



IFAD Results Series Issue 2

# RESULTS FROM THE FIELD



Investing in rural people

IFAD Results Series Issue 2

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The purpose of the Results Series is to document in a succinct manner the results and lessons emerging from IFAD-funded projects and programmes, and make them easily accessible to policy and decision makers, development practitioners, researchers and others. The series is a means to ensure that IFAD's extensive experience may inform the design and implementation of policies and operations in the agriculture and rural sectors, now and in the future.

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

CDD	community-driven development
DSF	Debt Sustainability Framework
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IOE	Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD
LRAC	local resource allocation committee
MARENASS	Management of Natural Resources in the Southern Highlands Project
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
NGO	non-governmental organization
PaSACCO	pastoral savings and credit cooperative
PCDP	Pastoral Community Development Project
PNRMP	Participatory Natural Resource Management Programme
RCPRP	Rehabilitation and Community-based Poverty Reduction Project
RELAP	Resilient Land and Resource Management Project
Sierra Norte	Strengthening Assets, Markets and Rural Development Policies in the Northern Highlands Project
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

## President's Foreword

Poor rural people face enormous challenges. Eighty per cent of the world's poorest people live in rural areas. IFAD works to create the social and economic conditions that transform the rural areas of developing countries into places where women, men, young people and the most marginalized community members can build decent lives.

The results and lessons highlighted in this second issue of the *Results from the Field* series demonstrate the achievements of the rural development initiatives that IFAD funds in partnership with developing country governments, poor rural people and other actors.

In Ethiopia, pastoralists are now more resilient to the harsh conditions they face in their communities, and equipped to prepare for and cope with natural disasters. They have better access to public services, including health and education. More stable incomes, especially for women, mean that household nutrition has also improved markedly.

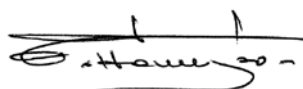
In Nepal, marginalized rural communities have built viable and sustainable livelihoods through an innovative approach to forest management supported by IFAD. Given secure, long-term tenure to degraded forest plots, they had the incentive to invest their time, effort and money in restoring the land and creating fertile areas where they could prosper.

In Palestine, despite the complex, volatile and fragile context, farmers were able to significantly increase their incomes from agriculture through a project that enabled them to reclaim and rehabilitate degraded lands and access financial services.

In Peru, a ground-breaking series of projects has fostered dynamic and entrepreneurial approaches to local development. Communities identify their own development priorities, compete for and manage development funds, and contract local service providers to provide technical assistance.

In Sierra Leone, a flexible and responsive approach helped communities rebuild important infrastructure following the civil war, and in the process created all-important employment opportunities for rural youth, giving them the skills and experience to seek jobs elsewhere in the country after the project ended. The project also enabled communities to strengthen their resilience to climate change.

IFAD-supported projects get results, as these experiences show. Still, we are raising our level of ambition and adapting our business model to help realize the promise of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. IFAD aims to deliver higher quality investment programmes with broader reach. These must be matched to specific country needs in order to achieve more sustainable results and impact at scale. We must ensure that our resources translate into real results on the ground for those who need them most.



GILBERT F. HOUNBO  
President of IFAD

**Pastoral Community Development Project**

Total project cost:  
US\$418.2 million

IFAD loan: US\$153.6 million

World Bank: US\$220 million

Beneficiary contribution:  
US\$33.6 million

Government of Ethiopia:  
US\$11 million

Duration: 15 years (2003-2018)

Directly benefiting:  
4.7 million rural households

Programme phases:  
Phase I (2003-2008)  
Phase II (2008-2013)  
Phase III (2013-2018)

## Ethiopia: Pastoralists more resilient to harsh conditions in their communities

*Participatory, demand-driven community development in the pastoral regions of Ethiopia is helping to improve nutrition, health and education, and to strengthen the resilience of rural communities against natural and man-made disasters. Communities participate in the planning of local development projects and benefit from growth and stability in household incomes.*

Ethiopia is one of Africa’s fastest growing economies. In the past decade, the country has made tremendous development gains in education, health and food security. The government has made huge investments to improve infrastructure, including commercial buildings, roads and railways. Since 2007, this development agenda has contributed to an average annual growth in GDP of over 10 per cent (World Bank, 2017).



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Despite these rapid economic gains, the country remains one of the ten poorest in the world, with an estimated annual per capita income of US\$590 in 2015 (World Bank, 2017). About 27 per cent of Ethiopians live below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 a day (World Bank, 2016) and about 85 per cent depend on subsistence agriculture (World Bank, 2011). Challenging climatic conditions, such as the recent drought triggered by the El Niño effect, have made the population extremely vulnerable to chronic food insecurity, especially in the arid and semi-arid northeast and southeast zones, which are home to predominantly pastoralist and agropastoralist communities.

Pastoralists represent only about 12 per cent of Ethiopia's population, but they occupy more than 60 per cent of the land. While they typically rear cattle and sheep, they also rear camels, goats and horses. Although they own about 40 per cent of all livestock in the country, pastoralists are economically, socially and politically marginalized. Not only are they vulnerable to climatic changes and shocks, pastoralists also face challenges in accessing public and social services, markets, water resources and good rangeland to feed their animals. This group is therefore among the poorest and most vulnerable in rural areas in Ethiopia.

### The project

The Pastoral Community Development Project (PCDP) is an example of a successful collaboration among development partners; in this case, IFAD and the World Bank, with the Ethiopian government and local stakeholders. The project aims to increase the productivity and resilience of smallholder farmers, pastoralists and agropastoralists by facilitating their access to technology, finance, markets and the knowledge they need to manage their natural resources in the face of climatic challenges. Through three phases over 15 years, the project has focused on improving public service delivery, investment and disaster management in pastoral areas as a basis for improving the incomes, nutrition, health and education of communities.

The community-driven development approach used to design and implement the project has meant that local people have played a significant role in decision-making in local development initiatives.

At the community level, the project worked with pastoralists to set up the necessary management structures through which to evaluate, approve and put into effect the activities they proposed. PCDP also built capacity within government institutions at the *woreda* (district) and *kebele* (subdistrict) levels, and improved systems for accountability, learning and policy dialogue.

Community-driven development (CDD) is an approach that gives community groups control over planning decisions and investment resources for local development projects. While use of this approach is common in IFAD-supported projects, prior to the PCDP it was untested in Ethiopia. Long-term support, extensive training, awareness-raising and the strengthening of institutional capacity are key to the success of the CDD approach. These factors were enabled by the Adaptable Program Loan (World Bank) funding mechanism applied by the World Bank, which allowed for a multiphased long-term engagement, with periodic reviews to identify where activities needed to be modified according to the country and operational context.



## Results

In the 15 years since its inception, the PCDP has grown into a national project, encompassing all the pastoral *woredas* in Ethiopia except those in Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambela. About 4.7 million rural people in 145 *woredas* are benefiting from improved access to public services and livelihoods.

### **Institutional strengthening and decentralization**

A major achievement of the project has been the strengthening of state institutions through decentralization of decision-making from the federal level to the lowest administrative units of *woredas* and *kebeles*. This process was facilitated through training, capacity-building and technical support, along with the provision of equipment and furniture to community groups. At the start of the current phase of the project in the Afar region, 3,620 community members had been trained in community facilitation and organized into committees. The committees have successfully mobilized community contributions in cash and in kind to establish and manage 366 initiatives, including building schools, access roads, water points and small-scale irrigation. These initiatives have improved both access to and the quality of basic social services, particularly health and veterinary services. For example, the average distance to a health facility has been reduced from 19 to 5 km for community members. The distance to water points has been reduced to an average of 3 km, providing considerable relief for women and children, who are traditionally responsible for water collection.

### **Stable incomes and improved livelihoods**

Almost 1,300 pastoral savings and credit cooperatives (PaSACCOs) have been established – a significant achievement given that only 8 per cent of the population has savings accounts with commercial banks. The PaSACCOs have mobilized both savings and capital from members, 66 per cent of whom are women. They have provided accounting and audit training at the *woreda* level for an average of 160 members each. The PaSACCOs have made it easier for the community, especially women, to obtain loans to set up income-generating activities, with a notably low repayment default rate due largely to peer pressure. Increased and steady incomes, particularly among women, have resulted in improvements in household nutrition, prenatal and postnatal childcare, and longer-term enrolment of children in school. Men have invested in building more permanent houses, and in improved inputs for higher livestock and agricultural yields.

