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Lessons-learned Reporting on Stakeholder Involvement: WIO-Lab



Abstract: While this existing political and institutional framework provides a good ground for political embedding of strategy formulation and decision-making, the capacity for stakeholder involvement (technical, financial and human resources) of the dedicated focal point institutions and individual focal persons may in cases be limited; experience with wide stakeholder involvement (or the motivation to assure such) may be limited or even non-existent. The WIO-LaB strategy for stakeholder participation is based upon a stakeholder involvement strategy that distinguishes between three levels of stakeholder involvement. The project has been underway for 15 months, and the approach is proven to be successful so far, in particular as it concerns the regional-level stakeholder involvement. However, the success rate of the national stakeholder involvement activities is still to be proven, with many of the project countries still establishing their strategies and structures.

Peter Scheren
Peter.Scheren@unep.org
Addressing Land Based Activities in the Western Indian Ocean

Lessons Learned Reporting on Stakeholder Involvement: 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.

While this existing political and institutional framework provides a good ground for political embedding of strategy formulation and decision-making, the capacity for stakeholder involvement (technical, financial and human resources) of the dedicated focal point institutions and individual focal persons may in cases be limited; experience with wide stakeholder involvement (or the motivation to assure such) may be limited or even non-existent. The challenge in this is thus to ensure that the more policy-oriented focal points adequately engage others in the process, and that were needed capacity at the national level is attracted from supporting institutions.

THE EXPERIENCE

The WIO-LaB strategy for stakeholder participation is based upon a stakeholder involvement strategy that distinguishes between three levels of stakeholder involvement:

1. Participation: represents the core group of stakeholders involved in the actual implementation of project activities, either autonomously, on through co-management or another form of collaboration. In the case of WIO-LaB, the key stakeholder in this respect are the National Focal Point Institutions (NFPIs), but also other regional and national institutions and organizations implementing specific project activities, such as the demonstration projects, the water and sediment quality monitoring programme, and training and capacity building activities.
2. Consultation: The group of stakeholders involved on a consultative level is very wide. The key mechanism for consultation is constituted by:
 - a. At the highest regional level, the regional Project Steering Committee, and which involves UN agencies, collaborating projects, regional and national NGOs, the and the private sector;
 - b. At the highest national level, the national Project Steering Committees (or Inter-Ministrial Committees) in each of the countries. The constitution of the National Steering Committees varies between countries but generally involves governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as representatives from the private sector;
 - c. At the more technical level, the regional and National Task Forces and Working Groups. The members of these groups are mainly from government agencies and research institutions, and at the national level also NGOs and the private sector.
3. Information dissemination: At the widest possible level, information is disseminated, both regionally and nationally. Regionally, the main mechanism for information dissemination is through the project website and newsletters, as well as through an annual Informal Western Indian Ocean (WIO) International Waters Forum. The first of these Forums was held in September

2005 and joined over 100 participants from institutions and organizations in the region. The project is furthermore developing a web-based Clearinghouse Mechanism (or information portal) for information on the WIO Coastal and Marine Environment, as a long-term sustainable mechanism for information dissemination under the Nairobi Convention Secretariat. At the national level, the existing national systems for information dissemination will be used as much as possible. Reports and other technical outputs are disseminated as widely as possible. Furthermore, several countries have already organized stakeholder meetings to inform the wider public of the WIO-LaB objectives and activities.

A specific issue related to the WIO-LaB project is the demonstration projects. In order for these projects to optimize chances of replication, project-specific stakeholder involvement strategies, as well as strategies for the dissemination of lessons learnt, are being prepared.

It should be noted that community-level engagement under the project has so far been limited. It is, however, intended to develop specific awareness raising activities to this extent, coupled as much as possible to actual (visible) project activities such as the demonstration projects, as well as educational programmes that are being developed. It is believed that such linkage with concrete activities will much increase the effectiveness of such campaigns. The same goes also for private sector engagement, which is most efficiently done through their engagement in concrete activities, in particular the demonstration projects, although the sector does also play a role in the various coordination structures (Committees and Task Forces).

The WIO-LaB stakeholder involvement strategy is documented in a Regional Stakeholder Involvement Plan (RSHIP). At the national level, further, the NFPIs are being engaged in the development of National Stakeholder Involvement Plans (NSHIP). In order to facilitate the implementation of the NSHIPs, the NFPIs have been invited to make requests for supported from the project, for example for the organization of National Task Force meetings, Stakeholder Awareness Campaigns, etc. The preparation of NSHIPs and the development of

MOUs between and the NFPIs for specific support in executing these plans, is presently ongoing.

Rationale for approach taken

The approach towards stakeholder involvement as taken by the WIO-LaB project builds strongly upon the experience of other projects. This concerns in particular the decision to operate on the basis of a structure of national and regional Task Forces and Working Groups. 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.

The project has furthermore attempted to approach the issue of stakeholder involvement in a pragmatic manner: not all stakeholder need to be engaged at the same level, and it should be clearly established which stakeholders need to be engaged at what level. The regional and national stakeholder involvement plans developed and being developed by the project provide the basis for such.

Pros and cons of adopted approach

The following advantages of the above-presented approach may be defined:

- The institutional structure through which stakeholders are engaged in Committees, Task Forces and Working Groups ensures a good level of ownership of the project and its activities; the project is very much seen as a joint effort from the region.
- The systemic way in which stakeholders are identified and involved ensures also that most key stakeholders in the region are actually involved, to various degrees, as appropriate.
- The network of regional partners, including other programmes and projects which have related objectives and activities, and the mechanisms established for cooperation with such partners, generates both efficiency and effectiveness of project activities.

The following disadvantages may be formulated:

- The institutional structures for engaging stakeholders, including the various

Committees, Task Forces and Working Groups, are very demanding in terms of management and budget.

- The efficiency and depth of engagement of stakeholders at the national level very much depends on the capacity and motivation of the National Focal Point Institutions, including the political support that such institution has. Not in all cases, stakeholder involvement is therefore equally effective.
- The effectiveness of certain mechanisms for stakeholder engagement at the regional level, such as the project website and the Clearinghouse Mechanism that is to be developed, is questionable, in a region where experience with such mechanisms and access to IT infrastructure is still relatively limited. For example, discussion forums established through the project website are very little used, despite regular promotion.
- Unfortunately it should be said that the representation in Committees, Task Forces and Working Groups is in cases determined by 'who knows who' rather than based on appropriateness and competence. The selection of participants should therefore be managed with a good level of diplomacy.

The project has been underway for 15 months, and the approach is proven to be successful so far, in particular as it concerns the regional-level stakeholder involvement. However, the success rate of the national stakeholder involvement activities as still to be proven, with many of the project countries still establishing their strategies and structures. The slowness of this process proves once more the dependency on the capacity and 'drive' of the National Focal Points.

REPLICATION

The approach is generally applicable to other projects. The main restriction in implementing such approach is probably a budgetary one, since the structure of Committees, Task Forces and Working Groups is financially quite demanding.

REFERENCES

WIO-LaB Website: www.wiolab.org

Contact details: Dr.ir. Peter Scheren, WIO-LaB Project Manager
Tel: +254.20.7621270/1206/1250,

E-mail: wiolab@unep.org /
peter.scheren@unep.org

KEYWORDS

- ◆ Stakeholder involvement
- ◆ Project design

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