ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF AID PROJECTS IN AGRICULTURE: THE CASE OF GANSU GRASSLAND AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Australia has assisted China with the Gansu Grassland Agricultural Systems Research and Development Project (GGASRDP) which was completed in 1992. Total Australian expenditure was $6m. The goal of GGASRDP was to help develop more stable and profitable farming systems on the Loess Plateau of China through (a) institutional strengthening of Gansu Grassland Ecological Research Institute (GGERI) capabilities to undertake farming systems research and development, and (b) development and extension of profitable farming systems in the Qingyang Prefecture as a model for replication.

A review of the GGASRDP assessed achievements of project outputs, purposes and goal as set out in the logframe of the Phase 2 Project Design Document (PDD), using three criteria: performance, sustainability and impact. Satisfactory progress was made in institutional strengthening of the GGERI considering the without project situation. In farming systems research and development, progress was moderately successful and most of the anticipated outputs are achievable.

Creating stable and profitable farms over a wide area, using the farming systems approach, is a long-term ambition requiring sustained inputs over a long time period. From Australia's perspective, the GGASRDP has been a satisfactory first step in strengthening the GGERI and promoting farming systems research and development in a poor region of China.

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INTRODUCTION

The Gansu Grassland Agricultural Systems Research and Development Project (GGASRDP) was a bilateral project between the Governments of Australia and China. It started in 1985 and finished in 1992. Australian project expenditure totalled about $6m and the Chinese contribution was about $2.5m.

The Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) reviewed the GGASRDP twice during its implementation, first in 1988 and again in 1991 (AIDAB, 1991).

This paper highlights the main achievements of the GGASRDP, focusing on project performance, sustainability and development impact.

PROJECT GOAL, PURPOSES AND OUTPUTS

The goal of the GGASRDP was to develop more stable and profitable farming systems in the Loess Plateau of the Gansu Province, China. This was to be achieved using two purposes (components):

(1) Strengthening the capability of the Gansu Grassland Ecological Research Institute (GGERI) to undertake farming systems research and development (FSRD) activities.

(2) Developing and extending more stable and profitable farming systems in the Qingyang Prefecture as a model for further replication.

The first component had six outputs and the second component had eleven outputs. Table 1 shows the details of the logical framework matrix for the GGASRDP.

Table 1 : LOGICAL FRAMEWORK MATRIX

NARRATIVE SUMMARY	INDICATOR	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS
PROJECT GOAL			
More stable and profitable farming systems on the Loess Plateau (LP) of China.	Reduction of soil erosion on the LP. Increased rural household incomes on the LP.	Measuring soil erosion over a period with appropriate devices on the LP. Statistical and survey data on rural household incomes on the LP.	That Government reforms in the agricultural sector encourage and reward management of the land and water resources whilst stimulating agricultural production. That National, Provincial and Prefecture Governments support FSR&D on the LP.
PROJECT PURPOSES			
1. To strengthen GGERI capabilities to undertake FSR&D.	The ability of GGERI to apply FSR&D to other projects outside the project area.	The application of FSR&D methodology to other projects.	That GGERI will be committed to the concept of FSR&D.
2. To develop and extend more stable and profitable farming systems in Qingyang prefecture as a model for further replication.	The adoption of more stable and profitable farming systems by farmers in the project area.	Project surveys on the adoption and impact of improved farming systems.	That the present support and co-operation of the Qingyang Prefecture Government and the co-operating research and extension organisations continue.
PROJECT OUTPUTS			
1. Institutional Strengthening of GGERI			
1.1 Organisational structure.	The formation of a separate agricultural economics/systems division in GGERI with responsibility for FSR&D activities.	Documentation of the new division.	That GGERI will have Government support for its FSR&D charter.
1.2 Information exchange.	The establishment of formal information exchange linkages with other FSR&D related institutions inside and outside China.	Documentation of meetings and information exchanged.	
1.3 Capable FSR&D team in GGERI.	The appointment and training of FSR&D team members in GGERI.	Records of appointments. Recording and assessment of training undertaken by short-term experts. Assessment of capabilities of trained staff.	That GGERI can provide additional staff with suitable English capability for the FSR&D team. That Chinese Masters students are available to the project.
1.4 Strengthened capability of agr. econ.l systems and remote sensing divisions and agr. extension training methods.	The improved capability of these divisions to support FSR&D.	Documentation of support to FSR&D. records of assessment of training by short-term experts.	That GGERI will give preference to the project for support by these divisions. That staff learn techniques applicable to China's economic systems.
1.5 Strengthened support facilities and services in GGERI (library & analytical).	The provision of required support to this FSR&D team.	Records on equipment and assessments of training provided to the support units.	That GGERI will co-ordinate the support unit for FSR&D work.
1.6 Monitoring/management unit.	Establishment of monitoring/management unit within the FSR&D division of GGERI.	Records of monitoring and management meetings.	