### **Improved disaster prevention and preparedness**

In the face of a steady increase in natural disasters in the target regions, traditional early-warning systems have been largely ineffective. The project has helped pastoralist communities to build participatory disaster management systems that reduce their vulnerability. Local facilitators have been trained in 32 *woredas* to collect, analyse and disseminate basic early warning and household welfare information, thus enabling communities to take precautionary measures.

Another initiative within the project helps communities to identify major causes of disaster and to prepare five-year strategic investment plans to mitigate against them.

For example, just under 64,000 pastoralists are now better equipped to deal with drought and floods, and their farmlands are protected from erosion through the construction of terraces. In addition, 82 water projects have been constructed in collaboration with regional and *woreda* water development offices. These provide potable water and have thus reduced waterborne diseases. Pastoralists now need to travel less in search of water sources, and water-related conflict among pastoralists has been reduced.

### **Increased participatory learning and knowledge management**

By its nature, the CDD approach increases the opportunities for pastoral communities to share knowledge and to identify and document local innovation and best practice. Pastoral communities take part in communication events, such as the annual Pastoral Day, workshops, reciprocal working visits, and radio and television programmes, which have contributed to their sense of empowerment and ownership of project interventions. In addition, demonstration sites have been set up in the *woredas* to offer better-quality seeds and share and discuss improved methods of agricultural and livestock farming. In this way, the experience and knowledge gained from the bottom-up approach that is the CDD have greatly improved the capacity of pastoralists for mutual learning and self-support.

### **Empowerment of women and girls**

The project has focused on increasing women's participation in the PaSACCOs, and on increasing enrolment of girls in schools, as well as reducing their dropout rates. As a result, girls' enrolment went up by 43 per cent and the dropout rate at the primary level fell by about 53 per cent. This success at the primary level has led to a push to establish more secondary schools to absorb the increased number of students. In the PaSACCOs, 66 per cent of members are women.

### **Challenges and solutions**

Although the PCDDP has achieved substantial improvements in the livelihoods of pastoral and agropastoral communities, it has still encountered some challenges. In particular, community-driven development being an innovation in Ethiopia at the time, there was low capacity in government institutions and in communities to both plan and implement initiatives. To counter this, mobile support teams of technical experts in such fields as needs assessment, project planning, finance, audit, operations and rural development provided technical assistance to local government staff.

### **Scaling up**

The number of pastoralists benefiting from each phase of the PCDDP has grown from 600,000 in the first phase to 2.6 million in the third phase. Geographically, the project has expanded from 32 *woredas* to 113.

Successive phases have consolidated and scaled up earlier interventions by incorporating lessons learned, and each phase has targeted particular development needs. For example, in the first phase, the focus was on assessing and strengthening the self-management capacities of indigenous communities and setting up development committees at the *woreda* and *kebele* levels. With that capacity in place, the second phase went on to establish community investment funding and introduce the pastoral savings and credit cooperatives, mainly for women and young people.

These two interventions helped to mobilize cash contributions from the community and to introduce the possibility of livelihood diversification through petty trading, grain and vegetable marketing, and livestock and milk production and marketing.

The third phase is consolidating achievements to date, and is emphasizing the institutionalization of the CDD approach. In addition, there is greater attention to improving rural livelihoods through diversified income-generating activities.

One of PCDP's key strengths is that it has engaged with existing government structures and development partner institutions, and has worked with them to build capacity where needed. It has thus been easier to scale up the successes of CDD, which is a major departure from previous top-down methodologies in rural infrastructure development in the country. For example, community groups themselves have pushed for the approach to be used in other interventions by government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Other communities have specifically requested the CDD approach as they learn about the success of the PCDP, and have pushed for its use in other community investments by government and other development partners. CDD modalities are gradually being integrated into national decentralization planning, budget development, support to rural livelihoods and policy dialogue enhancement. The integration is also horizontal in the target groups and other communities.

### Main lessons

- *Involving rural communities and civil society organizations in project design and implementation is essential to project success.* The CDD approach increased the involvement of local communities and government in decision-making, and ensured greater commitment to the success of interventions that were considered more relevant and beneficial. Also, the direct management by the community of financial resources for development activities has increased their engagement and ownership.
- *A number of factors are necessary for a successful CDD approach.* The success of the approach in PCDP can be attributed to broad participation by pastoralist communities, particularly women; effective facilitation of community discussions; clear accountability of community groups; and the fact that the interventions are relevant to the community, thereby also increasing their sustainability.
- *The success of projects improves with the modification of interventions.* The Adaptable Program Loan funding mechanism has a long-term focus and allows for a broader programmatic approach rather than discrete projects. The long-term focus makes it easier to regularly evaluate interventions, and modify them in line with the internal and external context.
- *Strengthening local institutions leads to more sustainable results.* The focus of the PCDP was to ensure long-term sustainability once the project ended. Local development committees were established at the *woreda* and *kebele* levels to lead implementation of project activities, and their members received training and technical assistance. These committees are now part of the formal government system, and their development plans are incorporated into the central budget, thus ensuring that projects that have been first confirmed by the community are sustained even after donor funding has ended.

## Conclusion

The PCDP has achieved its many successes primarily because it has brought communities together to discuss and decide upon the development interventions most relevant to them. It provided the support and capacity-building the communities needed to achieve their development goals, and then helped them set up systems and processes to achieve them. This participatory process has ensured increased interest and engagement, as well as learning and innovation with each successive phase. In addition, the structures established to lead programme interventions, such as the *woreda* and *kebele* development committees, are part of the formal government system, and will therefore endure beyond the life of the project.

With the commitment to continuous review, capacity-building and support for the broader institutionalization of participatory approaches to development, this project has not only provided otherwise marginalized communities with key skills to improve their livelihoods, it has also established a successful model for development interventions in the country.

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**Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme\***

Total programme cost:  
US\$15.8 million

IFAD loan: US\$12 million

DSF grant: US\$1.5 million

IFAD grant: US\$1.2 million

Government contribution:  
US\$1.05 million

Beneficiary contribution:  
US\$0.014 million

Duration: 2004-2015

Directly benefiting:  
44,300 households

\* Programme phases:

- Phase I (1989-2001):  
Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project

## Nepal: Marginalized communities benefit from innovative approach to forest management

*An innovative and inclusive programme in the Himalayan foothills in Nepal transformed barren lands into fertile areas where poor farmers could prosper. Degraded forest plots were allocated to marginalized rural communities with 40-year renewable leases, giving them secure tenure and thus the incentive to invest in restoring the land. Villagers have increased their incomes and created viable and sustainable livelihoods and forests have been restored.*

Nepal has made significant progress in reducing poverty in the past decade, and poverty rates (US\$1.25 per day) went down from 30.9 per cent in 2004 to 25.2 per cent in 2015 (Asian Development Bank, 2007 and 2017). However, Nepal remains one of the poorest countries in Asia. Poverty, along with food and nutrition insecurity,



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is widespread, especially in the rural hill and mountain areas of the country where 50 per cent of the population lives. Social discrimination is prevalent in rural Nepal and poverty is concentrated in specific ethnic, caste and minority groups, such as the low caste (Dalits) and indigenous peoples (Janajatis). Women are vulnerable to poverty and are often left to take care of the family when men migrate in search of work.

Forest covers more than 40 per cent of the national territory and plays a key role in the rural household economy by providing firewood, timber and fodder for livestock. But forest resources have deteriorated rapidly over the past century, mainly due to population growth, which has led to unsustainable use of natural resources. Deforestation caused by unregulated use and collection of forest products, mainly by poor families to cover their basic needs, and overgrazing by their animals, have resulted in environmental degradation that has transformed forests into wastelands.

In the 1970s, the Government of Nepal introduced community forestry and began handing over responsibility for managing forest areas to community user groups. In return for taking steps to protect against deforestation, the user groups were given limited rights to collect firewood. However, the poorest people were often excluded from these groups, and in the 1990s the government initiated leasehold forestry to address this gap. With support from IFAD, initially through the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project, from 1992 to 2002, small and mostly degraded plots of state forest were leased to groups of very poor, often socially excluded households on a renewable 40-year lease. The aim was to rehabilitate the degraded forest land while reducing poverty by enabling families to use and sell the forest products in a sustainable way.

### **The programme**

The Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme, implemented from 2004 to 2015 in 22 districts across Nepal's middle hills region, built on the successes of the earlier project. The programme targeted poor families living in the isolated hills and lower mountains at the foot of the Himalayas, and aimed to improve their living conditions by integrating forest conservation with livestock production. It was implemented jointly by the Department of Forests under the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, and the Department of Livestock Services under the Ministry of Agricultural Development. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provided technical assistance, financed by the Government of Finland.

