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Sida Review

Åke Sahlin

Evaluation of Sida's support to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency's co-operation with environmental authorities in the Western Balkan, 2005-2009

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Abbreviations

AfE	Agency for Environment
AGS	Albanian Geological Survey
CARDS	The Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization
DEM	Digital Elevation Model
DTM	Digital Terrain Model
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessments
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
FRMP	Flood Risk Management Plan
FYROM	the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IPPC	Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control
ISRBC	International Sava River Basin Commission
IWRM	Integrated Water and Resources Management Mechanisms
KTH	Royal Institute of Technology
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
MEFWA	The Albanian Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration
MSB	Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency
NES	National Environment Strategy
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NPI	National Programme for Integration with the European Union
OSCE	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
REA	Regional Environmental Agency
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEE	South East Europe
SEK	Swedish Kronor
SIPU International	Swedish Institute for Public Administration International
SLU	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
SMHI	Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WI	The Water Institute

Executive summary

SIPU International has been commissioned by Sida, to undertake an evaluation of Sida's support to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency's (Swedish EPA's) co-operation with environmental authorities in the Western Balkan, 2005–2009. The evaluation has been carried out during the period March–May 2009. The overall objective for the cooperation is to support and promote environmentally sustainable development in the region. The specific programme objective (as stated in the ToR for the evaluation) is to support the environmental authorities in South East Europe in the development of effective environmental management in order for the countries to fulfil national and international obligations. The cooperation should focus on facilitating the countries EU-alignment process and Stabilisation and Association Process. During the period under review, 2005–2009, activities have been carried out in three countries, i.e. Albania, Serbia and Macedonia. The project in Macedonia started more recently and is, according to our ToR, not covered by this evaluation.

In Albania, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration is the cooperation partner while in Serbia it is the Water Directorate under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management. The programme is considered relevant in relation to the needs of the target groups, the national policies and strategies as well as to other donor interventions in both countries.

The projects' importance for the development of environmental management capacity in the targeted countries varies considerably. In Serbia, the most significant result of the assistance is the integrated and coordinated involvement of relevant institutions in the project implementation process. Representatives of key institutions have developed knowledge and experiences of river basin management planning and flood disaster prevention. In parallel to building the competence of the individuals, an understanding of the importance of institutional collaboration has been fostered. The capacity building contribution of the trans-boundary project is less visible. In Albania, the involvement of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration has gradually diminished. There has been no clear project management function that has continuously assessed progress and reacted. In this case it is more difficult to identify any substantial achievements in terms of strengthened environmental management capacity among concerned institutions. While further investment in capacity development is recommended in Serbia, conditionality would have to be considered for continued assistance to be granted in Albania.

Institutionalisation of project capacity development is not given sufficient attention by the parties. The projects in Serbia and Albania include limited efforts to institutionalise the outputs and outcomes of the projects. Activities are technically oriented; the aim is rather to transfer knowledge and skills to individuals directly involved in the process. The wider institutional context and the necessity of institutionalising the results of the interaction need more attention. This issue needs to be addressed when future projects are elaborated. Likewise, Swedish EPA needs to take measures to ensure that projects are implemented within the agreed timeframes. We find it slightly surprising that all five projects have been or will be extended, in several cases more than once. The main issue in this context is not whether each "justification" for granting extensions is acceptable or not. It is rather to what extent Swedish EPA could improve its project design and project management system in order to avoid or reduce the occurrence of such situations in future programmes.

Swedish EPA's new strategy for international development cooperation was adopted early this year. The document contains a discussion concerning the conditions for Swedish EPA's involvement in future development cooperation programmes. It defines, in general terms, the agency's unique competence. The most important issue in this context is perhaps Swedish EPA's limited capacity to engage in new projects. We believe that this is the most important issue for Swedish EPA to address before new

cooperation agreements are entered into. The on-going Western Balkans programme is characterised by a low level of direct involvement of Swedish EPA staff members. Presently, it is only in a few of the projects that Swedish EPA is making a substantial contribution in terms of its own expert resources. Likewise, only one project is managed by a Swedish EPA employee based at the agency's office in Stockholm. The new strategy mentions as Swedish EPA's unique competence the role as an environmental agency, organisation of efficient environmental management at different levels and the cross-sectoral integration of environmental protection. Implementation of the strategy on the basis of this definition of core competence requires, in our opinion, that Swedish EPA's role in the projects is increased. We have difficulty in understanding how the experiences of exercising the mandate as an environmental agency could be presented and discussed by experts that are not employed by Swedish EPA. This question is strategically important for Swedish EPA.

There is scope for improvement in Swedish EPA's internal learning processes and systems. As a consequence of the delays in project implementation, at the time of the evaluation no end-of-project evaluations have been undertaken as a basis for learning and competence development. The internal dissemination of information to experts and current exchange of experiences between projects is also limited. Some limited interaction between project managers is also reported. Reporting is an area with a potential for further improvement. The frequency and quality of reports could improve. We believe that further standardisation and streamlining of regular project reports could increase the value of them. The reports' point of departure should be the project data contained in the LFA matrixes that are part of the project steering documents.

Our recommendations are contained in section 7 of this report.

1 Introduction

SIPU International has been contracted by the Swedish International Development Authority, Sida, to undertake an evaluation of Sida's support to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency's (Swedish EPA's) co-operation with environmental authorities in the Western Balkan, 2005–2009

The evaluation has been carried out during the period March-May 2009. Field work in Albania and Serbia was undertaken during the second half of April. As a complement interviews with persons in Sweden involved in the programme were conducted both before and after the field visit. Prior to the field visits the evaluation team reviewed a range of reports provided by Sida and Swedish EPA. Based on this review a list of questions and issues to be explored was prepared by the team.

This report gives an account of the findings and recommendations in response to the Terms of Reference (Annex 1) for the evaluation assignment. The team consisted of Åke Sahlin (team leader), Tim Greenhow, Narin Panariti, Tamara Maricic, Theodhori Pandeli and Númi Östlund.

Section two of this report contains comments regarding the evaluation method applied. In section three the main features of the Swedish EPA Western Balkans programme are summarised. Section four and five presents the main observations and conclusions from the evaluation of the programme. Swedish EPA's capacity to manage and support international projects is discussed in section six. Finally, our recommendations are contained in section seven.

Throughout the mission, Swedish EPA's international secretariat has provided excellent assistance, through the provision of information and documentation as well as through communication with the individuals involved in the programme. This assistance was highly appreciated by the team.

2 Evaluation methodology

2.1 General observations

Initially, it should also be noted that the Swedish inputs to the five projects, and consequently the role of Swedish EPA in the development process support by the project, are limited. Particularly, this applies to the Serbian projects that are managed and implemented by the partner organisations with assistance from Swedish EPA. These are mainly national development processes based on the agendas of national institutions. The role of Swedish EPA is to make available technical inputs in areas where the partner institutions have limited competence, for example when the analysis of collected data is made. This is a project design with a division of roles and responsibilities well in line with the ideas and ambitions contained in Swedish development cooperation policies and strategies. However, as a consequence it becomes difficult to isolate the effectiveness and efficiency of the contributions made by Swedish EPA as compared to the overall change process.

A methodological problem is the fact that we have been expected to evaluate projects that are still on-going. Only one of the five projects under review has been completed; the closing seminar was actually conducted at the time of our field visit. Several of the projects suffer from delays and have been extended, in some cases two or three times. In one case the project started recently (mid 2008), Swedish EPA's main role will be to provide assistance related to data analysis, an activity that is due in the early summer of 2009, i.e. after the completion of the evaluation assignment.

The Swedish EPA as any other government institution is a learning organisation that gradually changes its perception of its role and the environment within which it is operating, develops its approaches and methods of working, etc. As an organisation, Swedish EPA is gradually developing its capacity as a partner in development cooperation. It should be noted from the outset that most projects under review were conceived and designed several years ago. Some of the weaknesses of the on-going projects are reflections of insufficiencies in the processes and procedures that were applied at that time. At least some of these problems have later been addressed by Swedish EPA and they have been made part of the agency's internal process of capacity building for international development cooperation.

2.2 The evaluation process

As the first measure a range of project agreements, project documents, regular reports, steering committee meeting minutes, etc were obtained and reviewed. Our requests for copies of documents have been responded to by Swedish EPA's international secretariat without any delays.

The first set of interviews with Swedish EPA staff was conducted in March. In addition to the two key persons within the international secretariat, the five Swedish EPA project leaders were interviewed. Several meetings were also held with the coordinator for Western Balkans.

During the period covered by the evaluation, five projects have been agreed on by Swedish EPA and the implementation started. As agreed during the start-up meeting with Sida, the evaluation will cover all five projects. The majority of those are still being implemented; activities are to be completed during 2009. Additionally, information will be gathered about the project in Serbia that was planned but implementation never started due to a perceived lack of ownership within the partner organisation in Serbia. As stated in our ToR, Swedish EPA's project in Macedonia is not included in the evaluation since it started rather recently.

The purpose of the initial set of interviews with Swedish EPA staff/project leaders was to:

- obtain basic information about the projects under review,
- identify the organisations that should be included in the subsequent field visit in Albania and Serbia, as well as to
- discuss and agree on additional persons to interview in Sweden including experts engaged in the projects, representatives of other Swedish organisations that contributes to project implementation, consultants, etc.

A list of persons and organisations to be visited during the field visit was elaborated in close collaboration with the international secretariat of Swedish EPA based on proposals from the project leaders. To further broaden the basis for the evaluation our local partners in Serbia and Albania reviewed the list and provided additional inputs. An introductory letter was prepared by Swedish EPA and sent to the organisations prior to our field visit. The complete list of institutions and persons met with during the mission is attached (Annex 2).

Prior to the field visit a list of questions and issues to be covered by the team during the interviews was elaborated. The LFA matrixes attached to the project documents have provided the point of departure for our analysis. When possible, indicators and targets (or expected results) have been followed up on. A constraining factor has been the varying quality of the projects' LFA matrixes with almost only outcome indicators included. Coupled with that, the fact that most projects are still operational has reduced the scope for our assessment. Instead of following up on the final outcome of each project we have had to assess the outcome of those activities carried out.

In line with Sida's Evaluation Manual, the data collection has aimed at answering questions concerning the projects relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Our findings are structured and presented accordingly.

3 The western balkans programme

The Western Balkans Programme is Swedish EPA's first assignment in the region and its first attempt to collaborate with the particular countries targeted. The agreement with Sida gives Swedish EPA a delegated responsibility for implementation of a cooperation programme with partners in Western Balkans (also referred to in agreements as South Eastern Europe). The overall objective of the cooperation is to support and promote environmentally sustainable development in the region.

The specific programme objective (as stated in the ToR for the evaluation) is to support the environmental authorities in South East Europe in the development of effective environmental management in order for the countries to fulfil national and international obligations. The cooperation should focus on facilitating the countries EU-alignment process and Stabilisation and Association Process. During the period under review, 2005–2009, activities have been carried out in three countries, i.e. Albania, Serbia and Macedonia. The project in Macedonia started more recently and is, according to our ToR, not covered by this evaluation.

