

Retrospective Evaluation of Proximity and Integrated Rural Development Projects (PIRDP) in Naâma Region (South-west Algeria)

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ABSTRACT

The wilaya of Naâma results from the administrative division established by law 84-09 of April 4, 1984; it is located in the west of Algeria, between the Tell Atlas and the Saharan Atlas, and extends over an area of 29,819.30 km². Since its creation, the territory of Naâma has been the subject of several rural development projects. This contribution aims to evaluate the rural development strategy adopted in Naâma region (southwest Algeria). It is a retrospective evaluation of a program that lasted from 2010 to 2014. This retrospective evaluation focuses on the proximity and integrated rural development projects (PIRDP) that are the preferred tool for implementing the national policy of agricultural and rural renewal. The indicators used in this evaluation relate to physical and financial reports, unifying themes, efficiency, relevance, and coherence.

KEYWORDS: Retrospective evaluation, PIRDP, Naâma, efficiency, Relevance, Coherence.

INTRODUCTION

With nearly 13 million inhabitants, rural areas in Algeria represent nearly 40% of the total population, and the proportion of households, consisting of between 7 and 8 people, represents 25% of the rural population, with a much stronger concentration in rural communes in the north than in the south (Chaib and Baroud, 2014). Given the importance of rural areas in Algeria, the state has paid particular attention to their development. This interest has been manifested through the launch of a vast program to support rural renewal, which aims to make rural areas productive, attractive, and integrated into regional and national economic dynamics (Berkane and Moussaoui, 2012).

Furthermore, Algerian rural renewal policy has gone through four distinct phases since independence (1962) until 2014, from self-management and agrarian revolution (1962/1979), to the first reforms of the state agricultural economy (1979/1999), to stabilization, national reconciliation and emergency actions (2000/2008), and finally the national policy of agricultural and rural renewal (2009/2014) (MADR, 2008, MADR, 2012).

The national policy of agricultural and rural renewal defines the major directions of public authorities toward Algerian rural areas (Souidi and Bessaoud, 2011). This policy, which aims to establish a dynamic of rural promotion and development that accommodates overall and national economic development, aims (Souidi and Bessaoud, 2011):

- Improvement of the living conditions of rural populations;
- Creation of employment and income through the diversification of economic activities;
- Strengthening of social and territorial cohesion;
- Protection of the environment and enhancement of rural heritage.

The local and integrated rural development projects constitute the preferred tool for implementing this national policy of agricultural and rural renewal. In this context, our work aims to

analyze the implementation of the rural development strategy in an agro-sylvo-pastoral region, such as the case of the wilaya of Naâma (Southwest Algeria).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The projects of proximity and integrated rural development

The projects of proximity and integrated rural development are technical and legal instruments of rural development, which are mainly based on the integration and active participation of all actors (State, local communities, civil associations, populations) in the work of rural reconstruction (Aouiche-Chenoune et al., 2017). These projects were set up by the instruction Number 1 of January 27, 2008, of the head of government, relating to the consolidation of the program of support for rural renewal (MADR, 2012, Hadjadj et al., 2024).

The proximity and integrated rural development project cover four main themes, namely (Aouiche-Chenoune et al., 2017):

- 1) Improving the living conditions and quality of life of rural populations through the modernization of villages and Ksours;
- 2) Increasing and diversifying the income of populations through multiple activities;
- 3) Protection and enhancement of material and immaterial heritage;
- 4) Sustainable management and enhancement of natural resources.

These projects primarily concern individuals or households living in rural areas in isolated zones and in municipalities designated for promotion or who wish to return to engage in economic activities (Akerkar, 2015).

The implementation of these projects is envisaged within the framework of an original and innovative participatory approach, promoting local supervision of rural populations, which allows the identification of development actions to be undertaken, the integration of available potential, as well as the coherence and complementarity of the intervention of different types of actors in rural areas (Souidi and Bessaoud, 2011). The PIRDP approach is based on the following principles (Laib, 2008):

- The initiative of the rural communities concerned who participate in all stages of preparation and formulation of the action program and its execution;
- The local action of the administration which supports the populations in all stages of the project, from its initiation to its formulation and its implementation;
- A decentralized process for decisions to approve projects by the rural communities themselves then by the Chief of Daïra and the Wali (governor);
- The integration of women in the identification of development actions to be carried out and in their implementation (Fig. 1).