Poor families living in areas adjacent to degraded forestlands were allocated plots of land within the forests, with guaranteed tenure for 40 years and the possibility to extend for another 40 years. Despite the poor condition of the forest areas, land-poor and marginalized families were interested in taking over the plots, as the assured tenure gave them the incentive to work hard to restore the degraded forestland.

The programme helped establish leasehold forestry user groups and targeted the poorest and most marginalized groups, including Dalits, indigenous peoples and women. Each user group comprised five to ten households that were responsible for managing the forest plots, developing operational plans, and allocating sub-plots to group members. Young local women were hired as group promoters and trained to mobilize and support the groups as they put their plans into practice, advising on a range of technical issues, including the planting, management and production of appropriate species of forage, fodder and other non-timber forest products.

Livestock production played an important role in reducing poverty. Goat-rearing is a common practice in rural areas and a main source of income for many households. Women contribute significantly to raising livestock, so integrating livestock production with leasehold forestry provided an opportunity to bring women into the commercial production system and raise their incomes. At the same time, user groups were encouraged to stall-feed their animals in an effort to shift from the practice of free grazing which was damaging the environment.

Members of user groups were given livestock, mainly goats, once the leasehold plots and farms had produced enough forage and fodder for the animals to be stall-fed. Families were trained in how to build stalls for their animals, and the animals were allowed to graze only periodically in controlled areas. Local villagers were trained to become village animal health workers, and were able to start small businesses that provided basic veterinary and animal health care services for group members.

The programme later introduced the Livelihood Improvement Plan in response to demands from user groups for help in generating additional incomes through commercial production of new agricultural products. The plan funded activities such as construction of biogas facilities and cultivation of non-timber forest products and high-value crops.

## Results

The programme made important achievements, particularly in relation to the rehabilitation of forests and other natural resources. It also contributed to improved livelihoods of the poorest families in the hill communities.

### Increased incomes and food security

The programme resulted in significant improvements in income and food security through increased production and sale of agricultural, livestock and forest products. The average annual household income increased by more than 270 per cent and household expenditure increased by almost 150 per cent. Before the programme, the main sources of income were shifting cultivation, sale of firewood and outmigration for seasonal work. With programme support, farmers were able to diversify their income sources through improved farming, off-season vegetable farming, livestock production and employment. The production of vegetables on private land also increased and access to markets improved.

Livestock production contributed to increased income for 70 per cent of the households, and the sale of livestock increased by more than 130 per cent. Families received two goats through the programme, and most households increased their herd size to more than six goats. With the increased income from goats, some families were able to buy high-yielding dairy cattle.

The increase in the productivity of farmland also led to better food security and food self-sufficiency. During the programme period, households produced enough food to be self-sufficient for up to nine months of the year, in comparison to less than three months beforehand. Households experiencing one hungry season per year decreased from 64 to 22 per cent, while households suffering a second hungry season dropped from 7 to 4 per cent.

### **Restoring the environment and natural resource base**

Changes in forest management practices on the leasehold plots had a direct impact on the environment and natural resource base. The decline in shifting cultivation and free grazing of livestock resulted in less soil erosion and fewer incidences of forest fires. Shifting cultivation plots were converted into multiple-use agroforestry, and 60 per cent of households adopted improved land management and forage cultivation techniques.

As a result, 70 per cent of leasehold forest plots were covered by grass and trees. The forest crown cover increased with new plantations, and with the growth of new and old trees in the leasehold plots. The rehabilitation of the natural forest and vegetation led to increased biodiversity with more and improved varieties of forage and grass species, as well as non-timber forest products such as broom grass and bamboo. These non-timber forest products, including edible and medicinal plants, were important sources of income, and various indigenous plant species were regenerated once the areas were protected. The population of wildlife and birds also increased.

The availability of fodder and forage had an immediate impact on the livelihoods of the villagers, as it reduced the time spent on chores such as collecting fodder and firewood and herding grazing animals. This benefited mostly women and children. On average, the time required for collecting fodder and forage was reduced by 46 per cent, from 2.6 hours per day to 1.4 hours, while the time spent collecting firewood and timber was reduced by up to 40 per cent.

### **Inclusion and empowerment of marginalized groups**

The programme helped create 4,101 user groups, involving more than 40,000 households and including the most marginalized community members. Dalits and Janajatis represented 11 and 74 per cent, respectively, of all members, reflecting the ethnic structure found in the village development committees. More than a third of the members were women, and households headed by women were well represented, constituting 16 per cent of the overall membership.

Women held more than 80 per cent of key decision-making positions and felt empowered to express their views. Overall, most households had family members who held executive positions in the groups and participated in decision-making processes.

The user groups strengthened social links and built trust among people from the most vulnerable communities. This enabled members to work together on managing the forest plots and other economic activities. The best groups were able to grow into cooperatives and, in some cases, cooperatives have federated into district associations. This has built stronger social cohesion, also among non-user groups, and better relations and coordination with local institutions. Some cooperatives were able to access external financing and, while the capacity of the groups varied, group members were confident and committed to continuing and scaling up activities.

### **Challenges and solutions**

Despite significant achievements, the programme faced a number of challenges. One of the main challenges was to ensure the sustainability of the user groups after the end of the programme. A 2012 survey showed that 62 per cent of groups established during the previous leasehold forestry project were still active 15 years after they were formed, while one third of the groups were no longer active. Groups established during the Leasehold



Forestry and Livestock Programme are mostly active, but without programme support and, based on the experience of the earlier project, one third of the groups may be at risk in terms of sustainability. User groups that maintained good financial records also declined from 60 per cent in 2010 to 47 per cent in 2013.

The issue of sustainability of the groups is related to other key challenges. The leasehold forestry plots were severely degraded and often located in remote areas far from the villages, which meant that about one third of the plots were never allocated to villagers. Significant time, effort and money were involved in improving the forest plots, and operational plans had to be context-specific to ensure the best use of the land. The user groups also required forest-related training and training on marketing to sell their products. For example, some surplus species were wasted because of the lack of knowledge on how to use them, resulting in loss of potential revenues. The time-intensive nature of the work, in particular, was a major issue for the district forest officers.

District forest officers who are responsible for leasehold forestry are also responsible for community forestry programmes. With only two staff added to implement leasehold forestry, the district forestry officers had limited time to provide the necessary support to the user groups. This issue will require increased investments by the government to ensure that the district forest officers have the resources to support the user groups.

The social composition of the user groups also presented a challenge. While the majority of members were from poor households, people from wealthier households were also allowed to join the groups in order to avoid potential community conflicts. Leasehold forestry can challenge local power structures by favouring the direct transfer of productive resources to the poorest households. In this regard, the formation of larger cooperatives became an important mechanism to counter resistance or potential expropriation of resources by local elites.

### Scaling up

The leasehold forestry approach has been widely replicated and scaled up across Nepal. At the national level, leasehold forestry is considered an effective tool to address rural poverty and is among the top priorities in the government's poverty reduction strategy. After leasehold forestry was first tested through the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project, the Government of Nepal introduced the Forestry Policy in 2002, which streamlined the process and provided full authority to the district forestry officers to hand over plots, approve operational plans and renew leasing licences. The Forest Act of 1993 has also been amended to ensure that the legal status of leasehold forestry is equal to that of community forestry. This means that forest plots can be handed over directly to leasehold user groups without first offering it to communities for community forestry as was the practice before.

After closing the Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme, the government has continued financing and implementing leasehold forestry, and the approach has been replicated in government and donor-funded programmes, such as the Biodiversity Sector Programme for Siwaliks and Terai, the Livelihoods and Forestry Programme and Multi-Stakeholder Forestry Programme, as well as by the IFAD-funded Western Uplands Poverty Alleviation Project. Currently, leasehold forestry is being implemented in 37 districts in the country.

The Department of Forests has reorganized its Community Forest Division and has created a leasehold forestry section within the division to promote the leasehold forestry approach. Leasehold forestry has been mainstreamed into government policies and legislation and has addressed a gap in community forestry in terms of reaching the poorest people. While the two approaches are not entirely integrated, leasehold forestry has become complementary to community forestry and is recognized by the government and donor community for its positive contribution to environmental conservation through reforestation, and to poverty reduction through increased production and sale of forest and livestock products.

