

Summary & Lessons Learned
of
Building Capacity and Mainstreaming
Sustainable Land Management Project Terminal Evaluation

I- Summary:

The SLM Project (2008-2011) is a GEF/UNDP project in the final stages of completion. It was evaluated by independent consultants in accordance with the project terminal evaluation requirements and guidelines of GEF and UNDP. SLMP aimed to prepare a National Action Program (NAP) for land degradation, develop the capacity for Sustainable Land Management (SLM), and integrate SLM into national and sectoral policies and planning. Most of the emphasis has been on the first component – NAP preparation.

The project has made a significant contribution toward initiating the discussion and program activities for SLM in Cambodia. While the SLM project experienced slow implementation progress in initiating the NAP, after additional support and guidance from government, UNDP and GM, the project team undertook an intensive, well organized effort to prepare a comprehensive document that generally conforms to the UNCCD standards. This is a significant accomplishment and credit to the current project team to recover from the earlier difficulties with the project and to greatly improve the quality of the document from the earlier versions.

The project produced an admirable set of Best Practice documents organized around four SLM-related themes (Agriculture, Community Forestry, Community Fisheries, Community Protected Areas) that should provide an important resource for future programs. SLMP completed orientation and training sessions that have contributed toward heightened awareness of the key issues and risks of land degradation in the country. These included various awareness-raising, planning and focused training sessions (although no follow-up surveys of results were available). The main beneficiaries were MAFF staff and personnel involved in decentralized commune-level development planning, limiting the scale of capacity development.

The project had a modest effect on integrating SLM into provincial, district and commune planning. The most visible results are the inputs to the National Strategic Development Plan (2009-13) and the Strategy for Water & Agriculture (2009-13), and the proposed application of Agro-ecosystem Analysis guidelines within the extension services to include SLM. The project provided basic training to MAFF staff (27) in nine provinces, Ministry of Interior staff (18) involved in the D&D program and to the various members of project teams.

The technical studies, training, orientation and many events sponsored by SLMP served to introduce SLM to a range of stakeholders at national, provincial, and local levels who were not previously familiar with the concept. The modification to the Agro-ecosystem Analysis process is the most important and promising mechanism assisted by the project since it has the potential for direct SLM outreach through MAFF and other extension services. The project also established important linkages to the various programs and projects that are engaged in land management in Cambodia. Overall, however, the inability to complete many of the planned outputs, the limited scale of capacity building and mainstreaming, and the high cost/low efficiency in delivering the end results indicated significant performance deficiencies. About 35% of the output targets were achieved and the same proportion partially achieved, while 30% were unachieved. The late effort to generate a high quality NAP was the major achievement, recognizing that the scale of the project had to be reduced to produce this key result. This effort justified a moderately satisfactory rating for project results. Project implementation and sustainability were deemed moderately unsatisfactory.

The project implementation was characterized by many organizational, personnel and operational difficulties and inefficiencies. The slow start-up of the project, weak direction in the early stages and the general lack of clarity about the SLM concept and the means of cross-sectoral promotion imposed major barriers to progress. The NAP had originally been scheduled for completion at the end of 2008, but the eventual document took another two years, in part due to new standards established by UNCCD. There were not enough qualified staff and quality assurance measures to effectively implement the project and insufficient incentives to engage senior staff. Many of the early project staff and consultants were either under-qualified or not sufficiently connected to the government to fully achieve the expected results. The Project Board and UNDP made subsequent changes in project management, recruited new staff and advisors and involved GM which led to revisions that narrowed the focus primarily on to NAP preparation and investment strategy. This was a significant positive measure that provided the needed direction for the project at the costs of reducing Component 2 and 3 outputs.

Introductory mainstreaming of SLM occurred but it was not substantive enough to demonstrate during a short project period a major or sustained effect on integration of SLM in national and local development processes. The training program was rather ad hoc and unorganized, with limited records on the training activities and results. The project held 19 important training courses and selected technical planning workshops. It was reported that about two-thirds of the proposed 24 training topics were eventually developed, some of which were delivered in subsequent trainings.

Project implementation should have been guided by an approved inception strategy, and careful and timely recruitment of project staff, mentoring and supervision and targeted capacity development of staff. Gaps in recruitment of staff had a significant effect on progress. A key lesson is that new multi-sectoral concepts such as SLM require senior leadership and direction to ensure an effective response within government, and that the necessary resources, organization and incentives must be in place to directly engage qualified government staff in taking responsibility for project outputs.

Although the three year time frame limited the potential to substantially strengthen the enabling environment for SLM, the project has developed the initial approach and roadmap, and created an important level of awareness and role for SLM in national development. Further progress in advancing the concept will depend upon the institutional mainstreaming of SLM in cross sector programs, including climate change, and the availability of government and donor funding. Five recommendations are presented for further action during the final closing stages of the project.

II- Lessons Learned:

- III- Several lessons have been identified by the SLM project staff in the annual reports. Firstly, there is a need to recognize the partnership aspects of SLM that require full engagement of all stakeholders, and in addition, early exposure of the project management to field conditions also helps to orient the project to real issues in the field.¹
- IV- Secondly, the critical role of human resources was highlighted in the project implementation, particularly the need to address the manpower requirements for NAP preparation, to have a fully operational PTT (only part of the PTT was actively engaged), and to resolve accountability and roles of the international technical advisor and the national advisor.² Also, the hiring of external consultants without strong links to government, the management difficulties in enforcing quality standards and the lack of sufficient incentives to fully involve government experts created significant constraints for project implementation.³
- V- Thirdly, the SLMP experience demonstrates the importance of both communication and having a clear concept of the project strategy and expected results. There is insufficient time in a medium size project to accommodate any uncertainty in the measurable results expected from the project. This also means having an effective, feasible monitoring

¹ Paraphrased from SLM Project Annual Project Report for 2008, p.2.

² Paraphrased from SLM Project Annual Project Report for 2010, p11.

³ UNDP, Draft Project Completion Report, April 21, 2011, p. 19.

program that tracks progress during the implementation and that triggers intervention where they may be required.

- VI- Fourthly, it is apparent that SLM is a new concept in Cambodia that will take time and experience to become established. The expected results from SLMP within a three year time frame may have been too ambitious. Realistic expectations should drive future project designs. The SLM program will need to be much more strategic, simple and issue/ground-oriented than has been the case in SLMP if it is to be effective in the next few years.