



Tuning in to farmers' needs

Republic of Tunisia Country Programme Evaluation

Tunisia's economic performance over the last 20 years has been impressive. However, although efforts to distribute the benefits of growth have reduced poverty, disparities still exist between the urban coastal areas and central Tunisia, where the most marginalised people – the illiterate, women working in the informal sector and agriculture and smallholders working in rain-fed agriculture – live on the poorest quality land. Smallholders have to cope with highly irregular rainfall, land fragmentation and limited access to financial resources. IFAD support has concentrated on areas where land degradation is most acute – on protecting natural resources and improving productive community infrastructure.

Key recommendations arising from the evaluation, with regard to future IFAD assistance in Tunisia, include the following:

- **The key concern for poor smallholders** in Tunisia is to increase family income. IFAD projects, however, have tended to concentrate on natural resource management rather than on the specific needs of small farmers. Raising incomes will require tapping the full potential of the agricultural sector including processing and marketing (rather than an exclusive focus on production) as well as non-agricultural sources of income.
- **Projects need to be more closely involved with local institutions**, the private sector and civil society organisations to make the best use of available skills, resources and knowledge and to assist with the integration of smallholders into the local economy.
- **Given the diversity of project areas** and of farmers' requirements, greater flexibility in project design and in institutional arrangements for implementation would allow project staff to involve smallholders more closely in the planning stages and to adapt project activities to their needs and demands during implementation.
- **Targeting the most vulnerable** Tunisians through investments and services specifically adapted to their needs should go hand in hand with support for better-off groups with a view to achieving integrated development and interaction amongst the entire population.

Project data

Total cost	USD 289.85 million
Total IFAD lending	USD 114.70 million
Government contribution	USD 89.54 million
Total projects	9 (1980 to 2002)
Co-financiers	Islamic Development Bank; French Development Agency; Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries; World Food Programme
Executing agency	Ministry of Agriculture

Main results

For over twenty years IFAD assistance has been aligned with the government of Tunisia's policies and programmes for agriculture and rural development. It is estimated that 231,000 people have benefited from IFAD-supported projects in Tunisia (including 92,000 smallholders) representing around 20 per cent of rural poor people, as assessed in 1980 when the programme started. Available data give no indication, however, of how many rural poor people who have received programme support have risen out of poverty. Early projects focused on crop and livestock production, forestry and irrigation which led to higher incomes. More recent investments have concentrated on resource conservation, and incomes have been less than expected. On the other hand, new, drought-adapted measures such as the cultivation of hardy trees, hydro-agricultural schemes and soil and water conservation have contributed to resource conservation and drought-prevention. Women and their families have benefited from investments aimed at improving living conditions (access to drinking water and new tracks for example) or boosting farm incomes. However, although the ever-increasing role of women in running farms is widely recognised, their specific constraints (such as limited access to land ownership and agricultural inputs) have not been addressed. Women still lack equal representation in formal rural associations, due to the absence of clearly defined gender-oriented objectives and strategies.

Higher income = better life

Poor smallholders are mainly concerned with increasing their family income. IFAD projects in Tunisia, however, have tended to concentrate on standardised agriculture-based development interventions and are not always suited to the very specific but diverse needs and expectations of smallholders. Moreover, agricultural production is not necessarily the main source of income for the poorest households in rural Tunisia: through technical (extension activities) and financial (microcredit) assistance and training, IFAD interventions need to assist rural poor people to diversify their sources of income and help smallholders to improve their marketing skills and tailor their investments to the particular conditions of each region in terms of the availability and quality of natural resources and market outlets.

Local institutions matter

In line with national agricultural policies, IFAD-supported projects in Tunisia have so far only worked with the relevant line departments of the Ministry of Agriculture and not enough importance has been attached to farmers' participation. Neither have IFAD projects had much contact with other development partners within Tunisia in terms of liaising with local professional institutions: projects have remained isolated institutionally and economically, reducing impact and the opportunities for collaboration. Development initiatives need to make use of local natural resources, local heritage, and knowledge; they need to bring together all local stakeholders such as social and trade associations, local administrations, banks and NGOs in order to define specific areas for support. In short, a broader vision for regional and national development in Tunisia is needed, one that includes the participation of local smallholders in formulating strategy with a view to promoting harmonisation and mobilising available resources and skills. Forging partnerships should also help develop and strengthen skills (management and leadership for example) and encourage smallholders and their families to take on more responsibility and a greater decision-making role in their village or local community.

Flexibility pays dividends

Prior to IFAD approval of individual project loans in Tunisia, the project appraisal report, as with all IFAD-supported projects, set out the activities to be carried out during the project's life time: there is often limited flexibility or room for adjustment. Executing agencies are straight-jacketed in their capacity to adapt interventions to the diverse and often changing needs or circumstances of poor farmers, particularly those of a climatic nature. Giving executing agencies more responsibility for implementation, in collaboration with small farmers and other partners, and allowing them to build on experiences and lessons learned during a project's lifetime would allow a more specific and appropriate response to farmers' needs. To achieve greater flexibility, the development of a general strategy framework for intervention and shared responsibility for project planning throughout implementation with local stakeholders would be positive steps forward. Project formulation would also need to consider the extra time and training required to ensure these approaches are a success as well as the need for flexible management mechanisms for IFAD and the government, especially for procurement and disbursement.

Reaching the poorest areas

IFAD support needs to continue to tackle the poorest, most disadvantaged areas of Tunisia still suffering from poverty, land degradation, fragile economic integration and weak grass-roots organisations. The government has invested heavily in these regions and attaches great importance to reducing disparity.

Sustained efforts are still needed, however, to reach the poorest Tunisians. In the past most farmers benefiting from IFAD support had less than ten hectares of land. However, those with 20 hectares or more tended to reap proportionately greater benefits. Farm size was used as a targeting criterion for most projects: projects that applied it were more successful in reaching their target groups than those that didn't. However, farm size was not necessarily the best criterion, given that farmers with smaller pieces of land often had additional sources of income which made them significantly better off than those with more land. Specialised technical assistance tailored to the skills and resources of small farmers as well as specific mechanisms such as micro-credit may be preferable to using farm size as targeting criteria. However, as projects seek different ways to reach poor people in order to achieve growth in local economies they will need to mobilise all community members including women, young people, poor farmers, private companies, banks, non-government organisations and local government to work together to reduce rural poverty ■

Further information

Republic of Tunisia, Country Programme Evaluation, Report #1422-TN, November 2003. This Profile (in English and French) and the full evaluation report including the Agreement at Completion Point are available from the Office of Evaluation, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Via del Serafico 107, 00142 Rome, Italy. See www.ifad.org/evaluation, email m.keating@ifad.org or telephone +39 06 5459 2048

IFAD photo by E. Ben Hamida



IFAD photo by Nabill Mahairi



Farmers prepare land for rehabilitation: the Development Project for Small and Medium-sized Farms in Kef and Siliana assists farmers in making desert areas suitable for farming. Below, portrait of a warden, who also participates in project activities, in charge of protecting young shrubs against overgrazing in the Sidi Bouzid Irrigation Project.