Senegal: the National Rural Infrastructure Project (NRIP)

The objectives of the project – a credit of US$ 28.5 million equivalent over the period 2001-05 - were to: (i) improve decentralized local government and capacity; (ii) establish participatory and decentralized mechanisms for selecting, funding and implementing rural community investment programs; (iii) strengthen national institutions supporting decentralization; and (iv) implement basic infrastructure in a selected number of rural communities. The project was designed as an Adaptable Program of Lending (APL) to support a three-phase program over a 12-year period. The first 4-year period would be used to test and establish mechanisms for sustainable decentralized infrastructure planning and implementation, strengthen the capacity of rural communities to operate and maintain investments and reinforce national institutions responsible for decentralization. The first phase was also to include a program to improve intra-rural community roads and to test maintenance strategies.

Impact on the ground

- Under the Local Investment Fund, each of the 110 rural communities supported set up its own Community Management Forum which managed the process of planning, formulation and implementation of micro-projects. By the end of the project, 850 micro projects had been implemented of which 677 were for the Investment Fund and 183 under the Innovation Support Fund. The menu of micro-projects financed by the project included 298 water supply projects, 141 schools, 140 health centers and health posts, 114 livestock projects, 60 projects for the promotion of women’s activities, 34 for agriculture, 21 for youth and sports, 24 for commerce and 18 miscellaneous projects. Each rural community constructed 7-8 projects compared to the 2-3 initially envisaged.

- Implementation of the infrastructure component was the complete responsibility of LGs, which used local participation, provided counterpart contributions and contracted with local private contractors in full compliance with agreed guidelines in the project implementation manuals.

- Local governments provided almost 16% ($ 2.5 millions) of the Local Investment Fund. Since implementation involved sectoral staff, the transfer of staff – teachers, nurses, etc. – was done quickly ensuring that the resulting infrastructures are fully functional. Beneficiary communities have set up maintenance committees and set aside funds for operation and maintenance.
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• Studies undertaken during project implementation identified key issues and proposed reforms for rural fiscal and financial management. Studies on financial transfers to local governments (LGs) and on reforms to broaden the rural tax base were completed. The government fully adopted the recommendations and agreed on how to implement them.

• A strategic framework was formulated for the Directorate of Local Governments, thus facilitating the transformation of the National Association of Rural Council Presidents into a more inclusive Association of Rural Councilors.

• Using IDA resources, with co-financing from IFAD, 247 km of roads have been rehabilitated in 26 rural communities. Funds from OPEC and AfDB financed roads in 94 rural communities. Improved access to markets and social services has been the main results of these activities.

• A national rural transport strategy has been finalized and adopted by the government.

• A fully operational decentralized system for the transfer of public resources to local governments has been established. All project funds earmarked for local governments have been successfully transferred through the public treasury system.

• The fiscal revenues of rural communities in the project area improved by a multiple of 2.8, their revenues and tax receipts increased respectively by 4.1% and 2.8%.

• In addition, the purchasing power of beneficiary households rose by 6.8%.

• The partnership built between the project, the Public Treasury Department and local authorities now provides a vehicle for other donors to use in the future.

• A monitoring and evaluation system was established and an independent impact evaluation of the project has been contracted out by the PCU and carried out jointly by a Senegalese university and a French university. The research team gathered data from semi-annual household surveys and documented project impacts, which enabled adjustments in implementation as lessons were learned.

• An impact study using panel surveys of 850 households over the period 2002-2005, showed marked improvements in the living conditions of beneficiary households. Household incomes in the project target areas had increased by 25%. The project’s impacts also include improvements in health and measurable progress in the weight and height of children less than 3 years of age.

• Costs were reduced progressively with regard to participatory diagnoses and the formulation of local development plans, annual investment plans, local training plans and local communication plans by recruiting community mobilization agents to replace the NGOs and consultants who had been originally hired. The daily management of local affairs was also positively impacted by the recruitment of community assistants to assist rural community presidents.

**Lessons learned**

• To be effective, decentralization must be multisectoral. It is not practical to anchor such a project in a technical ministry – political support beyond that of technical ministries is critical. This lesson was reflected in the design of the follow-on operation.

• Decentralization is a long-term and comprehensive effort, which necessitates new systems to be established and officials to be educated and convinced to accept change.
The planning process of government needs to be modified to reflect a bottom-up approach that reflects the importance of local development in the framework of national development.

Sustainability depends on the degree to which the beneficiaries internalize the process. The ability of local governments to plan, implement and monitor investments using participatory processes depends on their increased ability to raise funds and maintain a high level of community mobilization.

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