In Sida's Assessment Memo three thematic areas are mentioned as possible areas of cooperation; EIA and SEA, water management and nature protection. The indicative budget for the programme period is 40 MSEK.

In Albania, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration is the cooperation partner. During the period under review two projects have been included in the programme; the improved water monitoring project and the EIA/SEA methodology development project. In Serbia, the Water Directorate under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management is Swedish EPA's development partner. Three projects are implemented under this programme; the trans-boundary water management project, the Kolubara river basin water management plan project and the Tamnava river basin flood risk management plan project.

In addition to the three projects mentioned preparations were made to commence a fourth intervention in Serbia. This project, in the field on Nature Conservation – "Strengthened management in nature protected areas", was planned to be implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Science and Environmental Protection – Directorate for Environmental Protection (which after the restructuring has become the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning). In our meeting it was not clear why the original project idea didn't get further.

After a year (2006-December 2007) nothing significant had happened, and at the steering group meeting in December 2007, the Ministry put forward a new proposal. In correspondence with the officers involved, Swedish EPA indicated its view that the project was too ambitious for the time available in the context of the on-going cooperation agreement with Sida (i.e. to the end of 2009). During our meeting with the Ministry's Sector for Nature Conservation, they expressed interest to continue the collaboration. The Sector continues to be interested in Sweden's approaches to, and methodologies in protected area designation and management, as presented by Swedish EPA.

When assessing Swedish EPA's interventions and performance the fact that this is a region where the organisation previously has not been active is taken into account. It is acknowledged by the team that

it takes time to build contacts, relations and the trust needed to succeed in development cooperation. The situation in the region can be difficult; resources are scarce and projects are often hampered by political changes and local politics.

4 Project performance

4.1 Relevance

Relevance is measured as the extent to which an intervention matches the needs and priorities of its target group as well as the policies of partner country governments and donor organisations.

4.1.1 Relevance of the projects in Serbia

The Serbian projects are considered relevant in relation to national policies, strategies and action plans. On its way towards membership of the EU Serbia has embarked on a process of adaptation and harmonisation of institutional and legislative frameworks. Objectives and principles for the transition —process are contained in the National Programme for Integration with the European Union (NPI). This voluminous document introduces a range of short- and medium term objectives including some relating to protection and management of water resources¹. Specific references are made to the EU Water Framework Directive and other relevant directives as a framework for the gradual adaptation of national legislation. The projects under review in Serbia are all seeking to apply the principles and methods of the EU Directives on Water and Flooding. Therefore, they are considered relevant to Serbia's process of EU-approximation.

The projects on river basin management are fully consistent with the Serbian Sustainable Development Strategy. As stated in the document “The sectoral policy objectives for sustainable use of water resources include: To harmonize national water legislation with the EU legislation, especially to implement the EU Water Framework Directive;...” (Final Draft, page 78). The National Environment Strategy (NES)² mentions water management, and in particular approximation to the EU Water Framework Directive, as a very high priority (page 61). Legislative, institutional and financial aspects are addressed in the NES, which includes an ambitious timetable for reforms and improvements.

Furthermore, the trans-boundary water project (project 701) is also in compliance with the UNECE Water Convention. The project is relevant in terms of its contribution to international cooperation by covering all aspects of water management: enough water quantity, satisfying water quality, pollution and flood protection; not only navigation obligations as it is in the framework of Sava Commission. It is also relevant in terms of contribution to currently weak trans-boundary water cooperation (except on the Danube and Sava river basins).

A new strategy for Sweden's development cooperation with Serbia was adopted by the Swedish government in early April 2009. The new strategy gives emphasis to strengthening Serbia's EU approximation process. The new strategy for development cooperation with Serbia builds on the country's own priorities, and will be focused on two main sectors, whereof environment and natural resource management, is one. Within environment and natural resources, water, sanitation and solid waste are to receive a high level of priority. Apart from the two focus sectors the Swedish development cooperation with Serbia shall in addition be guided by three strategic areas of dialogue. These are i) deepened EU integration,

¹ National Programme for Integration with the European Union, section 3.27.5, page 738-onwards

² http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/LawDrafting/status/Serbia_and_Montenegro/English/Serbia/Planning%20documents/Strategies/NEAP,%20National%20strategy/NEAP%20draft.pdf

ii) gender equality and women's participation in the development of a democratic society, and iii) sustainable development. One can conclude therefore that the water and flood control projects are entirely consistent with Sweden's new country strategy.

4.1.2 Relevance of the projects in Albania

It can be readily argued that from both Albania's and Sweden's perspectives the projects are relevant. For Albania generally because accession to the EU would necessarily require introduction of EIA and water quality standards compatible with those of the EU, specifically because the new industrialisation and commercial investment that is taking place necessitates a long term sustainable approach to environmental management generally and to water in particular.

The Albanian National Strategy for Development and Integration for the period 2007–2013 identifies various strategic priorities including strengthened enforcement of environmental legislation through strengthening of the Regional Environment Agencies and inspectorates, improvements in the permitting system, and enforcement against the offenders. The need for improved water monitoring is further acknowledged in the Environment Intersectoral Strategy of November 2007. The existing monitoring system is insufficient to allow for a complete analysis of the situation. This is true for both groundwater and surface water.

The EIA/ SEA project was relevant in its objective to support the development of an overall methodological manual for EIA, since MEFWA was obliged to develop such a document by the end of 2006. This to be in accordance with the law "On Environmental Impact Assessment" adopted in 2003, which in turn is in line with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU. The water monitoring project provides, at the institutional level where it is conducted, some limited contributions towards sector capacity development aiming at the application of mainstream European quality standards.

The water monitoring project was redesigned in order to avoid a duplication of efforts with a major EU funded project. The subsequent, current interaction between the two projects seems to have been limited. However, given the limited scope of the Swedish project, this is not perceived as much of a problem.

OSCE has financed a project that also has been focusing on the EIA process. Knowledge of the related project has existed at both Swedish EPA and OSCE. The projects have, nevertheless, had some overlapping activities with similar activities for, partly, the same set of people. .

4.2 Effectiveness

Effectiveness is defined as the extent to which the objectives of the project have been achieved through the implementation of planned activities. As mentioned, the specific programme objective is to support the environmental authorities in the region in the development of effective environmental management in order for the countries to fulfil national and international obligations. The cooperation should focus on facilitating the countries EU-alignment process and Stabilisation and Association Process.

The effectiveness of each intervention is commented on below, project by project.

4.2.1 Improved water monitoring, Albania

The project objective is to strengthen the institutional capacity at MEFWA and the water monitoring institutes in monitoring and assessment of the environmental status of surface water and groundwater. However, in practice, the project has focused its activities on the two selected institutions.

Actual as compared to expected results

At the end of the project the expected results are:

1. Trained staff at MEFWA and monitoring institutes in various aspects related to water monitoring and assessment;
2. Improved knowledge about water management legislation, policy and concepts in the EU within the management level at MEFWA and possibly other relevant ministries/institutes dealing with water, through developing and disseminating a Road Map for water management in Albania.
3. Legislative and/or policy framework improved.

The actual events to date are:

1. The project started in August 2006. Following some initial activities in 2006 and 2007 a decision was made to restructure and refocus the project. This was done in order to avoid overlap with the EU CARDS STEMA project as well as in response to the, by Swedish EPA, perceived limited absorption capacity. It was realised that the number of Albanian human resources working in areas related to the project was very limited. At the same time, these individuals made up the target group for several international development cooperation interventions. Adding to the decision to review the project structure was also the, at the time, on-going process of reorganising the water monitoring institutes in Albania. In parallel, Swedish EPA was experiencing some difficulties in identifying and mobilising experts to work in the project.
2. Building on these observations and conclusions a revised project document was produced in late 2007. The revised project was designed to complement the STEMA project. The project was given a reduced level of ambition regarding the volume of activities and expected outcomes. The approach chosen was to focus on implementing small and limited activities, and based on their results decide if and how to proceed with continuing activities. Five activities, sometimes broadly defined, were included in the revised project document; i) developing and disseminating results from Road Map, ii) conduct training in various aspects related to water monitoring and assessment, iii) data management, iv) providing support to legal matters in the water sector, and v) networking. As a consequence the budget was also substantially reduced. Our assessment of progress has been made against the revised project document.
3. In practice, as a consequence of the limited capacity of the MEFWA, the project has focused on building the capacity of two of the water monitoring institutes in Albania. The involvement of the Ministry in the project is very close to zero. The previous project coordinator at MEFWA left in mid 2008. It seems that she has not been replaced yet, at least we were unable to obtain any such information from the Ministry. The official responsible for the project did not show up for a confirmed meeting and remained unavailable during our mission. A meeting with the responsible vice-minister was also cancelled. Numerous attempts, all unsuccessful, were made to set up new appointments. No other person at the Ministry was able to provide any specific information about this project or answer questions. One official mentioned in passing that the Ministry has “stopped monitoring the project”. In summary, our failure to obtain information and even to get appointments at the Ministry, despite early notice and a large number of contacts, reconfirms the concerns regarding its absorption capacity and the low level of commitment to the project.
4. As a consequence of the above, we were unable to obtain any information about recent activities relating to the finalisation and implementation of the road map. According to project reporting from Swedish EPA (dated February 2009) the former project manager at MEFWA has reviewed and approved the draft road map. A study visit to Sweden did not materialise. No further progress is reported in this respect.
5. As mentioned, the main target for the project is two Albanian institutions. The bulk of the project’s resources are used to support them through capacity development. Assistance is provided to these

two institutions through short-term expert inputs. On-the-job training for a limited number of individuals is combined with seminars and workshops to discuss specific issues. The activities aim at improving sampling and analytical processes for groundwater and surface water monitoring applied by the two institutes. Two experts have provided assistance and advice to these institutes during four missions each. Results reported by the experts include the introduction of specific analytical methods and standards (ammonium and nitrate), repair and reactivation of laboratory equipment, review and improvement of sampling strategies, as well as a generally increased awareness of quality control measures. In addition the project has discussed proposals for improved data management, assessed the freshwater monitoring data and developed a first draft of reference values for phosphorous, according to the EU Water Framework Directive.

6. No particular activities are reported in relation to the areas of data management, legal support and networking. The latter is considered, at least partially, to be accomplished through the training and on-the-job training activities conducted.

