

Participatory Impact Assessment



The IFAD-funded Rural Income Diversification Project (RIDP) was implemented in 66 of the poorest communes in five districts of Tuyen Quang Province. Active from 2002 to 2009, the project dealt with 13 main topics (micro-enterprise development, forest land management, vocational training, animal health and others). During its implementation, the project set up a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system that focused primarily on quantitative monitoring. To be able to assess the project at different stages, it was necessary to develop monitoring tools that could also generate qualitative data. It was thought that an analysis based on both types of data gathering can provide a better picture of project impact.

The participatory impact assessment (PIA) of the project was integrated into the M&E system as a supplementary tool to provide qualitative impact information on an annual basis. Data were also collected to compare and assess changes collected at the beginning of the project using participatory project appraisal tools.

Participatory impact assessment

PIA is used to ensure greater involvement of beneficiaries in impact assessment. The exercise seeks to lend support to the main objective of the PIA, which is to assess implementation progress and the efficacy of local planning processes, beneficiary participation, gender mainstreaming, income diversification, empowerment, community capacity building, socioeconomic development, environmental protection, overall impact on hunger eradication and poverty alleviation, etc. The PIA was conducted each year before July to ensure that PIA results were used in the preparation of the annual work plan and budget (AWPB). Carrying out random checks in the field was one of the main functions of project management staff at the district and provincial levels. The project activities were then adjusted in accordance with the identified key issues. The community organisers (CO) and district facilitators provided support.

Implementation steps and assessment method

Step 1: Sampling

Sampling was carried out randomly in two steps: selection of the commune, followed by the selection of two villages within each commune. The sampling ensures that representative examples of the conditions in agriculture, the economy, the society and the environment are collected for each surveyed commune. The annual PIA sample survey was conducted after the first year of project implementation (e.g., communes that joined the project in 2003 conducted their PIA in 2004).

Step 2: Training of participating staff

Training of trainers was done at district and provincial levels. The international M&E consultant conducted a 4-day training course (1 day for theory, 2 days for practice in two villages, and 1 day for documenting experiences and finalising formats and tools). The trainers who participated in the training course at provincial and district levels provided training on methods and tools for impact assessment at district levels to the Commune Development Board (CDB) staff, village heads, chairwomen of village women's unions and extension workers. Training session in each commune lasted for 4 days (1.5 day for theory, 2 days for practice runs in two villages; 0.5 day for documenting experiences and agreeing on the PIA plan). The local trainers conducted impact assessments in the selected villages.

Step 3: Assessment method

DPCU prepared the plan for conducting the assessments and informed the selected communes, villages and households. Village stakeholders used PIA formats to rate the impact of activities (from 1-10).

Mark	Level
1-2	Negligible or little effect
3-4	Little effect
5-7	Significant or large effect
8-9	Very large effect
10	100% effect

Step 4. Conduct assessment

With the support of the provincial staff, district staff and implementing agencies, the CDB held a meeting for the village-level assessments. At a public meeting, each village nominated a group of 16 people who will participate in the rating exercise. The group was required to include 8 women and at least 8 persons who were considered poor. A village meeting was then conducted to discuss the overall assessment and the completion of the questionnaires and rating sheets. These were then submitted to the DPCU for consolidation. The consolidation sheets prepared by the DPCU were then submitted to the PPCU for preparation of the final consolidated report.

Step 5. Processing of assessment results

The annual impact assessment exercise provided early annual information on the impact of the project in the communities. Results indicated that the project had a favourable impact on communities and beneficiaries. On the other hand, the negative results (i.e., no positive improvement in the lives of the beneficiaries) highlighted areas for improvement and the lessons learned from implementation shortcomings. For example, the project might have to review its activities, processes and approaches at the grassroots level in order to improve collaboration with line agencies and local authorities.



Step 6. Data entry and reporting

The M&E staff of DPCU entered and analysed the data in MS Excel. The DPCU sent the data to PPCU, which compiled and drafted the final report. The draft of the final report was sent back to the DPCU for comments, which were then incorporated in the final report to be submitted to IFAD by PPCU.

Innovative features and limitations of the tool

Innovative feature	Limitation
Communities and poor farmers are empowered to assess and suggest improvements to project activities	Lack of outside party participation may make results very subjective
Project staff and representatives of implementing agency only play the role of facilitators; beneficiaries have the final say in the assessment	District-level staff trainers have varied experiences and skills in training; not all community-level participants may receive adequate training
Deals with both positive and negative aspects according to communities and villagers	Villagers who play an important role in the village could dominate the discussion, crowding out the opinions of others, especially the poor
Participation of women and poor farmers secured and considered important	No control groups are used.

The implementation of the annual PIA helped the RIDP assess the impact of the project on the beneficiaries and village/communities in terms of key aspects such as food security, diversification of income sources, capacity building, empowerment of communities and environmental impact.

Currently, the Tuyen Quang Tam Nong Support Project continues to use the PIA method to perform annual assessments.

However, some adjustments need to be made to overcome the limitations of the PIA method:

- The rating scale needs to be shortened from 1-10 to 1-6.
- The evaluation process should be carried out with participation of groups outside the project.
- Sample size selection needs to be improved and a control group should be introduced to ensure proper assessment of impact.



Lessons learned

For the assessment results to accurately reflect project impact, these main factors should be considered:

- Questionnaires need to be checked by multiple stakeholders before being used in the field. Also, interviewers at the training course should discuss their experiences after the pilot assessment is done in the field.
- The survey should be conducted before next year's planning cycle and at a time when the participating beneficiaries are not burdened by other activities (e.g., harvest time).
- After collecting feedback, a random check of the answers should be carried out to ensure accuracy.
- The role and skills of the interviewers and investigators are very important. Adequate training in both theory and practice should be provided to the staff.

References

A general guide for PIA survey

Impact Assessment Report the project RIDP 2008

PIA Manual (PIA meeting)

Questionnaire for annual impact survey

Report on impact assessment of the project RIDP 2004

Report on impact assessment of the project RIDP 2006

Report on impact assessment of the project RIDP 2007

Acronyms and abbreviations

AWPB	annual work plan and budget
DPCU	District Project Coordination Unit
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
PIA	participatory impact assessment
PPCU	Provincial Project Coordination Unit

PRA	participatory rural appraisal
RIDP	Rural Income and Development Project (Tuyen Quang)
CO	community organiser
CDB	Commune Development Board

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