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Lessons-learned Reporting on Project Management Structure: WIO-Lab



Abstract: The WIO-LaB project workplan is based upon the Nairobi Convention workplan. The synergy between the project and the policy/programme level, provides an important advantage. Despite these important advantages, it should be noted that the capacity of the focal points (technical, financial and human resources) for coordination of the different project activities, which cover a wide range of issues, may in cases be limited. A second challenge concerns the large diversity in the respective institutional, cultural and socio-economic settings of the respective countries. Apart from official structures, the WIO-LaB PMU has furthermore established/supported a number of more informal structures for stakeholder consultation and involvement. Although the adopted structure builds upon the existing structure of the Nairobi Convention, the approach would generally be replicable in other situations.

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Addressing Land Based Activities in the Western Indian Ocean

Lessons Learned Reporting on Project Management Structure: Wio-LAB

Experience of the GEF sponsored

Addressing Land Based Activities in the Western Indian Ocean” (UNEP/GEF WIO-LaB Project)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project entitled “Addressing Land-based activities in the Western Indian Ocean” (shortly referred to as “WIO-LaB”) addresses some of the major environmental problems and issues related to the degradation of the marine and coastal environment due to land-based activities in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region. The project is designed to serve as a demonstration project for the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA/LBA).

The project has three main objectives: 1) Improve the knowledge base, and establish regional guidelines for the reduction of stress to the marine and coastal ecosystem by improving water and sediment quality; 2) Strengthen the regional legal basis for preventing land-based sources of pollution; and 3) Develop regional capacity and strengthen institutions for sustainable, less polluting development. The project activities include among others, a regional monitoring programme for water, sediment and biota quality, the implementation of demonstration projects and the development of regional guidelines for the management of municipal wastewater and physical alteration and destruction of habitats, the development of regional guidelines for environmental quality objectives and standards and Environmental Impact Assessment, and a regional Protocol on Land-based Activities to the Nairobi Convention, and various training, educational and stakeholder involvement activities. The final product of the project will be a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and Strategic Action Plan (SAP), as well as related National Programmes of Action (NPA) for abating the impacts of land-based sources activities.

The project involves eight countries in the WIO region (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles). Its total budget is 11,413,465 USD, of which 4,511,140 USD from GEF, 3,395,650 USD in cash co-financing from the Norwegian Government, and 3,131,675 USD and 375,000 USD in in-kind and cash co-financing from the participating governments and UNEP respectively. The project is executed jointly by the Nairobi Convention Secretariat and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). The total duration of the WIO-LaB project is 4 years (2005-2008).

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The project is implemented under the umbrella of the Nairobi Convention, in that it executes part of the Convention’s Programme of Work as agreed by its Conference of Parties. As such, the project is strongly embedded in the political and institutional framework of the Convention, and key stakeholders are those related closely to the Convention. Among others, the national focal points of the Nairobi Convention are at the same time the focal points for the WIO-LaB project.

Furthermore, the WIO-LaB project workplan is based upon the Nairobi Convention workplan. The synergy between the project and the policy/programme level, provides an important advantage. Apart from the benefits of an existing structural setup, the fact that this workplan was adopted by the COP of the Convention, which is at Ministerial-level, and therewith expect reporting back on the basis of this agreed workplan, and also the fact that countries contribute to sustain the Convention (financially and in-kind), ensures a certain level of commitment from the countries. This is probably an important advantage

as opposed to projects which operate more in a kind of vacuum.

Despite these important advantages, it should be noted that the capacity of the focal points (technical, financial and human resources) for coordination of the different project activities, which cover a wide range of issues, may in cases be limited. Also, the focal points operating at a more political level, the need existed for a clear separation of technical-level interventions from political-level decision making. The challenge in this is thus to ensure that relevant technical actors/institutions are adequately involved in the design and implementation of the various project interventions, whilst at the same time assuring adequate involvement of the focal points, without causing conflicting situations and ensuring that decisions are taken at the appropriate level.

A second challenge concerns the large diversity in the respective institutional, cultural and socio-economic settings of the respective countries, ranging from the relatively 'rich' small-island states of Seychelles (80,000 inhabitants) and Mauritius, the much poorer island states of Comoros and Madagascar, to the large continental states of Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and in particular the economic giant (within the African context) South Africa. This diversity, in itself, is an enormous challenge, since varying resources and capacity do not enable, nor desire a fully uniform approach.

