

Protecting the environment for sustained development: Tunisia and Senegal

Background

Historically, environmental protection in Tunisia was born out of the cholera epidemic that swept the country in 1969. In Senegal, on the other hand, it basically began in the wake of the Rio Conference of 1992 and is therefore still very much in its infancy. Tunisia has had institutions operating in the environmental field for almost thirty years while Senegal is still in the process of establishing mechanisms and developing strategies. The two countries are also at very different levels of economic and technical development. Environmental problems are caused by unsustainable use of natural resources by rapidly expanding populations, particularly in Senegal. Planning and monitoring is often virtually non-existent. In both countries, poor wastewater treatment poses a severe environmental hazard.

To help alleviate such problems, projects to train personnel at treatment plants, to improve sewerage systems, and to develop action plans and monitoring programmes are carried out by the national and regional environmental protection authorities in both countries, in cooperation with Swedish technical expertise. Sida has supported some 25 projects in Tunisia over the last 20 years to the tune of SEK 32 million and five in Senegal since 1992 totalling SEK 9.7 million. The World Bank, the European Bank and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) are other important funders of environmental programmes in the two countries.

The Evaluation

In order to assess the results and quality achieved in Sida funded projects in the two countries, Sida commissioned the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to evaluate Swedish environmental support to Tunisia and Senegal over the last ten years. The aim of the evaluation was to analyse the relevance of each project in relation to needs and problems identified in the two countries and to Sida's overall aim of its assistance, and to assess the short- and long-term effects of the projects, as well as their sustainability and cost effectiveness. The professional quality of the services provided by the Swedish technical assistance was also looked at.

Ulf von Brömssen and Kajsa Sundberg, both Senior Technical Officers at the Swedish EPA, carried out the study and submitted their final report in March 1999, entitled *Environmental Projects in Tunisia and Senegal* (Sida Evaluation 99/7). The evaluation covers six of the 25 projects in Tunisia and all five projects in Senegal. The report was based on documentary studies and interviews with stakeholders in Sweden as well as out in the field.

Findings

The evaluation team found that most of the projects were relevant to the identified problems and needs of the two countries, and to the Swedish environmental objective, i.e. one of the six overall development cooperation objectives adopted by the Swedish Parliament. All projects were found to promote sustainable environmental improvements, and to form a good basis for further efforts.

According to the team, Swedish technical assistance in the field of wastewater treatment and also experience in institutional development, has been of key importance in the establishment of the National Sewage Authority (ONAS) in Tunisia and a similar authority in Senegal, as well as the Technical Environmental Education Center (CITET) in Tunisia. This capacity building has helped to bring about a notable and sustained improvement in Tunisian wastewater treatment. Thus, in recent years, ONAS has constructed 10 plants without any outside technical assistance, all of which were found by the evaluators to function efficiently. UNEP's initiative to nominate ONAS as a resource organization for Mediterranean regional training in this field, is a further indication that efforts have been successful.

External support to establish efficient institutions, mechanisms to develop action plans and monitoring programmes, and to train personnel, provide a plat-

Environmental Projects in Tunisia and Senegal

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form on which the countries can sustain the results of projects carried out to date and to develop new projects. Another example given by the evaluators of institution building is the establishment of the Senegalese Environmental Monitoring Institute (CSE). This body has, albeit with help from Swedish technical assistance, designed a number of project plans which will help the country apply for further support from other external financing bodies. In Senegal, however, collection and treatment of wastewater is only at a starting point.

The report identifies and discusses a number of problems and constraints when implementing environmental measures in the two countries. Some of them refer to insufficient planning, inadequate administrative procedures and slow decision-making in the partner countries, often an expression of the poor economic situation of the country. In Senegal, implementation was further hampered by deficient environmental legislation.

Other problems point to shortcomings in the Swedish assistance. Proposing unrealistically costly measures, such as the environmental monitoring programme in Senegal, is one example; another being occasional delays in disbursements. Problems were also caused by a lack of adequate skills in the French language on the part of some of the participating Swedish consultants.

Recommendations

The work of developing strategic environmental planning, in the form of local, national and regional environmental and physical plans requires continued international support, the evaluators stress. Such plans, and capacities to implement them, are essential for protection of the environment and sustainable use of national resources.

