

Plurinational State of Bolivia

Management of Natural Resources in the Chaco and High Valley Regions Project Project Performance Assessment

Executive Summary

1. **The project.** The objective of the Management of Natural Resources in the Chaco and High Valley Regions Project (PROMARENA) (2000–2011) was to reduce poverty and improve the living conditions of the rural population by promoting natural resource management and conservation, reducing ongoing desertification and supporting the market-oriented economic activities of the beneficiaries. The project aimed to benefit small farmers by increasing the value of their assets and incomes through appropriate management of natural resources.
2. This was to be accomplished by: i) improving natural resources and enhancing beneficiaries' capacity to manage them rationally and sustainably; and ii) addressing beneficiaries' need for technical assistance in production and marketing activities, with support for their business plans. PROMARENA used a system of competitions with rewards for families, communities, women's groups, and organizations in similar ecological and productive environments to encourage the target population to become involved in environmental management and conservation. It also promoted the development of a market for rural technical assistance services related to production and sales.
3. In 2008 the project area was expanded to the departments of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, reaching 19,372 families. The estimated cost of the project was US\$15.0 million, of which US\$12.0 million came from the IFAD loan. At the close of PROMARENA the total cost was US\$13.9 million.
4. **The evaluation.** This evaluation of PROMARENA was carried out in preparation for the IFAD country programme evaluation for Bolivia, to be completed in 2014. The objective was to provide an independent assessment of the project results and to draw lessons that could be used in future IFAD operations in Bolivia.
5. Disbursement was very low in the initial years of the project: only 17 percent by the end of 2006. In addition to the length of time it took to become effective, PROMARENA was affected by numerous delays associated primarily with institutional changes, administrative procedures and lack of management autonomy. The project's performance improved greatly with the expansion of its geographic scope and the acceleration of disbursements.
6. Overall, PROMARENA is evaluated positively in terms of the project's attention to natural resources management, participatory methods and approaches in the training of vulnerable populations and the delivery of technical assistance. Its achievements comprised the promotion of new productive activities in the communities and the dissemination of soil conservation and water management techniques as well as new and better farming and animal husbandry techniques, which were partially adopted by the participating families in the communities.
7. The project increased the material, natural and social assets of the beneficiaries, but there was generally only a limited improvement in their living conditions, and such improvement did not usually occur among the more vulnerable populations. There was low demand for the business development and market access component that failed to create the anticipated market for non-financial rural services. This element was useful mainly to well established groups that could

utilize technical assistance services effectively. The benefits for the other groups tended to be unsustainable.

8. **Lessons learned.** *Self-sufficiency and horizontal training.* The PROMARENA strategy prioritized community participation, independence and self-determination, with a farmer-to-farmer approach to training and technical assistance. It resulted in evident enhancement of social and human capital and progress towards the empowerment of beneficiaries.
9. *Territorial approach and conservation of natural resources.* The orientation of the approach to the individual family unit seriously limited the impact and sustainability of the project in terms of natural resource management: this was because it did not consider large-scale territorial interventions and the impact of the collective use of natural resources, nor did it motivate municipal authorities to undertake activities in connection with environmental management or infrastructure.
10. *Targeting of poverty.* A large proportion of the families – the most vulnerable – did not participate in the project. The project required a counterpart contribution for all activities and provided technical assistance only for improvements in production and market penetration, without considering financial investment needs. There was a lack of balance between natural resources management and conservation on the one hand and the need of vulnerable populations for short-term economic development on the other.
11. *Development ladder.* In a gradual process with distinct stages – the "ladder" – a proportion of organized groups and communities made progress thanks to support from the project and other interventions, participating in different value chains in a more complex and sustainable manner; such support was not coordinated, however.
12. **Recommendations.** *Need for a comprehensive strategy for poverty reduction and sustainable development.* Social and economic development must be combined with natural resource management and conservation. Broader approaches are needed that take less time to yield benefits and that strengthen organizations, leverage investments with existing initiatives, offer financial services, support access to value chains and markets, and foster linkages with the public policy system.
13. *Combine a territorial approach with a socio-environmental approach.* An approach is needed that is simultaneously territorial and socio-environmental, that includes communities and local governments, and that involves participatory land-use methods and plans. This implies working with families and searching for large-scale solutions, and forging partnerships and commitments for territorial action.
14. *Target vulnerable populations and tailor intervention modalities to them.* The new projects should adopt differentiated interventions that target different beneficiaries: on the one hand populations that have already received support and/or have good productive or market access potential, and on the other more vulnerable populations to be targeted with interventions promoting food security, habitat, microfinance and social policy. In this context, women's participation must continue to be prioritized through affirmative action in view of their involvement in livestock rearing and household activities such as fetching and using water and wood or growing vegetables.
15. *Reduce and focus the project intervention area.* This combination of a comprehensive, targeted territorial approach and self-sufficiency is complex and requires intensive work by experts. In view of its limited resources, it is important to concentrate IFAD's work in a few geographic areas, giving preference to large-scale interventions as opposed to pilot projects.