

Findings



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West Central Africa : Building Ownership for Environmentally Sustainable Development

Within the sub-region of West Central Africa (Benin, Cote d' Ívoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Togo) several countries have completed National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs). Some are implementing Environmental Support Programs based on these Plans, as well as more site-specific natural resource management, urban environmental management, and biodiversity conservation projects. However, in many cases these environmental plans and strategies are not fully integrated with the process of national development planning nor with World Bank assistance strategies for these countries. In addition, plans made at the national level often do not take adequate account of transboundary issues and the opportunities for maximizing benefits through cooperation at the sub-regional level.

With this in mind, the World Bank, in collaboration with other donors, NGOs and African experts, prepared an environmental strategy document for discussion with stakeholders in the sub-region. The study, *Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development in West Central Africa*, takes stock of national development efforts in the face of degrading natural resources and alarming demographic trends.

The report notes some success stories. It concludes, however, that high population growth and rapid urbanization, high poverty levels and the direct dependency of most poor families on natural resources for subsistence, low levels of environmental awareness at all levels of society, market and policy failures, and institutional weaknesses, all point to the need for redoubling and redirecting environmental efforts. These factors underlie the sub-region's priority problems as identified in national planning exercises: (i) land degradation; (ii) deforestation and loss of biodiversity; (iii) water availability and quality; (iv) urban

environmental degradation; and (v) coastal resource degradation. Without action, these problems will increasingly constrain the options for sustainable development. The strategy makes it clear that the next major phase towards Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) is to mainstream environmental issues into national development planning in all sectors and at all levels of society.

- Based on this assessment, the report proposes five priority areas for Bank assistance:
- Increase environmental awareness;
- Build national capacity for environmental management;
- Assist governments to respond to priority environmental problems;
- Define and address the interactions between social and environmental problems; and
- Address global environmental issues.

The process: Learning by sharing

Approach. Instead of viewing the strategy report as an end in itself or holding another Bank-driven Workshop, the dissemination process was designed to build capacity and connections amongst stakeholders to improve environmentally sustainable development. Representatives from each of the seven African countries designed the dissemination process for the strategy. The objective they set for themselves was for countries sharing the same eco-regions to begin to work together, learn from each other and propose new initiatives. A Norwegian Trust Fund provided the financial support to make this innovative concept a reality.

Planning Workshop. At a planning workshop held in March 1996 in Abidjan, three key stakeholders from each of the seven countries (typically, the head of the Environment Department, a senior staff from the Planning Commission, and the head of an environmental NGO) met with the Workshop Chairperson to comment on the strategy document and to map out the agenda for the main Workshop. No Bank staff were present at this planning meeting. The participants decided to devote half of the Workshop to discussing transboundary environmental issues because of the unique opportunity to bring neighboring countries together to consider common environmental concerns. During the rest of the Workshop they focused on sharing best practices for addressing national environmental priorities. To keep the Workshop centered on the sub-region and promote ownership, the planning group decided that virtually all the input papers for the Workshop should be prepared by local experts.

Role of the Bank's Resident Missions. Each Resident Mission designated a staff Focal Point to support the country delegations both before and after the planning meeting. As the Focal Points encouraged the national delegations to take ownership of the process and the work program that it implied, they, themselves, developed a much stronger link with the Bank's national environmental partners.

The Yamoussoukro Workshop

The Yamoussoukro Workshop, held in July 1996, was the first West Central African meeting to bring together the major environmental players from both Anglophone and Francophone countries. In many cases, environmental experts met their counterparts from neighboring

countries for the first time. Many participants felt that this opportunity, alone, made the Workshop extremely worthwhile. The planning group made another key decision - to involve stakeholders beyond the traditional environment community. Participants included representatives from the finance ministries, economic planning agencies, media, academia and the commercial sector. This was an important step toward mainstreaming environment in all facets of national development.

National issue thematic areas on the agenda included: capacity building and training, integration of environment into planning and budget processes, and stakeholder participation. The transboundary issues covered were: environmental information systems, coastal zone management, and management of transboundary terrestrial ecosystems. The Bank and UNDP Global Environment Facility (GEF) Coordinators held a separate GEF information day tailored to West Central African interests.

At the very beginning, five challenges were identified that needed to be met to move the sub-region towards environmentally sustainable development:

- Breaking down sectoral barriers and building multisectoral bridges;
- Addressing transboundary issues;
- Focusing on poverty-environment linkages;
- Mainstreaming environment in development; and
- Moving from talk to action.

Measuring success : follow-up activities

The success of the process will be defined by how well it has catalyzed follow-up activities to address the original question that started this process, 'How can environmental issues be mainstreamed into national development?'

In this context, in addition to sustaining informal networks established at the Workshop and implementing national activities, individual countries committed themselves to key follow-up actions to be implemented over the next 6-8 months by acting as focal points for specific regional thematic areas outlined in the "Declaration of Yamoussoukro". The actions extend the dissemination process to a more technical level, expand sub-regional cooperation and increase environmental mainstreaming.

1. Environmental Information Systems

Focal Points - Ghana and Benin

Ghana, one of the EIS Country Focal Points, will be holding an EIS technical Workshop in February 1997 to discuss the interfacing of databases and common natural resources indicators in the sub-region.

2. Environmental Impact Assessments

Focal Points - Nigeria and Benin

Nigeria and Benin are proposing to support two substantial EA technical training programs for the public and private sectors in the sub-region. On a bilateral level, Benin is helping Niger to hold an EA Workshop.

3. Coastal Zone Management

Focal Points - Togo and Nigeria

The ongoing UNDP GEF-assisted Gulf of Guinea project will develop a coastal zone data clearinghouse and prepare national coastal zone management action plans.

