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**PROGRAMME PLANNING AND EVALUATION: MONITORING AND
EVALUATION: REVIEW OF SELECTED PROJECTS IN THE
THEMATIC AREA OF MANAGING GLOBALIZATION**

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**CAPACITY-BUILDING IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

Note by the secretariat¹

SUMMARY

The present document reviews and assesses outcomes and impacts of activities carried out under a capacity-building project on strategic planning and management of natural resources in Asia and the Pacific during the period 2000 to 2004.

Project activities were carried out by the secretariat at the national, regional and subregional levels in collaboration with multi-stakeholder counterparts at all levels. Challenges related to the successful execution of the project and lessons learned of particular relevance to the sustainability of project impacts are described and analysed.

The Committee is invited to review the document and provide guidance on future project planning in the area of capacity-building for improved natural resources management.

¹ The present document is based on a synthesis project report prepared by the secretariat for the Concluding Regional Workshop, held in November 2004, and the external project evaluation report entitled "Evaluation of the Development Account Project: Capacity-building in strategic planning and management of natural resources in Asia and the Pacific" (February 2005).

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Introduction

1. The five-year Development Account project on capacity-building in strategic planning and management (SPM) of natural resources development in Asia and the Pacific was launched in 2000 as a regional initiative to contribute to the common global efforts in strengthening national capacities in the implementation of Agenda 21. The project was implemented by the Environment and Sustainable Development Division of ESCAP with a budget of US\$ 738,000, which was supplemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Government of the Netherlands with US\$ 35,000 and US\$ 80,000, respectively.

2. The main objective of the project was to strengthen the capacity of Asian and Pacific developing countries in SPM in the area of natural resources development and environmental protection, including the development of tools to enable policy makers to formulate integrated policies effectively.

3. The project aimed at developing the SPM concept to be shared, applied and adapted to country-specific situations. The implementation strategy for achieving that objective included the preparation of SPM guidelines followed by the training of a core group of government and other officials to improve their understanding of the SPM process. The process would then be adapted for and incorporated into national planning processes.

4. The expected accomplishment of the project was to strengthen the existing networks of expertise on environmental protection and natural resources management, which would then lead to the establishment of new networks. This was to be accomplished through the following actions:

(a) Developing or adopting guidelines to be used as tools to strengthen national capacities in SPM for natural resources development and environmental protection;

(b) Forming a core group of experts in the networks who could sustain the process of strategic planning and natural resources management;

(c) Assisting developing countries in using these networks and in formulating national programmes of action.

I. SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

5. The project has developed the SPM approach and has raised awareness, recognition and knowledge of SPM among experts and policymakers from the Asian and Pacific region as a valuable tool for natural resources development in support of sustainable development. SPM has generated interest among participating countries and some international organizations working the region.

6. Core groups of experts and networks of expertise have been trained and initiated in 22 countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam. The
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project supported national-level activities in these countries and supplemented the national teams with informal networks at the subregional and regional levels. In total, more than 700 policymakers, experts, consultants and representatives from 36 countries participated in the development of SPM and contributed to the formation of networks.

7. The project has promoted stakeholder ownership of planning and management with regard to water and energy resources and has secured their commitment to improving their planning processes. A number of countries have translated and disseminated the guidelines at the national and local levels, while others are attempting to revise policies and procedures for the further institutionalization of SPM. Some countries have initiated changes in their national plans or have formulated new strategies using the SPM approach.

II. MAIN PROJECT ACTIVITIES

8. The project activities were carried out in three phases and at three levels: regional, subregional and national. A summary of the main components of the project activities is presented below.

Phases	Summary of project activities
Phase I: 2000-2001	Focus on development of guidelines on SPM at the regional level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the contribution of international and national experts and consultants from various sectors in drafting and reviewing, the SPM guidelines were developed for the energy and water resources sectors; • The regional workshop held in December 2001 finalized the guidelines on SPM in the two sectors and developed a recommended plan of actions to follow.
Phase II: 2002	Focus on capacity-building at the subregional level through training of trainers from the selected countries and preparation for further activities at the national level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subregional workshops held in the five subregions: South-East Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, South Asia and North-East Asia. The sessions on energy resources focused on training in the SPM approach and discussions on methods to apply the approach to national policymaking. The sessions on water resources focused on developing SPM models to be used for water resources management; • Based on country interest in carrying out SPM in the water and energy sectors, a letter of agreement between ESCAP and each participating Government was initiated along with identification of key stakeholders to take active part in the SPM process at the national level; • In nine cases, the energy and water resources guidelines were translated into national languages.