### Main lessons

- *Leasehold forestry is an effective tool for reducing poverty and regenerating degraded forestlands.* Handing over degraded forestland to poor households has resulted in significant economic and environmental gains. The assured land tenure is critical because it provides poor people the security and incentives they need to invest their time and money in improving and developing the land. This has delivered significant benefits for poor and landless people, especially in terms of higher incomes. Evidence shows a direct correlation between how well the leasehold forestry plots are managed and the level of increase in household incomes. This has, in turn, resulted in substantial environmental gains.
- *Combining leasehold forestry with other income-generating activities, capacity-building and access to markets leads to better results and increased sustainability.* The clear economic benefits of leasehold forestry and the options it provides poor communities for income generation are key incentives for user groups to use the approach. The combination of activities such as livestock and commercial production of agricultural products has provided poor communities the opportunity to diversify their income sources, and thus earn higher incomes. Experience has underlined the importance of training in order to ensure user groups have the skills they need to manage the degraded forestlands productively. Likewise, access to markets, for example, for non-timber forest products, and linkages with private-sector industries along the value chain help ensure that user groups get maximum and sustainable benefits from managing and improving their forest plots.
- *User groups can become an instrument for social inclusion and empowerment of marginalized communities.* The leasehold forestry user groups have proven to be an important means of including very poor and marginalized people in decision-making, giving them the opportunity to voice their concerns and priorities. In cases where user groups have federated into cooperatives, members have benefited from improved marketing opportunities and services. It has also increased their bargaining power and influence at the political level as well as within their communities.

- *Establishing links between user groups, the broader community and local institutions is crucial.* Collaboration between the user groups and others in the community helped ensure the buy-in and support needed to make leasehold forestry successful. It also led to greater social cohesion. Potential conflicts were avoided in cases where user groups shared experiences and best practices with village development committees and consulted on the selection of families that would receive the forestry plots.

## Conclusion

Leasehold forestry was a new and innovative way of supporting the forestry sector in Nepal. It had a pro-poor focus and addressed an existing gap in the national approach to community forestry. By handing over degraded forestry plots to poor and marginalized households and supporting them in generating additional incomes from livestock and commercial production of agricultural products, the programme successfully contributed to reducing poverty while also restoring the forests. The leasehold forestry user groups provided an important platform for empowering the most vulnerable community groups and enabled members to work together. IFAD played a catalytic role in promoting the leasehold forestry approach and the good results led to changes in forestry policy and legislation. Leasehold forestry has been recognized as a key strategy to address rural poverty and has been integrated into community forestry programmes across Nepal.

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## Palestine: Higher incomes for farmers and microentrepreneurs and stronger institutions despite fragile context

*In the conflict-affected West Bank, where almost 20 per cent of rural people live below the poverty line, this programme addressed some of the most pressing barriers to sustainable rural development – secure access to agricultural land and water resources. Despite the fragile context, the committed efforts of the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, IFAD, local NGOs, farmers and the United Nations Development Programme led to increased yields and higher incomes for farmers and small and microentrepreneurs and created strong partnerships across the agricultural sector.*

Palestine is a lower middle-income country that has experienced decades of conflict, instability and political unrest. While the country has made some progress in areas such as health and education, the volatile situation has had a severe impact on economic and social development. The Palestinian economy has suffered multiple shocks over the years due to political instability, and economic growth has been slow and inconsistent.



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### Participatory Natural Resource Management Programme

Total programme cost:  
US\$16.85 million

Total IFAD financing:  
US\$10.79 million, as follows:

IFAD loan: US\$2.82 million

IFAD grant: US\$7.97 million

Duration: 2000-2015

Directly benefiting:  
5,540 households

#### Cofinanciers:

UNDP-DEEP (Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme): US\$3.3 million

Palestinian Authority:  
US\$0.48 million

Beneficiaries:  
US\$1.38 million

Microfinance institutions:  
US\$0.9 million

#### Programme phases:

Phase I (2000-2008) was implemented by UNDP-PAPP (Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People)

Phase II (2010-2015) was implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture

In the West Bank, the unemployment rate reaches 18 per cent, with youth unemployment reaching 40 per cent for men and 63 per cent for women (ILO, 2015).

Some 18 per cent of the population in the West Bank lives below the national poverty line (set at US\$700 per month for a household of five) (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Poverty rates are closely linked to political instability, restrictions on movement and high food prices. Many communities have been isolated by the separation wall and have lost access to agricultural lands and roads, as well as to services, markets and other communities.

About 25 per cent of the West Bank population lives in rural areas, where food insecurity is high. Under normal circumstances, agricultural production could contribute to a balanced diet. However, fragmented and small-scale family-owned farms, frequent freezing of access to Israeli markets and high food prices force the poorest households to reduce the variety and nutritional value found in their diets.

Restricted access to land is one of the biggest constraints for smallholder farmers in the West Bank. More than 43 per cent of land is not available to Palestinians for agricultural use due to Israeli settlements (UNDP, 2015). Also, land tenure practices pose a risk that idle and unused lands could be confiscated. About 63 per cent of the arable land is under the so-called Area C, which is not under the full control of the Palestinian Authority and where construction of agricultural infrastructure by Palestinian farmers requires additional permits. In addition, access restrictions mean that 82 per cent of the groundwater is not available for use by Palestinians (UNDP, 2015). Processing and marketing represent another challenge for most Palestinian farmers, since the Palestinian Authority does not have control over formal marketing channels.

As a result of these restrictions on movement and access, the cost of agricultural inputs is high. Significant investments are needed in rural areas to improve agricultural productivity and to raise incomes through development and management of land and water resources, construction of access roads, and increased access to financing for agricultural inputs and small businesses.

### The programme

It was within this context that IFAD and the Palestinian Authority developed the Participatory Natural Resource Management Programme (PNRMP) in the West Bank. IFAD was one of the first agencies to provide assistance to the Palestinian Authority in the agricultural sector. The programme focused on improving agricultural productivity through developing and managing land and water resources and by facilitating access to credit for income-generating activities.

The PNRMP became effective in 2000 and was originally designed as a five-year programme, financed by an IFAD loan. However, a number of factors delayed and disrupted its implementation. At the time, the Palestinian Authority had only

just been established and the implementation of the programme was transferred to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which implemented it through local NGOs. The launch of the programme coincided with the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, and given the continuous political instability, security concerns and restrictions on mobility, it was suspended from 2002 to 2004. Activities resumed from 2005 to 2007, but in an extremely fragile environment, coinciding this time with the 2006 legislative elections. The Palestinian Civil War between Fatah and Hamas that followed the elections and ultimately led to the takeover of Gaza by Hamas in 2007 resulted in suspension of donor funding and Israeli-imposed economic sanctions. While Hamas controlled Gaza, the Palestinian Authority governed the West Bank, but the freeze in donor funding led to severe budget deficits and the Palestinian Authority entered a fiscal crisis. Given the inability of the Palestinian Authority to assume any further debt, it requested, in 2008, that the IFAD loan be cancelled.

In the light of these developments, IFAD decided that the balance of the loan should be made available as a grant to the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). A grant agreement was, therefore, signed in 2009 between IFAD and the MOA, and from 2010, PNRMP became the first major programme to be directly implemented by the MOA. Local NGOs and farmer committees were involved in implementing the activities, which helped forge strong partnerships between the MOA, IFAD, NGOs and farming communities.

The programme reflected a shift in focus by the development community following the first Oslo Accord in 1993, from emergency relief to a development approach in Palestine. Within this context, the PNRMP addressed some of the most pressing barriers to sustainable rural development in the West Bank – secure access to agricultural land and water resources – and aimed to increase incomes and assets of poor smallholder farmers in the rural communities. Focusing on areas in the northern West Bank where there was good agricultural potential, the programme supported farmers who were able to contribute their own time and money as they improved their land by constructing rural access roads, building or rehabilitating water cisterns and small natural springs, removing rocks, planting seedlings, and establishing retaining walls, terraces and home gardens. The programme also provided credit to entrepreneurs for income-generating activities, as well as loans to establish and strengthen small businesses.

## Results

The programme contributed to significant changes despite the complex and volatile political context. IFAD's continued engagement and the commitment from UNDP, the Ministry of Agriculture and implementing partners were instrumental in bringing about these changes.

### **Increased production led to higher incomes and better food security**

Soil erosion, steep slopes and the presence of large rocks had prevented many farmers from cultivating their land in the programme area, limiting their ability to make a living and leaving them vulnerable to having their land confiscated. As a result of the programme activities, idle land was being cultivated (overall about 556.8 hectares), degraded land was transformed into more productive farmland (about 373.5 hectares), and yields increased.

Better access roads helped reduce post-harvest losses by almost 75 per cent, and the construction of cisterns meant that most farmers' annual water needs were met. Household incomes increased by up to 19 per cent for farmers whose lands had not been cultivated before the programme. Farmers whose lands had been partially cultivated before the programme saw their incomes increase by 12 per cent. Incomes specifically from farm production went up by between 70 and 87 per cent.

