

Strategic Environmental Assessment Of A Large Rural Development Programme In Ethiopia

Bernt Rydgren and Yohannes Afework

The main author works for SwedPower AB and the second author for the Environmental Protection, Land Administration and Use Authority (EPLAUA), in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. The conclusions and opinions in this article are those of the authors, and not necessarily those of SwedPower AB or EPLAUA.

The authors can be contacted via e-mail at:

bernt.rydgren@swedpower.com

yoh45@freemail.et

Abstract

The SEA was conducted as part of requirements for future funding of the SARDP (the Sida-Amhara Rural Development Programme), and as a combined study and capacity-building input to the local environmental-assessment competent authority.

Three alternative development scenarios were chosen for the assessment: the 0 alternative; the programme as it has been implemented, and; an idealised solution that would have attended fully to all identified strategic environmental priority issues. These three alternatives were then semi-quantitatively scored and compared with the 0 alternative.

The present programme scored quite well, higher than the 0 alternative in almost all categories. The only exception that stood out was in the case of rural energy, an important but neglected issue. The idealised case naturally scores quite a bit higher than the actual, but the difference is not alarming.

Our conclusions are, in brief:

- SARDP is a successful rural development programme in terms of environmental strategy and overall environmental impact, with only a few exceptions. This is in spite of rather weak attention to environmental strategy during the first two phases. In project formulation, a good strategy document was prepared, but this has largely been forgotten in formulations of later work programmes.
- The most important omission in terms of long-term sustainability is the complete lack of attention to rural energy issues.
- The most important success story of the programme, from a sustainability point of view is clearly the land administration reform. In a very short time, a new law has been put in place, and successful field trials have been implemented.
- Strategically speaking there are some worries at local level regarding the comprehensiveness of the programme, given that some specific key development issues are excluded from the funding.

Context of the study

The SARDP (the Sida-Amhara Rural Development Programme), is a very ambitious development co-operation effort about to move from its second phase into its third, and the programme is a well-established player in rural development in the ANRS (the Amhara National Regional State of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia).

Development efforts in general, and poverty alleviation efforts in particular, are often viewed as inherently positive impacts and, therefore, beyond scrutiny according to socio-environmental assessment tools. However, the Swedish donor, SIDA, has decided that all its activities are subjects to analysis, and the study reported in this article is a result of this commitment.

Methodology

This SEA has focussed on policy review, with regards to strategic impacts on, and of the environment, and primarily in regards to the principal target group of the SARDP – the poorest of the rural population. We have reviewed a great number of documents, most notably SARDP project and planning documents, various relevant government publications on strategic and policy aspects of the environment, conservation and socio-economic development, as well as Sida publications on subjects relating to Ethiopia, environmental assessment and poverty alleviation. We also prepared tailor-made lists of questions for relevant government officers at both regional and local levels. These lists were then used in open-ended discussions, and opinions duly noted and included into our analyses. We had no resources for direct grass-roots participatory consultations, but were fortunate enough to have access to extensive documentation of such consultations resulting from project activities.

The SEA was conducted as a review of programme implementation, and was expected to result in recommendations for improvement to programme implementation. Beyond this, it also was a training activity for the staff of the regional responsible authority for EIA and SEA: the Environmental Protection, Land Administration and Use Authority (EPLAUA), in Bahir Dar.

Alternative development scenarios

Methodologically, we often find the development alternatives in SEA application to be problematic. The main reason for this is fairly obvious, namely that the creation of alternative scenarios for entire sectors, regions or programmes becomes a very hypothetical exercise. Unlike in more project-orientated activities, lending themselves to a regular EIA-type assessment, options at the policy level are often vague and difficult to use for actual analytical work. Nevertheless, apart from the programme as is, we tried to define two alternatives: the “0 alternative”, i.e. the one representing no SARDP, and one which represents a SARDP where a strategic approach to environmental sustainability had been an integrated part of programme formulation, from the outset.

The 0 alternative

The 0 alternative in this study is the situation in ANRS *today* in general, and the 16 woredas (local administrative unit), that benefit from the woreda development fund in particular, had SARDP not existed.

SARDP as it is

We have tried to review the programme from the point of view of strategic environmental attention to development issues that have strong direct and/or in-direct linkages to ANRS's ability to develop in a more sustainable direction.

A SARDP with a clear strategic environmental focus

This alternative is the SARDP that would have materialised if a strategic environmental assessment had been carried out as part of programme formulation, and been fully integrated into the programme concept as a basic condition from the donor.

Alas, this alternative is defined as a situation which would differ from today's situation in that SARDP activities were defined and conceived with a more holistic approach, based on existing strategies and policies.

Strategic impacts of the different alternatives

The impacts were semi-quantified using a scale varying from -3 to +3. The 0 alternative by definition is given the impact score of 0, and then the alternative scenarios are scored in accordance with our evaluation of the existing SARDP, and what we envision could have been the situation had SARDP been planned with a clearer environmental strategy (see above). A negative impact means just that, the status of the issue is worse off than in the 0 alternative, and conversely a positive score means a positive impact.

