

Mission Report: Capacity-building for the strategic planning and management of natural resources in Belize

Mission Dates: 19 – 22 January 2014

Consultants: Kevin Hill

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As part of the GEF Project Preparation Grant (PPG), the purpose of this mission was to consult with key stakeholder representatives (interviewees) and to understand the particular challenges, opportunities to date, stakeholder representatives' expectations of the project. These consultations were an initial step to prepare the project document, specifically to ensure that the proposed project strategy and its activities are in line with an eligible and technically feasible GEF Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) project. These consultations were also to manage stakeholders', in particular key stakeholders' concerns and expectations about the project, and to take these into account into the development of the project. Furthermore, these consultations were to determine the extent to which there may have been changes in the political, socio-economic, or development context that could possibly adversely, or positively, impact the project's strategic value.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), acting as an implementing agency of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), is providing assistance to the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries, and Sustainable Development (MFFSD) in Belize towards the preparation of the GEF Medium Size Project (MSP) "Capacity-building for the strategic planning and management of natural resources in Belize." The purpose of the project preparatory grant is to design the activities in keeping with the expected outcomes and outputs as outline in the Project Identification Form (PIF).

The mission began with a debriefing by UNDP Belize (Ms. Diane Wade) to provide me as the international national consultant with an overview of the history and context behind the project, including an overview of the key actors. While there is no national consultant, Mr. Weizsman Pat, Coordinator of Sustainable Development in the MFFSD will support the preparation of the project document. The mission took place a three day period where I met with a number of key stakeholders, listed in the table below.

Ms. Diane Wade, UNDP Environment and Energy Focal Point

Mr. Weizsman Pat, Coordinator of Sustainable Development

Mr. Marcelo Windsor, Deputy Chief Forest Officer, Forest Department

Ms. Ann Gordon, Climate Change Coordinator, MFFSD

Mr. Paul Flowers, Director, Policy Coordination and Planning Unit, Ministry of Natural Resources and Agriculture

Mr. Martin Alegria, Chief Environmental Officer, Department of Environment

Ms. Beverly Wade, Fisheries Administrator, MFFSD

Mr. Wendell Parham, Chief Executive Officer, MFFSD

The aim of the project, as stated in the PIF, is:

To enhance Belize's institutional and organizational capacities for sustainable natural resource management through investments in human capital development; the application of advanced tools and practices for environmental information management and compliance monitoring; and improved national capacities for the effective leveraging of finances to meet Rio Convention Objectives.

In real terms, the expectation from this project is to strengthen the capacity of the soon-to-be-created Sustainable Development Unit within MFFSD to coordinate the implementation of Belize's National Sustainable Development Strategy, which is part of the country's long-term vision that is embodied in Horizon 2030.

The PIF outlines a CCCD project that is rather ambitious. There are three components: a) monitoring and diagnosis of national and global environmental changes and trends; b) piloting natural resource valuation into national environmental impact assessment process; and c) facilitating institutional and financial reforms for the integration of the Rio conventions and related commitments.

Key findings

The project is expected to facilitate coordination of mandates across ministries, which is currently challenged by certain institutional resistances. The Sustainable Development Unit is expected to be an institutional champion to catalyze this coordination by facilitating an agreement among government ministries, agencies, and departments of what and what not to do. However, the previous CCCD project was in large part intended to do just this, but the change of government in 2012 resulted in a number of institutional changes, and certain capacities were lost. Another challenge is that a number of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in key ministries do not understand why there is a need for a ministry of sustainable development.

The SD Unit is expected to have three (3) staff in addition to the director that will focus on data management and statistics, policy and project coordination, and monitoring and evaluation. Although the SD Unit is new, there are a number of existing mechanisms that are not operational, and it may be possible to revive them.

There is also the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) that is serviced by the Department of Environment of MNRA, which has offered expertise to the MFFSD, but this has not been solicited. One of the overlaps lies in the overlap between the sub-committee on investments (see below) and the NEAC.

With the institutional rearrangements and related changes, institutional arrangements for sound environmental governance appear to be inefficient and ineffective. For this reason, the MFFSD sees the need for an in-depth institutional assessment and a programme of institutional reforms for sound environmental governance.

An advisor from UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Ms. Amelia Siamomua, had come to Belize to undertake a scoping mission to explore undertaking an institutional assessment and strengthening for sustainable development. UNDESA could possibly send one or two experts to develop a strategic plan and policy framework for implementing sustainable development. I contacted Ms. Siamomua upon my return to New York to arrange a meeting, but she said that she could not speak to me, and instead to speak with her superior, Ms. Ndey-Isatou Njie, Chief of the Water, Energy and Capacity Development Branch, who is "the most

appropriate person for such a conversation.” This meeting will not likely happen in the near future due to difficult work schedules.

AusAID would have provided technical support to develop targeted plans, but the Minister of Sustainable Development said that they did not need this, but rather needed experts to help create the SD Unit. This CCCD project is effectively seen as a vehicle for strengthening the establishment of the SD Unit.

Consultations among national stakeholders on this issue had taken place, and most key individuals were on board, with the exception of the Ministry of Economic Development (MED).

Notwithstanding this tacit agreement, there remain varied interpretations of what sustainable development is. There has been some attempts to redress this issue, but undertaken through personal decisions. For example, the Financial Secretary benefitted from a scholarship to learn about sustainable development.

With the government moving towards a multi-year strategic budgeting process, the Financial Secretary is taking a more narrow approach to budgeting.

An important policy instrument is the Medium-Term Development Strategy, which is being written through a process of national consultations, which is also serving as form of training. This is also a process to validate the MED’s development policy objective.

