

profile

Number 25, December 2004

Tunisia: Integration Disintegrated

The integrated Agricultural and Rural Development Project in the Governorate of Siliana, (PDARI), a project spearheaded by the Government of Tunisia and the French Development Agency (AFD), was designed to fit within national strategies for soil and water conservation, and for poverty reduction. Targeting Siliana, a Governorate where natural resources are degraded, employment opportunities are low and poverty rates high, the pilot project was designed to integrate a number of investments and associated institutions whose combined impact would exceed that of individual efforts. Through an innovative participatory approach, the project supported natural resource conservation, crops and livestock production, roads, drinking water supplies, social development, in particular outreach to women and the generation of seasonal labour as a form of resource transfer to the poor.

These pioneering activities were neither replicated nor upscaled. During the project, priority was given to a more technical approach to investments in soil and water conservation which were carried out successfully and many brought significant benefits, especially to conserve and raise the productivity of Siliana's natural resources. The focus on crop and livestock production and on building farmer capacity to maintain investments were insufficient, however. Plans for integrating project synergies tended to disintegrate during implementation. This was partly due to old institutional habits of working along sectoral lines and lack of clear guidance from IFAD, the Government and AFD, and partly, to the spatial dispersion of activities and investments throughout the Governorate. While agriculture remains the core of economic activity in Siliana in the near future, environmental conditions are such that increased agricultural production alone cannot be a solution to rural poverty, especially in the light of the small size and low quality land holdings of the poorer households.

The interim evaluation recommended a second phase of the project and that in future, the Tunisian government and IFAD should strengthen their efforts to:

- Continue natural resource conservation work
- Support the development of a community-driven approach
- Diversify income sources beyond agricultural production

Continue Natural Resource Conservation Work

Soil and water conservation investments were important initiatives for the degraded environment of the Siliana Governorate. They included, for example, building bunds, planting trees, and modifying tillage practices, all ways of preserving the productive value of natural resources and contributing to forest, pasture and crop development while reducing vulnerability to factors of climate and topography. The Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, well-versed in the design and implementation of these types of investments, performed well in this area. However, the evaluation recommended selected considerations that could improve performance which included, giving more attention to developing local organizational skills to take over new practices and manage infrastructure operation and maintenance upon completion; undertaking rigorous evaluation of the relative costs and benefits of the various approaches being used; reviewing and adapting national technical standards and specifications to the area-specific conditions in Siliana; and, documenting experiences and results, in the form of technical reference materials and manuals for local staff.

Components of a Community-driven Approach

The concepts of 'integration' and 'participation' have been used widely in development circles. These concepts were, however, important as guiding principles in PDARI. The project was designed to be integrated through multi-sectoral investments and sought to



PROJECT DATA:

Total Project Cost: 41.67 million
Implementing Agency: Ministry of Agriculture and Environment

Main Partners: Ministry of Economic Development and External Cooperation, Regional Commission for Agricultural Development Siliana

Effectiveness: 1997

Closing Date: 2004

MAIN RESULTS

- The project has made substantial investments in improving production instruments, including soil and water conservation, establishing and repairing irrigated perimeters using the drip and borehole methods, research and development, and forestry and agricultural development
- Sizeable flows of financing were injected into the Siliana regional economy. Major investments were close to US\$5 million per year, 15% to 25% of which flowed into local economies. This injection of capital by means of investments involving socio-economic infrastructure, support for community-based organizations and the rapid development of revenue-generating activities have had a positive impact on the dynamics of local economies

improve natural resource conditions, improve production practices, provide capital (through an NGO credit programme), create socio-economic infrastructures like drinking water facilities and make a special effort to address the needs of women and girls. It was designed to be participatory through the design and implementation of local investments through consultative councils at the level of imada and delegation.

Yet, good intentions with respect to integration proved difficult to implement in practice. Investments and activities were spread throughout eight delegations. Only in a few spots were they concentrated enough to bring the true benefits of spatial integration. The various project partners were also too 'distant' to achieve effective institutional integration. Most institutions associated with the project - IFAD, its partner AFD as well as the technical services units at local levels - paid little heed to the concept of integration, carrying out their respective tasks in relative isolation. First efforts at participation were undertaken with the set up of consultative groups to plan local investments. Yet, not nearly enough was done to follow up and help communities to develop them into active self-help organisations, capable of interaction with government services.

To overcome these weaknesses and shift out of the integrated agricultural development project paradigm that has dominated the design of investments financed by IFAD in Tunisia over the past decade, the evaluation recommended a community-driven approach. This approach would be a means to mobilise a wider and deeper range of local resources and institutions and imply bringing all local partners together: farmers, traders, bankers, businessmen, technical service staff, consumers, traditional community leaders and political figures. Involving these various actors and mobilising the local resources that they control would re-enforce the participatory nature of the project. Furthermore, it would reduce the tendency of local communities to leave planning to government services and for institutions at the level of the Governorate to relinquish programming and decision making to central government agencies based in Tunis. By bringing activities and institutions closer together, the likelihood of reaping the benefits of integration planned for in PDARI would increase. Mobilising local resources for local development was also intended to pave the way to approach the promotion of micro-enterprises, the farm service sector and off-farm activities.



Pasture development

Diversify Income Sources

The evaluation revealed a number of compelling reasons why farmers diversified away from agriculture. Firstly, environmental conditions and natural resources in Siliana made it difficult for farmers with farm sizes of much less than 20 hectares to earn enough from agriculture to overcome poverty. Off-farm employment was used as a coping strategy and allows poorer households to invest in agriculture. Secondly, as long as land fragmentation and inequality in land ownership remain – most small landholders did not have land titles - any gains in agricultural productivity would be limited. Thirdly, Siliana has high rates of outmigration, putting a further strain on agricultural productivity in the area.

With a scarcely developed local economy, economic diversification for Siliana is curbed. Post-harvest storage facilities are limited. Little processing of agricultural outputs takes place. Input supply and output marketing agents are few as are other tradesmen and small scale artisans like blacksmiths, builders, mechanics, and millers. But overall income in Siliana is low which limits consumption and demand for new products. Hence, there is a need to support the development of more secure and profitable job opportunities locally in Siliana. Promotion of micro-enterprise development and provision of support to low income families to start or join such activities is a natural follow-on to the larger state investments in boosting agricultural productivity. To develop the local economy, the evaluation recommends stimulating off-farm activities, promoting services for and by rural people, alongside crop and livestock development. This should help people remain in their villages, reducing the need to migrate elsewhere in search of employment and income.

Further information:

République tunisienne, *Project de développement agricole et rural intégré de Siliana*, Interim Evaluation Report #1569-TN, December 2004, Office of Evaluation, IFAD, Via del Serafico 107, Rome 00124, Italy.

in the various locations, and have improved the quality of life for their populations.

- Forestry development as initiated by PDARI is crucial for rural residents living nearby, for whom the forest is the major source of energy, wood, fodder, food, non-wood forest products, and so on. Such development contributes significantly to improving the ecological balance and its impact on agricultural productivity in forest clearings.
- The project initiated a promising approach to research and development with national research institutions on leading topics relating to innovations and changes in production systems in the area, particularly in tree cultivation (Bargou peach), direct seeding and animal feed diversification.