Phase III: 2003-2004	Focus on capacity-building at the national level on the adaptation of SPM: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National teams comprising stakeholders in energy development were trained in the concept of SPM. The gaps between current planning approaches and SPM and strategies to shift towards an SPM approach in the energy sector were identified;• Key relevant stakeholders undertook case studies to apply the SPM guidelines with a view to preparing strategic plans for integrated water resources management in 17 countries under the guidance of the secretariat;• Concluding regional workshop was held from 24 to 26 November 2004 as a forum for discussing the results of and lessons learned from the project activities as well as measures to sustain the SPM process.
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III. ACHIEVEMENTS

9. The guidelines on SPM for the water and energy resources sectors were developed in consultation with a core group of experts from the region.² The Expert Group Meeting to Review the Draft Guidelines, held in Bangkok in June 2001, recognized the difference between the inherent characteristics of energy and water issues and recommended that SPM guidelines be customized for each sector.³ SPM was recognized as a valuable tool for sustainable natural resources development in support of attaining socio-economic and environmental goals. In the case of the water resources sector, the country core experts and policymakers have used SPM in drafting their integrated water resources management (IWRM) plans at various levels.

10. Training materials on SPM for both sectors were developed and used during the subregional workshops and national training courses. These also serve the national teams and core groups as a reference and guide in their future work.

11. The guidelines on water resources have been translated into five languages: Russian (common to the five countries in Central Asia), Chinese, Laotian, Mongolian and Vietnamese. Those on energy issues have been translated into four languages: Khmer (Cambodia), Laotian, Mongolian and Nepalese. The translations have been viewed as an important and effective medium for creating awareness and promoting the SPM process to a broader stakeholder group, including provincial/district and community levels, and thereby improving the understanding of and interest in the concept.

² A guideline on strategic environmental management, prepared earlier by the secretariat, was also used in the project implementation.

³ It was agreed that, instead of having a separate track on environment, relevant issues be integrated into the two sectors to the extent practicable.

12. A “core group or network of expertise” was established in the counterpart countries, representing different institutions with different stakes and levels of involvement in water or energy resources planning and management. This mechanism provided a common platform for stakeholder discussions on policy, strategic issues and implications for the individual sectors as well as advocacy and promotion of the SPM concept to relevant policy- and decision makers.

13. The involvement of subregional organizations was viewed as positive and beneficial for strengthening and sustaining the network. The informal network that was established helped to develop closer ties among the national and international counterparts through discussions, collaboration and exchange of country experiences and practices, and by seeking further assistance and guidance from ESCAP.

14. Increased ownership and commitment by stakeholders in planning and management in the two sectors was observed, including resource mobilization in some countries, as exemplified by development of a national energy plan and the implementation of IWRM plans as well as initiatives for the translation and dissemination of the guidelines and active advocacy for policy revisions in both sectors. Interest was also shown in the continuity of the SPM process through follow-up activities in the respective countries. To a large extent, the project managed to involve the “right people and organizations” for strengthening the networks.

15. *Understanding the usefulness of the SPM process.* Adopting the SPM approach was largely seen as a process and a tool to facilitate better planning and management with regard to energy and water resources at various levels in a country. Despite limited funds per country, the capacity-building activities of the project were highly appreciated.

16. While many countries have been practising some elements of SPM, the level of awareness raised through the project on the various elements along with a systematic method of planning (development of vision/goals, identifying gaps and issues as well as outlining road maps/action plans) was reported to be more realistic and manageable. Specifying the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and the emphasis on stakeholder involvement, including options for water and energy sector planning and management, was also most useful.

17. *Capacity of counterparts to apply the SPM approach.* Developing a national network for capacity-building in the SPM process was a key recommendation with regard to the implementation of priority actions described in the related strategic plans. Networks were formed comprising core group members and other stakeholders. The limited time and the type of intervention for developing the capacity to apply the SPM approach were viewed as ambitious. However, the first level of capacity, awareness and understanding of the SPM concept, was visible among all the experts and stakeholders involved. Some members of national energy and water teams reported having gained knowledge, skills and confidence to impart the SPM concept to institutions at the provincial or district levels.

18. The capacity gained, though valuable, was considered insufficient to institutionalize the SPM process, in particular at higher policy levels in countries where the SPM concept was relatively new. The need for further follow-up to capacity-building was strongly felt.

