

THE GAMBIA COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION

IFAD's targeting strategies in The Gambia

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was established in 1977 in response to the food crises of the early 1970s that primarily affected the Sahelian countries of Africa. Since that date, the Fund has worked in countries with high poverty rates, operating to enhance the two closely connected issues of (i) food security and nutrition and (ii) agricultural productivity. It is by looking at why IFAD was established that project managers and experts understand why they have to specifically target the rural poor.

According to the country programme evaluation (CPE) conducted by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE), in designing its operations in The Gambia between 2004 and 2014, the Fund did not use structured geographical targeting to prioritize the poorest areas; IFAD did however adhere to a key principle of engagement by using government systems and was fully aligned with government strategies and priorities. Design used a mix of targeting mechanisms, including being demand-driven and self-targeting through existing social structures. In many cases, poor farmers were reached and women were included, although the targeting was not specifically aimed at selecting poor rural villages. As a consequence, many such villages were not included in IFAD-supported activities in The Gambia for many years.

Targeting the rural poor: IFAD's approach

Countries differ in defining the concept of poverty; not only they have a different conception of the "poverty line" – noting that in some cases it can be above the World Bank threshold of US\$1.25 per day. To design targeting strategies in countries where it operates, IFAD usually looks at the country context, its peculiarities and opportunities, as well as the challenges that might impede reaching the rural poor. IFAD has developed guidance notes on targeting to ensure their access and participation – particularly for women and young people.

The Fund designs its interventions together with the government (which should include potential beneficiaries), and is guided by the IFAD country strategy as well as Government priorities. This information determines the nature of the project or programme, identifies the locations to target and, subsequently, the components of the intervention.

IFAD's targeting approach in The Gambia

In The Gambia, IFAD has targeted 548 sites between 2000 and 2014, and it has done so by aligning its activities to the country strategies and policies. IFAD has used country processes with a view to identifying the most appropriate communities; however, such processes in The Gambia were designed for decentralization purposes, focusing on bottom-up planning and budgeting for the different levels of government, and not specifically for poverty targeting.

In terms of project ownership and targeting, the traditional village groups (*kafos*) had demonstrated to be an effective entry-point to better target the most vulnerable, since they were able to significantly mobilize the local populations. Nevertheless, using the country systems the villagers did not always feel sufficiently consulted on interventions; they were able only to select the activities on a predefined list in many villages, thus the design was not tailored to their needs.

Given the large share of women in the agricultural sector, the project focus on rural women and youth in agriculture as the key drivers of change was appropriate. However, since an in-depth gender analysis was not conducted (neither by IFAD nor by the government), it is unclear how women's needs were to be addressed. There was no specific support for women-headed households even though, in 2010, 19.4% of households were headed by women. Perhaps of greatest concern regarding addressing gender inequalities is that no attention was paid to addressing the unequal distribution of household-related workload. This meant that for women participating in project activities, their already heavy workload increased (as no drudgery reduction strategies were applied); neither were men sensitized to the benefits of supporting women in a more equitable workload balance.

In general, the CPE in The Gambia found that IFAD did not apply a **structured geographical targeting** approach to prioritize the poorest geographical areas: no use was made of geographic targeting based on poverty data or poverty related mapping. While available data in The Gambia may have been a constraint, so was the focus on **self-targeting**: with self-targeting, the communities submit requests based on their perceived needs, and the selection is based on predefined eligibility criteria. As a result, communities with a strong voice or with a higher wealth index might get priority over the poorer rural population (as was seen by the CPE team during the field visit), as the decentralized process assumes that villagers are literate, empowered and with political voice.

The 2003 IFAD country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) was not explicit on the targeting strategy, leaving room for differing interpretations of what mechanisms were most appropriate. No assessment had been conducted on the priority needs and interests of the poor regarding possible interventions. Another critical factor is that no capacity audits which can help improve the skills required to deliver the strategies during implementation have been carried out. As the COSOP became outdated, opportunities were missed on optimizing alignment and interpretation of their needs. The 2012 revision could have created scope to better adapt the strategic focus to the current situation. The revision was neither discussed and agreed with Government (it is unknown if beneficiaries were consulted) and therefore nor could it be formalized in IFAD.

The CPE recommends that the next COSOP gives clear guidance to partnership opportunities and contains a detailed targeting strategy. In particular, the targeting strategy should describe: the different target groups and their needs; how geographical targeting including poverty pockets, based on poverty data, can be optimally layered over the government systems; and the best way forward to exclude elite capture and avoid power imbalances. Empowering and enabling measures, as well as direct targeting, can help ensure the participation of women and the youth.

Conclusions

In The Gambia, aligning with the country policies and strategies to identify priority interventions for investments was good. However, in terms of **targeting**, such choice translated into using the country's decentralized system, which the CPE found did not result in focusing on the poorest in rural areas to enable poverty reduction or meeting their specific needs.

Understanding where the real pockets of poverty are requires a solid geographical targeting strategy, which may have succeeded had IFAD engaged more with its partners. Among the findings, the CPE has identified the lack of a partnership strategy as one of the impeding reasons for weak targeting and results. For example, by working with the World Food Programme, IFAD would have better identified geographical distribution of high poverty areas, delivering coordinated activities to the target groups as well as increasing the likelihood of better outcomes and impact.

Finally, again in relation to partnerships, is the need to strengthen their respective capacities to deliver the desired outcomes from investments. This is true for "all" the partners involved be it government, the beneficiaries, agencies, IFAD or the private sector.

Further information:

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