Support to Senegal should be made a priority. Here, the report says, the problems of wastewater should be solved in stages. The first step could be to construct sewerage to control the disposal of untreated sewage; the second, introduced when the country's economy allows, could be to treat the wastewater in treatment plants. In Tunisia, evaluation findings show that the

collection and treatment of wastewater functions comparatively well.

The team recommends that training programmes in wastewater treatment be extended and continued in both countries, to improve the skills of local staff and allow them to keep abreast of technical developments. Training also promotes the establishment of long-term cooperation with international experts, currently especially important for Senegal.

Environmental legislation in Senegal should be extended and tightened to facilitate the implementation of various measures. In addition, the projects in this country should be preceded by feasibility studies to ascertain whether their final cost is realistic and acceptable.

Finally, the report indicates, there is room for improvement in both countries for more rigorous planning, quicker decision-making and smoother administrative routines. Swedish expertise must improve on their French.

Lessons Learned

Transfer of knowledge through technical assistance and institution building is often a time-consuming and expensive element of a long-term cooperation, the report notes. However, if continuous, it most often pays off. Tunisia's current capacity in dealing with environmental issues is a case in point. For knowledge transfer to become sustainable, it is crucial for the partner country to develop its own teaching resources.

An important element of the learning process is also the continuous feedback to all implementors and stakeholders of the experience from projects implemented. Effective feedback requires not only institutional mechanisms but also the gradual establishment over time of personal networks built on trustful relationships.

To improve on sustainability in the area of environment, the evaluators see it as important for donors to concentrate support to a limited number of key areas over a longer period of time rather than tackle too many issues in the short-term. ■

Rethink necessary for Sri Lankan environment project

Background

The Central Hills of Sri Lanka constitute a major catchment area for all the rivers on which the country depends for hydropower and irrigation. Many important crops, including tea and vegetables, are also grown here. Steep slopes, varying vegetation cover, heavy precipitation, constant erosion, a densely populated human settlement, and intensive, unhealthy chemical-based agricultural production are all characteristics of the region. These conditions, together with a lack of training and support from central government and economic constraints, constitute the problems faced by the region.

To find ways to alleviate the resulting environmental degradation, the Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC) ran a pilot project from 1995 through 1998, funded by

Sida to the tune of approximately SEK 5 million.

The stated aims of the project were to promote environmentally sound agricultural production methods generating more sustainable livelihoods. A project team was to carry out training programmes in environmental awareness and leadership, and, using a participatory approach, together with local farmers, imple-

The Swedish Cooperative Centre's Environment Project in Sri Lanka

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ment environmentally compatible agricultural practices such as soil conservation and the proper use of pesticides. The team consisted of local project officers, mainly newly graduated agriculturists and scientists, and local field staff.

The Evaluation

The project was examined from the point of view of relevance to the stated aims, achievement, cost effectiveness and sustainability. The evaluation team, led by professor David Gibbon from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, included expertise in the natural and social sciences, training and planning. Their report, entitled *The Swedish Cooperative Centre's Environment Project in Sri Lanka* (Sida Evaluation 98/30), was submitted at the end of 1998. The field work included visits to project offices, observation of training courses, interviews with project staff, course participants, villagers and officials in local government offices.

Findings

A major finding of the evaluation team was the existence, as they saw it, of conceptual and analytical inadequacies in the original problem analysis prior to project design. The main weakness was the lack of understanding of the historical, political, social and economic context that had led to the circumstances in which farmers and rural people in the area found themselves. The project was based on the erroneous notion that land degradation was only the fault of farmers, and there was no acknowledgement in the project that many of the environmentally harmful practices were due to factors largely outside their control. Farmers, the evaluators hold, cannot develop more sustainable production methods without the combined actions of many other stakeholders.

This does not imply, however, that all the project activities were irrelevant to the aims of the project. Some activities, the evaluators point out, such as environmental awareness training, compost making and innovative soil testing were all very appropriate with potential for positive long-term effects including less use of chemicals.

However, the way these and other project activities were carried out, left considerable room for improvement. Shortcomings stemmed much from the inexperience

of the project team and its somewhat narrow disciplinary base, one effect of which was too little emphasis on field-based adaptive research and monitoring.

On the whole, the evaluation team felt the project suffered from too many shortcomings to be viewed as either sustainable or cost effective. Also, activities were unlikely to make any significant impact due to outside influences, such as ill-advised government agricultural policy.