Despite a late start in delivering credit services, access to credit meant that small livestock and agribusiness owners were able to invest in their enterprises, resulting in a 47 per cent rise in average income from US\$601 to US\$888 per month.

Higher production of more nutritional crops, combined with increased incomes, also improved household food security and nutrition. Families were able to afford milk, cheese and fruits more regularly, and they were encouraged to establish home gardens and cultivate green vegetables, which significantly improved the diversity and nutritional value in their diets.

#### **Investments resulted in new employment opportunities**

With access to credit and increased investments in small agribusinesses, the average number of new job opportunities more than doubled, and full-time jobs were created for almost 1,100 people. In general, the number of people from agricultural households working as a result of programme activities increased by between 13 and 22 per cent.

#### **Land tenure became more secure and the value of land increased**

Under the land tenure system, farmers had a stronger basis for retaining their land if it was under cultivation. This gave farmers a clear incentive to develop and work on their land with programme support, which in turn gave them more secure tenure. As the quality of the land improved, they were able to farm more productively, lessening the likelihood that the land would fall into disuse. Overall, the programme helped improve the sense of security over their land for 50 per cent of the farmers.

Land values increased by 60 to 70 per cent as productivity improved, and as new and rehabilitated roads gave farmers better access to farmland.

#### **Institutional capacities and partnerships were strengthened**

The programme's implementation arrangements helped strengthen management capacities within the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as among the NGOs, village councils and farming communities responsible for implementing the activities. The location of the programme's management unit within the ministry and the training of Ministry of Agriculture staff helped build capacity in the areas of financial management, procurement, rural finance, and results-based management.

In particular, the participatory approach adopted by the ministry led to greater cooperation and exchange of valuable experience between partners. For example, sites for rehabilitation were identified in consultation with village councils, and farmer committees helped to select the participating farmers. The collaboration resulted in a high level of interest, engagement and confidence among individual farmers, farmer committees and other local institutions.

## Challenges and solutions

The programme encountered many setbacks due to the highly volatile political context, not least due to the outbreak of the second intifada, which led to a suspension of activities because of security concerns. Other challenges were related to lack of institutional capacity and difficulties in engaging the main target groups.

Credit services became available only towards the end of the programme in 2014, partly due to the initial lack of experience in the ministry in credit management and disbursement, and the perception that farmers were not willing or able to take out and repay loans. Consequently, the credit component was restructured to focus specifically on productive small enterprises, and implementation was shifted from the ministry to UNDP. The credit activities were successful in many respects, especially those related to investments in small enterprises and job creation. However, the late start meant that the land development and credit components were not well integrated.

Building on lessons from this experience, and taking into account that other development partners are investing in innovative banking and financial services for small and medium-sized enterprises, the new IFAD-funded project in Palestine – the Resilient Land and Resource Management Project (RELAP) – will encourage stronger linkages for farmers and microentrepreneurs with microfinance institutions.

The programme also faced challenges related to targeting of farmers. A standard requirement from the Ministry of Agriculture that farmers contribute their own funds – 25 per cent of the cost of land reclamation and rehabilitation – meant that some smallholders were unable to participate, while larger landowners could benefit from the programme activities. In addition, the primary focus on land development excluded some groups, such as landless people, and in particular women and youth. These challenges will be addressed in the new project: it will target farmers with smaller plots of land that will be less costly to develop and hence will require smaller financial contributions from the farmers; more vulnerable groups, such as women and young people, will be involved in development of microenterprises, including greenhouses, bee-keeping and small livestock; and community-based approaches to natural resource management will be encouraged.

In the Palestinian context, involving women in the programme also presented challenges, particularly in relation to land development, and despite considerable effort by the ministry, most activities were managed by men. The ministry, therefore, customized its approach and allowed women with small plots of land to participate even without registered property titles, as few women hold land titles due to customary practices. Specific targeting criteria were also developed for women. While these measures resulted in improved participation of women, the new project will take a different approach and focus on the whole family in land development activities. To further encourage women's participation, RELAP will also develop activities that specifically target women-owned microenterprises.

## Scaling up

Most of the programme's land development activities will be scaled up in RELAP, which is expected to get under way in mid-2018. The project will focus on land and water development activities that are more cost-effective and financially attractive for smallholder farmers, and will improve farmers' linkages to markets, one of the areas



identified as needing greater attention in PNRMP. This will include working with other donor-funded projects to raise awareness about existing marketing opportunities, link farmers to cooperatives, and support storage, packaging and processing facilities. The long-term goal is to integrate farmers into profitable value chains.

The PNRMP was developed and implemented shortly after the creation of the Palestinian Authority and in a context where the implementation of development projects was dominated primarily by local NGOs. As the first and one of the only donors to collaborate directly with the Ministry of Agriculture, IFAD contributed to building the capacity of the ministry, and through the implementation and coordination of the programme, a standard system on how to work and coordinate with local partners was established.

The programme also developed operating procedures for land reclamation which were mainstreamed into other donor-funded programmes, and the experience gained from the programme contributed to the development of two national policies, the National Agriculture Sector Strategy 2014-2016 and the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022.

### Main lessons

- *Ensuring flexibility to respond to both the external context and specific needs enhances relevance and impact.* Despite the fragile environment in which it was operating, the programme was able to make a difference because it focused on activities that would produce results. While the land development activities and technologies promoted by the programme were mostly traditional, they responded to the most urgent needs of the communities. The programme was flexible and restructured activities as needed, enabling it to respond to the volatile external context while directly addressing the specific challenges faced by the farmers.
- *Strengthening institutional capacities of national partners leads to better results.* The programme reflected a shift from emergency relief to a development approach in Palestine, which had clear implications for state-building. IFAD was one of the few development partners that contributed to building the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). The technical and managerial training allowed the MOA to take over responsibility and play a leading role in coordinating the programme. The leadership style adopted by the MOA created strong partnerships between the MOA, the implementing NGOs and the farming communities. The result was a feeling of common purpose, and this synergy led to valuable exchanges of experience and added to the capacity of both the MOA and the NGOs.
- *A participatory process builds confidence among individual farmers and enhances ownership and sustainability.* The MOA took a participatory approach to planning and implementation. Farmers were involved in decision-making on activities and were willing to contribute their own resources for maintenance of infrastructure built by the programme. The positive results sustained farmers' interest in agriculture; they felt more attached to their land and were able to rely on incomes derived from agriculture. This contributed to a sense of ownership over products and services in the farming communities, indicating good prospects for sustainability.

- *Leveraging local expertise is critical in a fragile context with weak institutional capacities.* NGOs have played a strong role in Palestine as the only vehicle for implementation of development programmes during the years of conflict. Local agricultural NGOs have long and relevant experience in working with rural communities through participatory approaches, and implementing land and water resource development activities. The programme did not introduce new institutions, but worked through well-grounded existing ones and leveraged their expertise in the agricultural sector. The local NGOs filled a critical gap in the institutional capacity to implement activities and complemented the efforts of the Ministry of Agriculture.

## Conclusion

The programme made a clear difference in the livelihoods of the participants, improving security over land and resources, creating discernible improvements in incomes and yield, and consolidating institutional partnerships across the sector. Despite the fragile context which interrupted the implementation of programme activities, IFAD, the Ministry of Agriculture and the implementing partners, including the farming communities, stayed committed to continuing the activities and contributed to significant impacts. The programme remained highly relevant by focusing on the most pressing constraints facing smallholder farmers in the area and adopting a flexible approach to accommodate the changing circumstances. The strong relationships created through the programme have resulted in a sense of shared responsibility and ownership and have built the capacities of national institutions, which is critical for future sustainability.

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**Strengthening Assets,  
Markets and Rural  
Development Policies in the  
Northern Highlands  
(Sierra Norte)**

Total project cost:  
US\$21.7 million

IFAD loan: US\$14.4 million

Government contribution:  
US\$3.4 million

Regional and local  
governments: US\$1.7 million

Beneficiary contribution:  
US\$1.2 million

Duration: 2009–2016

Directly benefiting:  
20,930 households

Cofinanciers:

Action Aid: US\$1.0 million

## Peru: Innovation, learning and adaptation transform highland communities

*In the poor areas of the Peruvian highlands, an interconnected chain of projects has significantly improved food security, reduced malnutrition and poverty, and empowered local communities. For more than 20 years, IFAD-funded projects have adopted a systematic practice of learning and adaptation, with decentralization and innovation as key characteristics. This approach is now part of the government's own strategy to fight rural poverty and has been scaled up by other donors.*

Peru is the fourth largest country in Latin America, divided geographically into three very diverse natural regions: *Costa, Sierra and Selva* – coast, highlands and forest. The natural environment ranges from arid coastline to dry highlands, pastures and lakes of the mountain ranges, to lush and dense tropical rainforests.



