

EVALUATION SERVICE

FAO Evaluation Web site
www.fao.org/pbe/pbee/en/index.html

Evaluation of FAO strategic objective D2: on conservation, rehabilitation and development of environments at the greatest risk

Evaluation of FAO strategic objective D2

The FAO Strategic Framework 2000-2015 identifies five major corporate strategies to be followed by the Organization. Corporate strategy D, “Conserving and Enhancing Sustainable use of the Natural Resource Base”, is broken down into two strategic objectives: D1 “Integrated Management of Land, Water, Fisheries, Forest and Genetic Resources” and D2 “Conservation, Rehabilitation and Development of Environments at the Greatest Risk”.

In May 2003, the Programme Committee commissioned an evaluation to examine whether FAO response to strategic objective D2 had been adequate, and to make recommendations on the design, implementation, results and follow-up of related activities.

Evaluators used the Agenda 21 definition of fragile ecosystems (i.e. deserts, semi-arid lands, mountains, wetlands, small islands and certain coastal areas) as a basis for looking at FAO work on “environments at the greatest risk”. For each of these ecosystems, evaluators looked at FAO work in: 1) monitoring and assessing; 2) capacity development; 3) promoting sustainable development; 4) and partnership mechanisms.

The assessment covers the first six years of the Strategic Framework (2000-2005), representing the first phase of FAO’s action.

Findings

The most important findings of the evaluation related to the validity of D2 as a free standing strategic objective for FAO. Evaluators found that while it is certainly relevant for FAO to devote attention to the problems of fragile ecosystems, they would best be addressed through a more inclusive approach within the major programmes of the organization.

There are conceptual constraints to FAO delivery of D2. Distinctions between fragile ecosystems and any others are becoming increasingly difficult to make based on the simple geographical terms of mountain zones, drylands, and coastal and marine ecosystems used in D2. Parts of each of these systems are relatively robust, while highly sensitive parts of other ecosystems are not taken into account by this spatial definition.

Findings cont.

There are operational constraints to FAO delivery of D2. To be effective, FAO work on D2 would have to clearly differentiate why D2 environments require different strategies from other ecosystems, or are different from other development challenges, which has not been the case.

FAO performance in terms of defining and leading the D2-related agenda was very modest. Activities related to D2 have been diverse, and dispersed, and varied in quality, relevance and impact. The evaluation found that FAO showed little evidence of strategic leadership in D2 areas, even where they had the technical capability and prior standing.

Much of FAO's comparative advantage in working on D2 related issues is dependent on the individual professional capabilities of a small number of changing staff.

The D2 strategic objective has received a minor share of FAO resources, mainly through TCP funds. Links between FAO Strategic Objectives and resource allocations were made explicit for the first time in the Medium Term Plan 2002-07, when D2 was ranked second to last of all strategic objectives, receiving three percent of Regular Programme resources. The proportion rose slightly in the following Plans. Around four percent of extra-budgetary projects implemented by FAO were related to the objective.

Of the four evaluation components, the strongest delivery was in the development of monitoring and methodologies, primarily in the context of broader resource assessments, management approaches, guidelines and information products. There was some capacity building, though not set in a D2 context. The promotion of sustainable development was also noted, and a limited number of rehabilitation activities, but there was little to be distinguished from more generic action. Support for Agenda 21 and for international conventions and programmes was also noted.

Recommendations

- **FAO comparative advantages** for working with D2 issues should be identified and used in measuring performance and determining appropriate priorities and responses. FAO should develop areas where it shows leadership, and where it does not build up capacity among others. Processes should be established for pioneering concepts, testing and scaling up, negotiating and developing partnerships, and transferring skills and responsibilities for longer term engagement. The Evaluation Team concluded that while FAO engagement in D2 issues is very important and will remain so, **there is no specific advantage in maintaining a separate D2 objective** as currently structured. The functions of D2 should be absorbed into the broader aims of FAO through a more comprehensive and operationally effective restructuring of its strategic objectives.
- **FAO needs an operational framework for issues related to fragile ecosystems.** In order to provide FAO and its partners a framework in which to define priorities, goals and indicators, an approach needs to be developed which puts production, resources, vulnerability and risk into context from global to local levels. Opportunities should be sought for donor support and developing strong partnerships for implementation.
- **D2 related work** in areas such as economic valuation and the realisation of environmental values by local communities should be given greater emphasis and extended across a wider range of FAO activities, drawing on applications used in other agencies.
- **Projects with environmental and sustainable development themes should be longer in duration.** Short-term FAO Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) projects should not be used for this unless they are pilot activities with very strong assurances of up-scaling, or there is a certainty that full requirements can be met within the project cycle. FAO should be much more rigorous in its ex-ante analyses to ensure these conditions.
- **FAO should define specific and effective criteria and measures for the stewardship of important fragile agro-ecological systems** and for developing sustainable and effective livelihood approaches, capable of being applied to meet future challenges at major system and local action levels. Working with partners, and agreeing on respective roles, an integrated approach should be taken in setting major goals, defining advocacy issues, investment needs and management approaches.

Peer review

The Peer Review did not agree with the Evaluation Team on the important question of whether a strategic objective dedicated to fragile ecosystems should be retained in FAO's Strategic Framework. It considered that the objective adds visibility and enhances FAO's ability to demonstrate the connection between food security and the environment, in keeping with the Millennium Development Goals and the recommendations of Agenda 21. The Review agreed with the other evaluation conclusions and recommendations. It stressed the need for more precise targeting and better use of FAO's comparative advantages. It also recommended promoting the ecosystem approach at a range of operative levels.

Management response to the evaluation

Management welcomed the evaluation report, stating that it contained useful findings and recommendations that would improve performance in both the Regular and Field Programmes. It agreed with all recommendations except that it had strong reservations regarding the recommendation that the D2 objective should be absorbed into the broader aims of FAO. It felt that retaining the strategic objective would enhance the ability of the Organization to direct its human and financial resources toward issues which are taking on greater global importance and visibility. It also stated that retaining the D2 objective would strengthen FAO's partnership with international financial institutions and bilateral agencies in mobilizing resources.

The Programme Committee found that the report provided a frank assessment of the work covered in this area over the past five years, but that some of the critical findings could have been better substantiated. It agreed with the FAO Management and the Peer Review that a re-formulated Strategic Framework should continue to feature a strategic objective directed at fragile ecosystems. The Committee welcomed management's intention to develop a coordinated overall strategy to address D2. The strategy should give priority to FAO's role in promoting policy dialogue at the country level, bringing together the diverse government departments concerned. Another essential feature of the strategy would be capacity building to support both national policy development and implementation. It agreed that longer duration projects should be sought in D2-related areas.

FAO Governing Bodies' conclusions (Programme Committee)

References

Evaluation of FAO Strategic Objective D2 "Conservation, Rehabilitation and Development of Environments at Greatest Risk".

Available at: <http://www.fao.org/pbe/pbee/en/index.html>

Summary of Evaluation and Report of the External Peer Review Panel PC 96/4 b.

Available at: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/011/j8196e.pdf>

Management's response. PC 96/4 b-Sup.1.

Available at: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/011/j8189e.pdf>

Report of the Ninety-sixth Session of the Programme Committee. Rome, 20-25 November 2006. CL 131-12.

Available at: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/011/j8493e.pdf>