

Defining Capacity Building Needs Related to Integrated Assessment of Trade-Related Policies

Recent capacity building workshops conducted by UNEP in Africa, Latin America and the Pacific region have identified some specific capacity building needs related to integrated assessment of trade policies. The eight questions below were drafted on the basis of discussions and questions raised in those workshops. The experience and insights of project leaders from UNEP's integrated assessment of trade liberalisation of the rice sector, as well as other experts, generated the following responses during UNEP's Meeting on *Integrated Assessment of Trade Liberalization in the Agriculture Sector* in Geneva, on 17-18 November, 2003.

These responses and the remaining questions may warrant further discussion between the project executants, other participants in the assessment and UNEP. They should also be of interest to other institutions and governments undertaking or considering the launch of integrated assessments of trade-related policies.

- **What recommendations can you make from your experience to enhance inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination on policy-making?**

Answers

It is important to persuade ministries that they need to agree common objectives in the context of their development plans. You can use stakeholder meetings guiding integrated assessments to establish the multi-disciplinary, inter-ministerial teams necessary to achieve this.

Longer term capacity building programmes are necessary to promote inter-ministerial cooperation and integrated policy making. These could involve regular meetings of the relevant policy makers (every 3-6 months), which might also be combined with study trips. Development of concise guidelines on policy integration (eg ten page documents) would be very helpful.

Both decision-making and technical level people from ministries need to be engaged to enhance implementation prospects as well as inter-ministerial coordination. It is also important to maintain the presence of the same officials throughout the process, to ensure continuity and enhance the likelihood of follow up.

It is often valuable to create sub-committee of the cabinet to enhance inter-ministerial coordination for assessments and policy integration.

- **Given your experience so far, are there any ways in which you would change the methodologies for integrated assessment, so as to promote more inter-ministerial cooperation?**

Answers

It would be useful to create one focal point from among the ministries, perhaps the Environment Ministry, though this will vary on a country-by-country basis and on the sector under assessment. The focal point must encompass research, technical and senior decision-making functions.

In the case of the rice projects the agriculture ministry was the appropriate starting point for coordination in one country. Furthermore, experience in another has shown that addressing economic and social issues before bringing in environmental ones has proved to be a more fruitful approach to enhancing policy integration. Experts in the range of relevant ministries are more comfortable with the former issues.

Further development of the integrated assessment methodology, and provision of training workshops prior to initiating an assessment, would be very helpful and would secure a more consistent approach to assessment.

More investment is required in ensuring that there is a follow-up to these assessments in terms of generating policy reforms. The implication was for more financial and political investment.

The budget provided for these projects was sufficient to undertake capital-based research and secure engagement of the necessary stakeholders. However, additional finance would be required to undertake fieldwork

- **Have you encountered any problems with encouraging broader stakeholder engagement in these assessments? If so, what recommendations would you make to overcome these problems?**

Answers

The experience of assessment project leaders was that stakeholder engagement could generally be secured. However, a key objective is to ensure that you had identified the most appropriate people to represent the different stakeholder views.

Another project leader noted that it was more difficult to engage stakeholders when the project is first identified as an environmental one. Identification of the integrated assessment as a project on rice, a vitally important staple food, secured more engagement. Emphasising the poverty alleviation element of the assessment would also be a good way to broaden stakeholder engagement.

It was noted that public interest NGOs are more willing to engage on projects related to the environment. However, it remains difficult to secure engagement of those who will be most valuable to the assessment project, and are committed to its aims.

Engaging high profile institutions operating at the national level (eg CGIAR in Indonesia, the China Council in China) would be a good way to raise the profile of these projects, and enhance stakeholder engagement more generally.

- **What actions or mechanisms could you suggest to enhance the ownership of the assessment and associated policy recommendations by the government and other stakeholders?**

Answers

Substantial investment needs to be made in presentation of the results of the assessment, including on the packaging and dissemination of results. Senior decision-makers, and wherever possible Ministers/Secretaries of State need to be engaged, for example by making a formal presentation to them.

Engaging other respected policy research institutions, and/or regional organisations, in the presentation process can increase credibility and ownership by government ministries.

If the presentation is made by one of the ministries this can increase the likelihood of cooperation by other ministries, whose policy-making needs can be more clearly understood by another ministry as opposed to a non-governmental body.

The final report should be formally submitted to all the relevant ministries. Issuing a newsletter reporting the progress of the assessment project can also be a good way of engaging other ministries, and enhancing the likelihood of a follow-up.