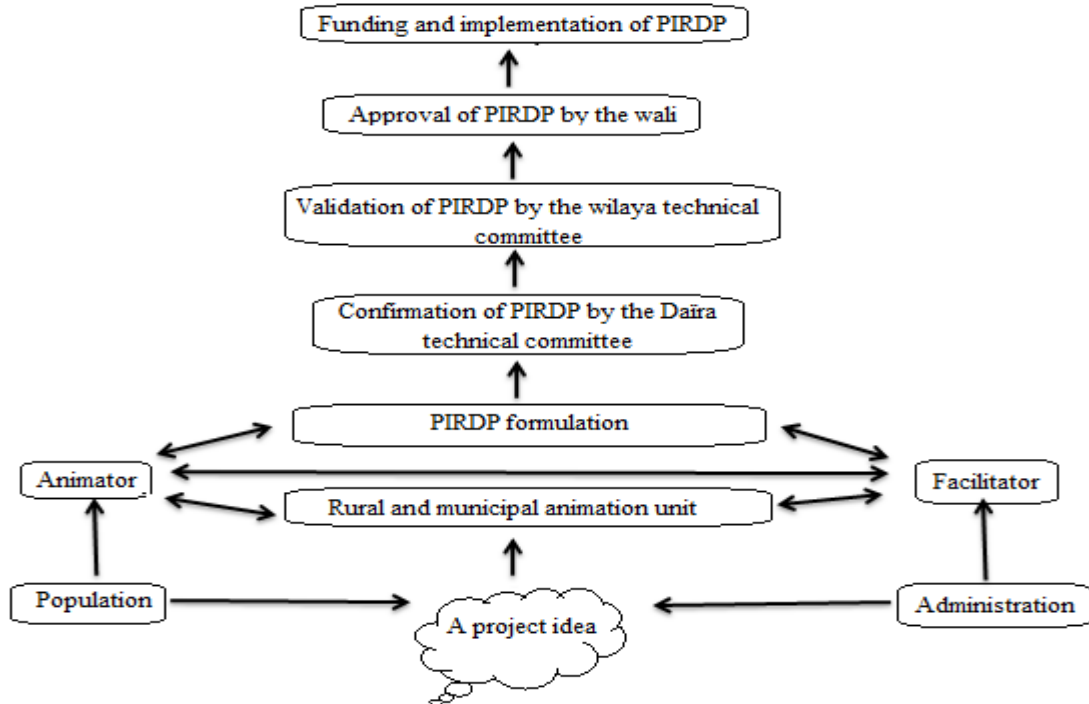


Figure1. Cycle of a PIRDP project (MADR, 2008)

Geographic framework of the study area

The wilaya of Naâma, with an area of approximately 3 million hectares, is located in the southwestern part of the high plateaus, sandwiched between the Tellian Atlas to the north and the Saharan Atlas to the south (Bensaid, 2006, Dahmani et al., 2016). It is bordered to the north by Tlemcen and Sidi Bel Abbes wilayas, to the south by the Bechar wilaya, to the east by El Bayadh wilaya, and to the west by the Kingdom of Morocco (Fig. 2).