The term "semi-quantified" above simply implies that this is a subjective scoring system, chosen and scored by us, and in no way reflecting real measured relative sizes of actual changes and occurrences in the ANRS. Thus, in the table below it is very important *not* to interpret our scores as absolute quantified levels. Only tendencies should be drawn out of the table, and also indications of where the largest potential for improvements lie.

Issue	0 Alternative	SARDP as it is	SARDP with clear environ. focus
Soil conservation	0	+1	+2
Crop production	0	+1	+2
Livestock improvement	0	+1	+2*
Health	0	+1	+2
Education/ awareness	0	+2	+2
Land tenure (legal reform)	0	+3	+3*
Rural roads	0	+1	+2
Participatory plan.	0	+2	+3*
Socio-environmental strategy	0	+1	+2
Energy	0	-1	+2
Gender	0	+1	-*

Biodiversity	0	0	+2
Alt. approaches to feeding animals	0	0	_*
Policy coherence	0	+1	+2
Land tenure (implementation)	0	0	_*
Population/ family planning	0	+1	+2
Environmental assessment	0	+1	+3
Water	0	+1	+2

* Denotes that two issues from the assessment of the present-day SARDP have been joined when predicting impacts from a more environmental strategy-orientated programme. The reason is that they are almost inseparable in such a highly idealised case. See joined scoring for “livestock improvement” and “alternative approaches to feeding animals”, “land tenure (legal reform)” and “land tenure (implementation)” as well as “participatory planning” and “gender”.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

In general, SARDP is a successful rural development programme in terms of environmental strategy and overall environmental impact. This fact is true in spite of serious lack of attention to environmental strategy in project formulation and implementation. The reason for this apparently contradictory state of affairs is rather obvious on closer scrutiny: Much of the causative mechanisms underlying poverty in ANRS are closely linked to issues of strategic environmental importance. Thus, focussing attention on poverty alleviation means one inherently also focuses considerable effort on many major socio -environmental problems.

A very difficult implementation problem with serious strategic implications is the conflict between donor control of sectors and issues supported, and the ideal of a grassroots-led problem prioritisation arrived at with state-of-the-art popular participation methods. Successful popular participation is very dependent on the credibility and trust the facilitators can gain in the community. If the implementation of activities agreed upon in a successful prioritisation exercise is then made impossible due to limits imposed by the donor (limits that are very hard to understand and/or explain at local level), credibility and trust are easily lost.

Environmental assessments has clearly not been a priority in the programme. In spite of a written statement, existing in documentation throughout the SARDP's lifetime, not a single EIA has been conducted for any of the many rural roads projects funded.

The land administration activities at the EPLAUA is quite clearly the SARDP component with the greatest potential to address real poverty alleviation through improved food security.

One of the principal achievements is the successful implementation of participatory and de-centralised planning activities. This is an oft recommended, but difficult to implement, approach to development planning. In SARDP, it has been successfully put into practice. This deserves serious accolade.

Recommendations

Note that these are not in any order of priority.

- 1) **Future evaluations:** Future evaluations of programmes as large as SARDP must contain well-defined analyses of socio-environmental strategy and impacts.
- 2) **Environmental goods and services:** In interventions of a SARDP type, strategic thinking in programme formulation should address the effective use of available resources. This is achieved by first identifying the essential environmental goods and services important to food security and poverty alleviation. The next step should be to analyse the relevant impact pathways affecting the quality and quantity of these goods and services available to the rural poor. Having done this, the most important interventions then become those that remove, or strongly reduce, serious negative effects along an important impact pathway, and strengthen such activities that benefit goods and service provision. By working according to this approach, one avoids removing one obstacle just to exacerbate another.
- 3) **Problem prioritisation:** The issue of un-articulated needs is critical to improving the efficiency of the development prioritisation carried out at local level. The participatory planning also needs higher resolution, e.g. stating an aim as addressing the food security of “the poorest” brings with it some unwanted and unnecessary delineations when taking problem prioritisation to the community level. Instead, wealth ranking or other methods to properly divide the population into several segments, each with their own agenda to be addressed by the programme, might help implementation forward. It is also important that the programme makes every possible effort at identifying the root causes behind these problems, in order to be able to offer sustainable solutions.
- 4) **Water supply:** Concentrate the interventions in the water supply area to those that are both technical socially and financially sustainable.
- 5) **Rural energy:** Address the rural energy issues in the programme. This would include traditional energy sources, both at the supply and the demand ends, as well as investigating the potential for and of a comprehensive rural electrification programme, based on renewable and sustainable energy carriers.
- 6) **Soil and water conservation:** Strongly reduce the allocation of funds to physical soil and water conservation activities (sometimes expressed as “watershed management” in programme documentation), and focus on biological/organic measures instead.
- 7) **Free-ranging animals:** We recommend a stronger emphasis on stall-feeding and controlled grazing, in order to reduce the number of free-ranging animals. This activity is already dealt with to some extent, but seemingly receives less attention than it merits.
- 8) **Land title registration:** We recommend to promote the speedy implementation of land title registration across ANRS, as quickly as the technical capacity allows. That capacity should obviously also be enhanced.
- 9) **EIA of individual projects:** All rural roads projects should be preceded by EIA studies. No funding should be released before EPLAUA has reviewed the study, and deemed it satisfactory.