

# Findings

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Good Practice  
Infobrief



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## Mauritania: Urban Infrastructure and Pilot Decentralization Project

The project, implemented between 1996 and 2001 with World Bank funding of US\$24 million had two components: (i) a program of poverty-oriented, labor-intensive works subprojects in participating cities, consisting of the rehabilitation or construction of urban infrastructure and community facilities; and (ii) capacity building ( pilot decentralization) at the municipal and national levels. The project capitalized on the work and experience gained by the country, the Region and the Bank through the earlier “highly satisfactory” Construction Capacity and Employment Project (CCEP).

### Impact on the ground

- The project created approximately 46,281 man-months of temporary jobs- more than twice the projected number.
- There was a delegation of 125 contract management conventions covering 149 infrastructure construction and/or rehabilitation subprojects completed in 13 cities, which accounts for 85 percent of the urban population or 1.2 million inhabitants. Nouakchott and Nouadhibou consumed 40 percent of the investments, commensurate with their share of the urban population (37 percent).
- Of the 149 subprojects, 144 were fully executed (5 were under implementation in 2002) targeting the most under-serviced neighborhoods. Two-thirds of the subprojects were for educational and social infrastructure and contributed to the reduction of crowding, improvement of hygiene and security in schools, access to primary health, and, to a lesser extent, access to productive assets. Revenue—generating projects accounted for about 18 percent of the total cost of \$15.4 million—these included the rehabilitation and/or construction of new markets, slaughterhouses, livestock enclosures, and taxi stations.
- The project built on the development of the private sector achieved by the CCEP. The number of construction companies and consulting companies registered with the Public Works Executing Agency of Mauritania (AMEXTIPE) stood at 517 and 146 respectively. Entry into both sectors is easy and free from any prior condition except simple administrative registration. All but one subproject were contracted to local construction companies and the same was true for project design and construction contracts.

- Thirteen referential urban plans were developed based on a unified method for all participating cities. The use of foreign consultants in the preparation of these plans for Nouakchott and Nouadhibou made it possible to pilot and test these tools and train local consultants in their use. These tools are now widely accepted by municipalities.
- City performance contracts were prepared at the start of the project; municipal audits have been carried out annually on the basis of which these contracts have been amended; also, city development strategies have been carried out through a participatory process for Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Kaedi. The sustainability of these initiatives is reinforced by the follow-up Urban Development Program.
- A comprehensive decentralization study was carried out that outlined the strengths and weaknesses of the process in the country; additional follow-on studies were carried out.
- The capacity of the Local Government Directorate (DCL) to assume its tutorship role has perceptibly improved. Studies conducted under the project (including assets inventories, city performance contracts and municipal audits) provided DCL with an insight into the current situation of municipalities. The administrative procedures manuals published by the DCL have been instrumental in unifying management and accounting procedures and clarifying regulations. Training was also delivered using consultants. However, while the tools have been accepted, they still need to be fully internalized and mastered by the municipalities.
- The decentralization, tax reform and urban development studies were instrumental in building a consensus on the priorities for deepening the decentralization reforms.
- The project clearly demonstrated the need for more transfer of resources to municipalities, which was negotiated and agreed under the subsequent Urban Development Program. This increase will give municipalities the potential to sustain investments in amounts higher than those under the Urban Infrastructure and Pilot Decentralization project. It will also improve their capacity to operate and maintain both existing and new infrastructure. Part of the transfers will be used to fund recurrent expenses.

### **Lessons learned**

- The delegation of contract management and reliance on private consultants are effective means of leveraging otherwise limited municipal capabilities. The municipalities provided their extensive knowledge of the preferences of their constituencies while AMEXTIPE and the consultants contributed technical know-how. However, more could have been achieved if foreign (Senegalese, for example) firms had been invited in specific cases—this is happening presently (2003).
- Building capacity should have accompanied or preceded the introduction of the management tools introduced by the project—city performance contracts and audits
- Both municipalities and the DCL needed a minimum in-house capacity to be able to effectively use these tools.
- Enhancing the competitiveness of local construction and engineering firms requires sustained efforts by an appropriate mix of specialized institutions. Tasking an institution like AMEXTIPE to do this is incongruent with the need to enforce stringent post-qualification and other selection criteria needed to ensure quality, low cost and timeliness.
- Adequate involvement of the government in institutional and capacity building component is essential to facilitate the implementation of the reform program. In this case, the lack of real involvement by DCL was a major inhibiting factor to AMEXTIPE's implementation of the program.
- Specific mechanisms should be identified early enough to mitigate a potential devaluation and thus shorten the reaction time of the implementing agency.
- The definition of a proper set of indicators is essential to reflect the achievements of the project.

*This Infobrief has been excerpted from Implementation Completion Report No. 24302. The Task Team Leader was Christian Diou. For more information, e-mail [Cdiou@worldbank.org](mailto:Cdiou@worldbank.org)*

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