



FNR_Rio Terminal Evaluation Visit to Liberia, November 2015. From left: Dr. Justine Braby (Evaluator), Mr. Jonathan Davies (National Coordinator), Mrs. Ellen Miller (National Assistant)

About the Project

The medium-sized project ‘Piloting Integrated Processes and Approaches to Facilitate National Reporting to Rio Conventions (FNR_Rio)’ was implemented between January 2010 and December 2013 by the United Nations Environment Programme and executed by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in partnership with six participating countries.

The countries involved were Liberia (Environmental Protection Agency), Eritrea (Ministry of Lands, Water and Environment), Mauritius (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development), Afghanistan (National Environmental Protection Agency), Lao PDR (Water Resources and Environment Administration), and Palau (Office of Environmental Response and Coordination).

The overall objective of the project was to pilot nationally-driven integrated processes and approaches to reporting to the three Rio Conventions. The website to access all relevant and interesting project documentation is here http://old.unep-wcmc.org/integrated-reporting-to-the-rio-conventions_675.html.

The total project budget was USD 1,615,880.00, with the GEF allocation being USD 840,000.00, with the remainder co-financing from the six countries. This brief is a summary on the results and lessons learnt of the Terminal Evaluation Report of the FNR_Rio.

Relevance

The reporting burden continues to be a real challenge to many countries, and even more so with countries of limited financial and human resources. The project objective was strongly aligned to the global environmental needs because it aligned directly to the three largest international environmental conventions and their improved implementation. The FNR_Rio was consistent with national priorities mainly because it supported enhanced cost and time efficiency, releasing resources for other, more pressing concerns at country level. The project was also consistent with the GEF framework and UNEP mandate. It was related to the Medium Term Strategy (2010-2013) and its associated programmes of work, as well as the Bali Strategic Plan.

Performance

Despite this being a complex project to implement, with the diversity and situations of countries involved, the project managed to achieve all of its outputs, and even an additional one added at the request of the GEF Secretariat mid-way through the project on developing and testing a template approach to reporting. Some countries (e.g. Afghanistan, Eritrea) felt that it did not have long-term staying power and was not necessarily successful in setting out what it aimed to achieve, or that it contributed to a more collaborative reporting environment.

This said, country visits to Liberia and Mauritius indicated that the project did establish some mechanisms in terms of sustaining institutional collaborative frameworks. Data mechanisms, which would have been a good strengthening tool to further improve reporting, did not come to fruition in any of the countries.

If lessons are taken up and this project feeds into a more global process, then it is likely that it can reach impact of improved overall reporting and implementation of the Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements.



FNR_Rio Terminal Evaluation Visit to Mauritius, November 2015. Meeting with project stakeholders.

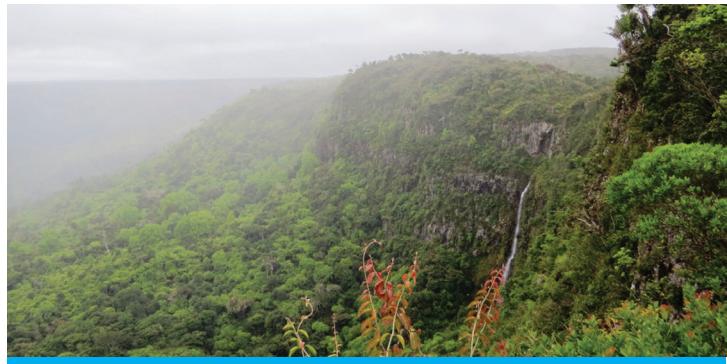
Factors affecting Project Performance

The project was well designed, although monitoring and evaluation and risk management was not well articulated in the project document. With regards project management, FNR_Rio was well implemented and coordinated at global level, but country implementation varied indicating differentiated results in terms of long-term impact.

There were quite a number of internal implementation issues at country level that were beyond the control of the project. Outputs were well managed, even at country level. There was communication and public awareness, but given the lessons from this project, there should be more. There was not sufficient country ownership and drivenness in some of the countries, but it did suffice in others. This was due mainly to the level of leadership and champions in each country (see Lesson 1 below).

Key Lessons Learned

Lesson 1: Strong/good leadership is important for project sustainability. It was noted by some respondents that even after the project there was a lack of real ownership at the higher level of this project. Many respondents highlighted that it's the people who make things work, not the institutions. More results were sustained in countries where there is strong leadership and ownership of the results of the project.



FNR_Rio Terminal Evaluation Visit to Mauritius, field visit, November 2015.

More effort should be placed at design phase during stakeholder analysis to identify possible champions at the onset, especially when conducting a pilot. In addition, more horizontal and vertical (strategic) communication could have gone a long way to further integrate the notion of synergies, especially when it comes to the who and how of the next steps.