4. Mainstreaming Environment in Planning and Finance

Focal Points - Niger and Côte d'Ivoire

Ghana is leading the mainstreaming of environment in finance by establishing an environment desk in the Ministry. In August 1996, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held an environmental economics workshop for 40 public and private sector participants. The Ministry of Finance has requested a follow-up workshop to incorporate environmental issues into the national budget process. The Ghanaian EPA, with the National Development Planning Commission, is proposing to strengthen local capacity to mainstream environmental issues at the district level. Attendance at the workshop catalyzed the Benin Budget Execution Director to add CFA 50 million (approximately US \$1 million) for environmental management to the 1997 budget.

5. Transboundary Issues

Focal Points - Ghana and Burkina Faso

Informal meetings between Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso at the Workshop paved the way for the countries holding an international meeting to discuss the management of the transboundary ecosystem. The informal West African Natural Resources Management Network plans to meet before the end of the year.

6. Other Follow-up Activities

Bank Team and Resident Missions. The Bank team is preparing a short summary of the Workshop outcomes for wider distribution. It will focus on presenting the dissemination process and identifying country and World Bank follow-up activities. The Resident Mission focal points will continue to support follow-up activities in their countries.

Networking. Participants have established informal and formal networks to build links with neighbors, share best practices and learn from each other. The NGOs at the Workshop are establishing a West Central Africa Environmental NGO network. Similarly, environmental

media and private consultant networks are also being created. Most participants have held briefing meetings on the Workshop in their institutions to disseminate the conclusions. The Niger NEAP team will be visiting Benin to learn from its NEAP process.

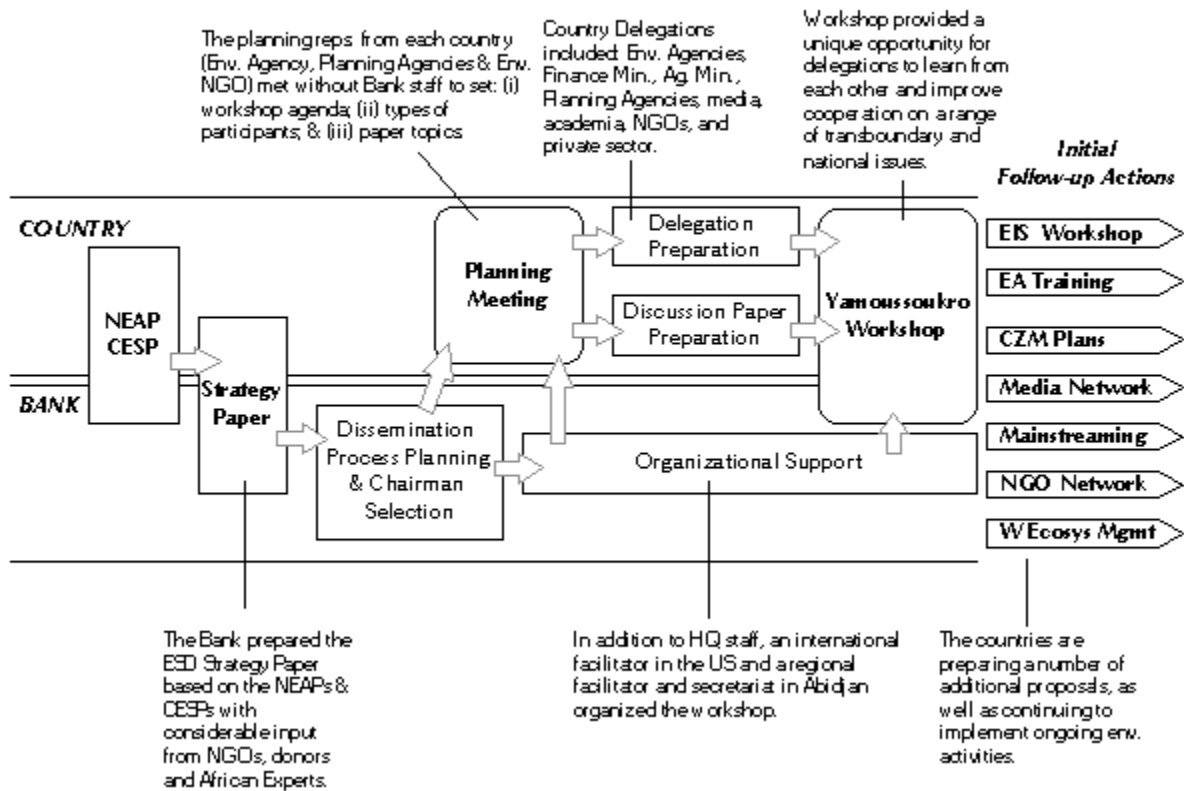
GEF UNDP-Bank Coastal Zone Management Coordination. Based on meetings held at the Workshop, the Bank will be represented on the Steering Committee of the UNDP GEF-assisted Gulf of Guinea Project which includes coastal zone activities in five West Central African countries. This presence will greatly improve communication and help to identify possible areas for collaboration between the UNDP-assisted project and the Bank's involvement in the growing coastal zone management program in the sub-region.

Conclusion

It was clear that Yamoussoukro exposed the wide range of participants to a wealth of new ideas and approaches which they took home to advance environmental objectives in their national development programs. As hoped, the Workshop has become part - a highlight - of a country-driven process to improve environmental management in the sub-region, rather than an end in itself.

The success of Yamoussoukro has led to proposals for holding similar workshops in Eastern and Southern Africa tailored to their specific concerns and aspirations, but following the Yamoussoukro approach and targeted to mainstreaming environment in national development.

THE W. C. AFRICA ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY DISSEMINATION PROCESS



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