

Indigenous women and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Latin America

Rural Development Programme for Las Verapaces (PRODEVER), Guatemala

Project title	Rural Development Programme for Las Verapaces (PRODEVER), Guatemala
Thematic area/programme	Assistance to indigenous women
Project duration	2002-2010 (eight years)
Location	Las Verapaces, Guatemala, Latin America
Beneficiaries	16,000 households
Executing agency/agencies	National Fund for Peace/Government of Guatemala (FONAPAZ)
Implementing agency/agencies	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) National Fund for Peace/Government of Guatemala
Source of funds	Total cost: US\$ 26.00 million IFAD loan: US\$ 15.00 million Domestic: US\$ 5.96 million Co-financing: US\$ 5.04 million (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC); Fund for International Development of Guatemala (OFID))

Overview

Poverty is extremely high among the rural inhabitants whose livelihoods are based on the extremely fragile natural resources of Las Verapaces Department, in Guatemala, where the Q'eqchies, Pocomchis and Achis peoples live. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) co-financed Programme aims to generate direct benefits to 16,000 rural indigenous households. In April-May 2003, shortly after PRODEVER was launched, an evaluation was undertaken to determine the differences between the situation of men and that of women in the Department. It was found that women interested in participating in the development activities

supported by PRODEVER would have to either hire someone from outside the family to take care of the children and prepare meals, or take their eldest daughter out of school and have her take charge of these activities. Women were found to suffer from lower education levels, higher rates of illiteracy (80 per cent), less ability to speak the mainstream language (Spanish), heavier domestic workloads, poorer knowledge of their rights, weaker citizenship in their communities, lower self-esteem, and non-recognition of their contributions to family livelihoods in the male-oriented local culture. The study provided the information needed for detailed planning of the activities to be supported by PRODEVER.

What was planned

The overall goal of PRODEVER is to reduce poverty among the rural families living in the poorest municipalities of Las Verapaces Department. Its specific objectives are to: (a) increase their incomes by promoting farming and non-farming income-generating activities; (b) promote and consolidate their local organizations as strong community-based institutions; (c) improve their access to rural financial services; (d) introduce a gender-sensitive approach to all programme-financed activities; (e) preserve and strengthen their natural resource base for future generations; and (f) promote their integration into the mainstream of the national economy. The purpose of the Programme's gender-sensitive approach is to create the conditions necessary for women as well as men to gain access to and exercise equitable control over the services, resources and benefits resulting from the Programme. The gender study of April-May 2003 led to inclusion of the following activities in the Programme's workplans:

(a) *Capacity-building, technical assistance and literacy training at community level.* The programme for bilingual education and training is being carried out at community level, in order to make it easier for women also to attend. Through literacy and skills training, women's ability to participate actively in local organizations and even to occupy decision-making positions within them will be strengthened. The curriculum includes training in the simple business skills required of small-scale entrepreneurs, for example, cost-benefit analysis, allocating of income, management skills, how to obtain desired information etc.;

(b) *Sustainable forest management.* The promotion both of firewood-efficient stoves and of the planting of fast-growing tree species in community wood lots aims to alleviate women's workload and thereby make it easier for them to undertake development activities. It will also diminish the pressures on natural forest resources and hence preserve those resources for future generations;

(c) *Income-generation.* Financial support for women's income-generating activities is associated with training in the skills needed to use



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their loans profitably, increase their incomes and gain access to knowledge and skills;

(d) *Training for community representatives.* Women account for about 30 per cent of the participants in the training programme designed to enable 100 community organizations in respect of formulating and managing their own development projects in a manner that will also reflect the interests and priorities of women.

Who was involved

- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
- Central Government: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, FONAPAZ, National Literacy Committee
- German Technical Cooperation
- Local government: Departmental Council for Development, and municipalities

Specific changes resulting from the project

- Empowerment: large increase in women's active participation in meetings (attendance, voice, vote); women account for 30 per cent of membership in mixed organizations; 65 mobile day-care centres created: 63 to allow women to attend literacy classes and 2 for the capacity-building workshops

- Women's workload alleviated through the building of 204 fuel-efficient stoves and planting 14 hectares of wood lots with 4,080 fast-growing tree seedlings
- Women's health improved: six workshops on reproductive health, maternal care and nutrition (with Ministry of Health); three emergency committees in the municipalities of Cahabón and Alta Verapaz, to assist women during and after difficult childbirth
- Women's economic position enhanced by the financing of 63 income-generating activities, mostly for livestock husbandry (87 per cent), but also for microenterprises (8 per cent) and textile crafts (5 per cent)

Sustainability

- Capacity-building, technical assistance and alphabetization at the community level. Post-literacy support will focus on improving training processes and capacity-building, going beyond the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic to enable women to better administer their productive activities and increase household income
- Sustainable forest management. Training on how to make and maintain firewood-efficient stoves, promotion of local nurseries with a view to their producing seedlings of fast-growing trees; direct involvement of households both to ensure implementation and to enhance ownership

What was learned

- Capacity-building measures aimed at empowering women must include leadership training and awareness-building on self-esteem.
- Women need their own spaces within which to exchange experiences, be listened to and brainstorm with other women, with a view to identifying realistic solutions for their priority problems.
- Literacy training must be bilingual in order to broaden women's horizons and enhance their mobility and communication with outsiders.

Factors contributing to success

- Programme support is based on needs identified by the women themselves.
- Support is provided in the communities.

- Support is associated with capacity-building processes, bilingual literacy training and other measures designed to enable women's active participation, self-esteem and leadership.
- Timetables take account of women's time constraints.

Obstacles or problems identified during the project

- Spouses or family members may block women's active participation in development activities, especially training and capacity-building.
- Male resistance to family planning can hamper progress in this respect.

Documentation/bibliography

For project profiles and existing documentation, visit www.prodever.org

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Programme of Reconstruction and Development for the Quiche and Proderqui Departments (PRODERQUI), Guatemala

Project title	Programme of Reconstruction and Development for the Quiche and Proderqui Departments (PRODERQUI), Guatemala
Thematic area/ programme	Support to indigenous women's groups
Project duration	1998-2007 (nine years)
Location	Quiche Department, Guatemala
Beneficiaries	10,000 rural smallholder families
Executing agency/agencies	National Fund for Peace/Government of Guatemala (FONAPAZ)
Implementing agency/agencies	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS/CI) National Fund for Peace/Government of Guatemala
Source of funds	Total cost: US\$ 19.0 million IFAD loan: US\$ 15.0 million Government: US\$ 4.0 million

Overview

At the beginning of the 1980s, a violent conflict erupted in two of the poorest Departments of Guatemala, Quiche and Verapaces, where 90 per cent of the population is indigenous. The violence was concentrated in the small towns and remote villages, with particularly devastating effects on the women and children of the K'iche, Pocomchi and K'ekch'i peoples.

In addition to enhancing food security, boosting incomes and improving the living conditions of at least 10,000 smallholder families living in 10 municipalities of the two Departments, the Programme of Reconstruction and Development for the Quiche and Proderqui Departments (PRODERQUI) aims to rebuild the social fabric and contribute to the consolidation of peace by strengthening local indigenous organizations, rebuilding the small productive units of indigenous farmers that were destroyed or abandoned during the years of violence, and promoting the socio-economic reintegration of the populations most affected by the conflict. The rationale for the Programme's gender-sensitive approach and methodology is the fact that: (a) a high proportion of the households in the post-conflict areas are headed by women (30 per cent in Quiche); and (b) women can be excellent mediators in a peace process, often contributing in decisive ways to reconciliation and reconstruction.

