

Draft Sustainability Plan IW:LEARN – additional input on website component

Background

The UNEP component of IW:LEARN will end October 2009. However, the activities will have resulted in outputs and established certain services that are worth considering to be maintained beyond project closure.

A process to determine the demand for sustaining the web-services provided by the UNEP component of IW:LEARN needs to be established. This process would include the following steps:

1. define the functionality of the IW:LEARN website and services (including learning among GEF IW projects)
2. scoping of the demand from IW projects for (certain) IW:LEARN web services beyond October 2009
3. establish the “fit” and links with other UNEP (web-based) environmental and knowledge management services
4. scoping of a sustainability plan based on 1-3 above
5. contributing to results-based management within the GEF IW Focal Area

Functionality

The ICT component of IW:LEARN (component A) plays an important role in facilitating mutual learning by:

- virtually bringing together the community of IW projects by linking their websites through one central node and highlighting project news(feeds)
- providing mutual learning platforms (blogs), experiences (knowledge documents, GEF IW experience notes) developed as part of the IW:LEARN and IW conferences
- capturing and facilitating access to TDAs, SAPs and other key IW project outputs through an easy to navigate website
- providing work spaces for IW (learning) projects
- encouraging IW projects to develop a website through the use of the toolkit
- archiving project websites and project data beyond project closure
- linking to GEF policies, key UNEP publications and the wider International Waters community through the GEF website and UNEPs web based services
- providing GIS functionality

The importance of IWLEARN.net as repository for project websites should not be underestimated. No other mechanism is capturing IW project websites and associated environmental data and reports as is done systematically through IW:LEARN. In addition, past experiences have resulted in changes in ownership of website addresses and loss of data and information.

Minimal service in sustainability plan: Register, maintain and sustain domain names and ensure that projects web sites are archived after project closure or in-between phases.

Demand

Sustainability can only be realized if the activity is fulfilling a certain demand. For the IWLEARN.net services, the following needs to be established:

- What level of demand is there from (future) IW projects for services provided by IW:LEARN and for GEF adoption of a policy to encourage such demand?
- What are the opportunities within UNEP to further mainstream and sustain the IW:LEARN services/website?

Concerning the first point, it would be interesting to find out what (future) IW projects are prepared to pay for services provided by a sustained IW:LEARN website component. It is therefore proposed to pursue a process through which IW:LEARN would be better able to define the scope of services to be included in the sustainability plan. As IW:LEARN has also contributed to the consistency amongst IW project websites through use of the toolkit, the GEF Secretariat might be interested in encouraging sustained IW:LEARN services by considering a policy on the use of IW:LEARN web services for new projects requesting GEF funding.

Concerning the second point, UNEP is in the process of finalizing its mid-term strategy. In line with the strategic directions, different parts of UNEP would have comparative advantages for sustaining the IW:LEARN services depending on the focus of these services (technical and substantive). The scope of the sustainability plan will have to be further tailored depending on the future “home” of the IW:LEARN website in UNEP.

Assumption: sustained IW:LEARN.net website and services contribute to mutual benefits for GEF, IW projects and UNEP, and possibly to all GEF agencies as UNEP becomes the “Knowledge Management hub” for GEF.

Sustaining IWLEARN.Net and technical support to GEF IW projects (drafter: SAK)

The following discussion points are provided for the December 11th , 2007 IW:LEARN Steering Committee meeting. It represents a rough estimate and rationale for cost basis to sustain IW:LEARN services. A more detailed analysis will be prepared in the course of the year using direct inputs from projects.

UNEPs infrastructure allows for hosting of GEF project websites. In addition the software platform being used (i.e. Plone) has gained considerable expertise within UNEP and around the globe (including GEF IW projects, CIA, USGS, etc).

Experience to date shows that greater face to face interaction with projects is needed to address needs from IW projects for our services (particularly with non-native English speaking projects). It is anticipated that the mini-workshops planned for 2008 will secure greater cooperation among projects and partners and confirm projects’ willingness to cost share technical training workshop and website hosting and support. For instance, in the recently held workshop, projects indicated they were willing to consider paying to attend

workshops (for China W/S, Guarani, Ningbo, and Shandong projects cost shared 50% of travel cost).

For GEF “corporate” ongoing maintenance and updating of IWLEARN.net incurs a recurrent cost, in addition to periodic hardware and software updates (e.g. increase disk space).

Also to be considered is whether IW:LEARN will need to continue archiving project content as projects as well as continue to host (and provide minimum support) to projects hosting their websites on the IWLEARN server (e.g. PEMSEA, Lake Chad, NWSAS, etc). In the event that funds cannot be secured to continue serving projects or the IWLEARN website, an exit strategy will need to be developed in early 2009, in particular to transfer website sites of existing projects under implementation to an alternative service provider. These will have cost implications not factored into the lowest cost estimate below.

The following is a low cost (rough) estimation for continued minimum IWLEARN/ICT services aimed at building the capacity of projects to do websites development and operation themselves and not rely on external consultants:

Server operation and maintenance	\$10,000
Hardware & software	\$ -2,000
Coordinator	\$36,000
Technical staff	\$36,000
Annual training	\$40,000
Technical support and back stopping	\$20,000

	\$144,000

If the average number of projects per year is: 3¹
 Min. cost per project = \$48,000 (\$144,000/3). If project “tax” is the only source of funds.
 Min. rough estimated operating cost = \$60,000/ year (with or without project tax)

To continue operations under the current arrangement, an annual budget of \$250,000 is required (to support a TCC function, workshops and maintenance – include updating, hardware, etc).

Estimated figures for ICT development and maintenance that projects pay:

Hosting services	\$50-200/year
ICT consultants for website development	\$2500 – 3000/month
Updating and maintenance	Project staff/ None
Archiving services	None in general
Other ICT Development (e.g. database, GIS)	\$8000+
Rough estimated cost project incur:	~\$30,000 - \$60,000 (tot).

¹ The average will probably be between 10 and 20 projects per year.