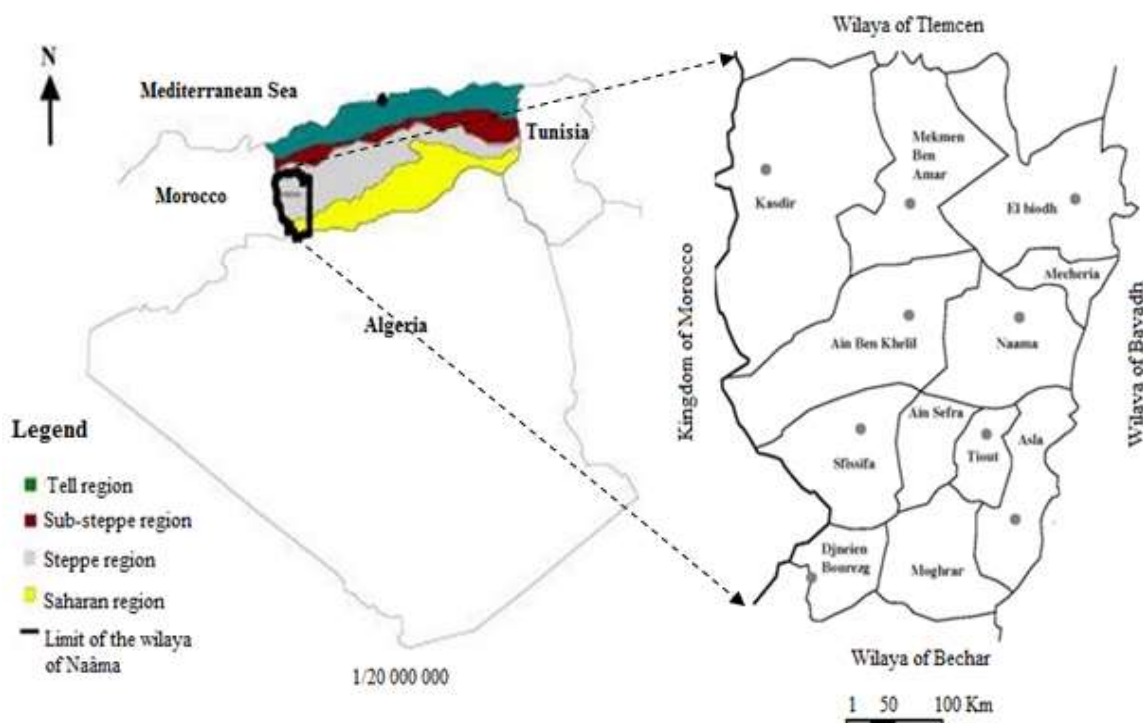


Figure 2. Geographic location of the study area

This region is divided into three distinct zones (Bouchetata et al., 2005; Benguerai et al., 2014; Benaïssa et al., 2018; Hadjadj et al., 2024):

- A pastoral zone located in the north covering 74% of the total area of the wilaya;
- A mountainous zone covering 12% of the entire territory whose structure is heterogeneous, it is a part of the Ksour Mountains and the foothills of the Saharan Atlas;
- A pre-Sahara zone that covers an area of about 14% of the total area of the wilaya.

The study area is located in the arid Mediterranean bioclimatic stage with cool winters and is characterized by an average annual rainfall of about 239 mm. The average maximum temperature is 36.58 °C, while the recorded average minimum temperature is 1.26 °C (Hadjadj et al., 2024).

The perennial vegetation formations of the area are dominated by degraded facies of grassy steppes based on Alfa (*Stipa tenacissima* L.), Sparte (*Lygeum spartum* L.) which constitute poor grazing lands and remnants of chamaephytic steppes based on white Wormwood (*Artemisia herba alba* Asso) as well as degraded facies based on *Noaea mucronata* (Forsk.) Asch. et Schw L., and *Thymelea microphyla* Cosset Dur (Benguerai, 2006; Benguerai et al., 2014; Hadjadj et al., 2017).

The production of *Stipa tenacissima* L., and *Lygeum spartum* L., facies estimated between 80 and 120 forage units per hectare in 1980 is now only 50 to 70 currently (Yerou and Benabdeli, 2013). Pre-forest formations occupy the mountainous relief of the Ksour Mountains (Mostefai and Grenot, 2006). These are sparse shrub formations of evergreen oaks (*Quercus ilex* subsp. *Ballota* (Desf.)), Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis* Mill.), red junipers and prickly junipers (*Juniperus phoenicea* L., and *Juniperus oxycedrus* subsp. *Rufescens* (Link) Deb), dimorphic ash (*Fraxinus dimorpha* Coss. & Durieu (Despois, 1959; Hadjadj et al., 2019 ; Hadjadj et al., 2020 ; Hadjadj et al., 2021).

The wilaya is divided into 7 districts and 12 municipalities, with a population of 246.692 inhabitants, representing an average density of 8.27 inhabitants per km². One-third of the population is concentrated in the municipalities of Mecheria and Ain Sefra, whose area does not exceed 6% of the total area (Zair, 2011).

Regarding population dispersion, we note that 193.480 inhabitants are concentrated in Chief-town agglomerations, 7116 inhabitants in secondary agglomerations, 29.047 inhabitants in scattered areas, and 17121 are nomads (DSA, 2017).

The total agricultural area of the wilaya is 2 203.460 ha, of which the useful agricultural area represents only 1.14%, or 25019 ha, and the rest (2.178.441 ha) consists of grazing lands. The pastoral livestock in this steppe area is estimated at about 1,273,094 heads, of which the predominant species is sheep (about 91.25% of the livestock) (DSA, 2017).