Observations and conclusions

- Following the revision of the project scope and steering document in 2007, the focus changed from MEFWA to the two institutions involved, the Water Institute (WI) for surface water and the Albanian Geological Survey (AGS) for ground water. A third possible collaboration partner, the Agency for Environment (AfE), was excluded from the cooperation, partly because it was receiving assistance from the Dutch Government.
- This project has produced limited results, mainly as a consequence of the reduced scope. It assists two institutes/laboratories in improving some basic methods and procedures. Undoubtedly, the activities made contributions in the institutions efforts to apply mainstream European standards and working methods. However, the support rendered does not have clear targets, such as getting national accreditation by a certain date; it is rather a question of supporting a process of gradual improvements. The agency responsible for accreditation of laboratories in Albania provides a checklist of steps that have to be taken to reach that goal; in the case of AGS this document serves as a basis for the work. The Swedish support assisted in the fulfilment of some of these requirements. However, the ambition to become accredited is rather new, it is part of the AGS strategy for 2009-onwards. Some of the reported activities are also very basic, for example discussions and proposals for physical reorganisation of equipment in the laboratories to streamline the work. These activities seem to be rather far from what could be considered the unique competence of a government agency such as Swedish EPA. We note also that the two experts engaged by Swedish EPA to provide the assistance are employed at and provided by other Swedish institutions, SLU and KTH respectively.
- The two institutions targeted by the project have a limited number of staff members dealing with water monitoring and water quality control. For example, each institution's laboratory has 3–4 staff members. Swedish support is geared towards these few individuals and the officials from the hydrological departments that undertake sampling. Both institutions report that they have reduced their staff drastically, with an estimated 50% each, during the last few years. Unfortunately, there seem to be very few mechanisms available for the dissemination of new knowledge and experiences from the involved organisations to other concerned institutions in Albania. WI operates under and reports to the Tirana Poly-technical University (Ministry of Education) while the Albanian Geological Survey is organised under the Ministry of Economy. Water monitoring services provided by the two institutions are based on annually renewable contracts. In the context of water monitoring the relationship to MEFWA is limited to the obligations stipulated in monitoring contracts; this includes sampling, analysis and reporting with a certain frequency. Reports with data are submitted regularly to MEFWA for further submission to the Agency for Environment which in turn prepares the State of Environment report. We are told that this interaction with MEFWA does not include any element

of discussions regarding methods applied, improvements made or any other exchange of information that could be considered as feedback to MEFWA for the purpose of further dissemination and continuous learning in the sector. Hence, new knowledge and competence provided by the project will remain within the two institutions, WI and AGS. There is no evidence that MEFWA staff have benefitted from the project at all, nor has the personnel of other water monitoring entities. The contacts between WI and AGS also seem very limited.

- During the period 2005–2007, an institutional restructuring process was conducted within the sector. It entailed a redefinition of roles and responsibilities of the entities concerned. In this process, the Agency for Environment's mandate was broadened. In addition to operating its own laboratory, as part of its scope of work, the agency is now also responsible for monitoring the performance of other institutions in the sector. The Agency operates directly under MEFWA. In hindsight, it seems obvious that sector capacity building would have been facilitated by the inclusion of it in the project. The fact that the Agency describes itself as closely linked to MEFWA reinforces this impression. However, when the revision of the project document and scope was made, it was difficult for Swedish EPA to foresee this.
- In summary, we find it questionable whether the project makes contributions to capacity building that are proportional to the efforts made and resources consumed. The capacity building will result in increased knowledge of a limited number of individuals and, as a consequence of that, improved quality of work of two institutions. There are no obvious mechanisms to disseminate the new knowledge and improved methods outside these institutions, for example through AfE. Within the two institutions covered by the project knowledge and competence is institutionalised through the gradual application of improved work methods.

4.2.2 Development of EIA/SEA methodology, Albania

The specific project purpose for the whole project period is to support the establishment of an efficient system for Environment Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments, based on the obligations set out in the relevant EU Directives and other related international conventions. The project is expected to be conducted as two separate phases. For phase one the project objective is to develop an EIA/SEA methodology which is known and used by stakeholders in Albania. Additionally a project description for phase two should be developed and, if possible, be decided upon during phase one.

Actual as compared to expected results

Initially the expected results of the project were to be:

1. Draft EIA and SEA methodologies ready to be presented to the Council of Ministers. This would include general and sector-specific guidelines.
2. Central, regional and local authorities as well as certified EIA experts trained to implement the EIA/SEA methodology in their work.
3. The partners have exchanged knowledge and information on the EUs IPPC directive and its implementation.
4. A strengthened MEFWA in the field of EIA/SEA through close cooperation on a day-to-day basis
5. A project description for phase two of the cooperation prepared, possibly approved.

The actual events to date are:

1. The project started in July 2006. Activities focusing on SEA as well as the IPPC directive have been revised during the project. The SEA part of the project was initially postponed waiting for new

SEA legislation that was being drafted by another donor funded project. The SEA legislation is now foreseen to be adopted in 2010, and work on SEA has been included in a newly started CARDS project. Activities on the IPPC directive was first postponed in discussions between MEFWA and Swedish EPA, and later excluded when it turned out that IPPC has also been included in the CARDS project.

General EIA Guidelines approved by the Minister of Environment in December 2006. The project was delayed by six months due to a high personnel turnover at the MEFWA. The initial project manager left the Ministry just a few months into the project. The role of project manager has since changed twice more.

2. Seminars have been carried out to inform affected MEFWA staff, to give them a better understanding of the guidelines. These have not reached regional staff nor the 400 certified 'experts' who carry out the EIAs.

It must thus be concluded that some wider form of capacity building is required before the full value of the guidelines is realised.

3. Regarding sector specific EIA Guidelines, drafts have been prepared for hydropower projects, urban landfills and quarrying (Feb. 2008 & Jan 2009) but have not been approved because a new law on EIA is under preparation. This change of legislation was decided in the planning of a new EU funded project in "early 2007". Project staff at the Ministry was not informed of this until around May 2008. This was not understood by Swedish EPA until late 2008/beginning 2009. Two of the manuals were discussed at a seminar in September 2007.
4. It has not been clear how the project will attain result 4: General strengthening of Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration in the field of EIA/SEA. In Swedish EPAs internal assessment memo dated 2006-06-26 it is stated that one of the project objectives is to decrease the workload at the ministry. Without a wide knowledge of the general EIA guidelines among local stakeholders this objective will not be reached. Without a training component aimed at the stakeholders expected to follow the guidelines it will have little impact, except perhaps in a longer perspective. OSCE will have training that might have an impact in this area, introducing local and international business to the Albanian legislation regarding EIAs.
5. We have not seen any proposal for phase 2. However, at the time of our visit the project was not yet complete.
6. In 2008 a new activity was added to the project. The MEFWA expressed a need for legislative assistance on regulations relating to trans-boundary environmental impact. These regulations have been developed through the project, and approved. In addition a seminar to present the new regulations was carried out in April 2009. They have yet to be applied.

Observations and conclusions

- The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration has an increasing burden of work, but a more or less static work force that is also affected by considerable turnover. The permitting office that oversees the EIA process has five staff members. Regional Environment Agents (REAs) and local authorities are mandated to manage smaller and simpler EIA cases. Many REAs are poorly equipped, have no vehicle for site inspections, have poor Internet access, etc. Work is still often done on paper, data management for analytical purposes cannot be done rapidly on computers, and databases cannot be searched for relevant information. There is considerable difference between the REAs' offices in terms of capacity. It can be assumed that the implementation of new methodologies and guidelines will be uneven at best, and may be very difficult under current conditions.

- Although the contents and structure of the guidelines were mutually agreed by Swedish EPA and the Ministry, Swedish EPA experts have done virtually all the work. Drafts sent to key Albanian stakeholders for comment elicited almost no response. Some input was received from Ministry staff, but very little information sharing or capacity building has occurred. Those we interviewed do not perceive themselves as being able to repeat the process for producing new versions or new sectoral EIA guidelines when necessary. No testing in the field was done as part of the process to assess the viability of the guidelines in reality.
- REA staff are politically appointed and can be easily replaced. Frequently no professional requirements are applied in filling the posts. As a result, REA staff need considerable training support, but any investment in their training can be wasted through their sudden replacement. REAs come to Tirana on a monthly basis for meetings with the Ministry. These could be useful opportunities for presenting new material, discussing new procedures or methods and approaches and even for conducting training. However, this is apparently not done.
- There is no culture within the Ministry of systematically presenting, disseminating or providing training on new regulations, guidelines and procedural requirements to all relevant staff at national, regional or local level. While documents can be (and are) placed on the Ministry website and legal acts are also published on the Official Journal, they are not accessible to regional and local staff unless they have internet connections or computers in their offices or subscribe to the Official Journal. REAs and certified EIA experts get information through personal contacts in the Ministry. The training organised by Swedish EPA on the new EIA guidelines was carried out in the form of seminars and workshops in Tirana. Few participants have taken part, especially from the REAs and the local level. Some EIA experts have received training. Perhaps more training connecting the new guidelines to actual EIAs, involving more stakeholders, would have increased the knowledge of the new guidelines. As it is, stakeholders outside the Ministry get acquainted with the new guidelines only if there is a reference to it when the Ministry responds to a submitted proposal and EIA. Similarly, there appears to be no systematic way other than through legislative means (Ministerial orders and regulations, for example) of mainstreaming new methodologies or procedures developed through projects. 'Guidelines' are supply rather than demand driven. 'Guidelines' are considered as regulations rather than advisory documents.
- Environmental Impact Assessments are carried out at project proponents' expense through certified 'EIA Experts.' The Ministry administers this certification. Recently, the Ministry has begun a revision of the system to one in which written examinations on EIA knowledge will be required, before issuing an EIA licence. The exam will be open only to graduates of certain faculties. Currently this process is being delayed by indecision over which institution should be responsible for administering the exam. 'Experts' currently certified will not be required to sit or pass the examination. Because these are the individuals who carry out the EIAs directly, their involvement and their views on the applicability of new procedures or methodologies are crucial to developing systems that work in practice. Training them in the Guidelines is also essential, whether or not they have been licensed.

4.2.3 Trans-boundary water management, Serbia³

Most of the water resources in Western Balkans are shared between countries, but the development of cooperation on these waters is still in its infancy. The project, which is an attempt to promote regional trans-boundary water cooperation, is the outcome of an initiative by the UNECE. The organisation is also implementing this project on behalf of Swedish EPA. The project, which commenced

³ The project is presented in our report as a Serbian project since, according to the revised Project Description date 2007–01–19, it has the Serbian Water Directorate as formal counterpart. However, all countries of the region (as well as Bulgaria and Romania) are considered as potential beneficiaries of the project.

activities in early 2007, has experienced mixed results and delays. As a consequence, the project agreement period has been extended to 31 October 2009.

Actual as compared to expected results

1. Awareness creation

Two publications on trans-boundary water cooperation were envisaged under this project component. The intention was that they would be launched at the Belgrade Ministerial Conference in late 2007. The publications were, i) an assessment outlining the problems, needs and future priorities in Western Balkan related to trans-boundary water management, and ii) a less technical publication on trans-boundary water management in the Western Balkans.

