Summary Learning report 2007
Ecuador Agriculture & Governance

This report is a summary of the Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) report on the Ecuador Country Programme in 2007. Summaries are published on the IICD website to show the work of our local project partners and the results that these partners and IICD have achieved. Important to point out is that evaluation reports are meant for learning, hence they focus on the outcomes and impact of the projects as well as their successes and challenges, rather than checking on project progress or money spent, which is done via progress reports.

Evaluations are based on questionnaires for different stakeholders. Depending on the country, the evaluation includes project teams (reflecting on IICD's support), participants of trainings (reflecting on capacity development) and end users (reflecting on the projects they take part in). Data from these questionnaires is analysed by a local M&E partner, who also facilitates a subsequent Focus Group meeting with the partners who implement the different projects. The discussions in this meeting result in more qualitative data from the projects (what is actually happening on the ground) as well as exchange of experiences (successes and challenges), and lessons learned for partners and IICD.

The evaluation report below is the unmodified original work of Martha Nuñez, the local M&E partner. It gives an overview of both the data collected and the discussions that followed in the Focus Group. Though sensitive information from specific partners has been removed to maintain a trust relationship with and between partners, M&E reports are an honest representation of the processes and lessons concerning the Country Programme. In 2007, the Country Programme in Ecuador consisted of 14 projects on the ground with almost 11.000 end users. 628 questionnaires have been collected so far in Ecuador in 2007.

The implementation of the different projects in the area of Good Governance started in 2006 and this is the first time that an evaluation has been carried out among final users. Projects in the area of Agriculture started in 2004, and in this case, a comparative analysis was performed with the achievements attained during the previous period, taking specific aspects of each project into consideration.

The learning report is the result of the quantitative and qualitative analysis made of all questionnaires that have been gathered for each one of the projects. It includes the reflections and the comments of the Focus Group meeting. We wish to draw attention to the fact that the experience gained from the on line application of a questionnaire specially prepared for the Web page users of the Participación Ciudadana Project turned out to be a success.

Ecuador Country programme partners at work during a workshop

As for the projects in the area of Agriculture, the following results can be pointed out:

o   Most of the final users live in rural areas and in small provincial cities. Nevertheless, it was a great pleasure for us to verify that the great majority of

o them have high school education. But, in spite of that, they still earn a below average income;

o This time again, like in the previous phase, the questionnaires were responded to mainly by men. This fact has given rise to the need to put forward a discussion concerning gender issues among the members of the Focus Group. The conclusion of these discussions included on one hand, a need to revaluate the role of women in society and to emphasize qualitative outcomes such as the quality of participation and the benefits obtained from the trainings. On the other hand, it was concluded that gender issues are closely related to institutional policy and thus, that it is not possible to find solutions simply by means of trainings addressing this issue.

The achievement of the selected objectives is quite high (86%) and this fact is closely connected with the achievement of the expectations of the participants. These expectations came into being as the users felt the need to receive quality training, empowering them to use ICTs as a tool to improve communication and to raise awareness among people in the communities. Most of the organizations expressed a need for information availability and also their decision to produce their own communication materials, according to their needs. Projects concerning environmental issues show higher levels of achievement of their objectives than in 2006. On the contrary, in the area of livelihood opportunities, this period showed lower levels of achievement than the previous one.

Likewise, with regards to the services offered by the projects, it is noticed that in environmental projects, satisfaction levels among final users have improved a lot if compared to previous phases of the same projects. The one issue that obtained high qualification from the users was quality of information. Moreover, the use of the services provided by the different projects is more and more frequent (56% of the respondents declared that they use them every day or at least once in a week). As for the projects of Livelihood Opportunities the use is less frequent as only 10% uses the services on a daily basis. Here, training is the service that has produced high levels of satisfaction. 46% of respondents declared that the quality of information is highly satisfactory and a third part of them thinks the same about the timeliness of the information they receive. These results have been taken into consideration and also the comments concerning the Web page of the projects in the area of Good governance (Participación Ciudadana and Radio La Luna), as these remarks enabled us to fully understand the importance that the information at hand should be not only updated but also of good quality.

The Focus Group discussed the different ways in which the projects should make sure of the quality and timeliness of information. Another matter of reflection were the advantages of working with "promotores" or "reporteros" (people that work directly with the communities; extension workers). Promoters are important as they act as "mediators" between the information or the use of new technologies and the final users.

Finally, the Focus Group discussed the advantages for the users to have a direct access to new technologies. The need for new mechanisms of interaction and feedback was acknowledged as well as the hindrances caused by technological and operating shortcomings and connectivity issues. Considering the previous analysis, the focus Group proposed the following actions:

o To advocate for society to act in compliance with the right of every community to have access to connectivity;

o To establish wireless networks in the communities;

o To provide a more permanent infrastructure;

o To improve technology in the institutions;

o To strengthen training for the members of the technical teams and for the end users as a way to reduce their dependence on reporteros and promotores;

o To use questionnaires to find out about the needs for information of the users and their opinions;

o To establish strategic alliances and to strengthen the sharing of experiences and information among the projects.

