

Mainstreaming of Environment in the EDPRS

This brief is providing arguments for the mainstreaming of environment in the EDPRS in progress in Rwanda. The paper focuses firstly on why environment should be mainstreamed, secondly on how to undertake this practice, and finally the expected outcomes and results of such a process.

Setting the Stage

The Government of Rwanda (GoR) has previously expressed commitment to develop a strategy to ensure that environment is mainstreamed into national development strategies and plans. The GoR recognizes, in the current poverty reduction strategy (PRSP I), that the poverty reduction goals can not be achieved without promoting sound and sustainable environmental management. Further, the GoR recognises the high dependency of the population on environmental resources. Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) was established in April 2005 to ensure environment issues are clearly integrated or mainstreamed in all sectors of development through collaboration and cooperation. The GoR has committed to work towards achieving the MDGs. Environment is key to many of the goals (please refer to Annex 1) and especially MDG 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability.

The ‘Why’

Environment encompasses a broad set of issues which transcend all sectors. It can be very difficult defining environment nevertheless, neglecting the environment in any country’s development strategy can be catastrophic and especially in a country where a very large percentage of the population is mainly depending on the natural resources for their survival. Recent explorative studies of linking poverty and environment have brought more insight in appreciating how poverty and environment are interlinked, but interestingly how poor people often fall victim of environmental degradation. The need to manage the environment and eventually improve the quality of life is quite expedient and imperative. However, in reality it is very little that is being done to address the real environmental concerns although the rate of environmental degradation is fast and alarming. Poor people often make decisions on limited information to exploit their environmental resources for livelihoods, and when faced with environmental disasters, they have limited options compared to the well-off who have several alternatives at their disposal. Further, very often the poor are not the main degraders of the environment as had been widely believed, but often fall victims of environmental degradation because of their dependency on environmental resources; are vulnerable to environmental health diseases resulting from pollution; are more vulnerable to environmental disasters such as floods and lands

It is crucial to understand the relations between poverty and the environment and to find the balance of exploitation of natural resources for socio-economic growth and to sustain the resources for future use. There is an urgent need to balance accelerated growth with efficient management of the environment and sustainable use of the resources, which requires integrating environmental concerns and approaches into the national development programmes. If this is not done, social and economic development will be undermined by the degradation and depletion of key environmental natural resources, such as soil and water. There is clear evidence that this is already occurring in Rwanda. It is equally important to understand that sound environmental management of the natural resources will promote economic growth and not slow growth as wrongly assumed by many.

The ‘How’

In the case of the EDPRS process we argue that Environment should be, as decided already, a sector working group but should further be mainstreamed into each of the sector strategies and overall strategy. This is because key environmental resource used decision are taken at a sectoral level – for example agricultural policy have very significant implications for the environment, which in turn have implications for agricultural productivity. We strongly agree that it is extremely important to produce a clear strategy in order to construct a document with a clear strategic direction within environment and land use management. However, we further argue that due to the fact that unconsciously decisions are being taken every day which impact on the environment negatively there is a need for affirmative action in the sector working groups to mainstream environment.

In the ToR for the sector working groups there should be paragraph stating that each of the sector working groups should undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment with a focus on e.g. a Sustainability Test¹, a Compatibility Matrix² (which in this case is very important since the EDPRS will be consistent of several sector/these sections) and the Compound Matrix³.

A mainstreaming of environment in the national development framework should be seen as a multi dimensional process rather than an activity, and should be promoted in a positive and opportunistic light and seen in relation to the importance linkages between poverty and environment.

¹ The Sustainability Test is a technique is designed to give a visual and quantitative measure of the extent to which a particular policy or programme is capable of proving sustainable growth and economic development.

² The Compatibility Matrix is used to compare the way in which different policies interact with each other. Sometimes policies are mutually supportive but at other times policies can work against each other.

³ The Compound Matrix is used to evaluate individual policies against a range of criteria, which serve as indicators affecting poverty.

For the resources to undertake the processes we have REMA, who is central in this process. In REMA there are several projects (e.g. Decentralisation Environment Management Project and Rwanda Poverty and Environment Initiative) which can assist in the mainstreaming and give technical advice and support throughout the process. Further, REMA can offer the technical working groups assistance in understanding the process and the importance of mainstreaming of environment and the opportunities. There are many examples of opportunities which during a SEA exercise are being discovered and explored. Such examples could be recycling of waste products from one production unit to be integrated into a different production as an input. Proper solid waste management in urban settings is often used as a good example. It is therefore also important that environmental mainstreaming is not looked at as a burden but as an opportunity.

Another important key fact to mention here is another output of the SEA process is that often overlaps in budget frameworks will be discovered, which will then further benefit the over all budget planning and possibly save financial resources.

The Expected Results

It is expected that by mainstreaming environment into the EDPRS it will enhance the GoR's capacity to deliver sustainable development. Sustainable development in this case means expanding the economy and raising standards of living for all Rwandans, especially the poor, without damaging the environment or depleting natural resources, upon which so many Rwandans depend for their livelihoods. A few countries in SSA, Ghana and Tanzania, has successfully undertaken this task and is now promoting the tools to other countries to learn from their rich and constructive experience.

Seen in the light of the above, we therefore would like to highlight once more that that Environment should be a sector working group as well as be mainstreamed into the EPDRS.

References

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Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Report
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Annex 1: The key links between the environment and the MDGs

Millennium Development Goals	Examples of Links to the Environment
1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Livelihood strategies and food security of the poor often depend directly on healthy ecosystems and the diversity of goods and ecological services they provide.
2. Achieve universal primary education	Time spent collecting water and fuel-wood by children, especially girls, can reduce time at school.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women	Poor women are especially exposed to indoor air pollution and the burden of collecting water and fuel-wood, and have unequal access to land and other natural resources.
4. Reduce child mortality	Water-related diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera kill an estimated 3 million people a year in developing countries, the majority of which are children under the age of five.
5. Improve maternal health	Indoor air pollution and carrying heavy loads of water and fuel-wood adversely affect women's health and can make women less fit for childbirth and at greater risk of complications during pregnancy.
6. Combat major diseases	Up to one-fifth of the total burden of diseases in developing may be associated with environmental risk factors – and preventive environmental health measures are as important and at times more cost-effective than health treatments
7. Ensure environmental sustainability	Current trends in environmental degradation must be reversed in order to sustain the health and productivity of the world's ecosystem