



International Fund for Agricultural Development

Climate change: a development challenge IFAD's experience in the field

The decision to create IFAD was taken in 1974 in the wake of the great droughts and famines that struck Africa and Asia in the preceding years.

We work mostly in marginal, rainfed areas that are at risk from water shortage, land degradation and desertification. That is why IFAD's work has always included aspects of adaptation to climate variability and strengthening resistance to environmental stress.

The international community has agreed on four building blocks of response to climate change: adaptation, mitigation, technology and finance. The following are just a few examples of how IFAD's work addresses these four building blocks.

Adaptation

In Sri Lanka, IFAD and GEF are supporting a programme to rehabilitate three key coastal ecosystems – mangroves, coastal lagoons and sand dunes – along the tsunami-devastated east coast. Mangroves along the coast will provide important shoreline protection. The project aims to enhance the resilience of these three ecosystems to climate variability and to reduce the population's vulnerability to extreme weather events.

In China, IFAD is supporting a weather-based index insurance project to help poor farmers. This is a private-public funded activity. Weather-based index insurance links an insurance payout to objective, measurable events such as rainfall or temperature. This means that farmers are better able to manage risk and may be more comfortable investing in agricultural activities that require a higher initial investment.

In Cameroon, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo, IFAD supports the World Agroforestry Centre's tree domestication programme, which has helped thousands of farmers benefit from the domestication, cultivation and sale of fruit and medicinal trees. Tree planting can also help the environment by stabilizing fragile ecosystems such as hillsides, and by enhancing soil fertility.

On the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues, an IFAD-funded programme is training members of communities in fishing methods that do not damage coral reefs or deplete fish stock. The programme has also helped participants diversify their activities into agriculture and micro-enterprises, so that they are not solely dependent on fishing for their livelihoods.

Mitigation

Poor rural people can play an important role in climate change mitigation by using better agricultural practices and by promoting forestry activities that will contribute to carbon dioxide absorption.

IFAD currently supports reforestation projects in the Himalayas and Yemen. An IFAD-supported programme in China is setting up solar power systems to help poor households get energy from the abundant sunlight in the area. A biogas project in China is turning human and animal waste into a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide gases that can be used for lighting and cooking.

In eastern Morocco, drought and overgrazing had degraded vast areas of the rangelands. An IFAD-sponsored rehabilitation programme has led to improved rangeland productivity, soil cover, regeneration of medicinal and aromatic plants and improved soil water infiltration.

Finance

IFAD has been working on pro-poor payment for environmental services in Indonesia, the Philippines and Nepal. The activities have had a significant impact on secure access to land, payments for water and maintaining biodiversity. High transaction costs and difficulty in accessing relevant markets mean that the project participants are not yet able to reap the benefits of carbon sequestration activities. They are ready to sell their environmental services, but the connection with carbon markets has yet to be developed.

Technology

IFAD supports research institutes and other bodies to test, adapt and disseminate technology to help climate-proof agriculture. For example, an IFAD grant to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture is funding research into improved soil fertility for yam production in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire. IFAD and the International Centre for Maize and Wheat Improvement have established a partnership to create and deliver stress-tolerant maize varieties to poor farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. IFAD recognizes the importance of blending traditional knowledge with scientific research, and the need to develop stronger alliances for sharing knowledge about responses to climate variability.

IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized United Nations agency dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries. Through low-interest loans and grants, IFAD develops and finances programmes and projects that enable poor rural people to overcome poverty themselves.

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