The actual events to date are:

- Material has been gathered for an assessment of trans-boundary water cooperation in South-East Europe. However, there was not sufficient political support and commitment to start this political process in conjunction with the Belgrade conference. As a consequence, the material available did not result in a publication produced by the project. Instead it has been used as inputs into other documents/ reports. A side-event on trans-boundary water cooperation in South-East Europe, partly based on the assessment material, was organized during the Belgrade Ministerial Conference.
 - A publication “Balkan Vital Graphics” produced, with project co-funding, a chapter on trans-boundary water cooperation in SEE. This publication was distributed at the Belgrade Conference. The chapter corresponds to the second above-mentioned publication.
2. An agreed legal, institutional and technical framework for cooperation on water management between Serbia and Romania/Croatia. Negotiations were expected to be held between Serbia and Romania on the establishment of a framework for bilateral water cooperation. Missions to Macedonia and Albania to discuss opportunities for projects facilitating trans-boundary water cooperation were also planned and conducted.

The actual events to date are:

- Technical documents to support negotiations with Romania and Croatia have been prepared. There is also a basic text to use as a starting point for negotiation. The delays have been caused by elections in the countries in question resulting in continuous changes in establishing and confirming the negotiation teams. In Serbia, the proposed team of negotiators has changed three times in 18 months. There seems to be little point in making further changes to documents ahead of negotiations as the negotiation process will almost certainly require further changes. We are also told that regular international and bilateral contacts exist at the technical/expert level. Romania already uses the EU Water Framework Directive. Nor is any particular technical difficulty expected with Croatia. Croatia has a similar agreement with Montenegro.
3. A draft Swedish EPA project proposal supporting the development of trans-boundary water cooperation in Western Balkan.

The actual events to date are:

Due to the delays accounted for above (elections and insufficient political support), a proposal was submitted to Swedish EPA in August 2008 to use available project funds for five additional activities. These are:

1. *Establishment of the Timok Forum in co-operation with the Regional Environmental Centre.*

A first meeting attended by representatives of regional and local authorities as well as non-governmental organisations was organised in February, 2009 in Bulgaria with financial support from Swedish EPA. The medium and long-term objectives of the Timok River project are to ensure the joint management of the river basin. A Timok forum website has been established (<http://timok.rec.org>).

2. *Organization of a workshop on the development of trans-boundary cooperation in the Drin basin.*

A consultative meeting on Integrated Management of the extended Drin River Basin was organised in Tirana in November 2008. The meeting was financially supported by Swedish EPA. The aim of the meeting was to exchange identify interests and needs from the key stakeholders in the Basin and identify challenges for promoting IWRM planning and application, as well as to identify ways towards trans-boundary cooperation for the integrated management of the Basin. The meeting requested the support of GEF towards the integrated management of the Basin. The ambition to continue the preparation of a regional cooperation framework with external funding was reconfirmed by senior representatives from several of the countries concerned. This could be considered a break-through in transboundary water cooperation in the region.

3. *Development of a river basin management plan for the Sava River.*

Being aware of the need for cooperation in the sustainable use and protection of the Sava River Basin, the joint International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC) was established in 2002. As a step towards the development of a Sava River Basin Management Plan, resources from the project were requested for the finalisation of an analysis report (assessment of significant hydro morphological pressures in the Sava River Basin) and the implementation of a consultation workshop. The workshop has been implemented and a final report prepared in collaboration with the Jaroslav Cerni Institute in Belgrade (May 2009).

4. *Organisation of a workshop on the UNECE Water Convention and EU Water Framework Directive in Skopje.*

This activity has been rescheduled for August 2009.

5. *Support to FYROM for the ratification of the UNECE Water Convention.*

Macedonia is preparing for the ratification of the UNECE Water Convention. In support of this process the project has funded costs in conjunction with various consultative meetings to discuss ratification related issues (legal, practical and economic implications of ratification).

These activities have been implemented as a preparation for the workshop in Skopje.

Observations and conclusions

Our major observations and conclusions in relation to the project are the following:

- Initially, we note that in Serbia, 90% of waters are international. Therefore, trans-boundary water cooperation is important for the country and the region. With the exception of the cooperation on the Danube and the Sava rivers, trans-boundary water cooperation is poorly developed in the region. The project is highly relevant in terms of the necessity for institutional improvement of trans-boundary water cooperation between the neighbouring countries that share the same waters. However, while the activity is important it is not obvious that it should be carried out in the context of Swedish EPA's programme in the region. It could be argued partly that the project is supporting processes that fall outside the competence of the Swedish agency. Rather than promoting capacity development among national institutions, the project contributes to the process

of establishing new regional structures and institutional frameworks. This is also the reason why the project is implemented by UNECE. Swedish EPA has not been particularly visible in the project although Swedish experts have participated in specific activities.

- Overall, the project report's mixed results. Support has been rendered for production of reports on trans-boundary water management that are similar to those intended. The bilateral agreement process has been supported but due to elections taking place, insufficient political commitment, etc., these efforts have not resulted in signed agreements. The cooperation agreements that are eventually signed will serve as example that can be used for bilateral agreements with other neighbouring ex-Yugoslav countries. The most important outcome of the project is perhaps the five additional activities that stimulates and facilitates continued collaboration on trans-boundary water management. These additional activities are also contributing to the objective of developing proposals for continued cooperation in the region.
- An issue that could be discussed is the relevance of extending the duration of the project several times to allow for the negotiation between Serbia and Romania/Croatia to commence. In an environment with political instability, it is not obvious that the additional time granted will make a difference. The political commitment to the process will not grow only because the project is given a few additional months. The assessment made and the justification for extending the project is not presented in any detail. It is questionable whether, as the basis for each extension, there were really any reasons to believe that the negotiations would start in the near future. If so, it is unfortunate that this evidence is not accounted for in the requests for extension.

4.2.4 Water Management Plan for Kolubara River Basin, Serbia

The aim of this project is to strengthen the capacity of the Serbian national and regional water administrators in integrated water management according to the principles of the EU Water Framework Directive, through the development of a pilot integrated River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) for the Kolubara river basin. The intention is that this will later serve as a template when developing RBMP's for other river basins in Serbia. The main target groups for the intervention are staff members of the Water Directorate and the institutes involved in the integrated water management of the Kolubara river basin.

Actual as compared to expected results

At the end of the project the expected results are:

1. A well trained group of Serbian water administrators in water management exists.
2. Serbian tools for implementation of integrated water management exist.
3. Legislative demands of EU water linked directives are transparent for the participants in the project.
4. A needs assessment for a water monitoring programme for the Kolubara river basin is developed.
5. Consequences of introducing the principles of EU Water Framework Directive are demonstrated through the production of a pilot RBMP for the Kolubara river basin.
6. The project has demonstrated the need and ways for consultation, communication and involvement of stakeholders and public in development of the River Basin Management Plan.

The actual events to date are:

- The project started in July 2007. The project is slightly behind schedule. An extension of a few months until the end of 2009 was considered (at the time of the evaluation). There are several reasons for the delay such as lack of data/late processing of data as well as, on the Swedish side,

the unavailability of an expert that was scheduled to conduct training (the expert resigned from Swedish EPA).

- The project builds on a preliminary characterization and analysis of the Kolubara river basin that had been completed by the EU CARDS Sava project. A working group has been established as the mechanism of cooperation and collaboration between the participating institutions. Monthly working group meetings have been held as part of the process of developing Kolubara RBMP. Staff members at the participating institutes are continuously receiving training, through seminars and workshops, organised by the project as part of these meetings and the project implementation process. A study tour to Sweden has also been conducted.
- Two public consultations have been organised in the context of the project. These were mainly attended by industries/business people, farmers, representatives of environmental NGOs and other persons directly affected.
- A new partner – Biological institute “Sinisa Stankovic” – has been introduced and involved in the project.
- There is no database for discharge of pollutants from point sources in Serbia. A cadastre/database of polluters in line with proposals from the project is under development. Data are now entered into a database to be analysed and reported as draft water quality criteria. This database is the basis for defining objectives, classification of waters and identification of necessary measures.
- A needs assessment was made earlier by the EU Cards Sava project. No additional work on this task has been carried out by the project. The intention is that this will be attended to towards the end of the project period.
- During the project “inception phase” the intention to develop a project web page was introduced. However, this has not materialised due to a lack of time and resources.
- Since mid 2008 a group of water administrators from Bosnia-Herzegovina have been regularly participating in the more formalised training activities conducted in the framework of the project.

Observations and conclusions

Our major observations and conclusions in relation to the project are the following.

- This project seems to be developing well. It is still at the stage of intensive implementation. The basic idea is to run a set of preparatory activities combined with regularly conducted training events for the members of the working group. During the later stage of the project the working group will, with support from the foreign experts, develop the RBMP on the basis of the principles contained in the EU Water Framework Directive. In line with the project objective a set of water administrators are being trained. Normally, some eight to ten persons participate in the training events. Availability of time to engage in project activities is reported to be a problem that occurs from time to time. At the moment the acquired knowledge and competence are not being institutionalised, it is rather the assets of the individuals participating in the project and the collaboration. Very few activities in the project, if any, aim at assisting the participants in institutionalising the knowledge acquired in their respective organisation. This fundamental issue needs to be addressed by the project and the Serbian partners as an urgent matter. The question is relevant considering that the aim of the project is to promote institutional capacity development.
- A major, perhaps unintended, outcome of the project is that the Serbian institutions are cooperating rather intensively. While this is not an entirely new phenomenon, through the project activities, the institutions have established closer contacts at individuals and organisational level. Obviously, this

process was initiated before the project started but it has, according to many of the persons met with, been further promoted and facilitated by the project. The study visits to Sweden, made by groups of representatives from different institutions, have contributed towards this objective. A point made during our interviews is that the institutions involved, based on their mandates and obligations, will continue to cooperate and thereby at least maintain the informal institutional links that have established through the project. This will contribute towards sustainability at the sector level and pave the way for the continued application of the methods and procedures introduced by the project.

- The so called public consultations represent a new way of thinking and working, setting an example for future similar processes and for the persons/institutions involved. The opinion expressed is that they have allowed for an open and informal dialogue with various stakeholders. An additional consultative event in the context of the project is planned before the end of the project. These activities influence the thinking of the participating officials and sets examples for the future. Once again, the challenge and the main issue is how to institutionalise such events as part of the RBMP development process?
- The Kolubara River project follows a similar exercise with German assistance. It was also aimed at meeting the requirements of the EU Water Directive. A fairly frequent comment made during our meetings was the difference in approaches between the German and Swedish cooperation with the later partner (Swedish EPA) being more flexible in its interpretation of the directive in question. There was a strong voice of appreciation for the sensitivity and flexibility of the Swedish partners in working with the Serbian institutions.
- In the project reporting the absence of a project office/venue is referred to as a constraint. The institutions met with do not perceive this as a problem. They find it highly unlikely that they would use such an office other than sporadically.
- Swedish EPA's experiences from the Baltics are by Swedish EPA referred to as a starting point for the collaboration. For several reasons, this is not perceived as important by the Serbian partners.

