Empowering Drylands Women

The Integrated Drylands Development Programme (IDDP) is a global UNDP initiative to promote sustainable development in the drylands and advance the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). IDDP addresses three interlinked issues of importance to poverty alleviation in the drylands: 1) Mainstreaming of drylands development issues into national policy and planning frameworks; 2) Improving livelihoods and building resilience of dryland populations to socio-economic and climatic stresses; and 3) Improving local governance, management and use of natural resources. IDDP is an innovative and flexible framework that combines policy advice with institutional capacity building and concrete programme interventions at national and local levels. It provides guidance to countries on how to move from strategies to the implementation of drylands development programmes and the UNCCD. IDDP is currently operational in 17 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States. IDDP recognizes that women serve on the frontlines of drylands development, managing land and water resources and affecting the choice of livelihood options of the family. For centuries, women have passed on their skills in water management, crop production, and forest management, among others. Through these experiences, women have acquired valuable knowledge that will allow them to contribute positively to sustainable development efforts in the drylands. Unfortunately, women are rarely given the opportunity to do so; this is particularly true in the Arab Region and Africa where discrimination against women, inequality and stereotypical gender roles are deeply entrenched, limiting women’s economic potential and decision-making opportunities.

The promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment is a core commitment of IDDP in its efforts for poverty reduction and environmental conservation in partner countries. It is seen both as an objective and an instrument for sustainable drylands development. In its operations, IDDP provides support to its partners as follows: 1) Advisory services to promote gender equality and women empowerment in drylands development policy; 2) Development of gender-sensitive programmes and projects; 3) Innovative interventions that benefit both women and men at the local level; and 4) Experience exchange between Programme countries.

IDDP aims at expanding women’s access to fundamental assets (capital, land, knowledge and technologies), strengthening women’s decision-making role and representation in local institutions, and improving well-being by facilitating access to basic services and infrastructures. IDDP’s actions are guided by the principle that development initiatives should incorporate the priorities and needs of both women and men and give them equal opportunities to access benefits and services. In this way, IDDP seeks to address the structural inequalities that prevent women from realizing their potential as human beings, producers and agents of change.

Over the years, significant results have been achieved by IDDP at several levels. At the policy level, IDDP supported the elaboration of gender-sensitive National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification (NAPs) to draw policy attention to women development needs in the drylands. The NAPs serve as a policy tool for addressing gender concerns in the drylands. At the knowledge management level, IDDP provided opportunities for knowledge sharing on gender issues among partner countries through documentation of good practices and dissemination on DDC’s website and relevant UNCCD meetings. At the programming level, IDDP pays great attention to women empowerment in the design and implementation of interventions in partner countries.

In 2009, a Gender Action Plan was developed to move IDDP’s efforts forward towards gender equality and women empowerment. It aimed to systematize and scale-up IDDP’s efforts to integrate a gender perspective in the different aspects of its operation. The Gender Action Plan contributed to the implementation of the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy for 2008-2013, specifically, enhancing women participation in local development, their adaptation to drought and climate change; and expanding their access to environmental and energy services. Efforts were invested to facilitate the implementation of the Gender Action Plan in partner countries. Results can be summarized as follows:

1 They include Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda in the Sub-Saharan Africa region and Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia in the Arab States region.
In **Morocco** and within the project “Programme Oasis Sud” (POS), activities targeted women groups building their skills, supporting their mobilization into cooperatives and engagement in income generating activities (accommodation, catering and handicraft activities), and enhancing their participation in local development efforts. Short videos on the activities and achievements of POS can be accessed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPnAxdoIcWI; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6R8oJzGD7_4. and http://www.positive-rio.tv/voir-video/valorisation-des-produits-de-terroir.

Moreover, IDDP supported the establishment and operation of “Cluster des Oasis du Sahara” (COS) as a network of small producers to add value and enhance the marketing of products from the oases. The network is creating jobs and securing income for drylands women and supporting their economic and social empowerment. Currently, IDDP is strengthening the Network of Elected Women in the Southern Oases to facilitate a greater role for women in sustainable drylands development.