What was planned

The main objective of PRODERQUI is to promote the installation of effective technical support mechanisms and activities within a broad range of areas that can help both women and men to: increase their incomes from farming and non-farming income-generating activities; recapitalize their small-scale productive units damaged during the conflict and create new ones; consolidate their local organizations and institutions; enhance the role of rural women in economic and social affairs; contribute to the long-term conservation of natural resources and the environment; and support the rights of indigenous communities with respect to their territory, their natural resources and their cultural values.

What the strategy was

The thrusts of the strategy encompass:

(a) *Gender as a cross-cutting issue.* The original design of the Programme had included a sub-component specifically designed to promote women's projects. This design was modified in 2000, placing gender equity at the core of all activities to be financed under the Programme. Since then, all personnel and partner organizations have been expected to adopt a gender-sensitive approach that perceives the family as a whole, including women as well as men, as the focal point for all their activities. The institution cooperating with IFAD, namely, the United Nations Office for Project Services, also hired two gender specialists—a woman and a man—to guide and supervise implementation of the new gender approach. Under the terms of reference laid down in their contracts, they are encouraged to make strong recommendations to Programme management on how to push for gender equality and women's empowerment;

(b) *Alleviating women's workload.* The strategy emphasizes the importance of finding ways to reduce the time spent by women on tasks like fetching water and firewood, preparing meals etc., so that they will have time to participate in development activities. Relevant aspects include: enabling access to clean water; food security; more profitable women's micro-enterprises; silos to store staple cereals; and a food-for-training programme aimed at allowing women to participate in greater numbers;

(c) *Food security.* This is a major focus in the communities where a majority of the inhabitants are living in extreme poverty. Groups of women, in particular, are being trained on how to improve the productivity of their vegetable gardens and orchards, are receiving egg-laying poultry and are being assisted in the creation of revolving group funds;

(d) *Gender training of social promoters.* Trained gender promoters—14 men and 4 women—are encouraging more women to grow irrigated vegetables for cash sale. Their training on subjects like gender

and participation places the family as a whole at the centre of efforts to promote more productive activities;

(e) *Municipal women's offices.* The Programme's general strategy of gender equality, which is based both on the Peace Agreements and the Laws of Social Development Decree 42-2001 and on the decentralization laws, is promoting the active participation of all women—indigenous and non-indigenous—in local development. These laws have enabled the creation of municipal women's offices with the mandate to undertake both advocacy and lobbying in favour of women's views and priorities in participatory planning processes.

Who was involved

- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) as co-operating institution
- Central Government: National Fund for Peace (FONAPAZ), Ministry of Health
- Local governments: municipalities of Quiche, Association for Research and Social Studies (ASIES), Council for Development, Quiche departmental government, Presidential Secretariat for Women's Affairs of Guatemala, Secretariat of Social Works of the First Lady of Guatemala, Human Rights Ombudsman's Office of Guatemala, Forum of the Woman, and Office of Defence for Indigenous Women of Guatemala

Specific changes resulting from the project

- *Alleviating women's workload.* Enhanced participation of women in community affairs; more time available to women for other family and/or community activities; fewer respiratory ailments, illnesses and eye disorders, particularly among children and women; and reduced deforestation
- *Food security.* More varied family diet thanks to better knowledge of food values and increased access to supplementary foods; revolving funds as a source of financing for new economic activities
- *Gender training of social promoters.* Greater awareness of the role women can play in family and community development
- *Municipal women's offices.* Opening of three municipal corporations for the creation and strengthening of three municipal women's offices; interest of other municipalities in such undertakings; increases in gender-specific "spaces" for women's participation both at municipal and at departmental levels; participation of delegates from municipal women's offices in meetings of the Women's Commission at the level of the Departmental



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Council for Development of Guatemala (CODEDE); effective lobbying for allocation by the Government of financial resources from the Departmental Council for women's projects

Sustainability

- *Alleviation of women's workload.* Women showed greater participation in the different activities of the Programme and improved their participation in decision-making processes as a result of the introduction of time-saving devices. The sustainable use of forest resources through diminishing the use of firewood for cooking is sustainable in the long run.
- *Food security.* This encompassed revolving funds able to deliver small loans to group members; and promotion of livestock husbandry, improved family orchards and vegetable gardens, and nutrition education.
- *Gender training of social promoters.* Promoters are local community members identified by the communities themselves.

What was learned

- Women's participation can be increased by reducing the time they spend on domestic and economic tasks.
- Women are reliable borrowers: they repay their loans on time, and administer their revolving funds well after a minimum of organizational strengthening and training.

- Literacy training is crucial and must be delivered with the agreement of the responsible institutions to ensure a higher level of participation of women.

Factors contributing to success

- Time-saving measures allowed women to participate more actively in Programme-supported activities and training.
- Revolving funds enhanced the cohesion of women's groups, thereby laying the groundwork for long-term sustainability.
- Literacy improved the conditions for greater participation by women in decision-making and improving management of income-generating activities.

Obstacles or problems identified during implementation

- Weak participation by women in decision-making owing to poor or no education
- Weak participation by women in training and capacity-building processes owing to spouse's refusal of permission
- Weak participation of adult women in literacy training

Documentation/bibliography

UNOPS, Informe de la misión de supervisión, Marzo 2002

IFAD, Informe de evaluación de la misión ex-ante, Septiembre 1996

For project profiles and existing documentation, www.proderqui.org

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Sustainable Agricultural Development and Environmental Protection Project for the Darién (PRODARIEN), Panama

Project title	Sustainable Agricultural Development and Environmental Protection Project for the Darién (PRODARIEN), Panama
Thematic area/programme	Rural development
Project duration	1996-2005 (nine years)
Location	Darién Province, Panama
Beneficiaries	60 communities (80 per cent indigenous, 20 per cent Afrodariens)
Executing agency/agencies	IFAD Government of Panama
Implementing agency/agencies	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Government of Panama (Ministry of Agricultural Development)
Source of funds	IFAD and Government of Panama

Overview

The Darién region, situated on the border between Panama and Colombia, has extraordinary wealth in terms of biodiversity, forests and water sources. It is characterized by a low population density (50,000 inhabitants per 16,800 square kilometres), little infrastructure, high levels of poverty and of extreme poverty (two thirds of its population), and a low human development index. Life expectancy at birth is only 64 years compared with the national average of 76, and the child mortality rate is three times the national average. The region is inhabited by five ethnic groups, of which three (Emberá, Wounaan and Kuna) are indigenous and two (Afro-descendientes and Mestizos) are non-indigenous. Indigenous territories within the region are self-managed by elected traditional authorities. The main sources of subsistence and income are extractive activities like hunting, fishing and logging, as well as slash-and-burn agriculture. Crafts are an important activity for indigenous women.

What was planned

The Sustainable Agricultural Development and Environmental Protection Project for the Darién (PRODARIEN) was designed to improve rural living conditions by fostering community organizations and strengthening traditional institutions and governance. Recognizing the importance of extractive activities, it includes a training programme on environmental sustainability and promotes replanting of trees. It also aims at improv-

ing agriculture by facilitating access to extension, credit and training on marketing skills. It also provides financing for the microenterprises of women's groups.