4.2.5 Flood Risk Management Plan, Tamnava River Basin, Serbia

The specific project purpose of this project is to strengthen the capacity of Serbian authorities in integrated flood risk management by producing a first draft of a Flood Risk Management Plan (FRMP) for Tamnava River Basin, according to the principles and the different steps in the EU Floods Directive. This process is considered as the start of the Serbian implementation of the EU Floods Directive. The project introduces new methodologies and techniques for elements necessary for flood hazard mapping, flood risk mapping and flood risk management, according to the different steps in the EU Floods Directive. The project is implemented with assistance from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB – previously the Swedish Rescue Service). Assistance is also provided by the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute (SMHI) as well as selected Swedish municipalities.

Actual as compared to expected results

At the end of the project the expected results are:

1. A document from the inventory phase.
2. A preliminary flood risk assessment for Tamnava River Basin
3. Flood Hazard Maps for different scenarios in Tamnava River Basin
4. Flood Risk Maps for Tamnava River Basin
5. A first draft of a FRMP in the Tamnava River Basin

6. A final conference and paper- and/or web-based information.
7. A group of administrators trained in producing a FRMP according to the principles of the EU Floods Directive.

The actual events to date are:

- The project started in early August 2008, a few months later than expected. Therefore, the project is still in the process of implementation with a range of on-going activities. As in the case of the Kolubara RBMP intervention, this project is implemented on the basis of a working group approach involving key Serbian institutions as well as the Swedish partners.
- The project has been divided into six sets of activities (or steps). The first four steps include inventory study and planning, preliminary flood risk assessment, development of flood hazard maps for different scenarios and elaboration of flood risk maps. The final product, a draft FRMP, is produced during the fifth step which is supposed to be followed by dissemination of the results (step 6).
- At the moment (May 2009), only the first step has been completed. Data required for the finalisation of the second step has been collected. During a study visit to Sweden in June 2009, SMHI will assist Serbian experts in the analysis of the data gathered. The activity will also prepare for the production of flood risk maps. The visit will also include collaboration with Swedish municipalities that at a later stage are expected to participate in the project as experts (during missions to Serbia). During the visit a revised work plan for the remaining project period until the end of December 2009 will be produced.

Observations and conclusions

- As a non-member country Serbia is not obliged to implement the EU Floods directive. However, it is bordered by EU member states and therefore affected by the directive and, as a consequence, forced to adjust to it. Furthermore, effective flood prevention requires cooperation between member and non-member states in the same watershed areas for the rivers.
- As noted in the project document, a complete FRMP has to be done by the Serbian Directorate for Water in cooperation with the neighbouring countries sharing the same rivers according to the EU Floods Directive. Therefore, the project will not result in a complete FRMP that can come into force. The document will rather function as a first draft and fulfil the main goals of such. The draft plan should take into account spatial planning and public awareness.
- The project is of relevance in terms of its relation to other projects supported under the Sida–Swedish EPA agreement, specifically the Kolubara RBMP as well as the Sava RBMP which is supported through the UNECE. It is conducted as a Serbian managed process with limited, but essential, expert inputs from the Swedish partner. We find it difficult to assess the extent to which project activities will be completed within the agreed period, i.e. the end of December 2009.
- Because the project has not reached the flood management planning phase it is not possible to know the extent to which other important stakeholders will be involved. However, it appears that the whole process could benefit by greater participation of other important stakeholders – especially land use sectors like agriculture and forestry, whose practices have considerable impact on run-off and therefore on flooding. Municipalities would benefit from clearly roles as well as participation. Some of these issues may be clarified under the new Water Bill which, if and when passed, will strengthen the government's ability and obligation to apply flood risk assessment and management.

4.3 Efficiency

Efficiency is defined as the relation between the value of the results of the intervention and the value of the resources used to produce these results.

By and large, our assessment is that project implementation in Serbia has been efficient. In two of the projects, the Kolubara river basin project and the flood prevention project, a working group methodology whereby different institutions are brought together has been introduced and applied systematically. The approach has proven to be very successful in terms of managing activities and facilitating collaboration. External experts have assisted through formalised training activities, seminars and on-the-job training. The methodology, with capacity building interventions integrated into a process aimed at developing a specific “product”, such as a management plan, could be further improved. Some of the persons interviewed suggest that the examples and exercises used during training could relate more directly to the specific working environment of the working group. This has however not always been possible; for example the Kolubara river basin project has been constrained by the absence of a local database to use as the basis for the training.

In Albania, the collaboration has been characterised by limited absorption capacity and more traditional expert-recipient interaction. In the EIA/SEA project, the focus has been on the drafting of legislation and guidelines. We are told that much of this work has been done by the Swedish experts on the basis of discussions with Ministry staff. A more efficient approach, in terms of building institutional capacity, would have been to support the staff of the Ministry to undertake the task with foreign expert support. Similarly, the assistance provided under the Albanian water monitoring project is geared towards a rather limited number of staff. A widened approach embracing also other institutions (in particular AfE) than those immediately targeted would probably have yielded a higher return in terms of capacity development. The Albanian projects are assessed as less efficient than those in Serbia.

We find it extremely difficult to assess the efficiency of the transboundary water management project. Measuring the efficiency of the publication activities under this project are almost impossible, at least with the limited resources available to the evaluation team. Similarly, it is very difficult to assess the efficiency of the other activities under project, partly because they embraced countries that were not visited by the team but also because the activities are on-going.

The capacity development facilitated by the projects has contained elements of regional collaboration. In one case, project participants were funded to attend a workshop in Zagreb organised by a separate institution, thereby making more efficient use of existing training possibilities at the regional level. Likewise participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina are participating in training activities conducted as part of one of the Serbian projects, thereby widening the value of the project beyond that country's boundaries, but within trans-boundary river basins.

Some indications of efficiency include the expansion of the historical analysis from the Tamnava River to nation-wide coverage, for use in subsequent river flood assessment exercises. The training in moving from the digital elevation model (DEM) to the digital terrain model (DTM) will be done in Sweden, but will use Tamnava river data collected and produced in the project. The training will itself provide one of the specific project outputs, as well as introducing the participants to the methodology and technology.

Study tours could be conducted more efficiently, none of the organisations met with seem to have any structured approach to disseminating information from the visits. The knowledge and information gathered is mostly the asset of the individual participant. To improve this, the participants could be requested to produce briefs, organise echo-seminars, draft articles, etc. An approach could also be to have, as part of the study visit programme, sessions already in Sweden where this is done.

4.4 Ownership and sustainability

The Serbian central authorities' ownership of the project process and results are assessed as strong, in particular regarding the Kolubara RBMP project and the Tamnava FRMP. While Serbia is neither an EU member state, nor a party to the UNECE Water Convention, the country understands the necessity of cooperating closely with neighbouring countries on water management and flood protection, pollution protection and other relevant water issues. At the same time, the authorities are preparing to comply with proposed new water legislation and obligations that Serbia will need to fulfil when the country becomes a candidate country. The fact that, at least in one case, Serbia is already beginning to apply new knowledge and approaches to other river basins is also an indication of the probable sustainability of the outcomes of the project.

At the institutional level the ownership of the process is reinforced by the fact that the development processes supported by the project are considered part of the institutions mandate and work schedule. No additional persons are recruited/mobilised to assist in the implementation of the project; the activities are conducted by regular staff members. The level of commitment is also reflected by the fact one of the institutions is continuing to provide inputs in spite of not having a current contract for their work, in the conviction that the Water Directorate is also committed enough that payments will be made when the 2009 budget is released.

The ownership of the projects in Albania has been less apparent. MEFWA has not been driving them forward, in the case of the water monitoring project they have even abandoned their role as project owners. As an example, the Ministry has only taken a small part in the actual development of the EIA guidelines, manuals and regulations produced by the project. The bulk of the work has been carried out by the Swedish experts. There is thus little institutional knowledge of this process transferred from Swedish EPA to their Albanian counterpart. The process of developing new EIA manuals for other areas is not sufficiently introduced to the Ministry for them to continue with it without support in the future. There is consequently no plan, or resources allocated, for the future process to develop EIA manuals. Furthermore, no testing in the field was done as part of the process in order to assess the viability of the guidelines in reality.

Most likely, the high turnover of/or absence of project managers at MEFWA has further reduced the Ministry's involvement and ownership. In addition to the lack of strong project management the project design has not contributed to a strong local ownership. There has been a very low level of participation from stakeholders in the Albanian project activities. A more pro-active approach of Swedish EPA in relation to MEFWA, based on agreed milestones could perhaps have produced a stronger involvement of the latter. As further discussed elsewhere in this report, clear stop-go decision-points in combination with clearly defined inputs requirements by each side is a necessity in an institutional environment with scarce resources.

Serbia has an Environmental Strategy that incorporates principles of environmental sustainability. All three projects can be readily linked to sustainability, inasmuch as they focus on natural resource management. However, we did not see or hear anything that related specifically and explicitly to sustainability as such, nor to the links between environmental, economic, social and institutional sustainability. Financial sustainability was raised specifically with respect to maintenance and repair of flood protection infrastructure, but as far as we were able to ascertain financial sustainability of the processes, methodologies, technologies and institutions being developed were not part of the project design. These issues still need to be addressed. They are closely linked to a significant absence in project design of the risk of counterpart finances not materialising from year to year. The Serbian budgeting system is such that this type of financial risk should "always be included in design of projects in Serbia".

The five projects under review have limited explicit replication, mainstreaming, or institutionalisation elements as part of their design. We believe this in this respect the project design could have been improved. In these particular cases there are indications that many methodologies and processes will continue to be used after projects are completed. However, there are few explicit activities or plans for dissemination of knowledge, application of “training of trainers” approaches, production of methodological or procedural manuals and guidelines that can be distributed. Explicit plans for dissemination of knowledge are a requirement in all Swedish EPA project proposals, according to the Swedish EPA Guidelines for project proposals. These could and should be ‘living’ documents that are amended and up-dated as new experience is gained, new regulations come into force, or new institutional arrangements are made.

4.5 Policy-based cross cutting issues

Cross-cutting issues, for example gender equality and gender mainstreaming, are not visible in the projects under review. The awareness seems low both among counterpart staff and the experts involved in the collaboration. The majority of the persons interviewed, when asked about the gender equality aspect of the interventions, have referred to the number of male/female participants in seminars, or responded in a similar, superficial way. Few have understood the deeper meaning of the concept, how problems and project interventions affect men and women respectively.

However, in the case of Serbia, there seems to be a rather strong commitment by the Government to gender equality, an agency has even been dedicated to this issue. There are also numerous national gender experts that could provide “local” perspectives on gender issues as they occur in the region. In this situation, it would be most appropriate to restrict Swedish involvement to administrative organisation of gender related workshops, leaving suitable national authorities (agencies and individuals) to provide content and message. In the case of Albania we do not perceive the same level of commitment to this set of issues. To some extent, this could perhaps be explained by the fact that these projects have less obvious gender aspects, for example the ground water quality monitoring project, than in the case of the Serbian projects.