19. *Better coordination and cooperation among stakeholders.* The stakeholders acknowledged that the SPM project had initiated, established and strengthened the platform for increased coordination and cooperation among the different stakeholders involved.

20. *Strengthened institutional and legal frameworks.* Different and complex institutional and legal frameworks existed for the two sectors. While in some countries the legal frameworks (policies and guidelines) were unclear, constraining the application of the concept to the specific sector planning and development, some countries have transformed the national team or core group into an apex body for coordinating the energy or water resources issues: in Sri Lanka, a presidential task force reviews water sector reforms; Myanmar is in the process of forming a water commission; Maldives has formed an Advisory Committee on Energy; and Viet Nam has established river basin organizations. In Nepal, there was a strong commitment from major stakeholders to use the SPM tool in the energy planning process, and a strengthened Water and Energy Commission Secretariat was viewed as the leading agency for coordinating all energy- and water-related policies and planning in the country.

21. *Towards holistic, integrated and realistic plans.* Multi-sector involvement in the planning was highly appreciated, though coordinating the various ministries and agencies remained a challenge. Involvement of stakeholders from different institutions led to better integration of the policies and issues related to water and energy. Collective planning led to better identification of priorities, an informed decision-making process to solve many problems and more importantly, improved transparency. The process increased the acceptability, ownership of and commitment to plans and programmes on the part of the stakeholders involved, and hence is viewed positively as a more realistic methodology.

22. Examples of policy initiatives resulting from the project include: the Lao People's Democratic Republic, where the energy sector policy was previously limited to a few subsectors and has now developed strategies for the entire energy sector (including the subsectors of energy, such as renewable energy), including integrated policies and strategies for ensuring sustainability; similarly, in Cambodia, a segregated way of viewing the energy sector existed, but, through the SPM exercise, the country developed a holistic approach to energy plan development, having established an inter-ministerial working group along with an advisory group. The IWRM plans are now viewed as more comprehensive and realistic in the 17 countries (China, Fiji, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam) working with ESCAP on water resources management. Some countries/organizations already use the plans and strategies

developed under the project for resource mobilization from the Government or external institutions (examples can be found in Central Asia, Mongolia, the Nadi river basin in Fiji, and Samoa).

IV. CHALLENGES

23. At the outset of the project, the use of SPM for the planning and management of natural resources development was new to many project countries and therefore required tailored approaches and intensity of interventions. Participating counterparts needed to understand the approach to be able to bring about change in the mindset of other concerned stakeholders.

24. From the outcomes of national studies and through consultations with members of the national teams as well as other stakeholders, it became evident that changing mindsets, ways of working and collaborating was as difficult a task as addressing issues of a more technical nature. Recognizing this, the secretariat's assistance throughout project implementation has been focusing equally on process and content to ensure that sufficient attention has been paid to the framework of natural resources management, changing the discourse away from technology and towards process, procedures and institutional set-up.

25. National regulations governing the use of foreign assistance make it difficult to carry out activities at the national level if they involve the transfer of project funds between ESCAP and government institutions. Often, it took more than a year for participating institutions to receive grants to support activities not originally planned for in their respective organizations. To address this issue, alternative options, including collaboration with United Nations country-based organizations or national research institutions, have been explored where possible.

26. Providing appropriate long-distance support, having the opportunity to visit the project countries only once or twice, has been a challenge. Regular reporting mechanisms somewhat lessened but did not solve the problem.

27. National-level stakeholders have reported the following key challenges faced during the implementation of the project for sustaining the capacity-building initiative:

(a) Difficulties in gaining and maintaining political will and support for the SPM approach;

(b) A poor coordination mechanism inhibiting transparency, a participatory approach and operation/implementation;

(c) Inadequate collaboration and cooperation among sectoral agencies and the stakeholders/representatives at different hierarchical levels;

(d) Inadequate and/or complex institutional and legal frameworks of sectors.

28. The most challenging aspect for ESCAP and the national counterparts was to bring about a change in the attitude of the stakeholders to take up the SPM process and apply it. As a multitude of

stakeholders were involved, it took a great effort to convince them to accept the SPM approach and institutionalize it for improved management of natural resources. It was also a challenge to ensure the sustainability of the SPM process, as the specific needs and available resources (human and financial) of countries vary.

V. SUSTAINABILITY

29. Efforts to integrate social, environmental and economic sustainability issues were made in both the water and energy sectors. This included the guidelines, training materials and deliberations on sustainability issues during the orientation and training sessions. However, the countries tended to emphasize largely economic gains, also “advocated” by their Governments. At subnational levels, stakeholders were reported as being more receptive to considering social and environmental concerns. The national studies in some cases made an effort to reflect discussions on sustainability issues. These issues were only reflected to a limited extent, however, in the action plans developed from the studies.