In **Tunisia** and within the framework of the project “Regional Action Program to Combat Desertification in Kasserine”, interventions in the district of El-Brek (a marginal poor area with a large percentage of women headed households) aim at strengthening local development groups, enhancing access to energy and water, promoting sustainable land management and livelihood diversification. Positive impacts on women include: i) Better access to water with the provision of animal-tracted water cisterns; ii) Better access to energy with the distribution of energy efficient cooking stoves; this reduced the amount of time invested by women to cut and carry the wood and also reduced the pressure on the forest resource; Better livelihoods with access to a rotational micro-credit fund. Additionally and within the framework of the project “Improving governance and access to water in rural areas” IDDP is enhancing women access to water and their role in water governance institutions and is thus contributing to their well being as well as their social and economic empowerment.

In **Lebanon** and within the project “Rural Dryland Development through Innovative Market Approaches”, activities are building the capacity of agri-food processing women cooperatives and enhancing their access to markets. Activities involve: 1) capacity building on food processing, small business management and quality control procedures; 2) facilitating linkages to local, regional and international markets; and 3) logistics support including the establishment of a micro-credit to facilitate cash flow. A sample of Programme supported activities can be seen in the following video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=381S--YoB58&list=UUGDp1PB2sq84nF7_hyl4lFg&index=8&feature=plcp.

In **Benin**, the IDDP has been implemented through the Programme to Support Drylands Development Activities in Benin (PADZAB). PADZAB has sought to mainstream desertification and climate change issues into the country’s development plans and strategies. Under PADZAB, the Programme supported and promoted the use of automated multifunctional platforms (MFPs) to improve productivity and energy efficiency within women’s groups in Ségbana, Sinendé, Kalalé, Lokossa and Akoussa Communes. The MFPs are used by the women to grind cereals, Shea butter, and manioc. These have helped to reduce the time and effort that women in these communities expend to carry out these activities. Women’s groups also earn income by providing a service to others; i.e., grinding Shea nuts for butter in large quantities, corn and other cereals. Time saved is now spent on other activities. This initiative has not only greatly reduced pressure on forestry resources but it has enabled income generating activities and empowered women in the drylands areas. By bringing women together into groups, their voices were strengthened, their productive potential was unleashed and a bond was created to work together to improve their households’ livelihoods.

The programme has also supported a feasibility study to support energy recovery from agricultural residues by producing briquettes, wood fuel substitutes and charcoal in Banikoara commune and the training of women to produce and use energy efficient stoves. 10 women were trained to produce and use energy-efficient stoves in two communities in Sinendé and Lokossa. The women trained now use less wood and coal and spend less time searching for wood. To increase the impact of this action, the training was replicated by the women trained. As a result, several dozen more women now use energy-efficient stoves and also benefit by no longer having to spend as much time searching for wood.
In Kenya, the IDDP has supported activities aimed at diversifying livelihoods through enhancing market access for drylands commodities including, handicrafts, livestock and livestock products, aloe Vera products, and honey produced by local communities in Kajiado and Turkana Districts. In most rural communities, pastoral and agro-pastoral, women and children are the most vulnerable to shocks and stresses that frequently occur in these areas resulting from differential leadership roles, participation in key decision making processes and ownership to key natural resources such as land, livestock’s, etc. The programme therefore focused on women and youth, with over 80% key beneficiaries being women. Based on the product groups’ needs, the programme built capacities of communities to penetrate markets and enhance fair trade through strengthening of market information linkages, carrying out market research on specific products and exposure visits to specific market segments. It also trained communities on business management; product value addition, including branding, packaging and labelling, purchased appropriate technology/equipment and trained communities on their use. It also supported communities to develop pro-poor financial mechanisms; the goal was to slowly nurture the communities to build a savings culture as basis for establishing collateral and for linking them with established micro-finance institutions.

As a result, for example, Ilparaku Maasai Handicraft Women group devised ways of coping with drought utilizing the skills acquired through the programme by leasing out their production unit at Kes 12,000 per month to be operated as a small hotel. The women then constructed a Manyatta using local materials that they used as a store, display and production unit. This initiative boosted their income and helped them to purchase food thus enabling them to cope with drought.

In Tanzania, the IDDP has been implemented as a component of the Tanzania Poverty-Environment Programme that supports the implementation of the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP/MKUKUTA), a second generation PRSP. In particular the IDDP focused on promoting efficient utilization of rangelands and empowering pastoralists to improve livestock productivity through improved livestock productivity and market access with the aim of achieving two outputs. These are (1) Enhanced capacity of government and non-government actors to influence national policies on pastoral livelihoods; and (2) Capacity developed for selected community groups in scaling up traditional land management systems, production and access to markets for indigenous drylands products.