NARRATIVE SUMMARY	INDICATOR	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS
Development and Extension of More Stable and Profitable Farming Systems in the Project Area			
An established data base.	Modelling based on realistic production and price data. Knowledge of land use potential in the Project area.	Project data base records. Land use maps.	That remote sensing division can negotiate tape and mapping costs with Xifeng City and Qingyang County.
Procedures for selection and planning research programme.	Efficient selection and planning of research programme.	Manual on research procedures for farming systems research.	That farmers be involved in planning process.
Undertaking research programme.	Technologies developed through a systems approach to address farm problems.	Project preschedules, interview reports, published research for on station/on farm trials.	That Project Prefecture Liaison Committee (PPLC) effectively operates in co-ordination.
Procedures for selection and planning of extension programme.	Efficient selection and extension of technology to farmers.	Manual on extension procedures.	
Identification of annual extension programme.	Prefecture and extension agency acceptance of annual extension programme.	Meeting minutes of annual Government planning meeting.	
Assistance to the existing extension agencies.	Farmers adopt improved techniques.	Minutes, training courses, output of trainees, bulletins, field days, demonstration farms.	Extension co-ordinator appointed.
Institutional/Infrastructural studies.	Understanding of, and action on, "off-farm" constraints.	Study reports, meeting minutes.	That Government will support co-operation by "off-farm" institutions with these investigations.
Government support in project areas.	Improved Government assistance and linkage to the project and between Government agencies.	Project records of PPLC meetings, appointment of liaison officer, training courses and co-operative programmes.	The Prefecture Government will support appointment of liaison officer.
Government and institutional understanding of FSR&D.	Acceptance of FSR&D approach to rural problem solving by Government institutions.	Conferences, conferences proceedings, Loess Plateau Records and Extension Society meeting, newsletters, use of FSR&D in other situations.	That facilities are available for printing proceedings etc.
Improved marketing and input supplies.	Identified opportunities for improved marketing and input supplies.	Documentation of market developments and input supplies.	
Adoption of improved technologies by farmers.	Number of technological packages recommended by extension agent. Number of farmers adopting recommendations.	Assessment of extension organisations work programme. Survey of farmers.	That the extension organisations participate in the programme. That farmers have an input into the design of improved technologies.

ACHIEVEMENTS AGAINST PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The achievements of the project were considered in relation to the project outputs, purposes and goal as set in the logframe of the Project Design Document (PDD). The three criteria described below were used for evaluation of the outputs.

(a) Performance: The degree to which the outputs of the project, as defined in the logframe of the PDD, have been or are likely to be achieved within the project period.

(b) Sustainability: The degree to which the outputs of the project are likely to continue in the short to medium term (up to three years) after the completion of the Australian inputs to the project.

(c) Impact: The degree to which the outputs of the project are likely to create social, economic, technical and environmental benefits for the target beneficiaries which would lead to a wider development in the longer term (beyond three years) after Australian inputs cease.

Each criterion was rated 1 to 5 indicating, in ascending order, the degree to which a particular output had been achieved. The definition of each rating for each criterion is set out in Table 2. The ratings of the project outputs are shown in Table 3.

A subjective assessment of project outputs against project performance indicators on a quantitative basis indicates that:

(a) in relation to the Institutional Strengthening component, progress was satisfactory particularly considering the without project situation of the GGERI; and

(b) in the FSRD component, achievements have been less consistent although the majority of the outputs were attained within the project period.

Table 2: DEFINITIONS OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

	PERFORMANCE	SUSTAINABILITY	IMPACT
5.	No problems encountered and project output reached.	Likely to be fully sustained.	High impact likely.
4.	Some problems but output generally successful.	Most of output likely to be sustained.	Moderate impact likely.
3.	Significant problems and output only half reached.	50:50 chance of sustainability.	50:50 chance that output will have development impact.
2.	Significant problems and output generally unsuccessful.	Output unlikely to be sustained.	Little impact likely.
1.	Major problems and output not achieved.	No chance of output being sustained.	No impact forseen.

Table 3: ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT OUTPUT ACHIEVEMENTS

ACHIEVEMENT	PERFOR-MANCE	SUSTAIN-ABILITY	IMPACT
INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING			
1.1 Organisational structure	3	4	3
1.2 Information exchange	4	3	4
1.3 Capable FSR&D team in GGERI	3	3	3
1.4 Strengthen capability of agr econ/systems & remote sensing divisions	3	2	2
1.5 Strengthen support facilities and services in GGERI	3	3	3
1.6 Monitoring/management unit	2	2	1
FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT			
2.1 An established data base	3	2	2
2.2 Procedures for selecting & planning research program	3	3	4
2.3 Undertaking research program	4	4	4
2.4 Procedures for selecting & planning extension program	2	2	2
2.5 Identify annual exten. prog	4	3	4
2.6 Undertake extension program	3	3	2
2.7 Institutional/infrastructural studies	2	2	2
2.8 Govt. support in project area	4	4	5
2.9 Govt. & institutional under-standing of FSR&D	3	3	3
2.10 Improved marketing & input supplies	2	2	1
2.11 Adoption of improved techno-logies by farmers.	*	3	3

* not quantifiable - no data available

FUTURE EXPECTATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Progress towards achievement of the purposes (components) and goal of the GGASRDP, although more difficult to quantify because the project was completed only recently, was assessed using indicators of interim progress. Satisfactory progress has been made in institutional strengthening of GGERI considering the without project situation. In farming systems research and development, progress has been moderately successful and most outputs should be successfully attained in the longer term.

Creating stable and profitable farms over a wide area, using the farming systems approach, is a long-term ambition requiring further inputs over a long period of time. From Australia's perspective, the GGASRDP has been a satisfactory first step in strengthening the GGERI and promoting the farming systems research and development approach in a poor region of China.

REFERENCES

AIDAB (1991) Review o Gansu Grassland Agricultural Systems Research and Development Project, China. Unpublished Report, AIDAB, Canberra.