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Peru is a middle-income country, with one of the best performing economies in the region. Its development has been led by private investment, strong export performance and low public-sector debt, resulting in growth in employment and incomes. Notwithstanding the good performance, about a third of the population lives in poverty, mainly in rural areas, and especially in the Sierra region.

Poor families in the highlands are primarily subsistence farmers who earn an income through off-farm employment, making and selling crafts, and other activities. There are many obstacles to rural development, including poor linkages to national and international markets, limited organization among producers, and poor access to public and financial services. The population is widely dispersed and infrastructure such as roads and telecommunication systems is lacking. The isolation is exacerbated by a lack of public institutions with the capacities to implement local development initiatives.

Over the past 20 years, government efforts to combat rural poverty have focused on strengthening the competitiveness and market access of small producers, and on improving household food security and nutrition. Decentralization and a territorial approach to development have been key, supporting local development through regional governments and institutions, such as municipal and regional councils. Since the 1980s, IFAD has supported the government, as it has transferred decision-making power and financial resources to local institutions and to rural communities themselves.

### The project

Since 1980, IFAD has provided 10 loans to Peru, investing in an interconnected chain of projects focused on the systematic introduction, fine-tuning and scaling up of innovations. Each project has sharpened IFAD's focus on a specific area or sector and has scaled up innovations piloted in previous projects. Projects have focused on investments in natural resource management, strengthening rural-urban linkages through the development of market corridors, development of small and microenterprises, and promotion of income-generating activities through better access to credit and technical assistance.

The driver in the Peru projects was the idea that rural development should be led by local people. The aim was to foster development by making local institutions and communities responsible for decisions on project funds and implementation. Early on, projects moved from a supply-based system of technical assistance to a demand-driven approach, whereby funds were transferred directly to the communities, enabling them to contract services provided by local technical experts, the so-called "rural talents". These rural talents are locally trained and speak the local languages, and combine their technical skills with local knowledge. This approach has been at the core of the IFAD-supported projects in Peru, empowering local organizations and communities by giving them decision-making power and fostering the development of a market for local service providers to meet their demand.

In 1995, the Management of Natural Resources in the Southern Highlands Project (MARENASS) introduced a public competition system, known as *Pacha Mama Raymi*. The competitions would become the cornerstone of every project in Peru and have replaced the long-standing practice of providing resources based on plans developed by outsiders. Through this mechanism, local farmers and organizations present investment proposals and compete for financial resources.

An independent jury awards funds to groups with the best proposals. The winners receive cash awards, which are transferred to them directly, allowing them to manage the funds and contract the technical services they need. Participants are required to also invest their own resources, which builds both commitment and ownership among the winning groups. Community members, especially women, are also given support to obtain identity cards, register their businesses, and get access to financial services such as savings accounts.

Building on these successes, the Puno-Cusco Corridor Project (CORREDOR) in 1998 introduced a new mechanism to transfer public funds to the communities, known as local resource allocation committees (LRACs). The LRACs are composed of respected community members such as local professionals, teachers, mayors and local leaders, and they review and select the proposals that are to receive funds, ensuring transparency and accountability in the process.

Based on the lessons of the earlier projects, IFAD and the Government of Peru designed the Strengthening Assets, Markets and Rural Development Policies in the Northern Highlands Project (Sierra Norte) to reach more than 20,000 farming households in the four regions of Amazonas, Cajamarca, La Libertad and Lambayeque. The project focused on valuing, protecting and enhancing the natural resources and the cultural heritage of poor rural families, developing business initiatives and opening new markets for entrepreneurial activities. It involved elderly people, children and adolescents from the communities, and supported families as they worked to improve their livelihoods – building on traditional knowledge and products with high social, cultural and nutritional value. To this end, the project strengthened local institutions and community organizations to provide better services and support local rural development and economic growth.

As in the rest of the Peru country programme, community competitions were a key feature of the project, with families and organizations preparing proposals for initiatives to manage and protect natural resources and other community assets and plans for business development, indicating the technical assistance they would need. LRACs were set up and tasked to review the investment proposals and award funds. Communities were trained in developing business plans and received support in opening bank accounts where the funds would be deposited. Winners were offered exchange visits in other communities operating in similar agroecological areas, or facing similar development issues. Through this approach, the competitions have allowed for sharing and replication of knowledge and techniques that have achieved significant economic and social impact.

## Results

Poverty in Peru is concentrated in the Sierra region, where rural poverty rates are considerably higher than in the rest of the country. The project contributed to a significant reduction in poverty: extreme poverty rates dropped by 24.5 per cent in the project area between 2010 and 2015. Child malnutrition was reduced by 6.5 per cent in the same period, while the average household income increased by 80 per cent.

### **Local communities took charge of their own development**

The results of Sierra Norte were achieved primarily through the direct involvement of local communities in all levels of decision-making. In this sense, the project played a

facilitating role, with community members making decisions on the management of resources and leading in the design of business initiatives.

The competitions were a mechanism through which public funding was transferred directly to poor farmers, who could use these resources to contract technical assistance. They fostered collaboration among peers and transfer of knowledge and practices, which in turn led to better results for the community as a whole. At the same time, the LRACs ensured that proposals were evaluated in a transparent way.

This approach led to higher participation by local families in community organizations. In fact, the number of community organizations, such as agricultural and livestock producers' organizations, increased by 81.5 per cent during the project period. Women also became more active in their communities. In total, 339 women's organizations participated in training activities on business development and entrepreneurship during the project. Women learned how to formulate proposals using simple business formats and took part in exchange visits that stimulated new business ideas. With their newly acquired knowledge and strengthened self-esteem, women assumed leadership roles in local organizations and more than 330 women became leaders of community organizations in the project period.

#### **Improved quality of agricultural land led to increased production**

The project built irrigation infrastructure for smallholders in the sierra and in the forests, which helped improve water management, and restored soil quality for agricultural use. Families and communities built more than 1,200 water reservoirs that they used to increase the production of vegetables in their gardens and to improve the quality of pastures. Communities also complemented their existing agricultural practices with new fertilizer production techniques, allowing them to diversify their crops and improve food security.

Community committees prepared more than 200 natural resource management plans based on maps of local assets identified by families and building on local knowledge. Asset maps identified social, cultural, environmental and productive assets, including ancestral products that had been forgotten or replaced by imported products. The plans led to improvement of 11,980 hectares of agricultural land through reforestation and sustainable land and forest management practices. These improved practices were adopted by the local communities based on knowledge shared through the competitions, as well as farmer-to-farmer training workshops.

#### **Supporting local markets for technical assistance stimulated the economy**

With the funds from the competitions, small-scale producers and entrepreneurs were able to contract technical assistance to improve production, marketing and management of their enterprises. By the end of the project, 768 organizations were executing business plans. This approach stimulated demand for and supply of technical assistance and expanded local markets for such services, leading to new employment opportunities. More than 1,600 technical service providers were hired by local organizations during the project period, and provided assistance in areas such as processing and marketing of agricultural and forest products, livestock production, management of orchards, textile production and housing improvement.

### Challenges and solutions

IFAD's long engagement in Peru and its overall programme approach, which tested innovations and consistently learned from previous projects, meant that many of the risks were known and could be addressed at the outset of a new project. However, Sierra Norte was implemented in the northern highlands, not in the south of the country where most of IFAD's past projects had been located. The different regional and cultural context posed some challenges. Andean communities and their organizations in the southern highlands play a major role in local development and have acted as an important conduit for project implementation. However, in the north there were far fewer community organizations, which meant that the project turned to municipalities and the private sector for support.

Given the weak local institutions in the area and their limited capacity to coordinate and implement local development policies, the project provided support and training to local governments. Municipality staff were trained in how to plan local investments and leverage resources from the central and regional governments and the importance of developing public-private partnerships to improve the business environment and collaborate on providing public services and infrastructure. A key part of the training dealt with changing the mind-set, moving towards valuing and integrating the opinions and experiences of the communities.

### Scaling up

IFAD's country programme in Peru has followed a clear approach to testing and scaling up innovations. Over time, projects have identified and developed innovations, and then tested, fine-tuned and mainstreamed them in public policies and investments.