30. Some country studies made reference to or included a preliminary analysis of gender issues related to water and energy resources. Reflection was, however, largely limited to awareness and understanding. Some counterparts reported that, in a quantitative sense, women had been involved in the process, but that their active engagement in planning, decision-making and implementation of policies and activities related to the SPM process had been limited. In most Asian and in some Pacific countries, strong sociocultural practices still discourage women professionals from engaging themselves; thus, very few women are engaged in the water and energy resources sector at the senior government level. Only a few countries, such as Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Samoa, had women professionals actively engaged in the process.

31. The lesson learned from the above is that the successful inclusion of sustainability and gender issues in project implementation requires due and detailed consideration already during the design phase of projects.

32. Despite interest and some measures initiated through the project in the form of national teams/core groups/focal points, the counterparts at the national level viewed the sustainability of the SPM process as a major challenge. Suggested future steps to sustain the process include:

(a) Further strengthening of the mechanism established to sustain the network of expertise at different levels;

(b) Further capacity-building and support for the network of expertise to continue as agents for promoting and sustaining the project-initiated activities as part of a “successful” capacity-building process;

(c) Establishing mechanisms to tap national-level resources and obtain broader stakeholder participation and acceptance;

(d) Soliciting and acquiring the commitment of national policy-level stakeholders and accessing resources (network) from external sources to implement the outcomes of the project initiatives;

(e) Aligning the different national institutions to become facilitators rather than obstacles to SPM;

(f) Raising awareness among high-level officials to develop acceptance for the application of the SPM approach for improved natural resources management, taking account of sustainability concerns;

(g) Using successful experiences and cases as promotional tools to generate more interest among high-level decision makers;

(h) Exploring the replication of the process at subnational levels and where possible;

(i) Using the subregional and regional institutions to promote SPM through their respective governing bodies.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

33. The project has achieved its primary objective: a foundation for the networking of expertise has been initiated in 22 participating member countries. The project has helped to focus activities on water and energy resources sector management in 22 developing countries, including 7 least developed countries and 7 countries with economies in transition. In addition, the following concrete outputs can be listed:

(a) A total of 15 strategies for integrated water resources management or for sustainable energy development have been formulated at the national, basin, sector or organizational level;

(b) Two rural energy surveys have been developed and carried out;

(c) Nine institutional mechanisms, in the form of advisory committees, core working groups, proposals for institutional reform or research forums for strategic planning and management, have been established or improved;

(d) Six countries are sustaining the activities through follow-up projects.

34. The contribution of ESCAP to the implementation of the project was appreciated by member countries and has generated broad interest among stakeholders in terms of further developing strategies and interventions to raise awareness, build capacity and exchange information and experiences in all the countries applying the SPM approach.

35. Project counterparts have recognized the importance of applying SPM and have expressed their interest and support for continuing efforts in the area. The networks established at the national level and the linkage of SPM with other relevant national-level activities, which has already taken

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place in a number of countries, have the potential to facilitate such continuation for enhancing the impact and generating synergies for follow-up initiatives. Support generated at the subregional levels for follow-up activities is also expected to contribute to the project's long-term sustainability.

36. To ensure the effectiveness of capacity-building for the application of SPM, it has been acknowledged that participating countries need further awareness-raising among stakeholders in order to bring them together on to a single platform. Soliciting the support of policy decision makers has been identified as a particularly critical issue. Efforts should be made to ensure that financial and human resource constraints are addressed with the commitment of Governments.

37. Applying SPM to national or institutional policymaking, planning and management is a continuous process, always with room for improvement. Most developing countries in Asia and the Pacific would benefit from aligning natural resource planning with SPM. Follow-up actions and activities are needed in order to realize the potential for institutionalizing SPM in the national planning process, including efforts to programmatically integrate social, environmental and economic sustainability issues into the SPM process.

38. Notwithstanding the need for and benefits of follow-up activities to enhance the institutionalization of SPM, strategies developed and institutional mechanisms established under the project already evidence the project's long-term impacts.

VII. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

39. Noting the obvious benefits accruing from the project to member countries in the form of more effective planning and policymaking for sustainable natural resources development, the Committee may wish to provide guidance and direction for future project development aimed at enhancing strategic planning and management capacities involving natural resources in the region.

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