THE EXPERIENCE

DESCRIPTION OF THE ORIGINAL DESIGN

Description of project management structure

The WIO-LaB PMU is established within the offices of the Nairobi Convention Secretariat and closely cooperates with the latter, at both the policy and technical level. The day-to-day WIO-LaB project management structure consists of two main components:

1. At the policy level, a project coordination structure consisting of National Focal Point Institutions (NFPs), which are the appropriate

government institutions mandated for Environmental Policy Making and Implementation, represented by National Focal Points (NFPs). Since the WIO-LaB project operates under the umbrella of the Nairobi Convention, the NFPs and NFPs are those of the Nairobi Convention. Under the general guidance of the NFPs, most countries have meanwhile (this is, 1 year in project implementation) set up National Inter-Ministerial Committees, which function as the national mechanisms for project coordination and decision making.

2. At the technical level, task/issue-specific management structures consisting of regional and national level Task Forces and Working Groups¹ have been established. Such mechanisms have been set up for the main project components, which are (i) water, sediment and biota quality, (ii) municipal wastewater management, (iii) physical alteration and destruction of habitats, (iv) environmental impact assessment and (v) legal and technical review. At the national level the work of the Task Forces is overseen by the NFPs. At the regional level such guidance is provided by the PMU, in cases assisted by a dedicated Regional Expert.

The overall structure constitutes a virtual matrix structure, whereby on one axis policy-level management is assured by the structure of NFPs, and on the other axis technical-level guidance is provided by the structure of Task Forces and Working Groups. The project structure is schematically presented below.

¹ Task Forces, in this context, are defined as groups of nominated experts dedicated to a specific group of project activities and outputs. It is anticipated that these Task Forces will fulfill a longer-term advisory role within the context of the Nairobi Convention. A Working Group, within the context of the WIO-LaB project, distinguish from this definition in that it will fulfill only a temporary function. It is anticipated, however, that the existing Working Group on Water and Sediment Quality will fulfill only a temporary function, to be taken over by the Forum of Academic and Research Institutions (FARI), which is later described.



At the governance level, the NFPs are united in the form of a Focal Points Forum, which provides guidance through the Nairobi Convention Regional Coordination Unit. Overall governance is, however, assured by a Project Steering Committee which consist of the NFPs, the executing and implementing agencies (Nairobi Convention Secretariat, UNOPS, UNEP/DGEF and UNEP/GPA), key regional NGOs (WIOMSA, IUCN and WWF), sister IW projects (the UNDP/GEF ASCLME project and the WB/GEF SWIOFP project) and national NGOs and the private sector as appropriate.

Apart from these official structures, the WIO-LaB PMU has furthermore established/supported a number of more informal structures for stakeholder consultation and involvement. Most importantly, these are:

- The Forum of Academic and Research Institutions (FARI) in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region. This independent Forum is constituted of the Heads of Institutions of academic and research institutions in the region and functions as a mechanism for coordination of research activities, but also as a mechanism for

quality assurance and as a sounding board / clearinghouse for technical outputs from the project and other regional activities.

- The Informal WIO International Waters (IW) Forum (not displayed in the above diagram), which is a regional event during which key players within the WIO IW arena, including organizations such as WIOMSA, WWF, IUCN, the IOC, as well as projects, discuss issues of coordination and synergy between projects and activities. The first of these forums has taken place in September 2005, as a side-event to the WIOMSA bi-annual WIO Marine Sciences Symposium and brought together more than 100 participants from organizations and projects in the region.

Following the Informal WIO IW Forum and more detailed discussions with other project managers, it has furthermore been decided to set up a more formal Coordination Committee for larger GEF (and non-GEF) projects in the WIO region, which are most importantly the UNDP/GEF Agulhas and Somali Current LMEs (ASCLMEs) project, the World Bank/GEF South-Western Indian Ocean Fisheries Project (SWIOFP), which are both expected to take off

in 2006, and the ongoing African Coelacanths Ecosystems Project (ACEP). The modalities for this Committee have already been agreed between the respective project managers of these projects. Other projects may join this structure as well.

Rationale for approach taken

The rationale for the approach is based upon two main elements:

- The existing management structure of the UNEP/Nairobi Convention Secretariat, consisting of a network of NFPIs and NFPs. This structure provided a solid basis for the overall regional management structure of the project. The embedding of the project in the Nairobi Convention structure represents a win-win situation, whereby the Convention is strengthened through the visibility of concrete project activities, and on the other hand the project benefits from an existing structure for regional coordination and a strong means of decision-making and achieving government commitment at the regional level.
- The decision to operate on the basis of a structure of national and regional Task Forces and Working Groups is mostly based upon the success of similar approaches in other IW projects, such as the South China Seas Project. Despite some of the drawbacks of such structure, such as the relatively high cost and administrative burden, the benefits of achieving ownership and a means of efficient exchange of experiences and points of view, seem to generally outweigh such considerations.

