



A gender-balanced model for community development

In Yemen, a community-led project fostering women's empowerment has improved the food security of thousands of landless and smallholder farmers living in the poorest areas of the country.

From 2004 to late 2012, the Dhamar Participatory Rural Development Project, cofunded by IFAD and the Government of Yemen, addressed the needs of the rural population in the Dhamar Governorate. By ensuring the participation of rural people in decision-making processes and income-generating activities, the project improved the food security of subsistence farmers and their families in the villages of Dhamar. The project is considered a model for both community development and gender-balanced, financially sustainable extension services.

Country: Yemen

Direct Beneficiaries:

Poor households, landless and sharecropper families. Women were the major beneficiaries of literacy and life skills training, and rural financial services.

Results:

- A total of 173 women's savings and credit groups were established with over 4 800 members and 2 000 borrowers.
- Community extension agents provided agricultural advisory services to 30 000 smallholders and trained community "paravets" – community-based assistants to veterinarians – who vaccinated and treated more than 300 000 animals.
- Over 12 000 women trainees graduated in literacy classes.
- The project supported the creation of health centres servicing 2 000 households, the construction of schools benefiting 3 000 households, and the establishment of drinking water schemes serving 5 000 households.

Main Lessons:

The project increased the incomes and food security of rural populations through improved crop and livestock services. A key success factor was the community-led and gender-balanced extension model that functions particularly well because it is commercialized and therefore financially sustainable.



BASIC INFO

Sources:

Midterm Review Report, Dhamar Participatory Rural Development Project (DPRDP)

Project Name:

Dhamar Participatory Rural Development Project

Project Starting Date:

2004

Contact:

Mr. Mohamed Abdelgadir
(email: m.abdelgadir@ifad.org)

WEB PAGES

IFAD Operations Near East, North Africa and Europe:

<http://www.ifad.org/operations/projects/regions/pn/index.htm>

IFAD learning notes:

<http://www.ifad.org/rural/learningnotes/index.htm>

Background

The majority of Yemen's population lives in rural areas where the highest prevalence of poverty is found. In addition to the food price, fuel and global economic crises of recent years, the political turmoil that began in 2011 in the Arab region has dramatically increased rural poverty in Yemen: from 40 per cent of the rural population in 2008 to over 60 per cent in early 2012. About 10 million rural Yemenis live in low-income, food-insecure households, making Yemen one of the poorest countries in the Arab world. Almost half of Yemeni children are malnourished, and 46 per cent of five-year-olds are underweight. In the International Food Policy Research Institute's Global Hunger Index, Yemen ranks among the ten countries with the worst hunger situations in the world.

The project supported about 30 600 poor households, landless and sharecropper families living in the rural areas of the Dhamar Governorate, considered one of the poorest and most densely populated rural areas of Yemen. It carried out activities in the western mountainous districts of Dhamar where the participation of small-scale farmers in income-generating activities and decision-making processes enhanced their livelihoods.

Community institutions, literacy and infrastructure

The project focused on community, livelihood, agricultural and environmental development. In a participatory planning process, communities prioritized their needs. Eleven coordination committees were formed to ensure effective implementation, coordination and monitoring of the project. Village plans were developed and community groups established and strengthened to manage project implementation. A total of 168 village units were formed, and community development committees were created in nearly all of the village units. Communities identified their priorities in terms of literacy and life skills, infrastructure development and improved agricultural outputs. Girls and women in particular benefited from train-

ing in literacy and life skills. Women were trained as paravets and started earning an income – many for the first time in their lives – by providing veterinary assistance to their communities.

A community-led and gender-based extension model improving rural livelihoods

The project introduced an innovative community-led and gender-based agricultural extension methodology in Dhamar. Extension leaders were selected by their respective communities and received training in participatory planning and gender equality, enabling them to provide advice to their communities and more efficient extension services on crop and livestock husbandry, animal health and beekeeping. More than 23 300 women farmers and 41 800 men farmers of the village units gained access to enhanced agricultural extension services.

These community-based extension services treated and vaccinated about 322 000 heads of livestock, and tested and treated 34 000 traditional and modern beehives. They contributed to the improvement of farming practices on more than 5 100 farms producing crops, fruit, vegetables and coffee. They introduced seed varieties that thrive in the local climate and soils. This resulted in a 42 per cent increase in agricultural productivity of the village units in rainfed areas. In addition, with the participation of farmers, the extension services introduced improved varieties of sorghum, legumes, wheat and maize in more than 260 varietal fields and new varieties of fruit and vegetables.

On a pilot basis, the project also provided marketing support, identifying market opportunities and establishing market linkages, training market cooperatives and groups, and extending credit for marketing infrastructure. Women's involvement has been a priority at all stages of these activities. Eight marketing associations and farmers' groups were formed for fruit, coffee and bees, and 140 savings and credit groups were created. Members of these groups were women who had previously

participated in the project's literacy classes. With the loans provided, they started more than 1 000 microenterprises. The improvement of rural financial services is one of the project's major successes.

Women's empowerment

Women beneficiaries of the project have been empowered to take control over decisions affecting their lives. They actively participated in all of the project's planning, decision-making and implementation processes at the village level. An equal number of women and men were selected as field officers in community teams, and women also played important roles as health workers and resource management agents. Over 12 000 women graduated from literacy classes: this, together with women's achievements in agriculture, has had an important impact on gender equality.

Replication and scaling up

The project is recognized by practitioners as a flagship initiative for community development. Due to its community-led and gender-balanced extension model, it is also considered to be an effective and financially sustainable model for crop and livestock services. Its successful results in agriculture, literacy, life skills and marketing have proved to be sustainable over time, with small-scale farmers continuing to apply the new technologies and produce increased yields. Some 90 per cent of women's savings and credit groups are still operating three years after being formed. The same applies to 70 per cent of infrastructure management groups and 80 per cent of the 1 500 promoted microenterprises.

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