

Findings

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Good Practice
Infobrief



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Mauritania: the Rainfed Natural Resource Management Project

The Natural Resources Management Project (*Projet de Gestion des Ressources Naturelles en Zones Pluviales – PGRNP*), assisted with a credit of US\$18 million (1998-2003) had two specific objectives : (i) the empowerment of rural communities, i.e. the provision of skills to organize, to manage common resources and obtain access to financing; and (ii) an improved institutional environment in the rural sector, including secure access to natural resources.

Impact on the Ground

- In the 295 villages where it intervened, (compared to the expected 250), the project reached 120,000 people. More than 1,500 well-documented village investments were designed and implemented through a participatory approach. These investments covered the following (i) nine types of land and water conservation activities, (ii) nine types of infrastructure and equipment activities; and (iii) five kinds of micro-enterprises. By the end of the project, investments totaled \$14 million – about \$48,000 per village and \$120 per beneficiary. In all cases, the Community Development Associations (*Association de Developpement Communautaire (ADCs)*) that were set up, contributed to the investment, generally in kind. The user fees for the services provided by the ADC, e.g. water and mills, included the operating and maintenance cost
- Income-generating activities resulted in 185 grain mills in 185 villages, 63 cooperative stores, 20 oil presses, 66 village veterinary pharmacies and 300 milk goats for 60 families.
- The village investments, in turn, generated additional activities. Some villages financed butcheries from their mill incomes; in villages where stores were managed by women's associations, a different group of women – generally 3 – takes over the responsibility for the store's management and shares part of the profit as a management fee; in some villages, women's associations have used the revenue generated by village stores and gardens to invest in local craft cottage industries.
- Land and water conservation technologies resulted in 3,470 ha reforested, 263,000 m fenced, 11,170 km of fire breaks, 8,200 m of sand dune stabilization, 21,600 half-moons (small manually-built dikes to rebuild degraded soil – the shape is optimal to capture rain water and prevent soil erosion), 500 ha of direct seeding and 102 thresholds of deceleration (sills).
- Infrastructure and equipment activities resulted in the installation or rehabilitation of 70 wells and 8 village water supply systems, the introduction of vegetable gardens in 217 villages, the creation of 210 ha of

agricultural land behind dikes and stone bunds, the installation of 74 cattle vaccination facilities, the promotion of animal traction (120 animals and 1,744 ploughs), and the construction of 5 health posts and 32 classrooms.

- A total of 14,750 ADC members were trained in participatory planning, including investment selection, procurement and operation, and maintenance of ADC sub-projects.
- The project supported extensive training and public awareness programs. It improved the skills of 203 livestock auxiliaries some 822 village training/awareness seminars were held and 123 hours of radio and 39 hours of television programs were aired to explain the project to the public. In each village, a participatory diagnostic was carried out that led to the formulation of a village investment plan.
- The project provided support to the National Statistical Institute and the statistical unit of the Ministry of Rural Development and Environment to design survey methods and collect rural statistics data. The Ministry's statistical unit has been conducting its annual national rural survey since 1999, which is now the most reliable source of information on the basis of which rural growth is estimated.
- The success of this project has encouraged the government and the Bank to move towards a follow-up operation, the Community-Based Rural Development project, which will scale up the results of the present initiative.

Lessons learned

- A combination of a critical mass of investment activities per rural community and adequate time in building the community's capacity is critical to moving towards the eradication of extreme poverty (essentially a rural phenomenon in Mauritania) and the sustainability of natural resources.
- Transparent and well-publicized procedures serve to neutralize exogenous political interference and elite capture.
- Baseline data and a functional M&E are essential to optimal project implementation.
- An effective Project Implementation Unit does not preclude the necessity to decentralize project management as much as possible.
- Mass media communication is extremely useful to keep the public informed about the project's activities.

This Infobrief was excerpted from the project's Implementation Completion Report No. 27558. For more information, please e-mail Amadou Omar Ba: aba1@worldbank.org

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