The later projects, which relate to water management, are relevant from a gender as well as from a poverty alleviation perspective. They are essential in the process of reducing the vulnerability to both material loss (through floods) and disease (through polluted water), effects that impact differently on men and women.

In general, we have not seen any indication that gender issues have been a consideration in either the choice or design of the projects. Nor do we see any indication that gender-relevant monitoring of the results is planned or undertaken. We believe that Swedish EPA could have been more proactive in incorporating gender issues in all the projects. This could have been done both through specific gender equality components in the projects, but more importantly through a focus on gender mainstreaming of the project outputs, outcomes and impacts.

As an example Swedish EPA could have included a gender analysis in the project producing Flood Risk Management Plan for Tamnava River Basin. There is no assessment of the gender specific implications of a flood, or the different implications of the structures put in place through the FRMP. The projects could have analysed the extent to which men and women are affected differently by floods, and why. Are men or women affected equally when infrastructure is damaged by a flood? And does the FRMP take into account the different priorities of men and women?

Several of the projects included some component of public participation and this is another area where a solid gender analysis could be included. Are women and men given the same opportunities to participate and make their opinions heard? Do, for example, women and men have the same opportunity to participate and give their opinion when it comes to EIA for projects that could affect their lives?

Water management, river basin management and flood management are all continuous activities that involve regular monitoring and data collection. An important aspect for mainstreaming gender issues would be the structuring of relevant databases and statistics so as to differentiate between men and women. Links could be made to other statistical databases where gender-differentiated socio-economic information is provided. This needs to be followed by a deliberate analysis of findings specifically looking at actual or potential differences in impacts and influence in decision-making. Additional aspects, such as income differentials (as poverty indicators) could similarly be incorporated in such statistical analyses.

5 Conclusions regarding the programme

The projects are contributing to the programme's specific purpose. As stated earlier, the specific purpose for the programme is to support environmental authorities in the SEE-region to develop effective environmental management in order for the countries to fulfil national and international obligations. The cooperation should focus on facilitating the countries EU-alignment process and Stabilisation and Association Process/Agreement. The project steering documents do not provide any detailed interpretation of this objective. The term "environmental authorities" is not further specified although, in the agreement between Sida and Swedish EPA, it is mentioned that programme interventions could also embrace other institutions than environmental authorities, for example multilateral organisations and NGOs. Consequently, our assessment of the link between the outcome of each project and the achievement of the programme objective is made on the basis of a wide interpretation of the term.

It should be kept in mind that the projects were still on-going at the time of our field visit. In one case, the EIA/SEA project, the closing seminar was conducted in parallel with our visit to Albania. Therefore, we have only been able to make a preliminary assessment of project outcomes and achievements. A first impression is that the projects are clearly contributing to the process of alignment with EU standards, methods and procedures. In several cases, activities are conducted in the framework of applicable EU directives. This dimension of the specific project purpose is visible in all projects. As reflected in national policy documents the contributions are also perceived as important for the process of preparing for harmonisation of national policies, legislation and regulations to those applied in the EU.

The projects' importance for the development of environmental management capacity in the targeted countries varies considerably. Our impression is that the selection of projects to be included in the programme has not been guided by their respective potential to make contributions to this process. The limited number of potential projects available for collaboration has reduced considerably the scope for strategic choices. However, the projects identified have been in line with national priorities and strategies. Project identification has not been a matter of finding the interventions that yield the highest capacity development return; it has rather been a question of responding to, as we perceive it, the few opportunities that have been available within the thematic areas of interest to Swedish EPA and Sida. In Serbia, the most significant result of the assistance is the integrated and coordinated involvement of relevant institutions in the project implementation process. Representatives of key institutions have, through a working group approach, developed knowledge and experiences of river basin management planning and flood disaster prevention. In parallel to building the competence of the individuals, an understanding of the importance of institutional collaboration has been fostered. The capacity building contribution of the trans-boundary project is less visible. Still, the overall impression is that the projects in Serbia have been reasonably successful and that as the projects are completed they will continue to produce benefits for the targeted institutions.

In Albania, the involvement of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration has gradually diminished. There has been no clear project management function that has continuously assessed progress and reacted. In this case it is more difficult to identify any substantial achievements in terms of strengthened environmental management capacity among concerned institutions, at least in terms of the competence of individuals. The EIA/SEA project has contributed to the institutional framework through the development of legal instruments. However, the benefits of these have only partly materialised. The water monitoring project has, in institutional terms, sunk to a level which prohibits broad dissemination of new competences acquired. While further investment in capacity development is recommended in Serbia, conditionality would have to be considered for continued assistance to be granted in Albania. The latter could be expressed in terms of manpower resource inputs, activities to be completed by a certain date, laws to be adopted before an agreed deadline and other similar requirements. Failure to meet agreed deadlines would lead to a temporary or permanent discontinuation of the project.

Institutionalisation of project capacity development is not a prominent feature of the project design. The projects in Serbia and Albania include limited efforts to institutionalise the outputs and outcomes of the projects. The interventions consists of a set of technically oriented actions that often aim at transferring knowledge and skills to individuals directly involved in the process. The wider institutional context and the necessity of institutionalising the results of the interaction are disregarded. Little attention is paid to questions such as:

- How are skills and knowledge transferred to other professionals in the sector? What could be done to further disseminate knowledge and information, revision of manuals and procedures, checklists, and so forth?
- Who is becoming the owner of new ideas/knowledge? How are new ideas, methods etc. made part of the institutional memory?

Clearly, institutional capacity building needs to be understood in its broadest sense. It is not simply a case of training individuals. Nor is it simply introducing new methodologies. If these two do not occur, neither one will have significant effect. Beyond this, there are many tools and equipment that will be needed to improve the productivity of human resources, and to support the continuous learning or developing processes that will be needed. For example, databases coupled to analytical tools that will monitor change and allow assessments of any changes introduced.

Flexibility in the provision of assistance has been a key issue and the attitude of Swedish EPA in this respect has been praised by several of the persons met with. This applies to the agency itself as well as to the individual experts. Several of the persons and institutions met with have also expressed appreciation of the fact that the experts engaged have shown great sensitivity in their interaction with counterpart staff.

What does it mean that the Western Balkans programme is a programme rather than a set of projects? An interesting question is to what extent the different projects implemented as part of the programme are supposed to complement and reinforce each other. Partly, this is suggested by the programmes thematic approach. In the Sida assessment memo it is suggested (page 11) that programme effectiveness will be promoted by the thematic approach. While this is a good idea and a reasonable assumption, in practice we see limited achievements in this respect. Firstly, the situation in Serbia and Albania differ greatly, in terms of commitment from the partners, ownership of results and processes, conditions for sustainability, etc. Therefore, besides the trans-boundary activities that specifically address such issues, it is difficult to see that project outcomes will have relevance and impact beyond the national borders. The two projects in Albania are also supporting very different sectors and issues (EIA/SEA and water monitoring). They are totally disconnected from each other apart from the fact that they are both formally implemented

under the auspices of the same ministry, MEFWA. In terms of content, the projects in Serbia are more closely linked to each other. However, the potential for integration and cross-fertilisation between these projects have only been tapped to a limited extent. The main connection between the river basin management project and the flood prevention project is the fact that partly, the same Serbian institutions are involved in both projects. The foreign support has been provided through different institutional arrangements, only in one case has the project been implemented directly by Swedish EPA.

An issue for the future is whether the *programme* aspect, at national or regional level, should be further emphasized. We believe that, during the programming of a possible continued cooperation between Swedish EPA and partners in the region, attempts should be made to develop further the thematic approach by identifying potential projects that could either complement each other or, alternatively, have relevance beyond the national borders. We are aware that such thematic programming would have to be carried out within the limitations of the priorities set by funding partners' country strategies.

Swedish EPA needs to take measures to ensure that projects are implemented within the agreed timeframes. We find it slightly surprising that all five projects have been or will be extended, in several cases more than once. For example, the trans-boundary project has recently been granted a fourth extension of the deadline for completion of activities. There are many different reasons for the delays including late data collection due to bad weather, political instability before and immediately after national elections, project restructuring due to overlaps with other donor funded interventions, insufficient counterpart capacity, and so forth. The main consequence of the postponed activities and completion dates is that continued collaboration through a second phase of the projects, which in some cases were envisaged, could not be accommodated within the Sida-Swedish EPA agreement period. In one case, the trans-boundary project, it is also questionable whether there is sufficient political commitment to conduct the bilateral negotiations that the project is providing support for.

The main issue in this context is not whether each "justification" for granting extensions is acceptable or not. It is rather to what extent Swedish EPA could improve its project design and project management system in order to avoid or reduce the occurrence of such situations in future programmes. What has Swedish EPA learnt about risk assessment and risk management from these many delays? What measures could be taken in the future to improve the situation? Is there anyone of the parties involved in the cooperation that has the role to be critical or argue against extending agreements? As one of the interviewees described it: all parties involved benefit from getting completion dates moved forward even if it is unlikely that the project will be successfully completed. Perhaps Swedish EPA should introduce a rule saying either that extensions could only be granted once or alternatively increasing the requirements for multiple extensions, for example through increased demands for counterpart contributions. In Swedish EPA's next annual report (or in the programme completion report) the agency should be requested to give an account of the lessons learnt in this respect and present possible measures that could be applied in future projects.

A related issue is the purpose of the Steering Committee meetings that are held annually. Our impression is that they are rather remote from the projects and the persons involved in the implementation of those (Swedish experts and counterparts). To what extent have they succeeded in addressing and solving the problems and challenges that have been encountered?

There are reasons for the parties to review and reconsider the role of the committees as well as the frequency of meetings. Project committees with members that are directly involved in the implementation of the projects and that meet several times per year might be an option. This does not exclude the organisation of annual meetings with a broader set of organisations represented, for example the Swedish Embassy.

Capacity development has not reached beyond the central level institutions directly involved in the projects. The agree-

ment between Sida and Swedish EPA opens up for the application of a broad cooperation concept embracing also other sectors of society. For example, the programme is expected to strengthen the interaction between the environmental authorities and the private sector as well as encourage private sector self-regulation⁴. This has not materialised. The same applies to the idea of involving NGOs in the cooperation. While some attempts have been made to involve regional environmental authorities in Albania in the EIA/SEA project, the programme focus and capacity development efforts have by and large remained at central level.

We have not seen any evidence that any of the projects have generated more engagement by Swedish actors beyond those directly involved in project activities. However, Swedish institutions such as SLU, KTH and SMHI are actively participating in the programme by making their experts available.

Would the programme be more effective if a Swedish EPA representative was based in the region and supported the projects more currently? In Serbia, we do not see any particular need for more continuous presence by a Swedish EPA representative. The project implementation processes are fully managed by the Serbian partner institutions; limited inputs are provided by the Swedish EPA experts in areas where these institutions lack sufficient experience and competence. The Serbian institutions do not see any particular advantage in having such an arrangement, at least not in the context of the on-going programme.