Who was involved

- Ministry of Agricultural Development
- Sub-office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Darién
- Other government institutions (for example, Institute of Agricultural Markets, National Authority for the Environment, and Institute of Agronomic Research of Panama)

Specific changes resulting from the project

- Indigenous women's organizations are legally recognized and actively involved in managing resources and implementing their projects
- Women's organizations are running profitable enterprises (restaurants, bakeries, small commodity stores) and undertaking profitable activities (sale of gasoline, processing of sugar cane and rice etc.)
- Women's organizations are marketing agricultural products and crafts
- Women have access to credit and other services
- Women participate more actively in community organizations
- Women are elected to administrative and managerial positions within the organizations
- Indigenous women are adopting innovative practices as farmers and microentrepreneurs
- In a multicultural region, the women of different ethnic groups interact, exchange experiences and are developing a common agenda

Sustainability

Networks of organizations as well as a federation of networks have been created to mobilize and offer economic and technical support. Other sources of funding have been mobilized to support the organizations and project-promoted development processes.

Replication/spin-off effects

Information and experiences are being exchanged with other projects in the country that are combating poverty, especially those that are working with indigenous peoples. New donors are becoming involved in the



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development of the region: for example, the Global Environment Fund approved a Programme of Small Grants that is scheduled to start next year in the Darién region. UNDP is providing funding to support the federation of organizations and other development initiatives. Other national and international organizations, such as Fundación Natura (Nature Foundation) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), have expressed interest in creating alliances in the region.

What was learned

- Women's interests and agendas differ from those of men (for example, women tend to be more interested in family planning and other aspects of reproductive health). Projects must analyse these differences and make provisions for appropriate initiatives also for women.
- There are structural barriers to the participation of indigenous women. Projects must take account of these barriers so as to be able to promote equality of opportunities. Under PRODARIEN, the following measures were found effective in addressing structural barriers such as those arising from language and traditional gender roles and responsibilities:
 - ♦ Using native languages and translators to overcome the fact that women had fewer opportunities than men to learn the mainstream language;

- ◆ Organizing activities at village level to facilitate participation by women;
 - ◆ Creating temporary childcare centres to enable women to bring their children with them to meetings and training sessions;
 - ◆ Fostering non-farm employment or income-generating activities to expand women's economic opportunities and thereby facilitate their social and economic integration;
 - ◆ Paying particular attention to households headed by women, as they tended to be the poorest;
 - ◆ Involving men in efforts to promote the participation of women;
 - ◆ Practising positive discrimination where necessary to stimulate participation by women.
- Income managed by women is mostly allocated to improving housing and living standards or educating children or retained as savings.
 - Women are more committed and accept responsibility more readily in the context of development activities.
 - Gender training and awareness-building of all project personnel is critically important to ensuring that gender will become a cross-cutting issue for all components.
 - Constant monitoring of gender indicators is critically important.
 - Project management must give high priority to gender issues.

Factors contributing to success

- Sensitization and education of project personnel on gender equity issues
- Cross-cutting inclusion of gender equity issues and use of specific indicators to monitor gender-sensitive performances
- The significant profits reaped by women from economic activities
- Women's enthusiasm and commitment
- The project's demand-led approach

Obstacles or problems identified during the project

- The role of cultural factors in limiting the role of indigenous women
- Male resistance at all levels, from design to implementation (staff and beneficiaries)

- Lengthy period between design and implementation, calling for significant flexibility and willingness of the cooperating and financing agencies to make the necessary adjustments

Documentation/bibliography

PRODARIEN, “Voces de la comunidad (testimonios de beneficiarias)”, a collection of beneficiaries’ interviews

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Asia

Enhancing Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Protecting Intellectual Property Rights in Western Mindanao, Philippines

Project title	Enhancing Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Protecting Intellectual Property Rights in Western Mindanao, Philippines
Thematic area/programme	Empowerment
Project duration	2003-2004
Location	Lakewood, Western Mindanao, Philippines
Beneficiaries	Subanen Indigenous Communities
Executing agency/agencies	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF)
Implementing agency/agencies	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
Source of funds	IFAD, through the Western Mindanao Community Initiatives Project (US\$ 10,500) and through a grant to ICRAF (US\$ 35,000)

Overview

Since they formulated their ancestral domain management plan, in 1998, the Subanen communities had expressed interest in documenting the flora of their ancestral domain. Between 2003 and 2004, following the implementation by the Department of Agrarian Reform of the 2001 IFAD-financed Western Mindanao Community Initiatives Project (WMCIP), an IFAD technical assistance grant (TAG No. 486) to the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) made it possible to provide technical assistance in documenting the ethno-botanical knowledge of the Subanen indigenous communities, especially women.

What was planned

The objectives of the project were fourfold: (a) to facilitate local participatory natural resource management planning of ancestral domains; (b) to assist indigenous organizations in identifying and documenting all their traditional rice varieties, and all their wild plants and animals; (c) to establish the property rights of local communities over their knowledge systems and practices; and (d) to ensure that no biological specimens or genetic resources left the area without the “free and prior informed consent” of the concerned communities. A fourfold approach to the documentation work was adopted, encompassing:

(a) *Multidisciplinary documentation.* A team of local researchers, half of them women, explored and documented the expertise of tribal plant experts. The team was supported by a multidisciplinary team of specialists;

(b) *Participatory documentation.* All the documentation activities focused on consensus-building and the convergence of the interests of the indigenous communities and the institutions involved. The communities were empowered by the transferring of the skills in technical documentation to the women and men making up the team. The Subanen community, especially women, carried out most of the documentation work, with the institutions as facilitators. Members of the community were involved at all stages, from that of the setting of research priorities through the stages of data gathering and processing, and the production of knowledge outputs. Illiterate but knowledgeable community elders, especially women, provided the information which was documented by literate younger members of the community;

(c) *Culturally sensitive documentation.* The ethno-botanical documentation work was conducted in a manner that was deliberately sensitive to local culture. Outsiders respected customary rules and behaviour during fieldwork: for example, ritual offerings before entering a documentation site; a thanksgiving ceremony upon leaving it; respect for taboos on matters (guarded secrets) whose public revelation was perceived as likely to compromise the well-being of the entire community etc. Reliance on community members as documenters simplified the task, as they were already familiar with local customs and mores;

(d) *Documentation sensitive to the issue of intellectual property rights.* As there was consciousness of the need to protect the intellectual property rights of the community, technical assistance was provided in helping the communities ensure that material was produced that guaranteed their intellectual property rights.

What the strategy was

The strategy comprised both an informal and a formal approach.

