

Sida Support to the Asian Institute of Technology

Summary report

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Dan Vadnjal**

**Department for Natural
Resources and the
Environment**

**Department for Infrastructure
and Economic
Cooperation**

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Sida Evaluation 00/10

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FOREWORD

Sida has during a number of years supported the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok. In 1988 Sida initiated i.a. funding of environment oriented masters scholarships. In 1993 Sida agreed to support a programme for electric power systems management as well as a programme for research and development of aquaculture in rural development in Indochina. The last agreement period has covered the period 1996-1999. The aim with Sida's support to AIT¹ has been to assist in the development of human resources in order to increase the national capacity to manage and promote a sustainable development and utilisation of natural resources in specifically Sida's partner countries Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. This has been done through support to the three components:

1. The Masters Scholarships Programme, generally for environmentally related subjects;
2. The Aqua Outreach Programme, for rural development through aquatic resources management based on local institution building (in cooperation with DANIDA and DFID);
3. The Electric Power System Management Programme, for improved capacity, management and efficiency of national power production and supply.

As part of the assessment of the possibilities for a new agreement with the AIT from 2000, Sida commissioned an evaluation of the Swedish support to these three components during the period 1996-1999 in 1999. The evaluation has been carried out by Scandiaconsult Natura AB. The part of the evaluation covering the Aqua Outreach Programme has been co-financed by the Department for International Development (DFID), U.K.

The summary report and the four annexes constituting the evaluation of the support to AIT are given below.

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00/10:2 Annex 2: EPSM (Electric Power System Management Programme)

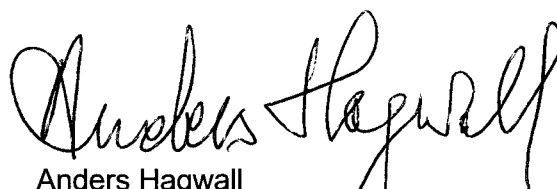
00/10:3 Annex 3: Scholarships, The Evaluation of Sida Support to AIT

00/10:4 Annex 4: Overall Programme and Crosscutting Issues

The views, conclusions and recommendations presented in the report are those of the authors and not necessarily fully shared by Sida.



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¹ The MSc-programme and AOP has been supported and managed by the Department for Natural Resources and the Environment and the EPSM-programme by the Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation. The AIT-support managed by Sida's Dept. for Research Cooperation is not dealt with in this present evaluation.

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Separate reports

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1 Introduction

This report provides a summary of the principle findings and recommendations of the three main reports, including the Aquatic Outreach Program (AOP), the Electric Power Systems Management (EPSM) Program and the MSc Scholarships Program (MSP). For detailed comments reference should be made to Annex 1, Annex 2 and Annex 3 respectively. The report in Annex 4 deals with the Overall Programme and Cross-Cutting Issues.

Section 2 provides a brief background on the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) and Sida support to the Institute. The evaluation objectives, team and timing are presented in Section 3. The findings of the three programs are presented in Section 4, and the recommendations in Section 6. To avoid any unnecessary repetition, only the recommendations of the Overall Report and Cross-Cutting Issues are summarised in this report.

2 Background

2.1 AIT

AIT was established in 1959 (under the auspices of the SEATO Graduate School of Engineering) to assist in area of advanced engineering education Asia. In 1967 the then renamed AIT became an autonomous institution empowered to award degrees and diplomas. The institute presently provides academic programmes leading to master and doctoral degrees, diplomas and certificates, as well as research and outreach activities, and a host of conferences, workshops, seminar, and short courses (see Annex 3).

AITs mission statement is as follows:

“AIT will take a leadership role in the promotion of technological change and its management for the sustainable development in the Asia and Pacific Region, through high-level education, research and outreach activities which integrate technology, planning and management. The focus of the Institute’s activities is in technology, with special emphasis on the inter-disciplinary interface among the above three fields, and will include attention to environmental and socio-economic considerations”.

