

# Republic of Sudan

## Gash Sustainable Livelihood Regeneration Project Project Performance Assessment

### Executive Summary

1. **Background.** The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) undertook a project performance assessment (PPA) of the Gash Sustainable Livelihoods Regeneration Project (GSLRP) in The Sudan with the objective of assessing the overall results of the programme and generating findings and recommendations for the implementation of ongoing operations in the country and the design of future operations. This assessment is based on a review of various project-related documents and a mission to The Sudan in November-December 2013, which visited the project area and held interviews and discussions with various key stakeholders, including beneficiaries.
2. **The project.** The project was implemented in Kassala State in the eastern part of The Sudan, where the Gash River and a spate irrigation system in the delta provide an important basis for the local economy and livelihoods. The area is dominated by *Hadendowa*, the main tribe of the *Beja* people, who have a strong tribal hierarchy and power structure. The Gash spate irrigation scheme is based on the capture of annual ephemeral flash floods that occur in the Gash River during the short period from July to September. The scheme was set up by the British colonial government in the 1920s to supply raw cotton for the textile industry – and also to settle poor nomadic people into a cash economy. The scheme went into serious decline in the 1970s mainly due to poor management, and spells of drought and security problems increased population pressure on the scheme. These factors led to the development of an increasingly unfair and non-transparent (annual) land allocation system in favour of tribal leaders and elite groups. It is important to highlight that in spate irrigation the area that can be effectively irrigated varies from one year to another and is dependent on the erratic hydrological regime of the river; and that, traditionally, tenants registered in the scheme were allocated a piece of land through a lottery system. As a result, the location and size of the allocated land that is actually irrigated and cultivated by a given tenant change every year.
3. In this context, GSLRP was designed as a US\$39 million project for implementation over eight years, with the goal of regenerating the livelihoods of the maximum number of poor people in and around the Gash delta, compatible with the efficient and sustainable use of its land and water resources and based upon a shared vision of development and the stability of the related institutional arrangements. The purpose was "to ensure the efficient, equitable and sustainable operation of the Gash Agricultural Scheme and the integration of the scheme into the local economy".
4. The specific objectives were defined as: (i) the elaboration and maintenance of a shared vision of development in respect of equitable, secure, transparent access to economically viable land and water rights; (ii) establishment of the related institutional arrangements appropriate to the shared vision; (iii) rehabilitated water and other social infrastructure and water-harvesting devices; (iv) improved crop and livestock husbandry practices; (v) establishment of financial services; and (vi) strengthened state planning capacity. The target group was composed of the poor rural households in the project area, estimated at 67,000 households, covering 30,000 scheme tenant farmers who would benefit from more secure and equitable access to irrigated land; 10,000 landless households who were expected

to gain access to irrigated land; and 27,000 non-tenant households who would benefit from improved infrastructure for livestock production and non-farm income-generating activities.

5. The project consisted of the following five components: (i) Irrigation infrastructure rehabilitation; (ii) Animal production and rangeland management; (iii) Community development, capacity-building and empowerment; (iv) Financial services and marketing; and (v) Institutional support and management.
6. The project was implemented between 2004 and 2012. Actual project costs amounted to US\$35.65 million against US\$39 million estimated at appraisal. During the project implementation period, there were major developments in overall country context. First, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the Government of The Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in January 2005. The CPA provided the states with autonomy and control over their resources and this had important implications for the operation of the Gash Irrigation Scheme in terms of authority and responsibilities. Second, the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement was signed in 2006, covering Kassala State. This resulted in improved security in the project area and improved progress in the river training civil works, etc. In summary, there were positive developments in the area over the project period, but the area also experienced flood events in 2003 and 2007, which caused damage, especially in towns.
7. **Performance assessment.** Overall, the project made an important contribution in terms of setting a reform process in motion and supporting institution-strengthening, notably the introduction of irrigation management transfer to newly formed water users' associations (WUAs) and land tenancy reform. Following substantial investment in civil works (river training and irrigation infrastructure rehabilitation), capture of floodwater and potential irrigation capacity have improved, and the towns are better protected from flooding. The project helped improve access to safe water for some 20,000 households. It made notable progress in empowering women in a highly conservative society through increased access to finance through women's savings and credit groups, and skills training.
8. Despite the important steps taken and contributions made by the project, the overall achievements fell short of the set objectives, not least because the initial aspiration was rather ambitious and over-optimistic, and the project environment was challenging. Given the initial request by the Government for the rehabilitation of the Gash Irrigation Scheme with a focus on infrastructure, the choice for IFAD was either to influence the project concept and design, or not to finance a project in Gash/Kassala. IFAD opted for the former, which meant that it had no choice but to engage with the delicate issues of access to land and water resources. On the one hand, this could be considered as a courageous endeavour in pursuit of more equality and betterment of the disadvantaged poor in a society with a strong tribal hierarchy and power structure. On the other hand, project design underestimated the complexities of social, political and institutional contexts. To some extent, it may have been difficult to foresee some of the contextual issues and challenges (for example, in light of the peace-building process in the eastern region, how sensitive the Government could be with respect to tribal leaders). Still, the project design was over-optimistic about such aspects as the preparedness of project stakeholders, and the work needed to put in place appropriate institutional arrangements with adequate capacity (technical and managerial), especially for the Gash Agricultural Scheme (GAS) which is responsible for the scheme management – and for the WUAs. There was insufficient consultation on the sensitive land issue at the design stage, resulting in lobbying by those with vested interest against the project activities once implementation started.
9. Against the backdrop of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement in 2006, the major infrastructure works supported by the project (notably, the river control works and