The impacts attained by the projects are very positive and they go beyond the results obtained in previous periods. Projects in the area of Environment have reached an impact of 90% concerning the increase of awareness. This can be confirmed by the fact that users now foresee a lot of opportunities in the use of ICTs and also because the number of people strongly committed to

environmental issues grows more and more. The achievements in the projects of Livelihood Opportunities vary according to the projects, as some of them show very important results while others have not succeeded in reaching encouraging outcomes so far.

As for empowerment, an important increase can also be noticed, and here again the most encouraging results correspond to the projects dealing with environmental issues (83%). One of the most important changes resulting from this phase of the projects is that final users feel now much more self confident and, thus, they are strongly determined to play a role of active participation in decision making not only in their working environments but also in the community. The achievements in computer skills are also very positive, even though they are not as impressive as the ones in previous evaluations. One of the projects in Livelihoods has also succeeded in increasing the empowerment levels of its end users.

As far as economic impact is concerned, the achievements are really encouraging; 91% of the users of environmental projects acknowledged that these projects have reached a positive economic impact, a figure that shows a huge increase if compared to the 40% of users that had expressed a similar opinion during the previous period. And in some aspects, the results are even more impressive. Like the ones that show that users can now foresee better job opportunities in the future, that they feel a strong motivation to improve their own performance at work and that they consider that they are now able to make a better use of their income and a more responsible use of natural resources. Unfortunately, among the users of Livelihood Opportunities projects the appreciations are not so optimistic.

Projects dealing with environmental issues have also increased their organisational or sector impact compared to last year (87% vs. 63%). One particular project in the area of Livelihood Opportunities has also succeeded in increasing its impact in the sector (73% vs. 59%).

All issues dealing with the impact attained by the projects, mainly the ones in the area of Environment, and the difference with regard to the results of the previous phase have been a matter of discussion during the Focal Group meetings. The objective of the discussion was to corroborate if the results

were due to the actions that had been carried on or if the modifications introduced in the statements of the questionnaires were the real cause for the answers delivered by the users. The reflections carried out during the focus group meetings showed that the consolidation of some conscious actions during this period have lead to such positive results. CAMARI has improved its infrastructure and has enlarged its services to the users in order to generate more income; C-CONDEM has performed a successful job in handling natural resources in danger of extinction. It has also done a great job with a plan for community tourism and in enabling the participation of its users in the generation of information.

In the area of Good Governance, the analysis entailed an individual examination of each one of the projects due to the peculiarities of the projects and also because of the differences in the application of the questionnaires. Only the shared general aspects are shown here:

It is easily observed that most of the respondents are men, and in the case of FFLA they are generally young men living in rural areas and in different provincial cities. The reasons for participation vary according to the objectives of the projects and they are closely connected with the reasons regarding the achievement of the selected goals, most of which have been successfully fulfilled; in some cases, there is a desire of the users to make a contribution to the development of their communities and a need to learn and to share knowledge among young people. In some other cases, objectives refer to the fact that having updated information available concerning the real situation of the country is really essential.

As a consequence of all this, the services of the projects are frequently used and that levels of satisfaction are high, especially among the users of the FFLA project, where 83% of the respondents described the technical support, the resources and the services obtained as very satisfactory.

As for the impact of the projects the results are very positive. The wider impact was attained by awareness rising, mainly with regards to more understanding of the opportunities offered by ICTs in the good governance sector. As far as empowerment is concerned, the results obtained show an enlarged active participation in community or

institutional matters and the availability of not only more knowledge but also of a better quality. Economic impact was only evaluated in the case of FFLA project and it showed a significant result (80%) very similar to the impact attained in the sector (79%). The other projects have obtained a lower impact in the sector.

The impact achieved by these projects was a matter of reflection for the Focus Group, mainly the questions related to lobbying actions carried out in governmental areas, as a tool against corruption practices. Also, actions intended to widen participation in public debates and to figure out what has still to be done in that respect. And finally, evidences showing that citizens are really beginning to make their voices heard thanks to these projects. Participación ciudadana and Jubileo 2000 pointed out that their actors had a scarce participation in virtual spaces. To redress this they propose to develop a suitable strategy of communication and public relations, the establishment of a new citizen's agenda, closer to reality and to the real interests of people. Jubileo 2000 stressed particularly the need for ICT training and for enlarged Internet access for the users.

FFLA thinks that more work has to be done with local governments and that young people may play a very important role to enlarge people's involvement in the changes that have been proposed and in the projects that will be developed in the future.

This time, negative impact was also evaluated and it has been very satisfactory to verify that none of the projects that have been analyzed has had a negative impact on the community