2.2 Sida

Sida has supported AIT since 1988. The first agreement provided training for nationals from Lao PDR and Vietnam. Over the years the Sida support has reoriented its focus towards capacity building, environment and poverty related issues. In total Sida has provided financial support totalling SEK 130 million.

The current agreement covers the period July 1996–December 1999. The agreement was enacted in February 1997 and encompasses the following four programs:

- (i) **The Aqua Outreach Program** for aquatic resources management; budget allocation for Phase II (1996-1999) totals SEK 14.5 million
- (ii) **The Scholarship Program (SP)**; budget allocation for the Phase II is SEK 18.9 million.
- (iii) **The Electric Power Systems Management (EPSM) Program**; budget allocation for the Phase II is SEK 11.0 million.
- (iv) **Administrative support**; budget allocation for Phase II is SEK 0.6 million.

3 Evaluation

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the evaluation cover three programs and overall support to AIT (see Appendix 1).

The objectives of the evaluation include:

- (i) Analyse and assess the overall achievements by AIT since 1995/96 in order to provide lessons learned. The assessment shall focus on the actual program performance, measured against objectives and planned outputs.
- (ii) Provide recommendations with regard to lessons learned from the evaluation in order to provide strategic guidance for Sida (and AIT) to consider for a possible support to AIT beyond 1999.
- (iii) For all components, and especially the AOP, consider points (i) and (ii) above, within the overall context of poverty alleviation, equity and gender equality issues.
- (iv) Appraisal the proposals documents from AIT for Swedish support for the 2000–2002.

The evaluation team consisted of six foreign consultants:

Dr. Jan Rudengren – Team leader.

Dr. Inga-Lill Andrehn – Gender, institutions and poverty.

Dr. Björn Kjellström –EPSM.

Mr. Guy Bradley – AOP.

Dr. Richard Friend – AOP.

Dr. Dan Vадnjal – Scholarships.

Fieldwork was undertaken during 27 September to 16 October (except for EPSM where field visits were made 14 –22 October). The evaluation was initiated with a workshop at AIT and was facilitated by several members of the Mission. Visits were made to Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, by various members of the Mission. For details of evaluation approach, as well as personnel met, refer to the respective program reports in Annexes 1–4.

The Mission would like to take this opportunity to extend their gratitude to all those AIT personnel who assisted in the evaluation. We also would like to thank those persons we met, during the course of our investigations in Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, for the time they devoted in discussions with the Mission.

4 Findings

4.1 Aqua Outreach Program

- The AOP is an important programme with the capacity to deliver technical change to target beneficiary groups that provides the opportunity for improved livelihoods by poor people. Many of the past recommendations aimed at improving the performance and delivery of outputs under the AOP (Joint review missions 1995 and 1996) have been successfully adopted.
- The existing programme framework is in transition – the increasing autonomy and divergence of the country programmes is a measure of success of the AOP, and it is recognised that each of the country programmes is distinctive; the provision of increased autonomy for the country programmes must be balanced by a corresponding level of transparency at country level, a clear programme for the promotion of provincial and district level management, and corresponding quantitative indicators of technology access and uptake by targeted households and communities.
- Within the context of the log frames, there are tenuous linkages between purpose outputs and objectively verifiable indicators in relation to the poverty criterion, suggesting the AOP must adopt a more clearly defined approach to demonstrate achievement of purpose.
- This evaluation concurs with previous reviews that aquatic resources are fundamental to the livelihoods of poor people and that there is considerable scope for aquatic resource management strategies. In order to reach poor people, effective targeting is essential. For this to be achieved the capacity of extension services need to be developed particularly in participatory needs assessment. There remain concerns regarding the relationship between research driven activity, the degree of participation associated with the definition of these research activities, and the delivery of developmental benefits to poor households and communities. We acknowledge the differentiation between country programmes in this respect.
- Where further research is required it is strongly recommended that it be in the form of participatory on-farm trials and pilot projects that fit with the developmental needs of poor rural people.
- Effective monitoring and evaluation of impact and uptake is necessary to indicate project achievement but also to ensure the institutional sustainability of project activities. Related to this is the need for cost-benefit analysis in farming systems analysis. The participation of farmers in all forms of monitoring and evaluation is to be encouraged.