The *Pacha Mama Raymi* public competitions methodology was introduced by IFAD in the MARENASS project and has been used by all subsequent projects. The mechanism has also been adopted by the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture and its implementing agency, AGRORURAL, and is used by local NGOs as well.

*Pacha Mama Raymi* sparked other innovations, such as mechanisms to transfer public funds directly to community organizations, the LRACs, the development of local markets for technical assistance providers, and the promotion of citizenship rights. These innovations have also been scaled up by the government as well as other donor agencies. The World Bank has introduced the competitions and used the LRACs for selecting winning proposals in its Sierra Rural Development Project (ALIADOS).

In 2009, the Government of Peru introduced the Law to Support Productive Competition (*Ley ProCompite*), which allows municipalities to allocate resources through the competitions and the LRACs to investment projects without having to go through the national public investment system. In 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture approved a strategy for the promotion and management of rural talents for family farming, known as the National School of Rural Talents. The strategy emphasizes the importance of local and traditional knowledge.

Learning has been instrumental to the scaling up experience in Peru. Projects have consistently learned from previous projects and have adjusted and enhanced innovations based on the experience and suggestions from the communities themselves. Learning routes, a methodology developed by the Chile-based organization Procasur

with IFAD support, have been one of the main vehicles for this in-depth learning and knowledge exchange about innovations emerging in the country programme – in Peru, the region and globally. Procasur has been able to scale up learning routes across Latin America, as well as in Asia, Africa and Europe.

## Main lessons

IFAD's experience in Peru provides a number of lessons which are of value not only to the Peru country programme, but also in other development contexts in the region and beyond.

- *A demand-driven approach empowers rural communities.* Recognizing the central role of the communities and handing over decision-making power to families and their organizations has been the key to success in the Peru country programme. Through the public competitions, families and community organizations have come up with appropriate solutions for local development in a transparent way that has fostered collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Funds have been transferred directly to the communities, enabling them to contract the technical services they needed. This approach has both reduced poverty and empowered the communities, creating a sense of responsibility and ownership. Local areas have been transformed based on their aspirations and expectations. It has also stimulated the development of a market for local service providers based on the demands from the communities themselves.
- *Learning and knowledge-sharing promote sustainability and scaling up.* The projects in Peru have fostered a culture of "learning by doing". Lessons have consistently been drawn from past experience to inform the development of new projects, resulting in a long list of tested innovations that have been applied in the country programme and beyond. In addition, the country team has valued and built upon local knowledge and culture, and has supported the exchange of experience and knowledge among farmers through the competitions, farmer-to-farmer training, and by using the "rural talents" as technical service providers. The learning route methodology was another way of sharing innovations and ensured that successful experiences were replicated across rural communities. Moreover, projects have remained flexible and have adjusted activities and innovations based on the experience and suggestions from local communities.
- *Community empowerment requires a holistic approach.* Involving the communities in decision-making and allowing them to take charge of their own development required considerable support. The key mechanism of transferring funds directly to the communities through competitions was supported by the training of farmers to develop proposals for the competitions, and support in developing business plans and opening bank accounts where the funds would be deposited. It also included support in contracting technical assistance for the implementation of the initiatives, including legal support to obtain identity documents and formally registering businesses in order to sign the contracts that are required for the funds to be disbursed. These complementary steps responded directly to the needs of the communities and enabled families to participate in and take full advantage of project benefits.



## Conclusion

Sierra Norte was the first project to be implemented in the northern highlands. The project built on IFAD's long experience in Peru and a systematic approach that had been developed in an interconnected chain of projects over the past two decades. At the heart of this approach was the idea that poor rural families should be in charge of their own development. Through a number of innovative mechanisms, decision-making power was handed over to local families and funds were transferred directly to community groups to implement the projects that they preferred. Over the years, these innovations have reduced poverty and empowered communities, and local areas have been transformed. Local families have been enabled to improve their livelihoods and obtain citizenship rights. Collaboration and exchange of knowledge among communities have been at the core of the projects, and have ensured that successful experiences were replicated in other rural communities in the highlands. These innovations have also been adopted by the government and donor organizations and are now considered as part of the national strategy to fight rural poverty.

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# Sierra Leone: Agile and adaptive project supports post-conflict rehabilitation

*In the east of Sierra Leone, this IFAD-supported project rehabilitated plantations and roads to improve the well-being of poor rural households following the country's civil war. The project created employment for young people, and contributed to improved food security and higher incomes in communities devastated by the conflict.*

Before the outbreak of Ebola in 2014, Sierra Leone had one of the highest economic growth rates in the world. It was well on the road to recovery from a decade-long conflict and was moving towards becoming a middle-income country. During the country's civil war (1991-2002), the eastern districts of the country were particularly affected, suffering widespread destruction and displaced communities.

## Rehabilitation and Community-based Poverty Reduction Project

Total project cost:  
US\$52.8 million

Total IFAD financing:  
US\$43.0 million

IFAD loan: US\$25.8 million

DSF grant: US\$17.2 million

Duration: 2004-2017

Directly benefiting:  
24,920 households

Cofinanciers:  
Global Environmental Facility:  
US\$2.6 million



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Rural areas were abandoned, villages burned and looted, with farmland reverting to bush, mangroves and forest. The damage to roads left rural areas disconnected. During this period, 82 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line and life expectancy was just 38 years (UNDP, 2002). Sierra Leone had the lowest Human Development Index in the world in 2002. Women and young people were the most affected by the conflict.

With the assistance of the international community, including IFAD, the Government of Sierra Leone put in place a National Recovery Strategy to rebuild its economy and foster reconciliation after peace was declared in 2002. Although a return to conflict was a real threat, a combination of new policies and reforms and a boom in the mining sector spurred recovery efforts. However, the Ebola outbreak and falling commodity prices stymied the country's development. Today, rural poverty and high youth unemployment are widespread and the country remains in a fragile situation.

### The project

The IFAD-supported Rehabilitation and Community-based Poverty Reduction Project (RCPRP) was launched in 2003 to improve the livelihoods of the most vulnerable households in two rural districts of east Sierra Leone most affected by the civil war, Kailahun and Kono.

The project focused on rehabilitation of farmland and infrastructure, and on meeting the immediate needs of the local communities, particularly poor smallholders, by providing a range of basic packages, such as seeds and tools to improve agricultural production and food security. This approach was designed to reduce possible tensions over resources and economic opportunities as internally displaced people and ex-combatants returned to the project districts.

In 2010, the project was redesigned in order to support a longer-term approach to community rehabilitation and sustainable economic development, in line with the Government of Sierra Leone's development strategy. The project also expanded into an additional two districts, Kenema and Koinadugu. Resources were directed towards initiatives designed to improve access to food, and provide opportunities for employment and increased incomes by focusing on infrastructure development, road and land rehabilitation, and community development. Plantations of tree crops, such as cocoa and palm oil, were rehabilitated. Inland valley swamp areas that had been destroyed or had become overgrown during the conflict were cultivated and irrigated by local youth contractors for agricultural use. Damaged roads were rebuilt, enabling villagers and farmers to more easily reach markets and other social services, and provisions were made for the establishment of road maintenance units across the country.

The project also provided support to the decentralization of government responsibilities to local administrations by building ward offices, providing training in skills such as financial management, and improving HIV awareness. In addition, district youth centres were built and equipped to train young people in business skills, such as how to prepare basic business plans, providing much-needed support at a time when 60 per cent of youth were unemployed or underemployed.

The project worked with rural communities that were highly dependent on rainfed agriculture and therefore vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Using additional funding from the Global Environment Facility, the project created a network of weather stations, trained farmers in alternatives to “slash-and-burn” practices and improved water management in inland valley swamps, helping them to adapt to the increasingly unpredictable wet and dry seasons.

## **Results**

The RCPRP helped communities to rehabilitate and return to their plantations, and supported the Government of Sierra Leone in creating sustainable economic development in communities most affected by conflict. Food security was improved and incomes were increased.

### **More productive cropping on rehabilitated lands significantly increased farmers’ incomes**

The RCPRP rehabilitated 9,000 hectares of tree crops and provided training in cocoa production to 4,500 farming households. As a result, cocoa yields increased and farming households were able to increase their incomes. The improvement in crop quality and output, along with rising world prices for cocoa, meant that farmers were able to negotiate higher market prices for their crops. The environmentally sustainable methods used to rehabilitate the farmland further ensured that yields and income were relatively high and reduced reliance upon slash-and-burn farming methods.