The National Climate Change Office (NCCO) is currently benefitting from support from the EU, which includes the mainstreaming of climate change into sectoral policies and plans, as well as a national climate change policy framework. Services include a national CC committee (NCCC) to advise on FCCC obligations and appropriate policies. As a structure, the NCCO is fairly well-organized, meeting quarterly with private sector, CSOs and NGOs. Under the NCCC, there are three sub-committees that focus on public awareness, mitigation, and vulnerability and adaptation. Opportunities exist to establish technical working groups to cover REDD+ and the clean development mechanism. There are six strategic area to guide climate change programming: a) mainstreaming; b) reducing cc vulnerability; c) benefit sharing from natural resources; d) GHG reduction; e) resource mobilization; and f) education and public awareness.

The technical advisory committee that was created under the previous CCCD still exists (a successful example of institutionalization) and this mechanism can be a valuable mechanism in tandem with the SD Unit to inform investment decisions.

Key challenges:

1. There is a recurring inadequacy of communication between entities. This is seen as the main problem by a number of stakeholders. An assumption is being made that a new coordinating mechanism could address this problem, particularly since there are a large number of responsibilities to address MEA obligations. Given the strong institutional resistance to change, the SD Unit needs to have a very clear and legitimate mandate and terms of references.
2. One of the new changes in 2012 was the new role of the Policy and Planning Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Agriculture as an executing agency. Coastal zone management is an example. Given the number of institutional actors and entities, what is expected is an institutional mechanism that will bring these together, first to develop draft TORs. At the moment, there are too many bits and pieces, and mandates are a hodge podge of responsibilities, with internal pieces that do not fit. The expectation is for the SD Unit to help re-organize this hodge podge.

3. The MED is an important ministry, but one of their main weaknesses is monitoring and evaluating their plans.
4. An important problem is that the National Sustainable Development Council is not effective as ministries develop their own cabinet paper and do not really consult other key colleagues until after the having been discussed by cabinet.
5. One of the findings was that the change in 2012 was the roll back of the capacities developed until the previous CCCD project, intended or not. One of the disappointing losses was the Natural Resource and Environmental Policy Sub-Committee (NREPs). As a result of the change in government, there is a tendency to reinvent the wheel, which is an unfortunate result of the loss of institutional memory and the change of leadership.

Key recommendations offered by stakeholders:

1. An institutional mechanism that the project should take into account in the sub-committee on investments and natural resources (and one or two other key issues) that the Prime Minister created and which is chaired by the Minister of Local Government, but includes forests, fisheries, and other key ministerial representation. This sub-committee is responsible to vet national investments, and could be an instrument mechanism for the SD Unit to be attached to. That is, the SD unit could help inform the work and decisions of the sub-committee.
2. One of the important capacity needs is data and information, and support to do more ground work to produce and manage land use plans. Two land zone plans have been produced and piloted in two districts through the Rural Area Development Project. Land use is one of the countries natural resource priorities due to land degradation in certain watersheds near rivers and affecting water supply. This is actually the mandate of the Forest Department (under the MFFSD), but if the land that is being degraded is agricultural land, then it is the responsibility of the MNRA. This is an example of why there is a need for coordination.
3. The CEO of the MFFSD was an important stakeholder interviewed, who outlined his expectations of the CCCD project, consistent the view of a few other key stakeholder representatives. If MFFSD is to coordinate policies for sustainable development, the SD Unit must have the requisite set of skillset and experience. Importantly, there is an expectation that the SD Unit will serve as the new secretariat for the National Sustainable Development Council, and coordinate a process of consultation.
4. One recommendation is that the policy consultative mechanism be through the CEO caucus, and include representatives from the private sector and CSO. This will strengthen the legitimacy of the process (religious groups could also be included).

Main project risks and assumptions:

A main risk to this project appears to be strengthening of the capacity of the SD Unit. GEF projects are not designed to create institutions, and in this particular instance, the SD Unit does not actually exist...as yet. Certain stakeholders may be under the false or misleading assumption that this project can strengthen the SD Unit to serve a high quality function in policy and programme coordination. However, there is very little applicable baseline. Much of the baseline that existed has apparently dissipated, and that which does remain appears unlikely to be co-opted into the work of the SD Unit. For this reason, this project requires a significant amount of baseline investment, some of which the government has already committed to, such as the staffing of the SD Unit, and some that is potential, as in the case of the institutional assessment that may be undertaken by

UN/DESA. An important assumption is that this baseline will be of the quality and timeliness necessary for the GEF increment to build on.

Not necessarily a risk or assumption related to the project strategy, but an important risk to project eligibility is that fact that Belize benefitted from a previous CCCD project before, which was largely about strengthening institutional and technical capacities for improved decision-making. This new proposed project is in effect attempting to do the same, notwithstanding that the activities in the project components do not belie this. For this reason, I will have to very carefully structure the project under the framework of the targeted capacity strengthening activities that were identified in the PIF. For example, the PIF outlines in output 3.1 the development of a mechanism to track the contributions of non-state actors, and yet, the first CCCD project created a mechanism for non-state input into the decision-making process on the global environment. The mechanism would inherently include reports and other trackable indicators to assess the quality of non-state input.

Next Steps:

During the mission, we discussed the extent to which a national consultant would be available to support the development of the project document per the PPG Initiation Plan. Mr. Weiszman Pat would serve this role and I spent a couple of hours with him on my last day to go over the work that would be needed. Rather than prepare a separate background analysis of the institutional context of the project, it would be more efficient to work with the international consultant to draft sections of the project document that provide the institutional context for the project strategy. The preparation of the project document would take place over the next couple of months, with the validation workshop to take place in mid-April, after parliamentary elections.