In Albania, the situation is somewhat different. The ownership of the project implementation processes has been weak, partly as a consequence of insufficient capacity at ministerial level. However, it is difficult to see how a Swedish EPA representative would be able to improve the situation. The presence of a technical expert would not necessarily speed up development processes or make the Ministry change its priorities in a situation where they are struggling with insufficient resources to meet all the demands. Furthermore, there is no indication that the Government would be open to accept a Swedish expert to work with broader institutional issues at Ministry level, assistance that could perhaps increase the institutional capacity in a medium-term perspective. Likewise, we ask ourselves whether Swedish EPA would have a person available for such a role. To identify an Albanian expert that would be accepted and allowed to make a difference in this respect seems unrealistic. Our opinion is that this is not a feasible idea.

6 Swedish EPA as a partner in development

Swedish EPA is currently making efforts to improve its systems and procedures for development and management of projects. A new strategy⁵ for international development cooperation was adopted by Swedish EPA early this year. Some seminars have also been conducted for staff members engaged in the development cooperation programme and an external consultant has been commissioned to review and propose improvements to Swedish EPA's internal guidelines for project proposals.

The strategy document contains a discussion concerning the conditions for Swedish EPA's involvement in future development cooperation programmes. It attempts to define, in general terms, the agency's unique competence. It also includes a listing of the criteria to be applied and considerations to be made when new cooperation agreements are discussed and decided on. The most important issue in this context is perhaps Swedish EPA's limited capacity to engage in new projects. It is noted in the document that the number of experts available within the thematic areas embraced by the Western Balkans programme is limited. Presently, in line with the commitments made in the strategy, Swedish EPA is in the process of identifying thematic areas (*nisch-områden*) that will be given priority when new cooperation

⁴ This ambition is also repeated in the Sida assessment memo, page 9.

⁵ Strategi för Naturvårdsverkets internationella utvecklingsarbete 2009–2011, dated 2009–02–05.

agreements are discussed. The intention is also to elaborate and implement a human resource development plan for the areas chosen. These tasks will be completed during 2009.

We believe that this is the most important issue for Swedish EPA to address before new cooperation agreements are entered into. The on-going Western Balkans programme is characterised by a relatively low level of direct involvement of Swedish EPA staff members. As mentioned earlier, the five projects under review have been and are being implemented through different institutional arrangements and with technical inputs from a combination of Swedish and non-Swedish experts. The situation is reflected in the table below.

Project number	Implemented by	Main technical inputs
Water monitoring, Albania	Swedish EPA	Experts from SLU and KTH
EIA/SEA, Albania	Swedish EPA	Swedish EPA mainly
Trans-boundary, Serbia	UNECE	UNECE managed, some Swedish EPA expert inputs
Kolubara river, Serbia	Swedish EPA	External consultant + project leader from Swedish EPA
Flooding prevent., Serbia	Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency MSB	MSB with support from SMHI and selected Sw. municipalities

This table illustrates the challenge that Swedish EPA has to deal with. Many of the technical inputs are provided by non-Swedish EPA permanent staff. At the time of the evaluation only one of the five projects is managed by a Swedish EPA employee based at the agency's office in Stockholm. In two cases project management has been outsourced to other institutions. It should be noted that this is in line with the agreement between Sida and Swedish EPA which stipulates that other agencies and/or consultants could be contracted to implement part of the programme.

However, the new strategy mentions as Swedish EPA's unique competence the role as an environmental agency, organisation of efficient environmental management at different levels (central, regional, local) and the cross-sectoral integration of environmental protection. In our opinion, to implement the strategy on the basis of this definition of core competence requires that Swedish EPA's role in the projects is increased. We have difficulties in understanding how the experiences of exercising the mandate as an environmental agency could be presented and discussed by experts that are not employed by Swedish EPA. This question is also acknowledged in the document. In order to succeed in mobilising resources for projects, the importance of international development cooperation interventions as part of the role of the agency might have to be emphasized in Swedish EPA's internal communication. Swedish EPA staff members have mentioned that in today's situation, characterised by competition for scarce resources, the attitude towards development cooperation projects is not always positive.

There are several other issues that are strategically important for Swedish EPA. As indicated earlier, the projects under review do not incorporate, as part of the design, institutionalisation of new knowledge and competence. The agency needs to develop the ability and capacity to make institutional analysis as part of the initial assessment of project proposals. Institutional constraints (legal, capacity, political commitment, etc.) have to be identified and assessed. An important issue in this context is whether Swedish EPA as a "sister" institution could be expected to have any other role than as an advisor at a technical level. We believe that it would be of interest for Swedish EPA to explore the possibilities to engage, in the role as a dialogue partner, in processes of institutional reform within the environmental management sector.

When new projects are developed the institutionalisation aspect has to be catered for. In addition, we believe that the ownership of the project would be further underlined if the project documents more explicitly described the entire project implementation process, not only the activities that are conducted by Swedish EPA or with Swedish funding. By broadening the scope of the documents the expected outcomes would become more visible. This would assist during follow-up by moving the focus from the

Swedish inputs/outputs, for example seminars conducted, to the outcome and relevance of the activities for Swedish EPA's partner organisation.

There is scope for improvement in Swedish EPA's internal learning processes and systems. The agreement with Sida requests the agency to undertake internal evaluations of completed projects in a systematic manner. As a consequence of the delays in project implementation, at the time of the evaluation no end-of-project evaluations had been undertaken as a basis for learning and competence development. The internal dissemination of information to experts and current exchange of experiences between projects is also limited. This could perhaps be explained by the fact that only one of the Swedish EPA project managers is based in Stockholm. Besides a few competence development seminars, concerning LFA and result based management, that have been organised with external assistance there has been almost no activities aimed at promoting dialogue and reflections based on the lessons learnt in the projects. Information about activities of relevance organised by Sida is distributed to project managers and sometimes to Swedish EPA experts that participate in the projects. Some limited interaction between project managers is also reported. Mainly, the communication goes from the projects to the international secretariat.

It seems that Swedish EPA and its project staff could gain much from closer contact with the EU offices, and with other donors specifically to avoid overlaps. Wider and more frequent contact with these actors should have alerted Swedish EPA, for example, to the existence of other projects working on SEA in Albania, or to the work on new EIA legislation that would affect the approval of sector specific guidelines. In this context Swedish EPA could learn from the knowledge and experience of other organisations working in the region.

Reporting is also an area with a potential for further improvement. The frequency of reporting could be discussed and improved. The problem is that the agreements do not always require regular three- or six-months reports. The assumption has been that the projects would be implemented within a short period of time; hence the need for regular reports has been limited. As the delays have occurred, this arrangement has become insufficient. Furthermore, the quality of reports could also improve. Some of the reports are well written and present the development in relation to the expected results and agreed indicators. Other reports present achievements and challenges encountered in a more unstructured manner. We believe that further standardisation and streamlining of regular project reports could increase the value of them. This is a task for the internal secretariat to look into. The reports' point of embarkation should be the project data contained in the LFA matrixes that are part of the project steering documents.

Following an agreement with Sida, Swedish EPA has not undertaken any particular efforts to disseminate information about the programme externally, perhaps with the exception of the agency's web-page which provides some basic information about the programme.

We applaud Swedish EPA for producing a set of Guidelines for development of project proposals. We are aware of the on-going work of reviewing these guidelines. We suggest that in this process the following issues could also be considered:

- The Guidelines have a very narrow definition of 'results' – focusing exclusively on what in other contexts are termed 'outputs' – "*Expected results are the actual tangible outputs that are a direct consequence of the project's activities.*" Sida now gives more attention to outcomes, effects and impacts – especially focusing on medium-term results. .
- The Swedish EPA Guidelines pose some important questions under the title Sustainability. However, it gives no guidance is given on how to assess these types of risk, nor on what to do with the answers. Should the project be rejected if there is little chance of sustainability? Are some of these questions more important than others, in assessing sustainability? Our review of the projects in Albania suggest that this assessment was either inadequate, or the results were ignored. Certainly, there is little

evidence that any of the major shortcomings were specifically and adequately addressed in the project's activities.

- The Guidelines do not give guidance on assessing risks and assumptions in general. Some project documents, for example, identify specific risks but, as implementation shows, do not provide adequate response to the risk. "The major risk in this proposal lies in the absorption capacity of the human resources at MEFWA and Monitoring Institutes which could be approaching the limit, as different national and international projects are competing for the same human resources."⁶ Major risks like this, with a high probability of occurring are usually a signal that the project itself should be seriously questioned. The response, that "the working situation of project staff will be carefully considered when planning project activities" should be done BEFORE entering into the project rather than after Swedish EPA has committed to it. Over optimism in dealing with risks relating to provision of resources of one kind or another, including time, or is one of the major causes of project failure or delay.
- The suggestions provided under 'Communication and Dissemination' are good, but limited to only one half of communications – concentrating on the out-going message, with no attention at all given to the 'listening' aspects of communication. This is not conducive to participatory approaches. We suggest that Swedish EPA support the development of communication strategies for each of its projects that include both outgoing and incoming aspects of communications.
- The final sentence of the Guidelines touches on Gender. In the introductory sections of the guidelines Swedish EPA states "*The Swedish Government also requests that gender aspects be incorporated in all Sida-financed projects. In practice, it has sometimes proved difficult to identify such aspects while focusing on environmental problems.*" It is our experience that it is specifically in the natural resources and environmental sectors that some of the clearest gender differences are apparent. Good gender expertise is needed. We have been disappointed in the Serbian situation to note that high quality gender expertise in Serbia has not been drawn in to the project work there for either design or implementation.
- The Guidelines provide an example of a project matrix. This is very good practice. Unfortunately, the example suggests that there is no need to identify inputs. This immediately raises the question of whether clear thought was given to the personnel, material, logistical and financial inputs needed for each activity. As suggested earlier, the project document in this respect should not be limited to inputs provided by Swedish EPA, but also those to be provided by the local partner. Identifying these specific inputs would immediately quantify the assessment of recipient and partner capacity to participate in the project. It is true that the sample budget provided illustrates the costs of counterpart expertise, but it does not indicate any other logistical or reimbursable cost burdens placed on the partner organisation.
- The LFA Matrix example also fails to illustrate the use and importance of the Assumptions/preconditions/risks column. This may suggest to users that this column need not be taken too seriously. Additionally, indicators and Means of Verification are shown as N/A for overall objectives, when in fact, these should be provided (and in this case, would not be difficult for Swedish EPA itself to identify).
- Assumptions and risks: this is perhaps the most difficult area to deal with as it places the desires and 'belief' in a project against hard realities. This is where the greatest occurrence of over-optimism lies. Consistent means of assessing the importance of specific assumptions (high, medium, low) against the probability that they will or will not be met (high, medium or low), is needed. Projects with high risks (important preconditions that have a high probability of NOT being met) should be either redesigned or avoided.

⁶ Improved Water Monitoring and Assessment Programme in Albania, pg 11.

7 Recommendations

Based on our review of the projects included in the Western Balkans programme we have arrived at the following recommendations that we believe would improve and further strengthen Swedish EPA as a partner in international development cooperation.