RESULTS AND LEARNING

The adopted project management structure has thus far proven to be very advantageous. On the positive side, the adopted structure offers all appropriate handles for project implementation and decision making. The following advantages may therefore be formulated:

- The NFP network provides direct access to policy makers at the national level, whilst the technical Task Forces ensure adequate involvement of technical-level actors. The system clearly separates political and technical decision-making processes.

- The fact that the NFP network is embedded in an existing regional coordination and policy-making structure (the Nairobi Convention), facilitates political-level decision-making at the regional-level. Decisions can thus be taken up to the level of the COP of the Nairobi Convention, at Ministerial level.
- The structure of regional and national Task Forces and Working Groups provides a good mechanism for the implementation of specific activities, such as for example the identification, selection and implementation of demonstration projects, and the review of existing and development of new policies and strategies for addressing the impacts of land-based activities. The Task Forces are generally very active and effective.
- The integrated regional-national management structure of both the NFP network and the Task Forces has a number of important spin-offs, such as the exchange of experiences and points of view between countries, and improvement of 'ownership' of the project by the region.
- The adopted structure provides an excellent vehicle for assuring broad stakeholder involvement. The various national and regional Steering Committees, Task Forces and Working Groups represent most of the key project stakeholders, and ensure their active involvement in the project.

Nevertheless, there are also a few weaknesses to be marked:

- The efficiency and effectiveness of implementation at the national level very much depends on the capacity of the individual NFPI, and more specifically the NFP. The capacity and strength of these NFPs is, however, in many cases inadequate which in cases leads to delays in the implementation of activities. Also, the NFPs are government employees, and not paid in any way by the project, which in most cases has proven to limit the level of priority given to the project, and which also limits the PMU in controlling/directing the NFPs in the execution of their tasks. The relative weakness of some of the NFPs is probably the most restricting factor in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of project implementation.
- The appropriateness of the structure also depends on the specific conditions of the

country. For example, having 5 different Task Forces, and an Inter-Ministerial Committee at the level of Seychelles (80,000 inhabitants) and even slightly smaller islands such as Mauritius, may not be feasible, nor desirable. In such cases, some of the Committees and Task Forces may better be merged.

- The structure of NFPs assuring coordination and decision-making at the national level also provides some concern in that such individuals are strongly influenced by the existing social and institutional structure in which they operate. Decisions, such as for example with regard to the nomination of participants in Task Forces, and the pre-selection of demonstration projects at the national level, may therefore be biased.
- The structure of technical Task Forces and Working Groups, however effective, weighs quite heavily on the project organization and budget. The organization of the many regional 'events' (meetings, workshops, etc.) takes up an important part of the time of the PMU as well as consumes considerable budget. In a region where modern communication means are still relatively underdeveloped (or better unused), cultural aspects inhibit quick and efficient responses, and simply acts such as ticket distribution is hampered by all kinds of logistical restrictions (not to mention the UN administrative demands and inefficiencies), the average meeting preparation poses a heavy burden on the small WIO-LaB PMU. Also, meetings are quite expensive (40-50,000 USD each for a 2-3 meeting with 20 participants).

The project is currently implementing measures to (partly) counteract some of the above-mentioned draw-backs. The strategy to do so consists mainly of:

- The provision of financial and technical support to the NFPs to implement their coordinative tasks. Country-specific approaches are taken in this respect, in view of the considerable differences between the various national institutional setups and capacity.
- Capacity building activities, such as a Training Course on Effective Leadership for the NFPs.
- Ensuring adequate flexibility in establishing coordination structures at the national level.

For example, the mandate given to the Inter-Ministerial Committees in Mauritius and Seychelles is much larger, and covers at the same time functions of some of the more technical Task Forces.

- Ensuring efficiency of the Task Force meetings, by continuously weighing the benefits of the regional meetings (i.e. not meeting only because of meeting itself, but only with very specific outputs in mind). Meetings are therefore not on regular intervals but on a pre-defined and agreed workplan for each Task Force)

REPLICATION

Although the adopted structure builds upon the existing structure of the Nairobi Convention, the approach would generally be replicable in other situations. This is demonstrated by the fact that other IW projects have successfully adopted similar approaches. It should be noted, however, that the regional legal framework of the Convention provides additional leverage to this structure, in particular the network of NFPs, and it would in all cases therefore be advisable to use such existing structure where available.

REFERENCES

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KEYWORDS

- ◆ Project management
- ◆ National focal points
- ◆ Socioeconomic disparity
- ◆ Inter-project coordination

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