



Syria at a glance

Population	16.1 million
	45% rural
Population growth	2.7%
GNP per capita	USD 940
Agriculture	26.1% of GDP
Inflation	0.5%
Life expectancy	69
Poverty (% of population)	...
Human Development Index	97/162

Source: World Development Indicators Database, World Bank 2001; Human Development Report, UNDP 2001

Total IFAD lending	USD 79.2 million
Project cost	USD 359 million

Evaluating IFAD's Country Programme in Syria

Reclaiming land and livelihoods

In Syria, rocks limit the planting area and dictate the techniques used in cultivation. This is a huge constraint on small farmers, particularly women – the source of 45% of unpaid farm labour. IFAD's objective was to support about 110,000 small and vulnerable farm households through 4 projects whose main intervention was land reclamation through de-rocking. The projects also included adaptive research and extension and skills training and credit for income-generating activities (IGAs) for women. A fifth, more recent project, focuses on introducing participatory rangeland management amongst herders in the Badia rangelands.

Key recommendations emerging from the evaluation are:

- Future strategies must reach the landless poor: technical criteria relating to land only benefits those with land.
- Gender issues need mainstreaming in all IFAD projects and supported in Syria's emerging policies.
- Income-generating activities need to be identified, analysed and promoted so that activities are profitable. Marketing and business skills training will help beneficiaries make informed choices in identifying suitable IGAs.
- Broadening the outreach of rural financial services to the poorest is crucial. Savings schemes will encourage people to save and successful innovative initiatives in community-based rural finance should be upscaled.

Main achievements

As a result of land reclamation, wheat yields have increased by 30%.

Orchards have been set up on about 60% of the de-rocked land and the national production of apples, almonds and olives has more than doubled in the last decade. (IFAD-supported projects contributed to around half this increase). Farm income and on-farm employment opportunities in all de-rocked areas have vastly improved and migration to the towns has fallen. The participatory approach to training has ensured better understanding and trust between herders and officials, in turn strengthening the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, and facilitating an upward trend for participatory approaches. Through IFAD-Government policy dialogue, the Cooperative Agricultural Bank has relaxed a number of its normal terms and conditions to ensure an increased flow of collateral-free lending to small farmers.



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A woman milks a cow in the Damascus province. An IFAD-funded project supports improvements in the marketing and processing of dairy products.



IFAD photo by Sahar Nimeh

Reaching the poorest of the poor?

Despite the many positive results, de-rocking only benefits those who have land whilst the asset-less poor are left out. Future cooperation between IFAD and the government needs to back activities that target the poor better. Future land reclamation initiatives should also be preceded by a full-scale environmental assessment to ensure that there are no inadvertent negative consequences.

Gender mainstreaming

Many initiatives were popular and successful, particularly for the women who undertook IGAs based on livestock. Many women increased the size of their flocks or herds, either by purchasing additional animals or by retaining offspring. A lack of marketing information and business opportunities, however, undermined the success of many IGAs: training should have focused on remunerative IGAs and improving women's project management skills. Women also need to be encouraged to save. Had working capital been provided to cover operational expenses, poorer women would perhaps have benefited more. In addition, the shortage of feed is a serious bottleneck in the development of the livestock sector: would liberalizing animal feed markets, production, and marketing help?

Making credit work better

In one IFAD project alone, 6,737 loans were dispersed for IGAs between 1995 and 1999. Significant institutional changes to the Cooperative Agricultural Bank's (CAB) credit terms have opened the way for collateral-free lending and facilitated an increased flow of credit for IGAs. However, CAB personnel and project extension staff need to be involved in the collection, scrutiny and appraisal of loan applications and post-credit supervision of loans, to ensure that CAB can continue with credit provision. An important issue for sustainability is the need for principal repayments of project loans to be recycled through a revolving fund.

Strengthening impact through greater participation

Group formation in Syria is still in its infancy and although the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (responsible for implementing IFAD-supported projects) is receptive to the idea of participation, its capacity to support participatory development is uncertain. Informal groups of around 15 farmers have been established to discuss local problems with extension officers and some projects are becoming more ambitious in their participation goals. Beneficiaries are keen to participate in IFAD-supported activities, but without the structure of organised groups, it will not be easy for the rural poor to drive forward their own development.

Policy dialogue should seek to define ways of extending the long-term benefits of self-reliance and participatory development for both government and people. NGOs could play an intermediary role, providing training and support to beneficiary groups and project staff in social mobilisation and participation.



IFAD photo by Sahar Nimeh

A shepherd herds her sheep. In Syria, women have almost exclusive responsibility for the care and feeding of farm animals.