- The new strategy for Swedish EPA's role in development cooperation attempts to define the agency's unique competence. The strategy suggests that thematic areas are identified for inclusion in future programmes. An important criterion for areas to be included is the availability of resources within Swedish EPA to provide assistance. We recommend that Swedish EPA completes this work before new cooperation agreements are entered into. We believe that in line with Sida's policy for capacity development it is important to apply an approach that embraces technical support (methodological development and staff training) as well as areas such as policy formulation, legislation, strategic planning, organisation development and similar fields.
- If and when a new cooperation programme is developed, we encourage Sida and Swedish EPA to explore the possibility of elaborating a programme consisting of interventions that are more closely intertwined. We believe that this would increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the support further. It would also assist the parties in Sweden as well as in the Balkans in mobilising the necessary resources through increased visibility and potential impact.
- A major weakness in the on-going Western Balkans programme is the absence of activities aimed at supporting the institutionalisation of new knowledge, approaches and methods. We recommend that Swedish EPA considers this question when new interventions are elaborated and include necessary measures in the project design. This would widen the cooperation from individual competence development to institutional capacity development in its broadest sense.
- In order to secure that sufficient attention is given to the institutionalisation aspect, we recommend Swedish EPA to engage external expertise on sector reform and institutional development at the design stage.
- Measures need to be taken to reduce the need for project deadline extensions. At the design stage some slack should be built into the time schedules. We recommend Swedish EPA to introduce a stop-go mechanism that requires the parties to present proper explanations and justifications for the extension. The role and responsibility of the Steering Committees in this context need to be further elaborated. Similarly, the project managers' mandate in this respect needs to be clarified.
- Future projects should be based on project documents that, in a more elaborated manner than today, include all the activities, resource inputs, institutional requirements, assumptions and risks that are of importance for the achievement of the objectives. Partly, this is already done. Moves towards this are believed to further strengthen the counterpart organisation's ownership of the implementation process and assist in identifying potential risks and institutional constraints.
- Swedish EPA's effort to develop Guidelines for project proposals is commendable. There is a potential for further improvement to the document. We recommend Swedish EPA to review and take action on the comments regarding the guidelines included in section 6 of this report.
- Cross-cutting issues need to be addressed more seriously by the projects. Already at the design stage activities aimed at mainstreaming gender awareness and equality and other policy based cross-sectoral issues should be elaborated and included in the plans. To the extent possible, we recommend Swedish EPA to promote the use of national expert institutions and individuals in this work.

- Project reporting could be improved. The format for the regular reports could be further standardised and the frequency increased. The point of departure in the reports should be the targets and indicators included in the LFA matrix. Obstacles encountered and action taken should be accounted for. Report formats should be constructed to enhance institutional learning within Swedish EPA.
- Swedish EPA's internal learning process could be improved. Exchange of experiences between projects in the same country should be encouraged by the international secretariat. We recommend Swedish EPA to organise internal events more regularly in order to disseminate information about the lessons learnt in projects, achievements made, etc. The target group would be project managers as well as experts that are currently participating in the international development cooperation programmes.

Annex 1 Terms of Reference

Evaluation of Sida's support to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency's co-operation with environmental authorities in the Western Balkan, 2005–2009

1. Background

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) has a long history (since the mid-90s) of cooperation within the field of environmental administration. After discussion between SEPA and Sida in 2004, SEPA carried out a Sida financed study to investigate the conditions for development of a bilateral and regional environmental cooperation with ministries and authorities in the South East Europe region (SEE). Since November 2005 they have been responsible for the co-operation with environmental authorities in SEE encompassing 40 MSEK over a four-year period. The co-operation involves cooperation in Albania, Macedonia and Serbia within the following areas;

Albania:

- Water monitoring and
- Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA);

Serbia:

- Water management and
- Nature protection;
- Regional Water Management with UNECE

Macedonia:

- Solid waste management and
- Preparations for EU-membership.

The overarching goal for the bi-lateral co-operation is to support partners in the region towards an environmentally sustainable development. The project objective is to support the environmental authorities in South East Europe in the development of effective environmental management in order for the countries to fulfil national and international undertakings. The cooperation should focus on facilitating the countries EU-alignment process and Stabilisation and Association Process.

The cooperation has emphasised institutional capacity building mainly on the national and provincial level and also to a lesser degree on the regional level (among countries). SEPA has in some cases been the sole project implementer but has also arranged for other Swedish or international, bodies, like the Swedish Rescue Services Agency or UNECE, to manage the projects (or to contribute). An agreement between Sida and SEPA governs the co-operation and gives SEPA the responsibility for assessment, approval, implementation and follow-up of projects and reporting back to Sida. This arrangement will be assessed by Sida in connection with new agreements from 2009. Projects are developed in dialogue after a proposal from the counterpart country.

Progress so far: Cooperation agreements between SEPA and partners in the three countries have been signed. Seven projects have been decided on, which are all on-going. Progress in Albania has been slower than planned for, due to weak administrative capacity among other factors has led to revised project plans. In Serbia progress has differed between areas of cooperation. The Serbian demand within water management has been strong but low interest for nature protection eventually led to a decision to cancel that area of cooperation. The cooperation with Macedonia is recent and started as late as 2008 and will therefore not be covered by this evaluation.

With the new country strategies for Albania and Serbia from 2009 (not yet decided) it is expected that Sida's environmental support will increase some over the coming years (Sida's support to sustainable development is also expected to increase to an extent over the coming years).

2. Aim and objectives

The overall aim of the evaluation is to draw on the experiences gained over the last three years and, if needed, make recommendations on changes for a possible continued support.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are:

1. To analyse the performance;
 - To what extent have the project objectives and expected results been achieved?
 - To assess the effectiveness of various methods for knowledge exchange/transfer including workshops, study visits, training etc.
 - To establish the relevance, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of the support in a country and regional context. Links and/or synergies with other Sida supported projects
2. To evaluate ownership, alignment and regional aspects;
 - To assess the degree of local ownership and the quality of the participatory process in project planning and implementation.
 - To what degree is the cooperation in alignment with national and public needs and priorities?
 - What is the assessed importance of the regional perspective within the cooperation?
3. To analyse routines and systems to ensure quality in project implementation and reporting feedback;
 - To what degree does SEPA use of Results Based Management and/or the Logical Framework Approach in their work?
 - Are the roles, mandates and coordination between the cooperation partners (ministries, authorities, provincial and local governments, regional actors, SEPA, Sida, other donors etc) clear and beneficial to the cooperation?
 - Assess the means and quality of reporting and follow-up: documentation, communication and indicators used.
 - To what degree does SEPA's use internal project evaluation (and what are the routines) for internal sharing of experiences and learning from evaluations?
 - Assess SEPA's external sharing of experiences and learning from evaluations.

3. Expected results

The assignment is expected to result in the following to be presented per country:

1. An assessment according to what is outlined in § 2 above,
2. A set of recommendations with a focus on the strengthening of a possible continued co-operation according to country and thematic area,
3. Projects and activities that were successful and activities which have been less successful (with an explanation why),

4. An assessment regarding the project's general relevance to a) poverty alleviation and gender equality, b) the EU-approximation, c) the increased engagement of Swedish actors in development co-operation (according to the Policy for Global Development), d) country cooperation strategies (old and new ones)
5. An inception report, a draft and a final report.

4. Method of work

Sida wants to employ a team of consultants whose assignment would include the following tasks:

1. Analysis of project documentation and planning of assignment (approx 2 weeks) – Selection of a number of projects to be evaluated, which should fairly represent the diversity of the co-operation,
2. Fact finding and interviews with the various key actors in Sweden, Serbia, Albania and UN-ECE (approx 4 weeks),
3. Report writing and possible revision of draft report after comments (approx 2 weeks)
4. Presentation and discussion of report and findings (approx 2 weeks) – To be held in one common place in the region (to be decided later).

5. Expertise, organisation, work plan and reporting

The evaluation is to be carried out in Serbia, Albania and Sweden (Stockholm). The services of interpreters (Albanian and Serbian) will be contracted by the consultant

The assignment is estimated to require approximately 10 man weeks, of which approximately 4 weeks would be spent in Albania and Serbia. At the end of 4.1 (above), Inception, the consultant shall present Sida with a proposal consisting of a detailed time and work plan for the assignment. A meeting shall be held in Stockholm to discuss the inception report. After 4.2 (above) briefing and discussion sessions will be held at Sida Tirana, Belgrade and Stockholm. The final report should be presented by the consultants at a seminar(s) in one of the two countries or possibly in Macedonia. This is to be decided at the inception meeting.

A draft report, written in English, is submitted electronically to Sida and SEPA after the assignment. Comments to the draft report will be given within two weeks of receipt. The final report shall be no more than 25 pages, including a 2–4 page summary, and submitted in 12 copies not later than three weeks after receipt of comments from Sida. The report shall be written according to “Sida Evaluation Report – A standardised mode”. The consultants shall also complete the “Sida Evaluation Data Worksheet” (attached).

List of documents

Listed below are some key documents deemed relevant for the tender:

- Sida's decision on support, dated October 2005, including Sida's assessment memo (Annex 1).
- The overall work programme (Annex 2).

Annex 2 List of officials interviewed

Sweden/international

Sida

Tomas Nyström
Björn Mossberg
Peter Troste

Swedish Environmental Protection Agency

Ewa Brederman
Marianne Tegman
Julia Obrovac
Hans-Roalnd Lindgren
Inger Alness
Gunar Bergvall
Carl-Mikael Strauss

Other persons

Anders Wilander, SLU
Gunnar Jacks, KTH
Sten-Åke Carlsson, Vattenresurs AB
Bo Libert, UNECE
Barbro Näslund-Landenmark, MSB
Hazme Akyol, MSB
Kari Örtengren

Serbia

Public water management company “Srbijavode”

Nataša Milić
Nataša Milić
Nikola Marjanović
Zvonimir Kocić

Ministry of Environment and Spatial planing

Božidar Vasiljević
Nevena Pišćević

Republic Hydrometeorological Service of Serbia

Svetlana Andrejević
Ivica Nikolić

Institute for the Development of Water Resources “Jaroslav Cerni”

Marina Babić-Mladenović
Dragana Ninković

Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Water Management, Directorate for Water

Dragana Milovanović
Marija Lazarević
Radovanka Pavlović

Lazarevac Municipality

Vesna Pavlović

Miloš Živković

Tamara Djordjević, Development Fund of Lazarevac Municipality

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This review covers the Swedish EPA's cooperation with environmental authorities in two countries in the Western Balkans; Albania and Serbia. The cooperation is stated to have been relevant in relation to the needs of the target groups, the national policies and strategies as well as to other donor interventions in both countries. The projects' importance for the development of environmental management capacity in the targeted countries varies considerably. Institutionalisation of project capacity development is not given sufficient attention by the parties. The projects in Serbia and Albania include limited efforts to institutionalise the outputs and outcomes of the projects.

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