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2007-008

## Think Regional, Act Local: The GEF's Small Grants Programme and Nile Project Partnership in Addressing Transboundary Water Issues



**Abstract:** The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP) has been promoting grassroots action to address global environmental concerns. The Nile Transboundary Environmental Action Plan (NTEAP) has funded 179 Micro-grant Projects, 36 School based learning projects and 21 nationally selected community based projects. The question is how to establish a linkage and forge a working relationship between various levels of interventions of GEF, and ensure a most cost-effective mode of action from a GEF standpoint. In 2004, a strategic partnership was developed between SGP and NTEAP to ensure greater impact by the two programs, with an integrated management approach and in a cost-effective way. Through this partnership, SGP's model was replicated at the regional level by NTEAP through the creation and implementation of a micro-grant component of the regional project. At the global level, the experience of a strategic partnership between a regional IW project and SGP can be replicated by other river/lake basins and regional seas. The significance of the partnership lies in the natural complementarities between a regional project and a locally driven program. NTEAP provides a regional vision and serves a regional forum for community-based actions, while SGP serves a delivery mechanism for local actions. From the SGP point of view, NTEAP provides a regional vision to ensure a coherent regional perspective of community-based actions and serves a regional forum for knowledge transfer.

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# Think Regional, Act Local: The GEF's Small Grants Programme and Nile Project Partnership in Addressing Transboundary Water Issues

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## GEF/UNDP/WB: Nile Transboundary Environmental Action Project

GEFID: 1094

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### *GEF Small Grants Programme*

Since its inception in 1992, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP) has been promoting grassroots action to address global environmental concerns. SGP aims to deliver global environmental benefits in the GEF focal area of biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, protection of international waters, prevention of land degradation (primarily desertification and deforestation), and elimination of persistent organic pollutants through community-based approaches. SGP is a corporate programme of the GEF. It is implemented by UNDP and executed by UNOPS.

Currently THE SGP has 101 country programs in developing countries. SGP applies a community-based approach and targets a special group of stakeholders of the global environment, i.e. the vulnerable, disadvantaged, and poor communities. As of March 2007, THE GEF SGP has funded more than 8,190 community-based projects worldwide. These projects have paid special attention to meeting GEF's environmental objectives while at the same time achieving poverty reduction and local empowerment objectives. Special concern is also given to local and indigenous communities as well as gender concerns.

#### *Nile River Transboundary Environment Action Project*

The objective of NTEAP is to provide a strategic environmental framework for the environmentally sustainable development of the Nile River Basin, to improve the understanding of the relationship between water resources development and environmental conservation in the Basin, and to provide a forum to discuss development paths for the Nile with a wide range of stakeholders. Focusing on

transboundary issues provides the riparian countries with a major opportunity to make significant progress towards their economic and environmental goals in ways that have proved difficult to achieve independently. Project activities include capacity building, training, environmental education and awareness raising, knowledge and information sharing, development of a decision support system, communications, environmental monitoring and field activities at selected pilot sites. Diverse stakeholder groups will be encouraged to work together, both within their own countries and with counterparts in other riparian countries, to help build the mutual understanding, relationships and trust that are essential to joint problem-solving.

As of March 2007, the NTEAP has funded 179 Micro-grant Projects, 36 School based learning projects and 21 nationally selected community based projects.

### THE EXPERIENCE

#### *Issue and Challenge*

Unlike other lessons learned notes, this "Lessons Learned Note" does not intend to capture the good experiences of a single program or project, but documents the experiences and lessons learned from creating a synergy and fostering an integrated approach between various levels of interventions of the GEF. While SGP's rationale is local and community-based, the NTEAP takes a regional approach. There seems a gap between the two levels of intervention. The question is how to establish a linkage and forge a working relationship between various levels of interventions of GEF, and ensure a most cost-effective mode of action from a GEF standpoint.

#### *Addressing the Issue*

In 2004, a strategic partnership was developed between SGP and NTEAP to ensure greater

impact by the two programs, with an integrated management approach and in a cost-effective way. Through this partnership, SGP's model was replicated at the regional level by NTEAP through the creation and implementation of a micro-grant component of the regional project. The institutional arrangements, modalities and rules and procedures of SGP were extended to and learnt by NTEAP.

The Program started implementation in 2004 through a regional launch held in Khartoum, Sudan in December 2004. The SGP Coordinators of Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda were all present in that workshop. Currently there are 179 projects in the nine Nile Basin Initiative countries under the micro-grant component of NTEAP. The total amounts committed have exceeded 4.085 million US dollars. The first countries to approve MG projects were the SGP countries which had sound institutional structures in place (national steering committees and SGP national coordinators).

#### Institutional Arrangement

SGP has a country programme in six Nile River riparian countries, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. It has established a national steering committee in each of the country programme, reviewing and approving country program strategies and projects to support the implementation of the strategies. SGP has an established institutional arrangement that has been fully utilized by NTEAP micro grant component. Through the collaboration of the SGP National Coordinators, NTEAP micro grant component approves its projects via the national steering committee mechanism of the SGP with an addition of two members, a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) member of the Nile Basin Initiative and a representative of the environmental host institution of the country.