- The *informal approach* entailed publishing the scientific name and generic use of medicinal plants but not detailing the recipes, dosages and specific illnesses for which they are used. This approach was adopted to encourage outsiders to seek permission from the community and come to mutually agreed arrangements before procuring complete ethno-medicinal information for commercial purposes.
- The *formal approach* consisted of four elements:
 - ♦ A memorandum of agreement witnessed by the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples stating that: (a) owner-

ship of documented ethno-botanical knowledge remained with the indigenous community; (b) no biological specimens should leave the community without free and prior informed consent; (c) future commercial utilization of ethno-botanical knowledge, if any, would require free and prior informed consent; (d) outsiders and participating organizations must observe customary laws in the conduct of documentation;

- ♦ Digital encryption of electronic knowledge products and technology;
- ♦ Registration of copyright-protected information such as that in books, magazines and electronic albums with the Philippine National Library;
- ♦ Recourse to the Plant Variety Protection Act (RA 9168). Under this act, a Certificate of Plant Variety Protection may be granted for plant varieties that are “new, distinct, uniform and stable”. The rice varieties developed by generations of Subanen may be considered new and distinct because they are not yet present in the global database of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

Who was involved

- International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF)
- Department of Agrarian Reform (through the Western Mindanao Community Initiative Project)
- Subanen Tribal Council
- Ipil—Development Foundation Lakewood Consortium (IDF)

Specific changes resulting from the project

- Over 568 plants, representing 70 per cent of the plants growing in the ancestral domain of the Subanen indigenous peoples, and their uses (food, medicine etc.) were identified and catalogued; 400 of the documented plants were stored in a database with digital photographs; and close to 300 specimens were collected, dried and mounted for the Subanen herbarium.
- A large amount of culturally relevant educational material was produced and copyrighted in the name of the Subanen Tribal Council. Publications, including books, magazines and digitally encrypted photo albums, are being reproduced for use in the Subanen literacy programme.



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- The technical expertise of the Subanen members of the ethnobotanical documentation team, as well as of concerned women, was enhanced significantly.
- A Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Government on behalf of the communities and based on their specific requests and stipulations secures their intellectual property rights and options for obtaining benefits from any future commercial or beneficial use of their knowledge, by requiring that the free and prior informed consent of the community be obtained before any knowledge is shared with a third party.
- A body of culturally relevant learning materials was produced with the potential for protecting/revitalizing traditional culture.
- There was reproduction of rice that was on the verge of extinction.

Sustainability

The project awakened in local women a strong interest in continuing the reproduction of threatened rice varieties for in situ (on-farm) conservation and documentation. In 2004 and 2005, a total of 82 traditional rice varieties were collected and planted for the first cycle of morphologic documentation by groups of women, who are traditional seed-keepers and seed-growers.

Replication/spin-off effects

The Lakewood approach has been adopted for the documentation of plant diversity in the ancestral domain of the Kankanaey peoples in Bakun, Benguet (also in the Philippines). After testing the approach in Bakun, the regional office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in northern Luzon entered into a memorandum of agreement with various government and non-governmental organizations in the region to carry out ethno-botanical documentation jointly in all ancestral domains within the Cordillera Administrative Region.

What was learned

- The project demonstrated that the ethno-botanical knowledge of indigenous women (and men) covers a wide spectrum of plant species (trees, vines, herbs, shrubs, grasses, ferns, edible mushrooms, palms and mosses), most of which have multiple uses. The documented species were used as medicine (62 per cent), food (37 per cent) and construction materials (20 per cent).
- Ethno-botanical knowledge can become an effective development tool for improving the living conditions of indigenous communities without degrading their environment. It can be used to increase and enhance livelihood options, revitalize agriculture, improve food security and health, and promote a sense of cultural pride within the community.

Factors contributing to success

- High level of interest on the part of the beneficiaries, as the project responded to a development thrust that had been identified by them in an already formulated development plan
- Collaboration of several organizations towards achieving the same goal channelled through a participatory approach
- Use of gender-sensitive, multidisciplinary, participatory and culture-sensitive research methods
- Respect for local culture and community intellectual property rights

Obstacles or problems identified during the project

- The culturally important plants are heavily utilized without attention to protection or regeneration and some have already become rare or endangered species.

Documentation/bibliography

Vel J. Suminguit, "Indigenous knowledge systems and intellectual property rights: an enabling tool for development with identity", 2005 (document prepared for the International Workshop on Traditional Knowledge, Panama City, 21-23 September 2005)

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Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project (HLFFDP), Nepal

Project title	Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project (HLFFDP), Nepal
Thematic area/programme	Rural development
Project duration	1993-2003
Location	Nepal
Beneficiaries	11,756 poor households
Executing agency/agencies	Department of Forests (Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation) Department of Livestock Services (Ministry of Agriculture/Cooperatives) Agricultural Development Bank of Nepal National Agricultural Research Council (NARC)
Implementing agency/agencies	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
Source of funds	Total cost: US\$ 12.00 million IFAD loan: US\$ 6.00 million Netherlands grant: US\$ 4.85 million Government: US\$ 1.15 million

Overview

The Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project (HLFFDP) sought both to raise the living standards of the poor and to regenerate degraded forest land. Its rationale, perceived as an alternative both to nationalization and to the community forestry approaches, was based on giving to small groups secure user rights over blocks of degraded forest which they would rehabilitate themselves. The 10 districts covered by the project were the traditional lands of several indigenous groups, including the Tamang, the Danuwar, the Praja, the Magar and the Majhi. A total of 7,377 hectares of degraded forest were rehabilitated by 1,729 leasehold groups comprising 11,756 poor households. Under a 40-year lease agreement, the leasehold groups have exclusive user rights over the products of the rehabilitated forest within the framework of an agreed management plan.

What was planned

The main activities included:

- (a) Fostering the creation of leasehold groups of 5 to 10 households each, and promotion of regular meetings to collect monthly savings, deliver loans and collect repayments;

- (b) Integration of women into mainstream forestry activities (instead of supporting specific women's activities);
- (c) Employment of women as group promoters.

What the strategy was

- In order to address the negative effects of “open access” management which had been resulting in widespread deforestation and degradation, the project introduced the idea of leasing specific tracts of degraded forest lands to specific groups, mainly women, willing to undertake their rehabilitation in exchange for secure access to the products thereof.
- As women represented the majority of the beneficiaries, women were recruited as group promoters to assist in fostering the activity of additional groups, for example, by linking their communities with the line agencies and extension staff.

Who was involved

- United Nations Office for Project Services
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- Department of Forestry
- Government of the Netherlands

Specific changes resulting from the project

- The project's basic premise, namely, that poverty alleviation and reforestation could be addressed simultaneously by transferring degraded lands to the very poor, was proved correct.
- Men increasingly accepted women's new status and their right to have agricultural land registered in their name.
- Biodiversity improved on the leasehold lands as a result of improved management (controlled grazing, controlled use of fire, enrichment planting): populations of plant species in monitored sites increased by 57-86 per cent over the period 1994-2000, and although herd sizes increased, shortages of animal feed actually diminished.
- Women acquired basic literacy skills and both men and women are more aware both of their legal rights and of the importance for themselves and their families of adopting new ideas with regard to education, health, sanitation and nutrition.

Sustainability

- The long-term leasehold arrangement, though initially for 40 years, is renewable.

- The impressive re-greening of most leasehold sites and the establishment of grasses and forage legumes are likely to encourage leaseholders to maintain grazing bans.
- The groups approach lays the groundwork for eventual withdrawal of line departments and group promoters.
- The creation of 120 inter-group organizations and 18 multi-purpose cooperatives, although unanticipated, has been widely regarded as highly promising.

