

profile

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Brazil: A multi-dimensional approach to rural poverty reduction

The overall objective of the Sustainable Development Project for Agrarian Reform Settlements in the Semi-Arid North-East in Brazil (also known as the Dom Hélder Câmara Project) was to consolidate a culture of coexistence with the semi-arid conditions of the North-East Region, and to ensure that families living in agrarian reform settlements and neighbouring rural communities would be able to lead dignified lives and become models for sustainable human development.

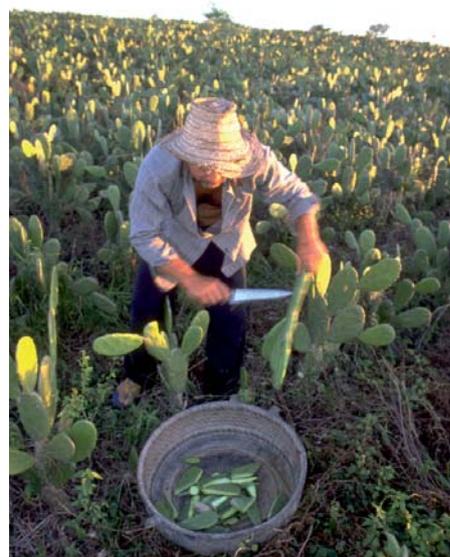
The project strategy was based on a multilevel approach. At the base level, priority was given to enhancing beneficiary families' individual and collective skills, building up awareness of their context, and facilitate access to opportunities available both through the project and through other government programmes. The second level aimed at improving income levels and consolidating the sustainable development of family agriculture. The third level promoted the integrated social and economic development of municipal territories, whereas the fourth aimed at formulating policies and proposals for sustainable development of the North-East Region.

Main evaluation findings

The IFAD Office of Evaluation undertook an interim evaluation of the project in 2010. The evaluation acknowledged that project activities were being implemented in a coherent manner and that the aim was to increase beneficiaries' individual and collective capabilities to create the conditions necessary for their effective participation in local decision-making processes. The project went beyond a simple alignment with government policies inasmuch as it acted as a facilitator for public policies concerned with family agriculture.

Some of the difficulties faced during implementation can be related to specific features of project design: the inclusion of six states, although justifiable in view of project objectives, increased the complexity of implementation, supervision and monitoring, and inevitably affected the project's operating costs. Administration of the loan at the federal level, however, largely freed the project from bureaucratic restrictions, thereby allowing it to engage in a range of partnerships and to experiment with new mechanisms for supporting family farmers. The evaluation acknowledged that resources were administered very efficiently, thanks to application of a self-steering system in which social mobilizers, grass-roots associations and technical assistance providers supervised one another to ensure optimal use of available resources.

The evaluation rated project impact as "highly satisfactory" in terms of empowering the targeted beneficiaries: this was achieved by entrusting responsibility for the management of financial resources



Farmer in a cactus field in Sergipe. Cactus pulp is fed to cows during the dry season.

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PROJECT DATA

Board approval: December 1998

Loan signing: October 2000

Loan effectiveness: December 2000

Loan closing: December 2010

IFAD loan: SDR 17.8 million

Contribution of
the Government: US\$25.5 million
plus US\$40 million
credit line

Contribution of
cofinanciers: None foreseen
at design, but mobilized
during implementation

- Syngenta Foundation: CHF 2 million
- GEF: US\$6.2 million
- Petrobras: R\$5.5 billion

to beneficiary associations, and providing them with opportunities for partnership building, capacity development, and participation in markets and decision-making processes. The project also promoted a gender-balanced approach and specific activities were undertaken to ensure the advancement of women – and youth – in society. The project cultivated the idea among family farmers that the harsh, semi-arid condition prevailing in the north-east are compatible with socio-economic advances, and that as a partner in economic and social development, the environment should be treated with care and understanding. At the institutional level, the project supported the different functions of social mobilizers and technical assistance providers, and promoted specialization and growth in technical skills.



The project provided beneficiary farmers and their associations with dedicated capacity building and awareness actions aimed at the better understanding of the North-East of Brazil context, to instill a culture of co-habitation with semi-arid conditions.

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In the communities and groups targeted, project results are likely to be sustained in the medium to long term. However, the evaluation concluded that bringing beneficiary associations to a self-sustainable level of operations calls for at least three-to-four years' support. A process of system-building at the territorial level to produce sustainable effects at grass roots also takes time. For family farmers, a crucial condition for continuing to enjoy project benefits will be further consolidating their production capacity and facilitating their access to markets.

Project performance has been positively affected by the national economic and political environment that favoured the establishment of effective rural development policies, as well as by proper sequencing of activities. The development of human capital, citizenship rights and living standards was tackled right from the start of the project, followed by action to increase both production potential and the participation of family farmers in markets. IFAD's role must also be acknowledged: by means of direct supervision, it was able to closely follow the project, allowing it to adapt and improve the strategy in line with the evolving context. Its internationally-financed status gave the project space for experimentation and innovation. Last but not least, the outstanding performance of

the project management unit was a major factor in the success of the intervention, especially because of its capacity to forge fruitful partnerships and mobilize additional domestic and international financing.

Key recommendations

Institutional set-up. IFAD and the Government to reach a clear agreement on the institutional organization of the second-phase project and administration of the loan. In the new project, ways of reducing management costs by making use of decentralized structures should be identified. Opportunities for cooperation with state governments should be included, with a view to maximizing the potential influence of the second phase at the state-level.

Policy linkages. Define the links between the project and public policies at the federal, state and municipal levels to clarify existing and possible future connections for more effective channelling of development policies to the family farming system.

Knowledge generation and dissemination. Include a knowledge-generation strategy in project design to increase the knowledge gained from experience. IFAD should increase and facilitate opportunities for transferring project experience to the regional level and to forthcoming initiatives for South-South cooperation.

Support for rural income generation. The project should include strategies for income generation through agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Support should be provided for upgrading products and facilitating the linkage of family farmers with value chains and markets. The project should identify instruments and strategies for increasing non-farm employment opportunities, especially for young people, and continue its support for the development bottom-up financial and non-financial business development services.

Managing for sustainability. At the outset, define both the strategy for engagement with settlements and communities, and its duration, including the type and length of such engagement and indicators to trigger off termination of project support.

Maximize synergies with the IFAD country programme. Where applicable, seek complementarities among the project and other IFAD interventions operating in the same states and territories.

Further information:

Federative Republic of Brazil, Sustainable Development Project for Agrarian Reform Settlements in the Semi-Arid North-East, Interim Evaluation, Report No. 2321-BR, March 2011, ISBN 978-92-9072-227-4, IFAD Office of Evaluation, Via Paolo di Dono, 44, 00142, Rome, Italy. The full report, Profile and Insights are available online at www.ifad.org/evaluation; email: evaluation@ifad.org.