The wilaya of Naâma is characterized in its southern part by the presence of oases which are specially intended for agriculture, this is the case of the oases of Moghrar Tahtani and Foukani and the oases of Tiout (Fig. 3). These oases which produce local varieties of date palms of excellent quality are characterized by the presence of layered crops of fruit trees such as fig, apricot, olive, pomegranate, apple and market gardening (Dahmani et al., 2016).



Figure 3. Asla oasis, wilaya of Naâma (Benaradj et al., 2020)

Evaluation methods

Evaluation is defined as a systematic and objective assessment of a development intervention in progress or completed, to determine the relevance of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the intervention (CE, 2006). Depending on the timing of the exercise, three types of evaluation can be distinguished (Zaghib, 2009):

- *Prospective evaluation (ex ante)*, carried out before the start of a project or program, provides essential elements for the feasibility of a project;
- *Mid-term evaluation (follow-up)* which allows for the monitoring of the entire project cycle sequence by sequence;
- *Final evaluation (ex post or retrospective)* which is clearly after the closure of actions and focuses on short- and medium-term effects (evaluation of results) or long-term impacts (evaluation of impacts) of a project or program.

Our retrospective evaluation method includes two complementary phases, a data collection phase from the management authorities including the Forest Conservation and its districts and triages at the level of the Naâma wilaya. The data collected (specifications, technical requirements, expert reports, photos, physical and financial reports, etc.) facilitated the preparation and conduct of field surveys. These surveys were conducted during the year 2020 and covered all completed projects. The main criteria selected for this evaluation are those frequently used in this type of study (Chevalier et al., 2010; Roussel et al., 2010; Chevalier and Dedeire, 2014; Aouiche-Chenoune et al., 2017). These criteria are defined as follows:

Effectiveness: concerns the actual achievements of the project, in comparison with what was initially planned;

Relevance: analyzes the relationship between the problems to be solved and the objectives of a project;

Coherence: Means deployed for the realization of the project. It is not limited only to the financial envelope but also includes human resources, and animation devices.

Table 1. Reference evaluation criteria chosen

Evaluation	Standard	Very low	Low	Moderate	Good	Excellent
Effectiveness	Completion rate					
	Coverage rate					
Relevance	Improvement of conditions and quality of life of rural populations					
	Increase and diversification of rural populations' incomes					
	Sustainable valorization					

	and management of natural resources.					
Coherence	Budget					
	Human and material resources					
	Program facilitation and implementation					

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Physical and financial report

27 proximate and integrated rural development projects were completed during the period 2010-2013 in the territory of the wilaya of Naâma. These actions were completed and closed by the direction of programming and budget monitoring of the wilaya (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of PIRDP actions carried out in the Naâma wilaya (2010-2013)

	Projects	Volume/Units
2010	Distribution of solar kits	120 U
	Plantation of windbreaks	500 Km
	Grazing exclusion of rangelands	3 000 ha
	Plantation of forest band	175 ha
	Pastoral plantation	450 ha
	Dune fixing	200 ha
	Planted shade	15 ha
	Water and Soil Conservation Works	11 430 M ³
	Plantation of fruit trees	359 ha
	Livestock (Sheep distribution)	1350
	Livestock (Cattle distribution)	416
	Beekeeping	390 Ruches
2011	Distribution of solar kits	360 U
	Plantation of windbreaks	500 Km
	Pastoral plantation	50 ha
	Water and Soil Conservation Works	8125 M ³
	Torrential correction	1500 M ³
	Plantation of fruit trees	150 ha
2012	Distribution of solar kits	240 U
	Plantation of windbreaks	350 Km
	Pastoral plantation	85 ha
	Dune fixing	50 ha
	Track management	20 Km
	Torrential correction	7300 M ³
	Plantation of fruit trees	1000 ha
2013	Track management	15 Km
	Plantation of fruit trees	290 ha

According to the conservation of forests of the wilaya of Naâma, the administration responsible for the implementation of the projects, it is noted that 43.84% of the amount allocated to the implementation of the program was used in 2010. In 2011, 21.63% of the amount was used, while in 2012, 28.73% of the amount corresponds to the sum of the actions carried out. Finally, the remaining amount was committed in 2013, which represents only 5.80% of the total investment amount (Fig. 4).

