management, erosion control, harvesting and post-harvesting techniques, and general animal care.



Nutrition

ACCESOS had no impact on household food security or dietary diversity. Both beneficiaries and those in the comparison group consumed on average almost 10 of the 12 food groups considered – including cereals, tubers and vegetables – with no significant differences.



Women empowerment

ACCESOS had positive impacts on women's empowerment, increasing women-headed households' gross income by 38 per cent and the value of their crop production by 35 per cent more than the comparison group.



Social capital

Probability of membership in: irrigation association +12 pp & Farmers' association/Producers' group +5 pp

ACCESOS increased participation and membership in different social groups including irrigation and farmer associations, agricultural cooperatives, natural resource management groups and cultural groups.

Lessons Learned

Income and resilience



Diversification of income and increased adoption of climate adaptation options could contribute to increased total income and climate resilience. ACCESOS had a positive impact on total income of beneficiaries and climate resilience though it did not affect components such as crop and livestock income.

Recommendation. To sustainably increase crop income among beneficiaries, interventions such as small-scale irrigation, GAPs and technical assistance should be expanded and deepened. Future project designs should understand the binding constraints of promoting these activities and address them as needed to ensure their sustainable adoption by beneficiaries.

Gender dimension



The project remarkably increased the welfare of women-headed households but was less effective in empowering women to make decisions jointly with men or separately over assets, production activities or revenue management within beneficiary households.

Recommendation. This lesson indicates the importance of factoring in the gender dimension and promoting activities aimed at ensuring gender balance and women's empowerment within beneficiary households.

Transformation



The study found that transformation is better achieved when linked to the market and value chain, but that the project did not increase the value of crop and livestock products sold in the market. This suggests that beneficiary households face market barriers that prevent them from commercializing their outputs and discourage market-oriented production.

Recommendation. Connecting farmers to the market infrastructure or buyers, and investing in processing and agribusiness to transform products into food with a longer shelf life could potentially increase income and generate a local economy multiplier effect. This indicates that future projects should integrate agricultural production and processing with market access. The trade fairs that the project organized for beneficiaries proved promising, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Investing in rural people

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About the brief

This brief draws upon the findings of an IFAD-funded impact assessment of the ACCESOS project in the Plurinational State of Bolivia which was prepared by Romina Cavatassi and Sinafikeh Gemessa.

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