Replication/spin-off effects

The Government of Nepal has decided to extend the leasehold concept to 16 additional districts as the first step towards covering all 75 districts of the country. The project's approach was replicated in the Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme (LFLP) approved by the Executive Board of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in December 2004. LFLP is an eight-year programme aimed at reducing the poverty of 44,300 households in 22 districts. Its objectives are to: (a) increase household forage and tree crop production through the environmentally sound management of rehabilitated leasehold plots; (b) improve household incomes from small livestock (goats); (c) foster the delivery by viable microfinance institutions of financial services to the leaseholders; and (d) strengthen the Government's capacity to implement leasehold forestry as a national poverty reduction programme with a strong gender equity focus.

What was learned

- Giving women secure access to land and forestry can transform their lives both economically and socially. Economically, this gives them access to a more secure and stable source of income and to new ways of making money for their families. Socially, they acquire a new sense of self-confidence and self-esteem: their husbands show growing respect for them and they are increasingly involved in higher levels of responsibility and decision-making. These transformations are weakening the unequal power relations that foster poverty both of their households and in their communities.
- External support should be planned and carried out in a complementary manner.
- The indigenous knowledge and active participation of farmers are crucial in defining and implementing environmentally sound land-use options for fodder, forage and livestock. Local practices with regard to the management of the tree canopy and understorey forage cultivation should be investigated



UN Photo/Isaac

more thoroughly. While the introduction of exotic trees and grasses should not necessarily be halted, greater consideration should be given to the competition between local and introduced species. The key requirement is to establish lively communication and promote site-specific packages and appropriate tree-forage models based on indigenous knowledge and market opportunities.

- There is a strong need to assess the demand and market structures for forage and to develop marketing strategies before promoting forage production. Livestock-rearing and the sale of grass seeds should not be overemphasized during the early stages of a project.
- The provision of training should be demand-led and the preferences of group members should be entirely respected.
- Leasehold groups should be encouraged through training and support to form or join inter-group organizations and eventually create a national federation of groups.

Factors contributing to success

- Flexibility in targeting

Obstacles or problems identified during the project

- Slow rate of disbursement

- Conditionality for withdrawal by the Crown, legal ambiguities concerning the status of lease certificates and the problem of inheritability of leasehold rights, issues that need to be addressed
- The present arrangement recognizes only collective rights of groups, without defining the rights of individual members
- Forgotten “social capital”: the original design did not envisage the creation of grass-roots institutions other than leasehold groups, nor did it contemplate any attempt to promote savings outside the limited scheme of the Small Farmer Development Project

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North-eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas (NERCRMP), India

Project title	North-eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas (NERCRMP), India	
Thematic area/programme	Agricultural development	
Project duration	1997-2008 (nine years)	
Location	North-eastern region	
Beneficiaries	39,200 households	
Executing agency/agencies	State Coordinating Committee for Government Activities (SCCGA)	
Implementing agency/agencies	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)	
Source of funds	Total cost:	US\$ 33.22 million
	IFAD loan:	US\$ 22.90 million
	Institutional financing:	US\$ 1.20 million
	Government:	US\$ 5.60 million
	Beneficiaries:	US\$ 3.50 million

Overview

Characterized by isolation, insecurity and remoteness in terms of both access and communication, the North-eastern region of India has a predominantly tribal population of over 30 million small-scale *jhum* (shifting agriculture) farmers with per capita incomes estimated at only 65 per cent of the national average, as well as a long history of inter-ethnic strife. The project area, comprising 862 villages and 39,200 households in the States of Manipur, Meghalaya and Assam (Hill districts), is characterized by a variety of agro-climatic zones and tribal groups: the Tangkhuls and Nangas in Manipur, the Khasi and the Garo in Meghalaya, and the Karbi and the Dimasa in Assam. Although these districts have experienced protracted conflict linked to local peoples' quest for freedom and the sovereignty of the Indian State, women were always agents of peace and dialogue. In 1974, they set up one of the most widely respected welfare-cum-human rights organizations of the region, Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL). In addition to undertaking a host of social activities aimed at uplifting women, TSL assisted the victims of conflict and was an important mediator between the people and the Government.

Despite such efforts, women continue to be perceived as second-class members of the household, with few legal rights over and within it. They perform most of the work done by the family, including weaving and agriculture, but it is their husbands who own the family property. Girls are



IFAD/Hollingworth

valued more for their work than for their status as individuals. According to the IFAD report on mainstreaming gender in Asia: “A woman in the Tangkhul society is much like a beast of burden, putting in 14-16 hours of work a day while the average working man does about half.”

What was planned

The project’s overall goal is to improve the livelihood of vulnerable groups in a sustainable manner, by improving the management of their resource base in ways that can protect and regenerate the environment. This goal is pursued by: (a) enhancing the capabilities of local people; (b) increasing family incomes from farm and non-farm sources; (c) fostering environmental awareness and knowledge; (d) establishing effective systems for input delivery and asset management; (e) increasing the participation of women in local institutions and decision-making; (f) enhancing saving capacity and thrift; and (g) providing basic services and social infrastructure. The resulting six components are the following:

(a) *Capacity-building of communities and participating agencies.* Helping communities to (i) establish viable, equitable and sustainable village institutions, (ii) formulate community resource management plans and (iii) strengthen their capacity to manage their development initiatives through training, in-country study tours and self-help groups;

(b) *Economic livelihoods.* Enhancing livelihoods by introducing/improving a wide range of on-farm and non-farm activities, including

irrigation, improved practices for crops and livestock, modifications to *jhum* plots, input supplies, fish farming, agro-processing and credit;

(c) *Community-based biodiversity conservation*. Protecting the region's rich biodiversity resources through protecting sacred groves and introducing buffer zone management, developing alternative livelihood sources for adjacent communities, surveys of biodiversity, creation of a database on local flora, conservation of endangered species, and awareness-raising programmes;

(d) *Social sector activities*. Improving access to basic services by building drinking-water schemes, training health workers, and providing basic medicines and training;

(e) *Village roads and rural electrification*. Improving access to markets by upgrading 170 kilometres of village roads and building 20 kilometres of new roads, and broadening the base of the rural economy by providing electricity so as to open up new possibilities for non-farm enterprises;

(f) *Project management*. Strengthening the capacity of the implementing agencies, and developing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation system.

What the strategy was

The patriarchal sociocultural and political backdrop prompted a strong focus on gender equality, ecology, participation and sustainability. The aim was to help women improve their position within their households and communities by enhancing their active role in economic and social activities. Instruments like natural resource management groups and self-help groups were used both to generate meaningful participation by women and to provide them with a chance to move beyond their traditionally subordinate role. The central principle of self-help groups is that women do not have to depend on outsiders for the credit they need for their economic activities. Their self-help groups, whose guiding principles are thrift and credit, allow them to increase their incomes and exchange experiences with other women. The end result is greater confidence in addressing their strategic needs. A facilitator in each of the beneficiary villages is responsible for providing the women's self-help groups with the information and guidance needed in their daily operation and for liaising between them and providers of support (for example, partner non-governmental organizations and project staff at district headquarters).

Who was involved

- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
- State Coordinating Committee for Government Activities (SCCGA)

Obstacles or problems identified during the project

The main obstacle to women's empowerment arises from local traditions, including the unequal, gender-based division of labour, that are deeply entrenched in strong patriarchal societies, and the exclusion of women from decision-making and from administration systems. It is necessary, first, to reverse the idea that women are primarily providers of services and, second, to confront the structural conditions that reinforce their subjugation in society. Gender issues were addressed by encouraging women's involvement in the management and use of community resources through natural resource management groups and by increasing their access to credit and training through self-help groups.