#### Capacity Building and Technical Assistance

In three countries, namely Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda both the SGP and micro-grants coordinators share the same office and rental costs. The SGP has been quite instrumental in the implementation aspects of the Program. The SGP Coordinators of Egypt, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania have helped in the recruitment of the micro-grant coordinators of

those countries; they have also assisted in the design and development of the National Action Plans for the Micro-grant Programs, as well as in the design and development of the training programs for the NGOs and CBOs. The coaching to the micro-grant coordinators has also proven to be quite valuable in the successful launch of the Program.

A training manual on the Monitoring and Evaluation of micro-grants was developed by the NTEAP project in collaboration with the SGP Coordinators of the Nile Basin countries. The purpose of the manual is to provide guidance and orientation to micro-grant coordinators, NGO trainers and other potential trainers working with NGOs in the NTEAP countries. The manual provides information that would be useful to the trainers when they are conducting their training sessions at the local NGOs or community level. It also provides definitions, concepts and some practical examples and case studies that may be used by the trainers when conducting their M&E training activities to micro-grant grantees. Each training session within the manual has some training slides for presentation purposes and an explanatory note that explains the slides. The trainers may also supplement the information provided in the manual by additional data and case studies to correspond to the local context of the given country. This manual has been tested in three of the Nile riparian countries and has been adjusted based on the feedback generated through those field testing trials. Feedback and experiences from the SGP on monitoring and evaluation issues were also incorporated to enhance the module.

The micro-grants program has developed a database of all projects. Even though this database is at its infancy stage, some of the Nile Basin countries with SGP are making use of the SGP data base to enter the micro-grants projects. It is hoped that in the future all micro-grant projects, in the eight Nile Basin countries with SGP projects, will be integrated into the national SGP database.

## **RESULTS AND LEARNING**

The NTEAP MG benefited from that of the SGP structure and experiences in getting a good start. Since the beginning of the NTEAP MG, SGP has contributed directly to the successful implementation of the micro-grant component of NTEAP through: sharing of institutional

arrangement; capacity building and technical assistance; and networking and exchange of information.

### Networking and Exchange of Information

The SGP Coordinators have participated in three regional micro-grants workshops organized by NTEAP. Their role was instrumental in sharing their experiences of SGP projects with the view of capturing some best practices and lessons learnt. They have also provided valuable inputs to help some countries in adopting the SGP model for implementing projects at the grass root level. An example is a presentation made by the SGP Coordinator of Kenya to government officials in Ethiopia about the SGP and its successes. The experience has convinced the Ethiopians to adopt the module and eventually Ethiopia became an SGP country.

Exchange visits from non-SGP countries to SGP countries have proven to be quite valuable to NSC members of non SGP countries as it allowed them to interact with their peers from SGP countries and share the experiences. The interaction has proven quite valuable as at least two projects (Water Hyacinth and Soil Erosion control) will be replicated in non-SGP countries.

### **REPLICATION**

Replication of the partnership arrangement has been achieved at the regional and global level. In the Nile River basin, the partnership between SGP and NTEAP demonstrates a mechanism for replication of local models at the regional scale. The design of NTEAP's micro-grant component is modeled after SGP, with the activities built on experiences gained by SGP. NTEAP provides a channel for SGP to influence and change policy-making at the regional level in cooperative management of its Nile River Basin.

At the global level, the experience of a strategic partnership between a regional IW project and SGP can be replicated by other river/lake basins and regional seas. Regional approaches and local community-based approaches are naturally complementary to each other, and will contribute to the overall objectives of GEF.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

The significance of the partnership lies in the natural complementarities between a regional project and a locally driven program. NTEAP provides a regional vision and serves a regional forum for community-based actions, while SGP serves a delivery mechanism for local actions.

As the Lead Specialist of the NTEAP Micro-Grants Program stated, the Nile Transboundary Micro-grants Program was designed as a replica of the successful GEF Small Grants Program. Even though the Micro-grants Program addresses one area of global significance (international Waters), it does in many aspects also address the SGP focal areas on Biodiversity and Land Degradation as far as they relate to the environment of the Nile Basin To a great extent, the success of the entire Nile Transboundary Micro-grants Program rests on the collaboration with the SGP as it draws on the experience of the SGP not only in the design but in the implementation of activities as well.

From the SGP point of view, NTEAP provides a regional vision to ensure a coherent regional perspective of community-based actions and serves a regional forum for knowledge transfer. Further, it is a natural replication mechanism for SGP to generate greater transboundary impacts.

### **REFERENCES**

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### **KEYWORDS**

- ◆ River Basin
- ◆ Community-based actions
- ◆ Watershed Management
- ◆ Partnership
- ◆ Institutional Arrangement
- ◆ Capacity-building
- ◆ Networking
- ◆ Information Exchange

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