- The role of AOP as a regional facilitator may be also expected to change in parallel with the national collaborating institutions. There is a need for structural change that will aid the sharing of experience between the five country programmes. The role of AIT and AOP in facilitating this needs to be clarified and strengthened.
- A central area of concern in all of the programme countries relates to the very restricted capacity of institutions at provincial and district levels. The enhanced development of extension skills at these levels of local government is fundamental to the success of the AOP in achieving delivery and promoting uptake of small scale farming technology to resource poor communities. Both Danida and Sida support have focussed largely on degree or post graduate level training. The relationship between the forms of training currently promoted and the skill sets required to achieve the programme goal need to be re-considered.
- At local levels many extension workers do not qualify for access to training under such programmes, but are still the primary vehicle for disseminating technology outputs to farm communities. The programme should now move forward and deliver extended practical training to provincial and district staff – the output targets for this vocational training should be more rigorously defined. Similarly the roles of the collaborating national institutions and their key activities and responsibilities under the AOP will need to be redefined as local institutions absorb some of the former activities of the national institutions.
- There is a need to attach more emphasis to the sustainability criterion, as it relates to wild stocks of aquatic resources. Despite the revised mandate of the AOP which incorporates both aquaculture and aquatic resources management, there remains a marked emphasis within the AOP programmes on introduced species and aquaculture production methods. Retention of biodiversity in the programme areas is becoming a critical issue. Cambodia is addressing this issue in elements of its programme looking at dry season refuges and community-driven conservation measures, but these considerations have not been widely addressed.
- Associated with the above, there is evidence of the increasing incidence of reported disease associated with increasing intensification of production methods by farmers and local institutions in all of the country programmes. It is the view of the mission that there are significant disease risks in activities under many of the country programmes that need to be more effectively addressed and a need for a service to which farmers have access.
- Central constraints to uptake of new technology by poor households frequently rests on risk-averse behaviour by farmers and by the limited available access to appropriate and affordable small-scale credit. We believe there may be value in exploring the opportunities for development of micro-credit schemes aimed at achieving entry for resource poor farmers.
- There are significant overlaps and poor communications between donor institutions in integrated planning. Under conditions where existing capacity in a number of the current collaborating institutions is weak, competition between donor institutions and implementing agencies for qualified and experienced project staff, threatens to disrupt the AOP through absorbing existing country programme personnel, and fragmenting current development efforts. It is now critical that donors adopt a coherent and integrated approach to the identification, planning and implementation of interventions in fisheries and aquatic resources, and related sectoral activity.

4.2 Electric Power Systems Management Program

- EPSM has achieved various outputs specified in the proposal for continued support from Sida for Phase II period. The following shortcomings have been identified:
 - (i) A total of 3 scholarships annually plus 5 from Sida have not been provided.
 - (ii) Out of the 14 seminars and workshops planned, 9 have been conducted up to October 1999. And of the 525 trainee days at AIT only 413 been conducted up to October 1999.
 - (iii) While additional topics have been covered, the topics themselves are rather narrowly focused, and there is no indication of any proposed changes.
 - (iv) Training in target countries amounting to 157 training days have not been arranged.
 - (v) The Electric Power Systems Development Centre that should engage in outreach activities has not been established;
- Despite these shortcomings, the EPSM program has achieved its overall goal by contributing to an increase in the number of persons with higher education in ministries, universities and electric utilities in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.
- The courses included in the masters program, as well as the seminars and workshops arranged as outreach activities, remain relevant. There is, however, some repetition in the seminars and workshops on electric power systems management under de-regulation.
- The needs for higher education in EPSM are not covered, however, by the present program at AIT. There is an apparent need to widen the scope of the education program to include, in particular, all aspects of planning, environmental impact assessment, construction and the operation of hydropower plants.
- The selection of students to the masters program is reasonable, although imperfectly balanced. There is some over-representation of students enrolled from Lao PDR, despite comparatively fewer admissions being offered.
- Female students remain under represented. Of the 25 students from the target countries that have received Sida EPSM scholarships, only 1 is female.
- The EPSM program has suffered from shortages of faculty members during some periods. Out of the 126 person months of faculty members proposed, it appears that only 119 will be utilised. This has resulted in cancellation of some elected courses and excessive workloads on thesis advisors.
- Any difficulties in the recruitment of qualified faculty members might be due to the fact that only assistant and associate professor positions are offered; uncertainty about long term financing of the EPSM program.
- The seminars and workshops arranged within the EPSM program contribute significantly to increased awareness about recent developments and new approaches to EPSM. They provide possibilities for key staff, including EPSM alumni, to increase their knowledge on specific issues. They also serve to generate and maintain a network for co-operation between professionals working in the field.