Sustainability

Promotion of self-help groups in beneficiary villages has led to deep changes in the mindset, attitudes and confidence level of women that are widespread and tangible. The very act of learning to read and write is empowering women, and this, in turn, is enhancing the chances of the sustainability of project efforts. Training in bookkeeping and accounting further increases their self-confidence and they seem to have internalized the new habits of saving and thrift introduced by the project. These achievements are likely to enhance their decision-making and financial management capability in the long run and hence improve their position both within the household and in the community. This said, the weak economic base of the self-help groups remains a concern.

Specific changes resulting from the project

- *Poverty reduction.* The category of "poorest households" has shrunk from 9,742 to 6,455 project-wide, and the category of "better-off households" has increased from 172 to 625. In other words, 18 per cent of the poorest households no longer belong to the poorest households category and 2 per cent of the once-poor households now belong to the better-off category.
- *Natural resources management.* Eight hundred and twenty-five natural resource management groups (with a female membership of over 50 per cent) are managing funds for watershed development and natural resource management activities, including conservation and protection; 10,211 hectares of *jhum* land have been turned over to permanent cultivation, including horticultural crops, and community forests for biodiversity management. About 370 hectares of new terracing were installed and 1,530 hectares of small-scale irrigation structures were repaired.



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- *Economic benefits.* Cash savings are increasingly common thanks to the fostering of 2,071 self-help groups with some 33,056 women as members. Total group savings in January 2005 amounted to 280,500 United States dollars. Loans financed through savings, which are usually small (US\$ 4.50–US\$ 67.00, depending on the availability of funds), are used for income-generating activities (cultivation of poultry, pigs, maize and potatoes and weaving) as well as school fees and consumption. Many economic activities are time-saving for women, in addition to generating more income and improving food availability. Forest management and water conservation activities also reduce their drudgery, for example, by reducing distances to water sources. Home vegetable gardens, previously little known in the area, have been created by 16,322 households and have added substantially to household food supply and sales. Animal husbandry has increased markedly, with 8,162 and 12,334 households, having adopted pig- and poultry-rearing, respectively. Ten villages in the West Garo Hills have established a cooperative milk chain and hope to undertake milk processing and packaging in the near future. The number of fish ponds has increased substantially (176 hectares); and 470 hectares in 547 locations are under fish-rice culture in irrigated terraces.
- *Social benefits.* The self-help group movement is particularly effective in bringing village women together and thereby en-

hancing their social and political status. They are and have been effective in representing and defending their interests. Overall, women are becoming more confident. Many natural resource management groups and self-help groups are conducting adult education programmes for members and promoting the schooling of girls. Significant achievements with regard to water supplies and education include the construction of 347 water supply schemes, 134 reservoirs, 34 ponds, 30 ring wells and 22,120 low-cost toilets, as well as 16 school buildings, and the provision of school funds and infrastructure for 66 schools.

- The road network was greatly enhanced with 181 kilometres of new roads, 126 kilometres of improved roads, 46 culverts/small bridges and 14 hanging bridges. In addition, 80 villages have been connected to the electrical grid and one micro-hydraulic scheme has been financed and built.

What was learned

- As a result of short time-horizons and small markets, the value of local produce is easily swamped by large-scale production. This reduces prices and discourages farmers. More attention must therefore be directed towards the downstream activities of harvesting, handling, storage and presentation.
- Natural resource management groups and self-help groups can play an active and effective role in mitigating ethnic conflict by educating and building awareness of the advantages of reconciliation, coexistence and mutual support, through, for example, a multi-ethnic forum for peace, reconciliation and development in sensitive zones.
- Self-help groups promote and reinforce women's solidarity. The project's positive experiences confirm their importance as an instrument for fostering a savings mentality leading to self-reliant and self-sustaining development. It is necessary, however, to strengthen the ties between these groups and the formal rural financial institutions.
- The emergence of unanticipated forms of cooperative ventures among some members (that is to say, collective farming and rearing) must be identified early on and supported.
- If women are to be empowered in societies where the major decision-making and official positions remain the prerogative of men, it is necessary that women's rights to land be secure and legally recognized. Women's land should be recorded in their name in order to protect their investments and earnings.

Factors contributing to success

- The key factor in women's empowerment has been the fostering of self-help groups allowing them both to increase and control their savings and to generate new sources of income.
- Both natural resource management groups and self-help groups have conducted adult education programmes for their members, including women, and are encouraging the schooling of girls.
- Another important factor was the proactive encouragement of women's participation in the management and use of community resources (natural resource management groups) and in the creation of self-help groups.

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Oudomxai Community Initiatives Support Project, Lao People's Democratic Republic

Project title	Oudomxai Community Initiatives Support Project, Lao People's Democratic Republic	
Thematic area/ programme	Agricultural development	
Project duration	2003-2010 (seven years)	
Location	Oudomxai region	
Beneficiaries	29,000 households (117,000 people) in 187 villages	
Executing agency/ agencies	Provincial government of Oudomxai	
Implementing agency/ agencies	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)	
Source of funds	Total cost:	US\$ 21.14 million
	IFAD loan:	US\$ 13.41 million
	Luxembourg:	US\$ 1.77 million
	World Food Programme:	US\$ 1.76 million

Overview

Oudomxai is the second poorest province of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, with a poverty incidence of 73.2 per cent and widespread dependence on shifting cultivation and opium production, traditionally a major source of income for the farmers living in the mid-hill and upland areas. The area planted to opium by the indigenous peoples in Oudomxai province doubled from 1992 to 2000, making Oudomxai the country's largest producer; and as a result of the Government's efforts to reduce shifting cultivation and eradicate opium cultivation, income and food security is deteriorating in these areas, which are inhabited mainly by indigenous peoples.

The project aims to reverse this trend and improve the livelihoods of these peoples by adopting a two-pronged approach encompassing: (a) diversifying on- and off-farm activities and (b) developing alternative livelihoods. The area covered comprises seven districts and 728 villages in the province of Oudomxai, situated in the north-western part of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. In 2000, the total population of the area was estimated at 236,525; the total number of households was 38,587 with nearly 90 per cent of this population living in rural areas. About 75 per cent of the population is made up of indigenous peoples, the majority of whom live below the national poverty line and depend on shifting cultivation and opium. Four main farming systems can be distinguished:



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upland rice, upland rice/opium, lowland rice and upland/lowland rice. The upland rice-based farming system is the most widespread. Rice growing for household consumption is the main crop under shifting cultivation in the mid-hills and uplands.

What was planned

The project's main objective is to improve the capability of poor indigenous families and their organizations to make efficient use of their natural resources and of the services available for their own social and economic development. The approach involves a process of community mobilization and participatory development aimed at increasing farm productivities and hence the incomes from stabilized agriculture and non-opium production. The five components are: (a) community development; (b) land tenure, agriculture and natural resource management; (c) rural financial services; (d) rural infrastructure; and (e) gender.

