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COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT STRENGTHENS REHABILITATION EFFORTS IN YEMEN

A novel participatory approach to community engagement demonstrates significant gains in Saber District where rehabilitation efforts are strengthening rural networks, raising productivity, and reaping financial rewards

A scheme targeting the rehabilitation of water harvesting structures in the Saber district of Yemen has developed a novel participatory approach, empowering local communities and raising the potential for long-term stability and success. Ultimately, this approach can lead to improved productivity and incomes in areas of implementation.



A new beginning: a young Bargou peach tree holds promise for the future of this indigenous peach cultivar.

Source: "pictures from project managers"

Points to Consider

- Adopt participatory approaches: encourage beneficiaries to discuss their needs and contribute to the design and implementation of rehabilitation strategies
- Community institutionalization: encourage communities to form organizations that promote collaborative ways of working for maximum impact and long-term sustainability
- Gender-sensitivity: empower women as a means of strengthening their voices and responsibilities, and raising their education levels
- Draft community agreements: an effective way to outline responsibilities, timelines, and expected costs.

Purpose

This briefing describes preliminary work on a water harvesting rehabilitation project in Yemen that is implementing an innovative strategy of community engagement. It is aimed at policymakers, donors, and other potential partners and supporters.

Suitability

This intervention is suited to rehabilitation efforts in dry land areas which aim for a participatory approach that includes local communities in development plans.

The project in numbers

- Site specifics: 50 ha in Saber District
- Investment: 20,000 USD
- Potential Income generation: increased by 20-30 per cent
- Number of beneficiaries: 1100

Partners

- GEF
- Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Yemen

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A farmer association discusses needs and plans the way forward.

Source: "pictures from project managers"

The long-term success of this initiative depends on initial attempts to effectively and accurately assess existing conditions within a given community. 'Rapid rural assessments' provide a proven framework to quickly understand key physical and socio-economic indicators: poverty levels, employment, sources of income, for example, or annual rates of precipitation.

Subsequent needs assessments take an inclusive and participatory approach and are implemented in consultation with local communities. Open meetings provide an opportunity for community members to voice their concerns, discuss the problems and constraints they face, and plan appropriate strategies that are capable of reducing degradation and raising productivity.

Promoting community organization

Activities are implemented and monitored through community associations registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs – formal groups composed of residents and farmers which are committed to democracy and the election of representatives. These organizations are a requirement of the project: failure to form an association means that the initiative cannot progress. This approach promotes accountability and community responsibility, and by encouraging collaboration and knowledge-sharing, better ensures long-term sustainability.

The formation of community-led associations also facilitates a process of empowerment which can strengthen the voice of once-marginalized people. This is further supported by a commitment to capacity development: implementing authorities impart knowledge on organizational effectiveness and improvement to maximize impacts.

An added gender-sensitive dimension has seen the establishment of women associations and efforts to match female extension staff and villagers to ensure that the needs and interests of women are consid-

ered. This has resulted in higher education levels among rural women, a greater appreciation of female rights and strengths, and heightened female contributions to decision-making processes.

Another innovative feature of this participatory approach are formal community agreements; 'contracts' that are used as a framework to guide negotiations with government bodies or officials. These are used to clearly outline costs, timelines, and the designation of responsibilities.

Promoting rehabilitation

The results of this form of community engagement have so far been impressive. The initiative has invested around 20,000 USD in the rehabilitation of terraces and reservoirs, reaching approximately 1100 beneficiaries and raising farmer incomes by up to 20-30 per cent. Families benefiting from the project are now capable of earning up to 2000 USD per season from the cultivation of tomatoes, and up to 500 USD from the sale of decorative flowers.

