



Evaluation Summaries

Evaluation: Training for rural economic empowerment (TREE) Project

Expanding economic opportunity and income security through workflow education, skills training, employment creation, and local economic development in Pakistan and the Philippines

Quick Facts

Countries: Pakistan, Philippines
Mid-Term Evaluation: January 2005
Mode of Evaluation: independent
Technical Area: Skills Development
Evaluation Management: HQ-Skills
Evaluation Team: Katherine Webb, Trevor Riordan, Bruno Bui
Project Start: September 2002
Project End: September 2005
Project Code: RAS/02/50/USA & RAS/02/55/USA
Donor: United States (US\$ 1,560,756)

Background & Context

Project Background: The Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) Project in Pakistan and the Philippines set the ambitious task of creating an alternative model for income generation and employment creation for the most marginalized groups in diverse, geographical areas. In the two countries, rural populations have suffered from peace and security issues for a long time and no jobs or foreign investment can be found. In addition, the government has limited capacity to address poverty. For both countries, the target groups are the rural poor, specifically, women, disenfranchised male youth, and persons with disabilities.

The development objective for the TREE project in both countries is increased economic opportunities and security in the target areas, which is supported by immediate and sub-immediate objectives. In The Philippines, the development objective also includes increased peace in the target areas.

The project pursues its task through the development and implementation of the TREE methodology, which is a comprehensive training package that identifies and assesses local economic opportunities, designs and delivers community-based skills training, and provides post-training services. The project builds the capacity of government and private sector partners to implement the methodology. The implementation arrangements are different in both countries; the methodology was adapted to the unique socio-cultural characteristics and prevailing local conditions of each country. In Pakistan, there is one lead implementing agency, the National Rural Support Program (NRSP), a nongovernmental organization (NGO). In The Philippines, there are eight implementing partners—five Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) government agencies and three NGOs.

Evaluation Context: The primary purpose of the mid-term evaluation was to assess the progress to date toward the achievement of

project objectives. In addition, the mid-term evaluation was to provide project management, partners, and others with the information needed to assess and possibly revise project policies, strategies, data collection methods, objectives, institutional arrangements, work plans, and resource allocation.

The evaluation's methodology included formal individual and group interviews, using the interview protocols, as well as informal discussions, and the review of project documents and other data.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The project is making substantial progress toward the achievement of the strategic development objective, as evidenced by its results, benefits to target groups, and impact to date.

Pakistan: The project has trained 1,138 beneficiaries (35% female, 65% male) in vocational, entrepreneurial, managerial, and literacy/numeracy skills. This is 47 percent of the end-of-project target of 2,400 trained beneficiaries. Eighty-two percent of beneficiaries successfully passed training; 89 percent of this group was employed or self-employed as a result of training. Twenty-nine savings and credit groups were established, which were linked to NRSP credit operations, and 174 beneficiaries accessed credit, with a 100 percent loan recovery rate. Twenty-three partner organizations were trained in the TREE methodology, developing their implementation capacity.

The benefits to the target groups are both economic and social. Young, single men who were previously unemployed are now gainfully employed or self-employed and contribute to household welfare with their earnings. The success of many of their small businesses has led to the employment of additional workers. The social benefits are self-esteem and new-found respect of families and communities. The young men are seen as role models in their communities. The chief economic benefit to women is first-time

earned income, which is used to support their families. The social benefits for women are profound. In traditional Muslim culture, women stay at home under the purview of their fathers or husbands, do not participate in financial decision-making, and confront literacy/numeracy barriers, among others. Following skills training and literary/numeracy training, women have money in hand, may move more freely, can help their children with homework, are seen as role models by their families, and generally have been given more security, prominence, and attention.

The project had a positive impact on beneficiaries and communities. Young men who despaired over their futures have genuine economic opportunities and are unlikely to become a part of groups that create security problems. Poor, rural women have become empowered to an extent that was not thought possible. New, beneficiary-owned small businesses provide services that did not exist previously in communities, which contribute to local economic development. The project impact is also seen in the high demand for skills training using the TREE methodology within and outside the target areas.

The Philippines: The project trained 514 beneficiaries (48% female, 52% male) in vocational and entrepreneurial skills. This is 42 percent of the end-of-project target of 1,220 trained beneficiaries. Some 99 percent of trainees successfully passed training. A follow-up study showed that 80 percent of 153 training graduates were engaged in economic activities, and average family monthly income increased by 28 percent. Fifteen corporate community groups were created, and five participate in an experimental profit and loss sharing scheme that accords with Islamic law. The project strengthened the implementation capacity of all eight partners.

The benefits to the target groups are increased self-esteem, hope for the future, and the ability to contribute to family welfare. As a result of training, beneficiaries—both women and men—are empowered with skills and have the confidence to set up small businesses in their

communities. These community enterprises can be expected to have an increasingly greater impact as enterprises mature and support local economic development.

The project has had a wider impact on peace and order in the ARMM. Since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 1996, the concern has been how to convince people to support the peace process, that there is something good, something to wait for, something to expect from the peace process. The project addresses the major problems of poverty and unemployment in the ARMM by providing people who have been left out with skills training to take advantage of economic opportunities and, in this way, links economic development to peace in the region.

Sustainability: The economic and social benefits to beneficiaries are likely to be sustained after the project concludes on September 30, 2005 (the adjusted completion date is now 31 March 2007). The project partners' implementation capacity, having been developed, will be sustained. However, their access to the financial resources needed to carry on project activities is uncertain, and thus, the sustainability of many project activities is unlikely. To date, adequate preparations for project sustainability have not been made in part due to reduced project duration, which will also affect the completion of some post-training services such as the creation of business associations in Pakistan.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Recommendations: In sum, the project has succeeded in addressing the issues of poverty, unemployment, security, and peace by means of community-based skills training and local institutional capacity building. It has everywhere generated a strong demand for skills training and has the unqualified support of government, donors, partners, and the target groups.

It is recommended without reservation that the project continues beyond the scheduled closing date to ensure sustainability.

Furthermore, all concerned parties should give serious consideration to the expansion of the project, whether by means of increased coverage in the present target areas or extended coverage into new target areas or both, for the purpose of scaling up a highly effective project. Several reasons underline this recommendation:

First, the actual project duration was reduced and thus did not permit the complete development and consolidation of all project activities or adequate preparation for sustainability.

Second, the TREE methodology is demonstrably an effective approach, and is widely viewed as the best approach, to addressing the problems of poverty and unemployment not only in the ARMM but also the whole of Mindanao. It is fully embraced by partners, stakeholders, and target groups alike. Lastly, the project has linked economic development to peace in the region. Closing this successful project in the near future would in all likelihood have a negative effect on the peace process.