- The target organisations for seminars and workshops appear to have been primarily the electric utilities. The role of government authorities in electric power system management appear not to have been given attention it deserves in the target countries. It is also obvious that a number of important topics have not yet been covered by the seminars and workshops.
- In general, the positions and backgrounds of the participants in the seminars and workshops appear to justify their participation in these events. There are few occasions when the justification for participation is doubtful.
- The routines at AIT for invitation of participants to workshops appear reasonable. Based on the nominations, AIT endeavours to achieve balanced participation and only admit those who will benefit their organisation by participation.
- All the target countries are interested in creating a mechanism whereby the topics and venues of seminars and workshops could be influenced and arranged by the beneficiaries. There is a clear demand for locally arranged seminars and workshops focussed on problems that are considered to be of interest to more than two or three persons.
- The proposed flexible masters degree program can probably make it possible for people presently holding key positions to participate. This option might in fact also be more attractive for female students. However, a strict division of the scholarships between the regular and flexible masters degree program may not lead to enrolment of the most promising students.

4.3 Masters Scholarships Program

- A key issue for the purposes evaluating the MSP concerns the effectiveness and relevance of the regular masters degree program (RMDP) and the proposed flexible masters degree program (FMDP). Specifically, are the masters degree programs relevant to Sida's goal of strengthening and enhancing human resource and institutional capacity of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, to promote environmentally sustainable development?
- There is evidence of human resource and institutional strengthening occurring in all three countries: alumni (MSc graduates) commonly returned to the same type of organisation; either they moved from provincial level to national level organisations, or remained at the national level; within these organisations, they commonly moved up the managerial ladder, into middle or senior management positions.
- Similar findings are reported in the 1993 Alumni Tracer Study. While comparatively more alumni tended to move out of the government, public or private sector, and into the private sector (a trend which may have slowed due to the Asian crisis), the Study reported a similar movement of alumni, into middle or middle management positions.
- It is difficult to predict the likely movement of Phase II students. However, given their comparable characteristics (in terms of age, gender, organisational and managerial origins, etc.) it would not seem unreasonable to assume that *ceteris paribus* their post-MSc behaviour will at least approximate that of their Phase I alumni colleagues. In other words, it is quite likely Phase II students will, upon returning their respective countries, similarly move up the managerial ladder.