Recommendations

To ensure renewed relevance, the evaluation team recommends that the logical framework of the project be rewritten, followed by the drawing up of a detailed strategic work plan. The social, political and economic reasons for environmental problems need to be acknowledged and considered, so that the project can focus on areas, activities and groups that are most likely to benefit from what it has to offer. More stakeholders need to be involved for better and sustained results.

The evaluation team also recommends significant changes to the project team composition. More people with adequate competence in the relevant sciences and professional training skills are needed to broaden the project team's competence base. In addition, greater involvement of an experienced advisory group and a new steering group are required to monitor progress and provide guidance in training, research and the development of more sustainable systems. This would also improve cost effectiveness. Furthermore, more staff time should be devoted to active fieldwork, adaptive research and environmental monitoring.

Lessons Learned

The evaluation team feels there are several lessons to be learned. The most important being that a complete problem analysis is essential at the outset of projects such as this, which includes gaining a clear understanding of the socio-political situation. Progress also needs to be reviewed regularly under the guidance of a competent steering group and the active involvement of more experienced social and natural scientists is needed to help inexperienced project teams of graduate agriculturists, such as the one in this Sri Lankan project. ■

Concerns for the environment in credit-financed projects

Concessionary credits were introduced as an instrument of Swedish development cooperation in 1981. They consist of funds borrowed on international capital markets combined with funds from the Swedish development assistance budget, extended on soft terms. In the period 1989-1994, the former BITS (Swedish Agency for International Technical and Economic Cooperation), since 1995 part of the Department of Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation within Sida, financed the start of approximately 100 projects through

concessionary credits, to the tune of some SEK 9,500 million. Projects ranged from large-scale infrastructural projects of up to SEK 1,400 million to small-scale projects of approximately SEK 2 million each.

One of the six objectives adopted by the Swedish Parliament for development cooperation stipulates that Swedish aid shall "contribute to the sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment". Ten years after the introduction of this additional development objective, Sida commissioned an evaluation

Posttidning B

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to assess the extent to which environmental aspects have been taken into account and considered in credit-financed projects. Twenty selected projects, initiated during the said period or soon thereafter, were scrutinized by the Swedish environmental consultant assigned for the task, ÅF-IPK AB. The five-person team, led by Ms Gunhild Granath, was also asked to make recommendations on how to develop best practices for including environmental aspects and concerns in credit-financed projects. The evaluation had the character of a desk study and the report, entitled *Environmental Aspects in Credit Financed Projects – 20 case studies* (Sida Evaluation 99/22), was submitted in mid-1999.

The team found that environmental awareness and understanding in Sida had clearly increased during the studied period. Environmental concerns are addressed more extensively in projects initiated towards the end of the period. Secondly, they found that Sida's influence on any environmental aspects of the projects during the early planning stages was weak. Because of the process and system ruling the credit instrument, projects come up for Sida's assessment (including an *environmental impact assessment*) and decision only at a late stage, often when tenders have been submitted.

Thirdly, the team observed that 80 per cent of the documentation dealing with environmental aspects of the studied projects, had been produced in connection with Sida's assessment of the projects. With a few exceptions, the documentation was found to have covered the most important expected environmental effects. Strangely enough, however, little reference is made in the documentation to Sida policy and rules on environ-

mental considerations. Also, in most cases, no reference is made to the environmental laws of the partner country, nor to its commitments to relevant international conventions.

Sida's follow-up on the environmental information collected during the assessments appears weak, according to the report. At least as documented: only two out of the twenty projects have filed any monitoring or recurrent follow-up at all during the implementation phase, though evaluation reports existed for four projects. The lack of explicit environment goals and indicators in agreements does not encourage appropriate follow-up.

A main recommendation in the report is that Sida be more pro-active in informing potential clients and important actors, including the Swedish Export Credit Cooperation and other financiers, of Sida's conditions regarding the environment. Sida should also find ways to encourage that findings and recommendations from environmental assessments of projects are translated into explicit conditions in loan agreements. When contracting environmental consultants, Sida must condition the assignment to its environmental policies, and also request the consultant to present clear-cut conclusions on whether the project is acceptable, or not, from an environmental point of view. ■

Environmental Aspects in Credit Financed Projects - 20 case studies

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