What the strategy was

The project's gender component recognizes the major role that women play in both on- and off-farm activities. The women of the indigenous communities are facing an increasingly critical situation with regard to land ownership. Although the traditional kinship and residence patterns of many groups are matrilineal, with matrilineal inheritance systems, land allocation documents normally carry the name of the husband as the household

head and he becomes the legal owner of land inherited by his wife. This situation has serious implications for women's ability to provide land as collateral for credit.

Gender considerations are mainstreamed in all project activities, through the Lao Women's Union, a mass organization mandated to mobilize women. The Union is providing women with training in on- and off-farm income-generating skills (numeracy and literacy, marketing, and management of small business and village development funds) as well as health. The project is also building local drinking-water systems that alleviate women's burden and improve family health status.

Who was involved

- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
- World Food Programme (WFP)
- Provincial government of Oudomxai
- Department of Planning and Cooperation
- Government of Luxembourg

Specific changes resulting from the project

- Substantial numbers of women are employed by the implementing agencies: 24 per cent of the 296 staff of the project; 20 out of the 69 staff (29 per cent) at provincial level; and 52 out of the 227 staff (23 per cent) at the district level.
- Under the community development component, 683 people, including 411 women, attended 103 days of gender training, and 36 per cent of the participants in all training activities are women.

What was learned

- To ensure that project activities respond to the needs of the target group, community-led development and participatory planning from the village level should be integral parts of both project design and implementation, and a government agency should be made responsible for coordination.
- Project implementation should be as decentralized as possible to the provincial, district and village levels, and phased in in accordance with existing institutional capacity at these levels.
- The issuing of land-use certificates in the name both of wife and of husband prior to the planning of irrigation schemes enhances beneficiary participation and builds the sense of ownership needed to ensure that the schemes will be appropriately



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managed and maintained by the communities or water users associations.

Factors contributing to success

- Strong focus on women
- Provision for a broad range of activities, including gender awareness, income-generating activities and study tours

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Rural Income Diversification Project in Tuyen Quang Province, Viet Nam

Project title	Rural Income Diversification Project in Tuyen Quang Province, Viet Nam	
Thematic area/programme	Rural development	
Project duration	2002-2008 (six years)	
Location	Tuyen Quang Province, Northern Uplands region, Viet Nam	
Beneficiaries	49,000 households	
Executing agency/agencies	Provincial People's Committee of Tuyen Quang Province	
Implementing agency/agencies	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)	
Source of funds	Total cost:	US\$ 30.43 million
	IFAD loan:	US\$ 20.90 million
	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency:	US\$ 5.00 million
	Government:	US\$ 2.70 million
	Beneficiaries:	US\$ 1.80 million

Overview

The project area is located in Tuyen Quang Province, in the Northern Uplands region of Viet Nam, where indigenous peoples account for 74 per cent of all households and 83 per cent of the poor. The Province is predominantly mountainous, with altitudes of up to 1,400 metres above sea level. The project's target group comprises 49,000 households living in 936 villages in the 66 poorest communes of the Province. The Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas has classified 42 of these communes as "most disadvantaged" because of their mountainous, remote locations and poorly developed infrastructure.

Historically, Vietnamese women have played an important role in national development and traditionally enjoy a higher status than that of the women in many other Asian countries. The ongoing transition to a market-based economy, however, is generating gender disparities and erosion of the social gains made by women during the socialist period. This IFAD-initiated project, as reflected in its design and implementation, therefore views women as constituting a special target group for efforts aimed at improving productive roles.

What was planned

The project seeks to improve the socio-economic status of poor upland indigenous peoples, women as well as men, by increasing their capacities and roles



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in decision-making, providing institutional support and services, enhancing food security, promoting sustainable use of natural resources, and integrating forest-based producers into the market. It has adopted a comprehensive empowerment approach that envisages: (a) a deepening of the decentralization process that recognizes an expanded role for village development boards in needs assessment, prioritization and implementation; (b) the adoption of highly participatory planning processes; and (c) the introduction of a flexible and demand-driven credit scheme. Throughout design and implementation, women are viewed as a special target group for all five components of the project, namely: (a) microfinance and microenterprise development; (b) upland farming systems extension and research; (c) livestock improvement and animal health; (d) forest land management; and (e) gender.

What the strategy was

The gender component aims at empowering women from indigenous upland communities by improving their access to and control over productive resources. A Women's Livelihood Fund (WLF) established in each of the beneficiary communes assists women in carrying out activities that they themselves have identified with a view to improving their living conditions. Each of the beneficiary villages has a WLF Village Group. The Women's Livelihood Fund may be used to fund: any activities that will benefit groups of village women; support for destitute households; and support to education (schools and short-term vocational training). The planning and management of Women's Livelihood Fund-funded activities follow a highly decentralized and participatory approach.

Who was involved

- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
- Provincial People's Committee of Tuyen Quang Province
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)

Specific changes resulting from the project

- The membership of self-help groups is 71 per cent women and 71 per cent indigenous groups. The women's self-help groups fostered in 2002 and 2003 are developing well and are waiting eagerly to receive land.
- Nearly 70 per cent of the 3,300 persons trained in farmer field schools were women.
- Land-use certificates in the names of both spouses are still pending owing both to ongoing land exchanges and relocation and to new legislation that has altered the format of the "red books".
- The chief accountant of the Provincial Project Coordination Unit is a woman, but only 7 of the remaining 22 Coordination Unit staff are women. However, women account for 47 per cent of the staff at district level. Three of the 11 community organizers are women.
- Two hundred and two project staff and 53 village leaders have undergone training on gender-awareness enhancement and gender mainstreaming. Discussions with the implementers at project, district, commune and village levels suggest that both the implementing agencies and the target population are fully aware of their responsibilities with respect to gender issues and the corresponding project targets.

Sustainability

- According to the Women's Union in Tuyen Quang, the most successful activity is credit. Reflecting on why women are targeted for collateral-free group-based credit, it reported that: "traditionally, women keep the key to the family's savings box", "women know how to manage family money", "women don't waste money on drinking or gambling", "women are creditworthy", "the leaders of women's SHGs see that payments are made in time".
- Self-help groups with access to project support in the form of agricultural extension, irrigation and credit have recorded enormous success in improving the economic position of women members and in poverty alleviation.

Replication/spin-off effects

- This is the follow-up of a previous project entitled "Participatory resource management project: Tuyen Quang Province", which was launched between 1994 and 2000.



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What was learned

- Specific activities must be designed and implemented in order to reach indigenous peoples and women and the approach must be as participatory as possible. In particular, the emphasis must be placed on improving their farming systems, on facilitating their sustainable access to forest resources, and on developing extension materials that are better suited to their requirements.
- Impact on women and gender relations will be limited so long as the positions of women within the home and the community remain fundamentally unchanged.
- Women often join self-help groups in order to gain access to other support, including information, agricultural extension, irrigation and credit.
- Indigenous women who have used and handled loans successfully are best able to convey the purpose, procedure and use of loans to other community members.
- Poverty alleviation measures must take account of both income-based and power-based forms of poverty.
- Women need to expand the improvement of their managerial skills and education beyond basic literacy and numeracy.
- Indigenous women, in particular, need to develop special skills (for example, language and literacy) that will allow them to articulate their views and make more positive contributions to their society.