the rehabilitation of the Gash Irrigation Scheme) is likely to have made a major contribution to general development in the area. However, the opportunities offered by these investments were not exploited to the extent necessary to achieve expected results at farm and household level due to the limited progress with regard to in-field improvement and land and crop management, and the incomplete land tenancy reform process. Key institutions for the Gash Irrigation Scheme (GAS and WUAs) remain weak. The achievement with respect to the major focus of the project – efficiency, equitability and sustainability in the Gash scheme operation – was limited. There is still a lack of transparency in the land allocation system, especially given the inability to verify identification of tenant farmers. Sustainability of the scheme's management, operation and maintenance is a serious concern. Overall project achievement is considered moderately unsatisfactory.

10. **Recommendations.** Provided below are some key recommendations for consideration by IFAD and the Government. As IFAD has not pursued follow-on support for GSLRP, nor does it plan to do so, some of the recommendations would be for consideration by the Government in collaboration with other partners, for follow-on support for the Gash scheme, or other agricultural schemes as may be appropriate.
- **Sustainability of the Gash spate irrigation scheme.** IFAD could consider engaging in discussions with the Government to address key outstanding issues threatening the sustainability of the Gash Irrigation Scheme. IFAD decided not to continue supporting the Gash scheme, but as a partner that provided substantial financing under GSLRP and as a major partner in the agricultural sector, IFAD is well-placed to work with the Government to tackle these issues. These include: (i) clarification on the institutional arrangements concerning operation and maintenance (O&M) of the Gash Irrigation Scheme, including the GAS status; (ii) putting in place measures to strengthen institutional arrangements and capacity of both GAS and WUAs; and (iii) critical reflection on how best to bring the land tenancy reform in the Gash Irrigation Scheme to a conclusion.
  - **Irrigation scheme operations and maintenance.** Regarding the possible institutional arrangements, if and when WUAs play a more substantial role in the scheme O&M financed by water fees as envisaged, the roles of public institutions could – and should – focus on the management, operation and maintenance of major infrastructure, including river training works, off-takes and main canals.
  - **Strengthening of WUAs.** To ensure the development of WUAs that are managed in a transparent and accountable manner, it is recommended that further medium-term investment be made under a proposed follow-on project to strengthen their capacities to undertake O&M activities in an effective and efficient manner.
  - **Comprehensive planning for the river basin.** Taking into account (increasing) sediment problems, changes in flood patterns and increasing water demands, it is recommended that a Gash river management plan be developed based on the concept of integrated water resource management. As the Gash river is a transboundary river, this management plan should be prepared in close consultation with Eritrea to ensure (more) sustainable management of the Gash river, including interventions in the catchment area to reduce sediment load in floodwater caused by (increasing) soil erosion.
  - **Irrigated crop production.** In order to enhance the viability and sustainability of the scheme's operation, in the future more attention is required for increasing the returns on irrigated crop production both in terms of yield and of profitability, taking into consideration the issue of access to inputs and markets. This needs to be done in combination with measures to improve irrigation efficiency.