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## Lake Chad: Tackling Implementation Challenges Early On



**Abstract:** This note covers how the Lake Chad Basin GEF project has responded to initial delays in project implementation. First, the project identified and address weaknesses in inadequate project management at the level of the Project Management Unit. Second, the project addressed the need for more inclusive involvement of the regional basin institution, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in project implementation, as well as the need to build its institutional and fiduciary capacity. Finally, the project has improved coordination among the two implementing agencies (World Bank and UNDP), the executing agency (UNOPS), the regional basin institution (LCBC) and the Project Management Unit (PMU).

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Reversal of Land and Water Degradation Trends in the Lake Chad  
Basin Ecosystem**

# Lake Chad: Tackling Implementation Challenges Early On

Experience of the GEF sponsored

## Reversal of Land and Water Degradation Trends in the Lake Chad Basin Ecosystem

GEF Project ID: 767, UNDP PMIS ID: 1845, IBRD PMIS ID: 1118, IBRD PO ID: 70252

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project development objective (PDO) is **to contribute to the sustainable management of land and water resources in the greater conventional basin of lake Chad** (including Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger and Nigeria). The project is designed to achieve the following three specific objectives: (i) build capacity within the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and its national committees related to success in its mandate of managing land and water resources, (ii) enhance policy initiatives and transboundary institutional mechanisms to ensure that the member countries jointly develop and manage the Lake Chad basin's resources, and (iii) conduct a transboundary diagnosis analysis (TDA), implements pilot demonstration projects, designs a Strategic Action Program (SAP) for sustainable management of the basin and mobilizes increased donor interest/support for implementing the SAP. This sustainable management of the resources is expected, in the long-term, to reverse the environmental degradation in the Basin.

This GEF grant is implemented by the World Bank and UNDP, while UNOPS is the implementing agency. The project has a total of six components. Three out of the six components of the project are implemented by the UNDP, two components are implemented by the World Bank, and one component is implemented jointly by the World Bank and UNDP.

The UNDP implements the following three components:

- (i) Establishment of Program Management Unit (PMU) and country lead agencies.
- (ii) Strengthened stakeholder participation and education, involvement of stakeholders through development of local initiatives.

- (iii) Key measurements, TDA and synthetic basin framework

The World Bank implements:

- (iv) Enhanced regional policy initiatives and institutional mechanisms to address transboundary issues
- (v) Donor support mobilized for SAP and LCBC plan implementation

While the UNDP and the World Bank jointly implement:

- (vi) Demonstration projects to test methodologies, stakeholder involvement and implementation modalities. The World Bank three pilot projects are the following: the Lake Fitri pilot, the Komodougou-Yobe or Hadejia-Nguru project, and the Waza-Logone project. Similarly, UNDP is implementing three pilot projects, two of which have become 'twinning' for smoother execution arrangements: the Lake Chad Shorelines project and the Niger-Chad northern basin project; and, separately, the Chad-CAR (Chari) transboundary project.

The sector board approved the project in January 21, 2003 and it became effective only one year later in January 22, 2004. Given this delay, the closing date has been extended till January 2008.

### ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES

#### I. Need to improve project management

**An initial lag in project implementation occurred due to inadequate project management and insufficient technical capacities in the PMU; the initial Project Manager (PM) selected and installed proved to be a stronger technician than manager.**

An early resolution of logistic problems is equally essential for smooth project implementation in a difficult operational environment. Outsourcing to consulting companies may from time to time be considered. To address the initial lag in project implementation and kick-start the project activities, the implementing agencies hired an international consultant (IC), an experienced GEF Project Manager cum Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), on a retainer basis to assist the resident project management unit (PMU) in reviewing all preparation documents with a focus on short-term 'implementability', revision of the Project Implementation Plan, revision of the budget, preparing work plans, etc. The same IC was kept on a retainer basis to support the PM to build managerial skills and experience.

The more difficult the project's implementation and operational environment is, the more important it is - and also the more difficult it is - to find highly qualified staff, willing to work in such conditions. In the light of the need for improved project management, the project also made the difficult decision to hire a new PM with demonstrated skills in contract management, human resources, strategic planning, and performance. However, ultimately, this second PM did not possess the adequate skills, and the initial PM, who had been reposted to a more technical assignment, was reinstated.

**II. Need for more inclusive involvement of the regional basin institution, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in project implementation, as well as the need to build its institutional and fiduciary capacity.**

**The relevant basin institution lacked ownership of its role in the project. Opinions diverged as to whether its role should include direct project execution, or be strengthened in the areas of information sharing and knowledge, monitoring of regional basin protocols, and other political supervisory activities.**

To strengthen LCBC's ownership of the project, two of its staff have been employed by the PMU, while a Project Management Group – consisting of senior staff of LCBC and the PMU – has been established to advise and guide the PMU and to ensure LCBC's full involvement in all project activities, decision making for the project, submission of documents to the Implementing Agencies for *no-objection's* through LCBC,

without infringing on the responsibilities of the PM.