Under the programme livelihoods options/activities implemented to support drylands communities include: poultry farming, bee keeping, establishment of community natural vegetation reserves (“Ichito” and “Ndobido”) and community woodlots, tree planting, handicrafts (beadwork using traditional and modern beads, bottle tops and indigenous seeds; bag making from recycled paper bags and bottle tops; and basketry/basket weaving/basket making using reeds), construction of fuel efficient stoves and processing and trading in leather. Capacity building initiatives implemented include: Training communities on modern poultry husbandry and beekeeping, processing and marketing of drylands products, developing marketing strategies and quality control, branding and labelling of drylands products.

As a result, women from Iramba and Manyoni Districts are engaged in modern poultry husbandry, including the use of chick hey brooder technology that use locally available materials and beekeeping. Semi intensive poultry production has increased replacing the traditional free range system that is less profitable. This has resulted in improved poultry keeping, increased production, better control of diseases and decrease to crop damages. More women have also now taken up beekeeping as an income generating activity. Traditionally, only men owned beehives and engaged in beekeeping. There has been an increase in natural vegetation conserved areas in the villages, e.g., trees have been planted. More natural resources such as grass and wood used in the villages are from the conserved areas. This has saved time used to search for fuel wood and the long distances travelled, especially for women. Communities now earn income from the sale of wood and grass from these conserved areas. There has been an increase in community incomes (family and individual incomes) and improvement of livelihoods, e.g., group members are able to pay school fees for their children, build better housing (modern - iron sheets roofs). This has also enhanced food security and made improvements in diets; communities can also afford to provide for other family needs such as health care, better clothing, etc. This has also promoted a savings culture within the communities. Income saved is now used to cover emergencies; invested to improve their own productive capacity, e.g., for purchasing implements such as ox ploughs.
The Way Forward

IDDP will build on its achievements and scale-up its efforts towards gender equality and women empowerment. In the Arab States, IDDP’s approach is two-fold: 1) stepping-up support within country projects to better address gender issues under its three areas of intervention (mainstreaming, livelihoods and natural resource management); and 2) supporting gender specific activities in partner countries to advance the women empowerment agenda. A new stand-alone gender-related output was added to the Programme in order to: i) support relevant national initiatives to enhance the role of women in drylands development; ii) consolidate Programme efforts towards gender equality and women empowerment in the form of comprehensive reports, publications and documentaries. About 40% of the catalytic funds allocated for programming in the new phase are earmarked for gender equality and women empowerment activities.

In Africa, the need to incorporate women in the development agenda has been key and hence the prioritization of women as direct beneficiaries in the majority of activities in all programme countries. This has resulted in significant improvements in the working conditions, income levels and overall status of women.

The programme plans to scale up these achievements and will continue to focus on making sure that 50% of its direct beneficiaries are women. This is in recognition of the role women play in natural resources management and agricultural production and post harvest management in the drylands and Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole where they contribute between 60-80% of the labour force. A larger proportion of women are also engaged in income generating activities. The programme also plans to target actions that address the enhancement of women’s productive, income generation potentials and that reduce their heavy burden, e.g., promoting alternative livelihoods options/opportunities, promoting efficient biomass production, including energy saving stoves, production and use of briquettes from invasive species and agricultural residues to the use of renewable and clean energy such as solar, bio gas production from cow dung. The access to reliable and affordable energy sources will greatly improve the livelihoods of drylands communities in terms of their health, cooking, income generating potential, e.g., small agro-processing activities, pumping of water, etc. This will not only reduce pressures on the ecosystem, but drudgery faced by women and the girl child who are tasked with providing for the energy needs of their families for cooking and heating as well as unleash entrepreneurial potential in the drylands.

IDDP will thus be an active contributor to the implementation of Outcome 4 of the UNDP Strategic Plan for 2014-2017 namely, “Faster progress is achieved in reducing gender inequality and promoting women’s empowerment”. Specifically, it will contribute to: 1) enhancing women’s livelihoods thus reducing wage gaps between men and women at the local level; 2) strengthening women’s role in decision-making for drylands development; and 3) improving women’s access to environmental goods and services.

For more information, please visit http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/environmentandenergy/focus_areas/sustainable_landmanagement.html or contact us at ddc@undp.org.

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