Building Cooperation in Post-Conflict Areas: Rwanda Community Reintegration and Development Project

Social Development Best Practice Elements

- Multi-dimensional approach to poverty reduction aimed at enhancing opportunities, capabilities, empowerment, and security of the poor
- Institutionalized mechanisms for participation and decentralized implementation
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of social development outcomes by the government and community

Since the 1980s, 15 of the world’s 20 poorest countries have been riddled by violent conflicts, most of them internal. The 1992-96 civil war in Rwanda was rooted in decades of social and economic exclusion. Such conflicts seriously weaken fragile economies, erasing the gains of social and economic development and increasing debt burdens. The destruction of physical assets, disruption of trade links, decimation of institutional capacity, and loss of human capital can take years to rebuild.

The burden of recovery is particularly heavy for the poor. Typically, the poor are recruited to fight such wars. Re-establishing their livelihoods is a crucial part of demobilization. The transition to peace and stability invariably involves delicate negotiations and requires a high degree of transparency for trust in government to be rebuilt.

In Rwanda, postwar poverty is widespread, especially in the rural regions. The World Bank-supported Rwanda Community and Reintegration and Development Project is a best practice example of promoting the social and economic integration of the poor amid ethnic tensions in a post-conflict situation.

Participation in Peace-Building

In late 1996, large numbers of refugees returned to Rwanda after four years of civil war. Following a Joint Assessment Mission by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the new government of Rwanda proposed a strategy of decentralization, in which communes would plan and implement development projects as a means to facilitate community reintegration.

During the pilot project, use of Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) enabled community members to voice their concerns. The Bank provided technical assistance and mobilized local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and consultants for the PRAs to...
identify local needs and priorities. In the words of one community elder, “This is the first time we are asked what we need. If this is the approach this Government is taking, we will finally be able to develop our country.”

The Rwandan Ministry of Interior established Community Development Committees (CDCs) at the commune level to act as the project’s decisionmaking bodies, and the Project Coordination Management Unit (PCMU) to coordinate projects nationwide. The PCMU contracts with a team of local consultants to build PRA capacity and to inform communities about project opportunities. The team assists CDCs to develop and finalize Community Development Plans (CDPs). Each commune is responsible for hiring an accountant and a Community Development agent, who oversees local implementation.

Plan Qualifications

To qualify for support under the project, CDPs must adhere to the following principles:

- Enhance the opportunities for self-reliance of vulnerable populations and communities.
- Strengthen local capacity to implement reintegration and development activities.
- Promote sensitivity to gender equity and to protection of the specially disadvantaged (female-headed households, widows, orphans, and the disabled) in decisionmaking.
- Maximize grassroots participation and input in the project cycle.
- Encourage trust building through community-based reintegration and development activities and increase conflict resolution capacity at the communal level.

Under the project, each commune is allocated approximately US$240,000 to finance subprojects that address the community’s infrastructure, income-generation, and capacity-building needs. The three-to-five year Community Development Plan determines how the funds will be spent. Project proposals incorporate the use of PRAs, which rely on the beneficiaries for ideas and solutions to local problems. Communes are selected based on socioeconomic criteria that denote the degree of war-related destruction, number of returnees, and local organizational capacity. Many qualifying communes turn out to be from extremely poor rural regions.

Empowering the Socially Excluded

Participatory methods identify vulnerable groups, including the homeless, widows, orphans, the disabled, and refugees, the majority of whom are impoverished. Although specific mechanisms of inclusion are up to individual CDCs, the project specifies that at least one of the two elected members from each cellule (a commune subdivision) must be female, and that women must be incorporated in training activities. Women’s NGOs also are expected to be involved in the CDC effort.

Because of its focus on rebuilding social capital and diminishing cleavages among groups, the project does not directly raise the sensitive issue of ethnicity. Nevertheless, the project is critically aware that the government and donor-supported projects should not be seen as benefitting one group, such as the Tutsis, more than the Hutu.

Project Development in Uncharted Territory

At the forefront of community development, the project uses a novel and promising approach that builds partnerships between local populations and local administrations to enhance ownership of development. The project attempts to achieve decentralization through institution building. In Rwanda, very few skills exist for conflict-resolution, financial management, or consensus building. Therefore, the project pays great attention to creating capacity in central and local administrations, local committees, and community-based groups. To this end, it defers decisionmaking, financial management, and subproject supervision to the communities, leaving only coordination and monitoring to be carried out at the central level.

The Rwanda Community Reintegration and Development project is being implemented in an environment of high insecurity, both political and social. As in other post-conflict areas in which fragile government and social processes can rapidly deteriorate, establishing transparency in-country monitoring and supervision is critical to ensure long-term project success.