In response to a question of whether it was useful to have a higher or lower profile for UNEP, one participant answered that this will vary on a case-by-case basis. Engaging other significant international institutions can be very helpful in this regard.

It was suggested that the results of such assessments should be formally presented in bodies such as the WTO and regional bodies such as the European Commission, ECOWAS, ASEAN etc.

- **Are there any factors or policies operating at a regional level which affect the rice sector, and which imply that cooperation on assessment at a regional level is required? If there are, which regional bodies do you believe could support assessment teams and governments in this work?**

Answers

Issues relating to transboundary resources such as rivers and water resources generally may need to be addressed at a regional level. For example, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and the Gambia cooperate on river basin management, including on policies for setting water prices – these policies are highly relevant to rice production and its impacts.

Regional economic cooperation bodies (such as ECOWAS, ASEAN, APEC) have a potentially important role to play as do institutions which promote regional cooperation within a particular sector (eg the West African Rice Development Association – WARDA)

Less formal groups contributing to analysis and policy making on economic integration issues, which nevertheless engage senior officials, such as the BOAO Forum in China, also offer useful mechanisms for promoting cooperation on assessment and policy integration issues.

- **How would you modify your assessment methodology, if at all, to address the needs of the most vulnerable stakeholders/groups in the country (eg to achieve poverty alleviation objectives)?**

Answers

It is important to ensure that the poorest and most marginal groups within a local community are engaged and data is secured on their situation. This requires adequate funding of assessments to allow field studies and the application of PRA techniques involving in depth interviews.

It is not possible to treat poverty and gender-related issues and policy impacts separately, particularly in sectors such as the agricultural one. There are some indicators on how specific policies affect women, but these need to be developed further.

Incorporating gender effects is particularly critical in the rice sector, where women are the main producers of the commodity in some regions (eg West Africa and much of Asia). Rice production is very much a family-based enterprise in some areas, and assessments need to take account of this characteristic too.

In addition to selecting appropriate poverty indicators, it may be necessary to develop new ones, linked for example to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). UNEP might have a particular role to play in developing environmental indicators to contribute to measuring and achievement of progress towards the MDGs.

- **Have you any recommendations to make on developing an ‘information exchange forum’ on assessment to share knowledge and experience at national, regional or international levels?**

Answers

Enhancing information exchange and dissemination of information on integrated assessment was considered to be a crucial objective by all present. Environmental issues and problems are still relatively new and poorly understood by economic policy makers and other decision makers. Awareness of them has not reached many resource users, in particular, nor the technicians who advise those users.

A strong follow-up to assessment projects is required, directed towards those who operate in the production sector in question. These need to reach beyond policy makers into extension services and to the producers themselves. A combination of workshops, training, meetings with producers, and new structures for information exchange are required to get the message out.

Those who have undertaken assessments could demonstrate their use to others – the implication was that practical experience and local knowledge are vital to help communicate the utility and practice of assessment.

While the primary objective is to enhance information exchange and capacity building on assessment at the national level, information exchange at regional level was also considered valuable. UNEP may have a particularly important role to play on this at international level, too. More interaction with the World Bank on assessment could also be valuable to spread the messages on its utility and practice.

It was noted that WARDA is staging a major regional conference in Bamako during 2004, the Year of Rice. Planning with FAO is ongoing for this now and this might be platform on which to disseminate information on integrated assessment.

- **What specific requirements do you see for developing indicators for integrated assessment, providing formal training on it, and designing appropriate policy responses to it?**

Answers

Not only is it necessary to develop new poverty indicators, adapted to particular policy objectives as noted above, but they will also have to be complimented by improved environmental indicators. Physical indicators of environmental impacts tend to be more robust than monetary ones, but there is strong merit in monetising environmental impacts and natural resources wherever there are data and techniques available which are sound and utilizable.

One key indicator is the level/degree or organization of producers as this is an important determinant of their ability to adapt to new conditions and policies.

It was noted that a wide range of indicators have been developed responding to the different priorities in different countries. While it is not possible to integrate them all into one set of indicators, nor to monetise all the environmental effects, some simplification and establishment of a core set of indicators would be helpful – by implication both for those undertaking assessments and those evaluating and responding to results from them.

Other ideas included:

- developing a single index from a group of indicators to give policy makers a quick and broad picture of environmental impacts and trends;
- aggregating indicators at the provincial level;
- undertaking more research on environmental effects to refine existing and develop new indicators; and
- providing input on environmental indicators to research or government bodies currently focusing on economic and social indicators (eg of resource use, income generation, poverty alleviation).

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UNEP
19 November 2003*