With such decision-making body embedded within LCBC this ensures that all the decisions taken in the project are taken by and on behalf of LCBC. The PMG meets once a week, and on an ad hoc basis if needed, to review the issues and proposals prepared by the PMU and take decisions on them. The PMG chairman is the Deputy Executive Secretary of LCBC, who along with the Project Manager meets with the LCBC Executive Secretary at least twice a month to brief him on the issues around the project. This set-up has been tested and proves to be effective. Additionally, the PMU will exercise more managerial responsibility in delegating activities to seconded staff from the LCBC to the PMU.

In order to build capacity, the project will invest in more training for LCBC staff through the use of the project training budget. A framework for the specification of this training will come out an Institutional Analysis of LCBC, which will include an (i) institutional assessment report, (ii) an action plan for institutional reform, and (iii) a resolution at the level of the LCBC Council of Ministers, which will lend political support for the institutional assessment and accompanying action plan. This process has been launched with a workshop on institutional assessment and its action plan.

In order to provide more direct financial capacity, an audit will be executed by a firm of international standards and funded by the project. The GEF project will also hire a Financial Management consultant to assist LCBC in developing an action plan for fiduciary capacity building, assist with the implementation of the recommendations of the audit firm, and conduct training for representatives of the member countries.

Lastly, a special account has been opened for the regional basin institution by the EA through signature of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in order to sub-execute specific project sub-components relating to pilot / demonstration activities.

**III. Need to continue coordination between the two implementing agencies (World Bank and UNDP) and executing agency (UNOPS) of the line of communication with the**

### ***regional basin institution (LCBC) and the Project Management Unit (PMU)***

**Coordination of flow of information as well as prioritization of key messages has been challenging, as there is a project PMU, a partner organization (LCBC), two implementing agencies (WB and UNDP) and one executing agency (UNOPS). Most informal communication has been through two-way email traffic, cc'ed to all others. There has been a need to increase communication which gathers all parties in order to make decisions on issues of mutual interest.**

Project management performance has significantly improved due to increased management input of UNOPS and daily interactions between the Implementing Agency teams and the Project Management Unit (PMU).

The PMU holds monthly telephone conferences with the participation of the IAs, EA, and the LCBC. The PMU performs the secretarial and facilitation functions, which include preparing and distributing an agenda in advance, and preparing and distributing meeting minutes. The EA will ensure technical connection of all parties.

### **RESULTS AND LEARNING**

To assist other GEF IW projects that may be struggling in terms of delayed implementation, weak project management, and lack of clarity with regards to the roles of stakeholder institutions, the Lake Chad Basin GEF project shares the following “lessons-learned”:

- Projects should take action to improve project implementation at an early stage, without the formality of “project restructuring”.
- Strong managerial skills in a Project Manager are critical to working with a regional basin institution with varying degrees of capacity and ownership over GEF project objectives.
- A clearly defined role for the regional basin institution is a pre-requisite to ‘ownership’ and thus to successful project implementation.
- The ‘roadmap’, or framework, for institutional change must be adapted to the character of

the institution in order to be accepted, and thus embarked upon.

### **REPLICATION**

Elements needed for replication include:

- fungibility of funds to bring in additional consultants when necessary and to be able to restructure the work of the PMU;
- open communication and close cooperation across the implementing agencies and executing agency, in order to exert needed improvement in functioning at project level;
- leverage of Project Implementation Review rating of “unsatisfactory” in order to propose formal project restructuring as an alternative.
- willingness of the project’s management and IAs/EAs to be proactive in addressing problems and making radical changes when needed

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Project start-up was slow, while project effectiveness and launch were substantially delayed. The above issues in turn affected progress in other areas: PMU logistical set-up, initiating flows of funds, effective preparation of work plan and budget, etc. Similar projects would be well-advised to pre-emptively address such issues before they delay project implementation.

### **REFERENCES**

For more information on the Lake Chad project, please visit [lakechadbasin.org](http://lakechadbasin.org) or contact the Project Management Unit at [anadatiega@yahoo.ie](mailto:anadatiega@yahoo.ie). Task Team Leaders for the project are Abdoulaye Ndiaye (UNDP) and Johan Grijsen (World Bank).

World Bank external website

<http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=64283627&piPK=64290415&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=228424&Projectid=P070252>

Project Appraisal Document

[http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64193027&piPK=64187937&theSitePK=523679&menuPK=64187510&searchMenuPK=64187511&siteName=WDS&entityID=000094946\\_03010904004780](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64193027&piPK=64187937&theSitePK=523679&menuPK=64187510&searchMenuPK=64187511&siteName=WDS&entityID=000094946_03010904004780)

Lake Chad Basin Commission web site:  
[www.cblt.org](http://www.cblt.org) (currently under revision)

## KEYWORDS

- ◆ Informal Project Restructuring
- ◆ Lake Chad Basin
- ◆ Joint Implementing Agencies
- ◆ Institutional Arrangements
- ◆ Project Management

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