

Findings

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Good Practice
Infobrief



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Niger: The Natural Resources Management Project

The Natural Resources Management Project (1996–2002), was intended to provide assistance to the Government of Niger to (a) assist rural communities in designing and implementing community-based land management plans by providing them with the necessary know-how, information, technical and financial resources, and proper institutional and legal framework for implementation; and (b) assist the Borrower in building capacity to promote, assist and coordinate various natural resources management initiatives within the framework of a long term national program. The project was to initially operate in 5 Districts selected in various regions of the country (Say, Boboye, Dogondoutchi, Tessaoua, and Gouré), and would be extended to other regions of the country if successful. Project design capitalized on experience gained in Niger and the sub-region by the Bank and other donors (multilateral and bilateral) in community-based operations and natural resources management. During the first phase (1996–1999), efforts focused on capacity building at both Institutional and community level, and by January 2000, when the MTR was implemented, the 95 communities originally targeted for implementation had drafted their community development plans including CBNRM (Community-Based Natural Resources Management). An episode of acute food crisis in 1998 resulted in these plans focusing initially on food security and the establishment of community cereal banks. At the Mid term Review (January 2000), community based procurement was introduced, and implementation was extended to a further 30 communities bringing the total number of beneficiaries to half a million.

Impact on the ground

- Since the Mid Term Review, which took place (February 2000), and when Community based procurement was introduced, soil and water conservation activities (a dry season occupation), have increased from 20 ha in 1998, 316 in 1999, to 1093 in 2000 and up to 423 until the end of CY 2001 (the dry season lasts until late May).
- Soil fertility improvement practices have been applied on 207 ha in 1999, 5951 in 2000, 13,379 ha in 2001; dune fixation, which was carried out over 10 ha in 1998 and 59 in 1999, reached 380 in 2000, and 452 in 2001; the number of trees planted for hedges, windbreaks and shade has increased from 2880 in 1998 to 125,958 in 2001.

- This has been facilitated in part by the provision of 994 ox carts, in addition to the 1303 distributed under this project in previous years. These implements are essential for the transport of tools, manure, agricultural inputs, crops, building and landscaping material necessary for soil and water conservation. Most of these carts were allocated to poor people (women and young) identified by the communities, who provided their mandatory contribution as labor, and will reimburse their community for the credit balance.
- Regarding the strengthening of village capacities, 514 adult literacy center have been opened in 2001 against 251 in 2000, 249 in 1999, and 153 in 1998, each with an attendance of 20 to 40 people.

Lessons learned

- The initial challenge with this project in the context of sustainability was to convince communities to engage in CBNRM without receiving any specific support of incentive from the project (such as “Food for work”, the practice so far in all such projects) and without using heavy machinery. It was found that during the food crisis and until community-managed cereal banks had been established, almost no result was achieved. But during the grain shortage of 2001, beneficiary communities were able to undertake extensive CBNRM operations because food security made the exodus of male labor to coastal countries purposeless, and manpower remained available for NRM during the dry season when crops had been harvested. The deterioration of the environment, usually recognized during the initial participatory diagnostic exercises as the first or second major problem for community development or even survival, was addressed whenever the most urgent food security issue had been solved.
- The second challenge for community development and community-based procurement was the low rate of literacy in rural Niger, many communities of 2 to 5000 people having to rely on a handful of members with basic education, and in some cases even only one young man in this capacity. It was found during the second phase of implementation (2000 onwards) that communities, after being properly trained in CB procurement procedures in the local language, proved to be perfectly able to advertise, select and contract providers for the procurement of goods and services. The rationale for competitive bidding was quickly understood and adopted.
- It was necessary, at the time of the MTR, to strongly encourage project staff to abandon bureaucratic habits, and devote most of their time to direct interaction with the communities. After a short while, this effort was rewarded by a new recognition by the communities of the staff contributions, and relatively impressive technical results in the field. Strong support from the highest Government levels and close supervision by both Resident Mission and HQ staff were instrumental in inducing this change of behavior.
- A relatively small investment in communication (\$ 10,000 for the production of a 40 mn video documentary on project activities in the field and community based procurement procedures), provided a strong return in public interest when broadcast on the national TV network, by raising awareness and attracting reactions from the opinion- and decision-makers.
- Labor-based land reclamation and soil and water conservation, which are replicable and sustainable at community level, even under conditions of deep poverty, address issues about which rural communities are acutely aware, but which they can tackle only when essential issues of food security have been addressed. Supporting the development of animal- powered transport (mainly ox carts worth \$ 400 each) through community-supported short-term credit solves the major problem of transporting heavy and bulky materials (crops, manure, crop residues, building material) over long distances to and from villages, and provides a stepping stone out of poverty for beneficiaries because transport is the source of daily cash income.
- Most communities have proven their ability to manage the Community Development Funds established under the project, by having beneficiaries reimbursing their loans (for which the communities had originally provided joint guarantee) to the CDF and not to the project. The CDF thus established are now financing out of their own resources 30% of all community investments, a good basis towards the sustainability of community development.

The Infobrief is based on information from the Project’s Task Team Leader, Noël Chabeuf, who can be contacted for further information at nchabeuf@worldbank.org

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