Lesson 2: Improving collaboration and coordination among focal points increases cost- and time-effective synergies. Improving coordination among the focal points, especially in countries where the focal points are housed in completely different institutions or even Ministries (e.g. Afghanistan) became a key area for recommendations in each country's manual and at the final PSC meeting.

This project helped the focal points see the need and benefits of synergy and some countries have even used the collaborations for the reporting (e.g. Liberia and its SNC). For instance, the consultant responsible for the SNC in Liberia made it a point to see all three Focal Points separately, and then together as a team. This in turn caused a team atmosphere to build between the focal points where synergies were easily seen. Because of this (and of course the MEA unit where they all now sit in the same office block) created a collaborative atmosphere.

A meeting of MEA high level staff in Mauritius to discuss combined reporting and how it can be done is another step towards collaboration that has been effective (although in its initial stages). Regular meetings and intra and inter institutional communication also improves collaboration and decreases duplication of efforts (and causes a team spirit if work is shared and used by all).

Lesson 3: Providing strong platforms for effective stakeholder engagement forges sustainable relationships for collaboration...in some cases - what are these? Based on the country visits to Mauritius and Liberia, it was found that relationships forged during project implementation have stayed strong two years on, and this has increased synergies and collaboration. Stakeholders are required for an effective implementation of the Rio Conventions and therefore need to be involved for reporting processes. Through this project, the countries started to forge strong relationships with stakeholders for processes of data and information collection and the analysis and writing of national reports.

This was not the case in all countries so it begs the question - why was it so effective in some, and not in others? The reasons for this are alerted to in Lesson 2 above. In Mauritius, continued active engagement that is routinely managed and coordinated through the MESD makes a large impact on sustaining relationships (especially if the same people come to the meetings every time).

If there is also less turn-over in staff then there will also be more opportunity to meet the same figures responsible and thus forge stronger relationships.

Lesson 4: Building and maintaining an effective data collection and access mechanism continues to be vitally important in streamlining reporting. Based on country visits two years after project closure, it was noted that data mechanisms were not effectively built and sustained. There was a lot of mention especially of grey literature that has not been effectively collected. Access continues to be a problem. This needs to be a priority as this access is vital to effective reporting.

The Final Project Report made it clear in one of its key lessons that facilitating access to global data sets may help address some issues and be a useful interim tool while country data is being organised (and even for data that is just not available in-country). Suggestions to reduce barriers to data access have been widely captured in international decision documents. In the long-term there needs to be the development and promulgation of a relatively simple set of guidelines on how countries can manage data and information to implement the MEAs in a more coherent manner.

Lesson 5: Capacity-building at national level continues to be very important. It was noted strongly by many respondents that capacities still have gaps and there is a strong need for continued support in this area. This was also particularly emphasised in the final PSC meeting. Countries like Lao PDR and Afghanistan were prioritising capacity building towards harmonisation in reporting. Capacity building continues to be an important component generally in convention implementation.

Lesson 6: Stronger support and guidance (and integration among conventions) provided by conventions would go a long way in improving country reporting. A strong sentiment reflected from the evaluation was the need for more guidance and support from the Rio Convention Secretariats, including more synergies amongst the conventions themselves in terms of reporting (e.g. reporting cycles, templates). Convention Secretariats could learn a lot from the FNR_Rio project. The project also developed recommendations for improved integration of the reporting processes between the conventions at the global level, which have elements of previously used tools such as UNCCD PRAIS, as well as other online reporting systems. In future, where there is particular relevance of GEF projects to Rio Conventions, there needs to be more flagging of such to the Secretariats at planning phase.

Lesson 7: Work on providing clearer guidance on how to assess and report co-financing for future projects. It is the Evaluator's opinion, based on interviews and reporting, that countries may have underestimated the amount of co-financing they contributed during the process of the project. This is not a situation that is necessarily unique to this project, but it bodes well to think about this for future projects and how countries (and project partners) can better assess and report their co-financing contributions.

Lesson 8: Conducting a Terminal Evaluation too long after a project has ended poses limitations on the quality of the evaluation. This evaluation was conducted two years after the project ended. As a result, many of the project partners and implementers had moved on and were no longer contactable.

This had limiting factors on the evaluation. On another note, it was helpful to look at the project sustainability two years on to see how many of the activities have actually 'stuck' in the long term. There should be some thought given to projects that have ended and how important it is to either assess project performance generally and have a direct link still to project partners, or assess the effectiveness and impact the project has had in the long term.



FNR_Rio, Results and Lessons Learnt.