- In order to change gender roles and gender relations, greater emphasis must be placed on women's strategic needs, for example, gender mainstreaming, dedicated funds for needs identified by the women themselves, capacity-building, and land-use certificates in the names of both spouses. It is particularly important to respond to the perceived needs of women themselves.

Obstacles or problems identified during the project

- Language was a problem because most indigenous women are not confident when speaking the mainstream language: they fear that they will not use the correct words.
- Social norms may limit women's ability to express their priority needs in mixed groups, often because their role within the community is perceived as being one of maintaining social harmony by not raising issues.

Factors contributing to success

- The programme was attentive to the needs of the women themselves, and 10 per cent of the base cost was allocated to gender mainstreaming and improving the livelihoods of women.
- All reports were disaggregated by gender and wealth ranking.

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Wulin Mountains Minority Areas Development Project, China

Project title	Wulin Mountains Minority Areas Development Project, China
Thematic area/programme	Agricultural development
Project duration	1999-2004 (five years)
Location	Eastern part of Guizhou Province and western part of Hunan Province, China
Beneficiaries	390,000 families
Executing agency/agencies	Ministry of Agriculture of China Ministry of Finance of China World Food Programme (WFP)
Implementing agency/agencies	Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance
Source of funds	Total cost: US\$ 107.25 million IFAD loan: US\$ 28.00 million WFP grant: US\$ 18.80 million Government: US\$ 55.80 million Beneficiaries: US\$ 4.60 million

Overview

Some of China's poorest areas are found in the Wulin Mountains, particularly in the eastern part of Guizhou Province and the western part of Hunan Province. The project area focused on the steeper, less fertile, less accessible and less developed mountainous area. It covered 92 of the 239 townships in the two Provinces. The prime recipients of support for socio-economic activities and food for work were ethnic minorities who account for some 60 per cent of the population, estimated at 10 million, of the two Provinces. The best-represented indigenous peoples are: the Miao (28 per cent), the Dong (14 per cent) and the Tujia (19.4 per cent). Although the target group included all rural households living in the project area, consisting of about 390,000 families, priority was given to those living in the more remote and hence poorer villages. Indigenous peoples were specially targeted if found to be structurally worse off than mainstream society, and indigenous women in particular were a major target group owing to their low literacy resulting from gender discrimination, weak or a lack of access to credit—as most of their work was unpaid—and weak participation in leadership.

What was planned

The project had six main thrusts:

- *Food crop production.* A range of land-improvement activities, including: land levelling and terracing, drainage to eliminate water logging, conversion of dry land to paddies, and amendments to improve less fertile clayey and sandy soils
- *Livestock and fish production.* Technical and financial support for livestock, paddy fish farming and carp cage culture
- *Cash crop production.* Rehabilitation and new planting of tea, bamboo, shiitake and other mushrooms, elephant-foot yam, encomia, hot pepper and a range of fruit trees
- *Credit.* Short- and medium-term loans to individuals and groups, particularly the poorer households and women
- *Women's programme.* Functional literacy and numeracy for 150,000 women aged 15-49 years, focused on basic agricultural skills, handling credit, improving nutrition and health. Village-level technical training on the husbandry of annual and perennial food and cash crops; grafting; tea processing; livestock husbandry and fish farming; fertilizer and pesticide use etc. Township-level sessions (10 days) for special skills training in income-generating activities like raising pigs, growing mushrooms, embroidery and weaving
- *Rural infrastructure.* Irrigation, drinking water, electrification and roads

What the strategy was

- For this joint IFAD/WFP project, resources provided by WFP were used to support training programmes for poor women and children (literacy, productive activities, health care) while the proceeds of the IFAD loan were used to finance all other activities.
- A strong gender focus was assured by provisions for: the fostering of women's associations at township, country and prefecture levels; the fostering of federated associations at prefecture and national levels; special attention to women's crafts (embroidery), fish farming, livestock and agriculture; and assisting support services aimed at improving women's health.
- The loan agreement between IFAD and the Government clearly stated that women were a major target group (article 35) and part of the allocations for short-term credit was reserved for women's income-generating activities (article 112).
- Special groups made up of village leaders and farmers, including at least two women, were formed at village level to disseminate information and mobilize local communities.

Who was involved

- World Food Programme (WFP)
- Government of China: Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance

Specific changes resulting from the project

- Women's workload was reduced by two to three hours per day owing to improved drinking-water supply systems and the introduction of labour-time-saving technologies for women's activities.
- Hygiene and health improved owing to improved drinking-water systems; training on health, hygiene and nutrition; and greater attention to widespread gynaecologic disorders during medical check-ups as the first step towards curative protocols.
- Livestock husbandry undertaken by women improved through specialized training.
- Incomes increased by incremental livestock husbandry provided additional cash for food, school fees and clothing.
- Women's self-esteem and social position improved owing to improved economic performances and entrepreneurial success.
- Over half (55 per cent) of the participants in literacy training in Tongren prefecture were women.
- Although 95 per cent of the loans were used for typical women's activities, they were signed in men's names: neither men nor women were aware that women could sign their own contracts.
- Women accounted for 20 per cent of technical staff and 30 per cent of project staff.
- Seventy-five per cent of the 31,490 participants in health and nutrition training were women.

What was learned

- The specificity of the grass-roots stakeholders must be taken into account when designing and implementing projects.
- The fact that women were major beneficiaries of the project was not reflected in the records of the project because its formal procedures did not envisage a focus on gender-specific responsibilities. Functional literacy training in Mandarin, including the ability to sign, ought to have been provided to women, who should be assisted in obtaining the individual seals allowing them to sign their own loan contracts.
- Emphasis on organic farming of medicinal herbs would have resulted in a good opportunity to valorize local knowledge and



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resources, promote high-value products and build awareness on environmental issues.

- Credit alone cannot help the poor: it must be associated with training designed to improve their skills and thereby improve their ability to repay loans.

Obstacles or problems identified during the project

- Although the design envisaged that women would participate in the activities, take out loans and undertake training, participation by Miao women was limited because most of them do not speak standard Chinese and are unable to communicate with outsiders, gain access to information and training etc.
- Land is a very important constraint for women. Property rights are not based on freehold ownership. Although daughters have inheritance rights to a share of their parents land, they lose those rights if they live elsewhere (for example, with their husband).
- Women attending literacy training reaped some benefits, but the organization of day-long sessions was a major problem for them; they also found the teaching to be tedious and difficult to follow (only Mandarin was used); the curriculum was not sufficiently relevant to their world.
- Although fully aware of the advantages of proper education for their children, women over age 30 were sceptical of their own

ability to benefit from literacy training; they appreciated numeracy training more highly.

- Participants in training often regretted the inability of teachers to speak the local language: this was often the reason why women did not ask questions.
- Teaching methods did not take adequate account of women's special constraints, including higher illiteracy and shortage of time due to heavy daily workloads.

Factors contributing to success

- Strong emphasis on empowering the indigenous minorities, and recognizing their specific poverty position and issues
- Implementation by a national team of consultants using technical modules designed at a preparatory phase during which prospective beneficiaries were involved in diagnostic and analytical work using participatory rural appraisal. Implementation was thus guided and decided by the beneficiaries themselves
- Emphasis on organic farming, which had the advantage of valorizing local natural resources and helped in reducing the need to use costly fertilizers. The warm climate of these mountainous areas provided an ideal niche for organic farming

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