Similarly, just under 3,000 hectares of inland valley swampland was restored, enabling about 8,700 farmers to grow rice and vegetables more productively. The introduction of new climate-adaptive rice varieties, and new planting and soil management techniques, enabled farmers to produce multiple crops annually, leading to significantly improved rice yields and doubling farmers’ incomes. Farmers in the drier upland areas reported double and triple cropping of rice following training in building earth dams and collecting water for use on their crops during the dry season. These new activities were introduced to the project to scale up climate-smart approaches using funds from the Global Environment Facility, and as a result farmers were able to increase their yield and number of harvests in a year, raising their incomes and combating the adverse effects of climate change on their livelihoods.

### **Capacity-building raised government awareness and responsiveness to climate change**

Being able to respond to climate change requires accurate national weather data and natural disaster records, which were missing from the government’s meteorological services. The project worked with government and communities to rebuild weather stations and train government staff in statistics and climatology, resulting in improved capacity and responsiveness in forecasting dangerous or extreme weather events, and building awareness of climate change at the institutional level.

### **Road reconstruction generated employment for youth and reconnected rural communities**

More than 700 young people were trained and employed to rebuild almost 1,300 km of damaged roads, and to rehabilitate swampland and tree plantations under a pilot “youth contractor strategy”. The young people can now use their skills and experience to seek employment in other parts of the country where roads and land are being rehabilitated. The project made a significant contribution to the rehabilitation of the damaged road network, thus reconnecting isolated rural communities, allowing farmers to take produce to market, lowering transportation times and costs, and reducing the loss of fresh produce.

### **Simple, practical tools empowered women and young people to participate in the workforce**

The project worked at the household level to ensure that both women and men benefited equitably. The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodology was introduced, and simple, visual teaching tools and practical activities were used in households to help bring about positive changes in family and working relationships that were inclusive of women and men. Topics included household financial planning, methods of improving food security, and learning to negotiate workloads and decision-making. This resulted in an awareness of gender inequalities in households, farmers’ groups, communities and local institutions, and empowered women, youth and men to make significant life choices. These activities led to a different sharing of power between women and men at the household level, and a fairer sharing of workload and incomes through women’s increased participation in the workforce. The learning system improved communication in the home, which women reported reduced or ended domestic violence. This increased awareness also empowered women and youth to speak out in community meetings and to be supported in doing so by their families.

### **Challenges and solutions**

Progress was slow in the first three years of RCPRP, as the project sought to tackle the many different needs in the immediate post-conflict period and respond to the challenges of coordinating a complex programme being implemented by multiple partners. Consequently, IFAD decided to refocus project activities on long-term rehabilitation, and to decentralize part of the project administration by locating some coordinating offices in districts where the project activities were taking place. With additional IFAD funding, the pace of rehabilitation of infrastructure and plantations was increased, and activities were expanded into two additional districts.

In 2014, the Ebola epidemic spread to Sierra Leone, causing its economy to slump, at a time when lower world commodity prices were slowing economic development. This presented a unique challenge for the RCPRP team. When the Ebola epidemic reached Sierra Leone, it affected rural areas first, acutely affecting farmers before quickly spreading to urban areas. Bans on group labour and the weekly markets where agricultural produce was traded, and restrictions on movement from one community to another to stop the spread of the disease, brought unintended

consequences in the agriculture sector. Crop yields began to drop, particularly in the inland valley swamp areas, meaning farmers saw their incomes fall and food security reduced. RCPRP staff were not able to access many districts to supervise activities and provide support, slowing down the progress of project activities.

In response to the challenges this presented, IFAD collaborated with the United Nations Children's Fund, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security to reach out to farming households to warn of the dangers of the disease and to provide preventative care products. RCPRP connected with another IFAD-supported project to use community facilities, such as rural financial institutions, as centres for distribution of preventative care products, including buckets and soap for deep cleaning, and for raising awareness and providing training on actions to prevent the disease from spreading. Where possible, RCPRP kept its team operational, and in some instances conducted missions remotely by hiring local contractors when access to programme districts was not possible. IFAD extended the programme by one year at the request of the government to enable RCPRP to complete its mission and continue providing support following the crisis.

### Scaling up

Agriculture is at the centre of the government for Sierra Leone's strategy for socio-economic growth and development. To support growth in the sector, successful elements of the RCPRP have been scaled up into the US\$50 million, multi-donor, nationwide Smallholder Commercialization Programme – Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme. This programme is financed in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, supervised by IFAD and implemented by FAO.

Beginning in 2011, this nationwide programme scaled up many of the activities from RCPRP. The tree crop and inland valley swamp rehabilitation activities of the RCPRP were expanded nationwide to improve smallholder food security across Sierra Leone. The youth contractor strategy, which RCPRP piloted, is again being used to increase youth employment, this time with additional farming equipment provided to increase the area of land each contractor can rehabilitate. The scaled-up programme also continues RCPRP's support for the government's decentralization process by building capacity for the district authorities across Sierra Leone. The Gender Action Learning System has been scaled up by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security nationwide, and has since been used in other IFAD projects in neighbouring countries. It has also been adopted as a method for empowering teachers at local universities and by private-sector cocoa exporters looking to introduce the learning system to their cocoa suppliers.

A concept for decentralized road maintenance was developed by the project to ensure the sustainability of investment in road rehabilitation. Local councils received training and logistical support, as well as a pool of road maintenance equipment in each district. A road maintenance fund was piloted in one district and then scaled up in other districts with government support. A government agency, the Road Maintenance Fund Administration, was established and now annually provides funds to local councils for the maintenance of roads.

### Main lessons

The project was successful largely because of its agility in responding to the changing development context in Sierra Leone. Activities were reprioritized as conditions changed, and the project focused on the building blocks of development most vital to rural communities. It has produced many lessons about approaches to rehabilitation in post-conflict countries that are relevant not only in Sierra Leone, but also in other countries.

- *Keep the design simple, limit the number of interventions and scale up.* By simplifying the design of the programme and reducing the number of activities that it implemented, RCPRP was able to target smallholder farmers more effectively. Increasing funding to these fewer activities enabled the project to reach a much wider number of people, scaling up the essential activities to have an impact across four districts instead of two. The simplification of the design and decentralization of the project teams allowed the project to be more agile in responding to later challenges, including the Ebola crisis.
- *Focus on rehabilitating infrastructure in the initial stages.* It was not just the simpler structure that helped RCPRP, but also the choice of activities. Prioritizing the rehabilitation of roads from the earliest stages supports communities in the rebuilding process, reconnects rural communities to urban areas, and allows other programme activities to be implemented more easily. When the project began in 2003, IFAD was responding to the immediate, short-term needs of rural communities following the end of a civil war, but by 2009 this was adjusted to focus upon long-term rehabilitation activities that could keep pace with the fast-changing and growing economy while providing sustainable and improved incomes.
- *Engage women and men in learning activities that support farming and household planning.* Working with women and men together at the household level positively changed their relationships and led to powerful outcomes for the families involved. By embedding an action learning system into the project, RCPRP was able to engage with and provide benefits to the whole community to support families to take full advantage of the RCPRP activities and feel ownership of their participation. The action learning system spread significant improvements in gender awareness across households, communities and institutions to change gender roles, traditions and culture.
- *Employing local youth in project activities built technical expertise.* Using a youth contractor strategy enabled RCPRP to not only meet its goal to rehabilitate farmland to improve food security and incomes, it also contributed to reducing rural youth unemployment in the project districts. The training itself enabled young people to seek further employment using these skills. However, the challenge is to provide long-term opportunities by improving access to finance and markets for their own business initiatives.
- *Integrate activities to build climate resilience into project design.* Introducing climate-smart activities underlined the importance of building climate-smart projects. These activities improved the rehabilitation process by introducing new farming methods, products and training, bringing awareness of environmental sustainability issues into almost all areas of RCPRP. This underlines the ability and importance of making programmes that are both effective in reducing rural poverty and environmentally sustainable.

## Conclusion

The RCPRP was a complex project, but its agility in adapting to changing circumstances and conditions in Sierra Leone meant that it was able to respond to new priorities as they emerged. It introduced some innovative solutions that have now been taken up by the government, for example, the approach to decentralized road maintenance, which has contributed to sustaining the considerable investment in rehabilitation of the devastated road network. The project's initial focus on meeting urgent food security needs and providing immediate relief to farmers evolved into streamlined, long-term post-conflict rehabilitation. RCPRP improved food security and raised incomes by rehabilitating plantations overgrown during conflict, providing employment opportunities for young people, and reconnecting rural areas through a major push to rehabilitate damaged roads. It has left a legacy of good practices and success stories.

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