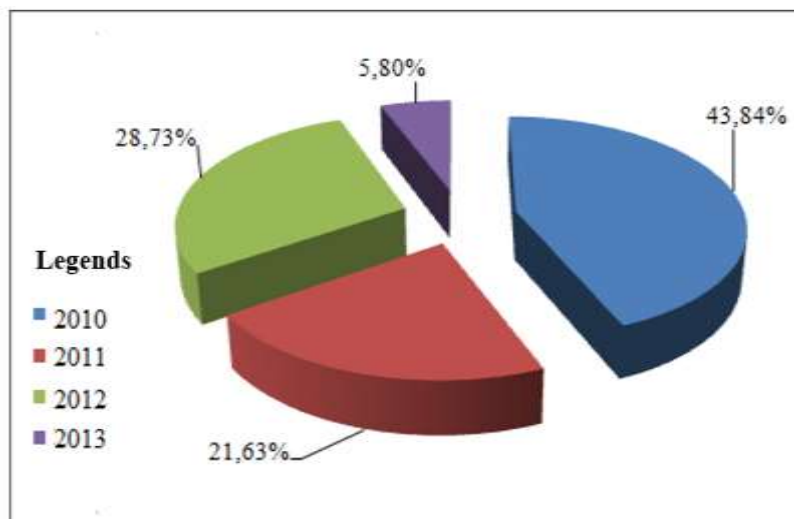


Figure 4. Percentage of amounts consumed per year

Distribution of projects by unifying themes

The implementation of proximity and integrated rural development projects must meet strategic axes called unifying themes, which are four in number. Figure 5 shows the financial consumption rate of PIRDP projects by unifying themes during the 2010-2013 period, where nearly half (46.29%) of the budget was directed towards actions under theme 2, which revolves around increasing and diversifying rural populations' income through multiple activities.

Theme 1, which focuses on improving the living conditions and quality of life of rural populations, is ranked as the second priority with a consumption rate of 27.43%. The sustainable management and valuation of natural resources (theme 4) is a major concern for the forest administration. The projects implemented in this area consumed 26.28% of the program contract allocated to PIRDP projects for the period. Finally, we note that actions related to the protection and valuation of material and immaterial heritage (Theme 3) were not programmed by the forest conservation of Naâma. This may be justified by the presence of other administrations more specialized in this field.

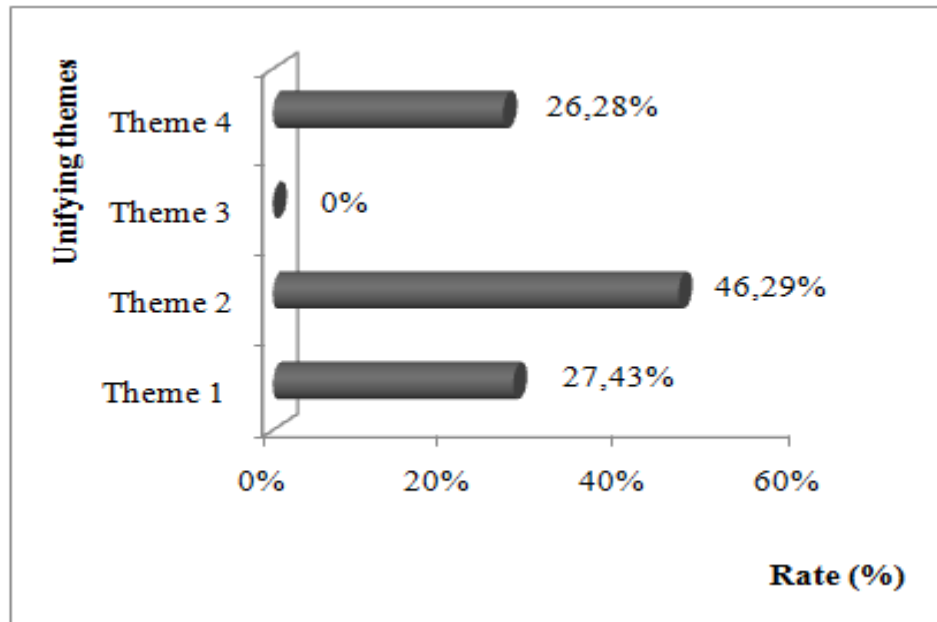


Figure 5. Financial consumption rate of PIRDP projects by federating theme

Evaluation of PIRDP projects

Efficiency analysis

If we consider the rate of achievement, compliance with deadlines and execution plans, and beneficiary access to the results produced by the projects as criteria for analyzing the effectiveness of the planned PIRDP projects, it appears that this effectiveness is strong and acceptable since all approved projects are completed within the scheduled timeframes.

As previously mentioned Naâma has a vast steppe area that covers most of its territory (74% of the total area). This area is currently in an advanced state of degradation which favors desertification.

