

Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

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Criteria-1 Efficiency

The construction of two bridges and rehabilitation of National Highway 1, were executed almost as planned and the construction of a new access road to the capital's northern trunk road, the project plan was revised to increase the length of the road. However delays affected the efficiency of project implementation. Most infrastructure projects are large, complex and slow to get off the ground, however delays were much larger than anticipated, increasing significantly the project costs and postponing the positive impact. National Highway 1 construction and rehabilitation began five years after it was planned (project began in February 2000 instead of January 1995) and the Northern trunk road construction project began in December 2001, instead of December 1994 (seven years delay).

Delays in project implementation were partially explained by external factors, the floods caused by Hurricane Mitch (22 October thru 5 November 1998) and the two major earthquakes of January and February 2001. Incidentally the damaged caused by the earthquakes in buildings, houses, roads and other infrastructure also increased the demand for construction materials and consequently project cost.

A number of lessons may be drawn from the project. First, projects designed as part of a reconstruction effort must allow for flexibility, as conditions may change rapidly. Second, it is important to develop local capacity and work closely with local partners. Third, the managerial structures required for resource mobilization and implementing multiple large infrastructure projects are weak long after the period of conflict comes to an end. Thus it requires long-term commitments. Fourth, to avoid delays in the project execution, the process and negotiations of the right way should be initiated with anticipation to the initiation of the road construction.

Criteria-2 Impact

The floods of hurricane Mitch flattened two Bailey bridges installed to replace the "de Oro" and "Cuzcatlán" bridges that were destroyed during the civil war, the latter a double-track structure. After the disaster, communications were cut but quickly re-established. In the first case the old one-lane railway bridge was used, and in the second, the dam near the destroyed bridge served as a crossing. In both cases the crossing was restricted (one way was open to traffic, on the other end traffic had to wait for their turn to cross), slow and somewhat unsafe. Depending on the traffic amount, it took one hour or more to cross 700 meters of the railway bridge. Increasing significantly passenger and commercial transportation cost. Additionally potholes proliferated in the road network mainly because of the poor condition of road surfaces, which was due to insufficient periodical and routine maintenance. Before the capital's bypass (northern trunk road) was constructed in this project, passenger and commercial traffic to and from the capital, San Salvador, were usually caught in traffic congestion in Soyapango and Ciudad Delgado. National Highway 1 also experienced severe traffic jams near San Martin.

The bridges and improvements in the road network designed and completed within the framework of this project, undoubtedly contributed to improve social and economic conditions of Salvadorans. That statement can be supported, for the following reasons: alleviated traffic congestions in the San Salvador Metropolitan Area, eliminated long delays to cross the Lempa River (from more than one hour to less than a few minutes), diversified road network use and increased options of routes, reduced cost, in time and money, needed for transportation of passengers and goods within the country in the east-west corridor, as well as international trade. A better transportation network also contributed to increase competition in some goods markets and facilitated the labor mobilization by reducing the time and cost required for commuting. Furthermore, better roads also reduce vehicle maintenance and increased their lifetime.