- There remains serious doubt, however, as to whether this pattern or direction of human resource and institutional strengthening is relevant for achieving promotion of environmentally sustainable development.
- There are several key issues which might explain this apparent miss-match between human resource and institutional strengthening on the one hand, and the promotion of environmental sustainable development on the other:
 - (i) the MSc program is rather inflexible, failing to adapt and change in accordance with the various macro-economic conditions and changes that have and continue to occur in the region as a whole, as well as in each individual country;
 - (ii) the MSc program has an overly parsimonious disciplinary focus, providing graduates with highly technical skills in very specific subject areas, yet failing to provide them with the necessary knowledge with which to manage and disseminate these skills.
- Furthermore, while there has been a very explicit emphasis on attracting females into the MSc program, there has been only a marginal increase in the number of women enrolled for an MSc degree. Women remain notably under-represented.
- There have been attempts to rectify these apparent problems, most notably, in the Phase III proposal as well as in the SERD Restructuring Summary Report. In their current form, however, these attempts appear rather cursory and it remains questionable as to how effective they will be in addressing the issues raised above.
- In particular, while the Phase III proposal recognises the need for flexibility, hence the Flexible Masters Degree Program, the proposal deals only with the timing of the MSc program and fails to address the more substantive issues of adaptability and relevance. For instance, how might the MSc program be made more relevant to the needs of individuals and countries? And while emphasising interdisciplinary aspects in its restructuring criteria, there is little if any guidance as to how this might be achieved. For instance, how might it be possible to ensure students are given the necessary technical as well as managerial skills?
- In summary, the MSP would appear to be making a firm contribution to strengthening and enhancing human resource and institutional capacity in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. However, exactly how the MSP – current Phase II or proposed Phase III – will contribute to the promotion of environmentally sustainable development, remains unclear. There is, as a consequence, a need for modifications and refinements to be made to the Phase III proposal.

5 Recommendations

- The Mission recommends that Sida continue supporting the three programs (AOP, EPSM and MSP) during 2000–2002, pending modifications and refinements to the respective Phase III proposals. To ensure continuity of the programs the Mission strongly recommends that Sida arrange for bridging finance, for a pre-arranged period of time, to ensure these changes can be satisfactorily achieved. It is important that financing of the AOP, EPSM and MSP is not suspended during this time.
- As a general recommendation an attempt should be made to co-ordinate all three programs supported by Sida. The relationship between the MSP and the AOP and EPSM programs should be more closely co-ordinated so as to ensure the selection of candidates are appropriate to achieving the objectives of the individual programs. And the AOP and the EPSM program should be co-ordinated to ensure complementarity, especially, in instances where conflicts may arise over resource use.
- Training courses (vocational or degree level) should be packaged to suit the particular needs of institutions and individuals in each target country. At district and provincial levels the focus should be more on courses which enable staff to reach women and poor households. And there should be greater emphasis on courses which enable staff to disseminate their knowledge and skills within and between organisations at the national level. There is an obvious need, more generally, for the provision of training in social science subjects (e.g. gender development, development and environmental economics, participatory rural appraisal, etc.) that focus on developing country issues rather than technology-based research and development.
- More attention should be paid to monitoring and evaluation of the individual programs to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in achieving a priori goals and objectives. In AOP, the effective implementation of aquaculture and aquatic resource management in poverty alleviation requires participatory monitoring and evaluation. In EPSM and MSP, effective and relevant capacity building demands more interactive monitoring of alumni.
- The growth in international development assistance, particularly in the case of AOP, has put pressure on the institutional and management resources of recipient countries. While development assistance is positive there is a risk that it may jeopardise successful implementation of the existing programs. There should, in the future, be much greater efforts to improving donor co-ordination.
- Poverty approaches varies between the three components/programmes. It is only in case of AOP where a clear poverty orientation has been stated. The other programmes have an indirect affect on poverty through capacity and human resources development that will lead to economic growth and reduced poverty. AOP is working in areas that are poor, but in many cases the nature of the programme requires that the target farmers have access to land and means of financing the required aquaculture investments. In the next phase AOP has a more pronounced poverty focus and to accomplish this there is a need to improve the methods and approaches to reach the poor. This involves methods and skills that are not central to AIT's capacity.

- AIT is making concerted efforts in mainstreaming gender issues in the programme. In EPSM it is difficult since there are very few qualified women in the subject of electric power. It is also cultural difficulties for women, especially in Lao PDR and Cambodia to participate in Master Training. In the AOP there is a need to involve the women to a greater extent as they are, in many cases, the target group.
- Finally, the Mission recommends, for *immediate action*, that Sida make resources available for a series of logical framework approach (LFA) and goal oriented project planning (GOPP) workshops, to facilitate design and implementation of the Phase III proposals. These workshops would give consideration to the specific recommendations made above, while focusing, more generally, on capacity building measures which are necessary and appropriate for achieving poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and gender equality, in the each of the three target countries.

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