According to the realization report, we note that 4010 hectares of land have been treated as part of the fight against desertification (dune fixation, pastoral planting, protective fencing, planting of green belts and forest strips). This area is very insufficient as the wilaya is among the most affected by the phenomenon of desertification.

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In terms of infrastructure development, we have recorded the development of 35 kilometers of track, which is totally insignificant for a vast territory like that of Naâma.

The actions taken to diversify the income of rural populations are limited to sheep and cattle farming, fruit plantations and beekeeping. No attempt to develop tourism, handicrafts, local products, or investment in the forestry sector has been undertaken. Finally, soil and water conservation operations remain insufficient, totaling only 28355 m³.

Relevance analysis

The relevance of PIRDP projects at the level of the wilaya of Naâma is considered weak for the three federating themes. In the absence of a participatory territorial diagnosis reflecting the wishes of the rural population and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the territory, the forest administration was unable to set objectives adapted to the context of the rural territory of the wilaya.

The axis of diversifying the income of the rural population was based on promoting livestock breeding, beekeeping, and fruit tree planting.

According to our field surveys, we found that distributing sheep (5 ewes and one ram/beneficiary) and cattle (two cows /beneficiary) to farmers who were not engaged in animal husbandry was an unwise action in a degraded territory that is home to a livestock population of over a million heads of sheep.

Concerning the fruit tree planting and to ensure that the operation would be carried out, the forest administration charged the regional rural engineering company with carrying out the planting for the benefit of the beneficiaries. Despite this initiative, we found that the success rate of this operation in several communes was very low, due on the one hand to climatic hazards and on the other hand to the lack of enthusiasm of the beneficiaries for agriculture.

The actions planned to improve the living conditions of the population are limited to the distribution of solar kits, windbreak planting, and track development. No project is included in the framework of mobilizing water resources.

In terms of environmental preservation, we have recorded operations aimed at combating desertification and hydraulic erosion (fixing dunes, setting aside grazing land, torrent correction), protecting roadways (planting green belts and forest strips), and improving grazing production (pastoral planting).

It should be noted that the wilaya, with a purely pastoral vocation, offers significant potential in several areas; however, the valorization of these resources remains insufficient. For example, livestock farming occupies a prominent place in the wilaya, but no measures are planned to promote the transformation of wool and hides derived from animal resources (Table 3).

Consistency analysis

The implementation of the 27 approved PIRDP projects in Naâma wilaya was carried out through performance contracts entrusted in the form of a global contract to the regional rural engineering company (ERGR) of Tiaret.

Delays have been recorded in the implementation of projects due to the low human and material resources deployed by the Regional Company of Rural Engineering (ERGR). In addition, the monitoring of operations was carried out by the forestry department of the wilaya which does not have the necessary means to do so.

In addition to the insufficient human and material resources, there is a deficit in the integration of the human component in the planning processes of development projects. A valid

design and effective implementation of the development of a given territory requires the participation of those who should benefit from it, and this is not entirely the case for development projects carried out in Naâma despite the presence of a representative of the rural population during work meetings. In light of all these justifications, we can conclude that the coherence of the strategy of the Naâma wilaya remains weak at all levels.



Figure 6. Illustration of some executed actions.

Table 3. Status Evaluation of PIRDP projects

Evaluation	Standard	Very low	Low	Moderate	Good	Excellent
Effectiveness	Completion rate			X		
	Coverage rate	X				
Relevance	Improvement of conditions and quality of life of rural populations	X				
	Increase and diversification of rural populations' incomes	X				
	Sustainable valorization and management of natural resources.	X				
Coherence	Budget	X				
	Human and material resources	X				
	Program Facilitation and Implementation	X				

CONCLUSION

In light of this retrospective evaluation study, it appears that the objectives sought through the implementation of proximity projects and integrated rural development in the Naâma wilaya have not been achieved.

In the absence of studies reflecting the current state of the territory, managers cannot target the main development axes within a so-called participatory development strategy.

Moreover, initiatives need to be implemented to succeed in the rural development policy in the wilaya. These include, among other things:

- Encouraging the participation of all local actors in the wilaya;
- Launching studies on territorial diagnosis;
- Implementing necessary measures to integrate the rural population in the development process and not limiting it to a single representative;
- Diversifying the sources of funding for programs;
- Promoting multidisciplinary approaches in territorial management;
- Adapting overly constraining administrative procedures to increase efficiency.

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