

profile

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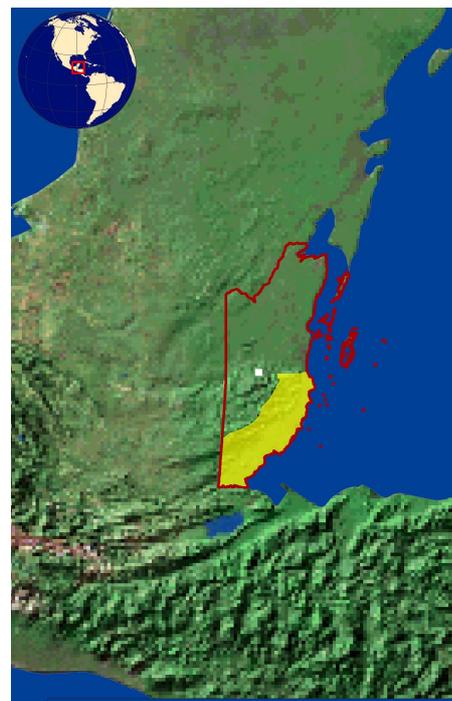
Belize: The Community-initiated Agriculture and Resource Management Project

The Community-initiated Agriculture and Resource Management Project (CARD), a rural development intervention cofinanced with the Government of Belize and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), became effective in 1999. Designed to be implemented over seven years, the project was intended to address issues related to change in a geographically remote and culturally complex area of Belize that had previous experience of poorly performing agricultural and rural development projects. The project's overall goal was to reduce rural poverty in the southern part of the country and increase the production, employment and income of the rural poor; this was to be achieved by developing the productive potential of balanced, sustainable land-use systems and ensuring the provision of support services to poor smallholder families in the target area. To that end, the project was structured around four components: (i) community promotion and the strengthening of local organizations; (ii) technical and marketing support services, and small-scale infrastructure investments; (iii) rural financial services; and (iv) project coordination.

Main findings

Several initiatives demonstrated the value of CARD, particularly in terms of support to producers' organizations. In particular, the project assisted in identifying and securing the economic potential for cacao production. The training and extension provided to farmers through the Toledo Cacao Growers' Association proved successful, not only in generating quality, organically-certified cacao production but also in improving overall farming practices. Moreover, CARD support for microfinance in southern Belize greatly contributed to improving the livelihoods of local households. Two credit unions received technical and financial support to assist in establishing microfinance activities that have particularly benefited cacao and rice farmers. Membership of both credit unions has increased substantially, and they have been able to attract micro-clients even from remote villages.

As a result of strengthened local institutions, a number of economic benefits have been achieved. Small producers now have improved access to financing, markets and technical support. The first international Cacao Festival, held in the project area during the CARD evaluation, demonstrated that southern Belize now has a place in international trade and that local communities have new opportunities to improve their livelihoods.



PROJECT DATA

Project Cost: US\$6.76 million

IFAD Loan: US\$2.29 million

Co-financiers:

Caribbean Development Bank
US\$3.4 million

Government of Belize
US\$1.06 million

Cooperating Institution: Caribbean
Development Bank

Executing Agency: Ministry of
Agriculture and Fisheries

Project's Effectiveness: June 1999

Loan Closing: June 2006

Nevertheless, the evaluation found that the project's potential for achieving its objectives had not been fully realized in a number of areas because community-based activities had met with limited success and only a few had been sustained. One constraint to project implementation was the difficulty in securing experienced, appropriately skilled staff to work in such remote and complex areas. Different strategies for training and capacity-building were piloted, and the most appropriate approach was found to be a combination of medium-term training provided by local service providers and capacity-building by experienced, technical specialists with a specific mandate to transfer their knowledge and skills to local groups and individuals.



One of the most successful community activities was the purchase of costumes for the traditional Mayan Deer Dancers. The community revived their local customs, particularly encouraging young people to keep their heritage alive. The community earned income from performing dances for visitors and from hiring the costumes to other communities for their own traditional events.

Photo: Dorothy Lucks

Key recommendations

- **Continued investment in the southern Districts of Belize.** Investment is required across all areas but the level of poverty in the south is still recorded as the highest in the country. Advances made through CARD show that southern Belize has a potential in niche export marketing and ecotourism, which is realizable with appropriate technical support.
- **Continuing support for rural finance.** There is still a need for additional credit funds throughout Belize. Investment is required to strengthen the capacity of credit unions to develop a stable financial market for rural financial services. Marketing support, recognition of collateral (particularly land) and decreasing delinquency call for improved strategies. There is a need for policy reviews of broader financial processes such as taxes, incentives, trade finances and rural credit policies to support the microfinance sector.
- **Investing in people.** Improved communication mechanisms and opportunities for cultural exchanges should be encouraged to bring about increased mutual understanding of the different cultures comprising the national identity of Belize. The targeting mechanism needs to consider cultural/area specifics and not just formal poverty indicators. Criteria that are too rigid may exclude people with capacity, such as community leaders who can support others in achieving change.
- **Professionalizing project processes.** Project processes and procurement procedures should be aligned with the expected type of subprojects concerned, and need to be appropriate to the capacity of the local community involved, for example in terms of language, style and culture. Experienced rural development implementers are needed at the management and field level to serve as mentors and provide proper orientation and on-the-job training for local project staff.



CARD provided technical support, training in planting of seedlings, regular plant maintenance and quality control for harvesting. The increase in perennial crops is encouraging movement away from "slash and burn" cultivation. Products are sold locally (above) and internationally.

Photo: Dorothy Lucks

Further information:

Belize, Community-initiated Agriculture and Resource Management Project, Completion Evaluation, Report #1965-BZ, July 2008, Office of Evaluation, IFAD, Via Paolo di Dono 44, 00142 Rome, Italy. The full report and profile are available online at www.ifad.org/evaluation; email: evaluation@ifad.org.

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