

A large, faint illustration of a balance scale, symbolizing justice, equity, or evaluation, positioned on the left side of the page.

Evaluation of the Framework Agreement between the Government of Norway and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

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Findings and Conclusions

1. This is an evaluation of the framework agreement between the Government of Norway and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The evaluation was carried out by a team of consultants from Nordic Consulting Group AS of Oslo, Norway between May and September 2005. It is based on consultations in Norway and on field visits to UNEP's offices in Paris, Geneva and Nairobi. In addition, the Ministries of Environment in Kenya and Uganda were consulted.
2. The framework agreement focuses on five particular areas;
 - support to Africa
 - environmental information, monitoring and assessment
 - environmental policy and law including trade and the environment
 - support for implementation of environmental conventions
 - co-operation between UNEP and the civil society.
3. The agreement covers the period 2002–2005 and expires at the end of 2005. It provides NOK 35 million per year for the partial or full funding of some 24 projects in six of UNEP's eight Divisions. This funding is provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, NOK 9 million a year was provided to various projects in addition to the framework agreement. In addition, through the Ministry of Environment, Norway provides some NOK 15 million to the Environment Fund which contributes to funding UNEP's day-to-day operational obligations. Thus the total support to UNEP from Norway in 2004 was over NOK 64 million.
4. The parties to the agreement meet at least once a year to review on-going cooperation. UNEP regularly submits lists of proposals for projects and makes annual reports and end reports for each of the projects carried out under the framework agreement.
5. A thorough analysis of the framework agreement portfolio of 24 projects was undertaken involving the study of reports, analysis of questionnaires and personal interviews in Paris, Geneva and Nairobi. The main conclusions of the analysis were that:
 - UNEP places great faith in the power of awareness-raising and institutional strengthening to bring about lasting change. However, the actual authority and power in recipient institutions may be very weak.
 - It is very difficult to establish a focus and then evaluate impacts and results because of the very wide and diverse range of outputs and objectives to be achieved.
 - Monitoring of impact is virtually impossible since no counterfactual benchmarks have been established, and indicators of progress are not systematically established at the time when projects are designed and started.
 - Many projects have complicated institutional arrangements so that it is difficult to identify the impact of Norwegian support. Fungibility of funds adds to the difficulty.
6. There is a widespread danger of duplication between Divisions within UNEP and between UNEP and other agencies, although UNEP is aware of this. This is partly because UNEP has become very ambitious and moved into areas which may be outside its original remit. MFA needs to more actively monitor what sort of environment-oriented programmes and projects are supported via other framework agreements with e.g. WHO, FAO, UNESCO and UNIDO, as well as through trust funds in the multilateral development banks, so as to create complementarity and synergy rather than costly duplication.
 - The framework agreement supports projects which seek to mainstream environmental considerations into poverty reduction strategies in separate UNEP Divisions. Better internal coordination in the selection of programmes to be supported as it should minimize internal duplication and overlapping.
 - There is a strong case for focusing Norwegian support in areas where UNEP has frontier comparative advantage/expertise/competence e.g. environmental monitoring/remote sensing and warning systems, awareness raising and training of e.g. journalists, customs officers and lawyers/judges towards effective implementation of the many multilateral environmental conventions, and the regulations regarding trade and depositing of waste and chemicals, cleaner production etc.
 - Norwegian support has been useful and effective in assisting small countries, especially in Africa, to meet their obligations under a variety of multilateral environment agreements (MEAs).
7. Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland and Sweden have similar framework agreements with UNEP. They vary in focus and in size, but operate largely as Trust Funds.

8. Norway operates framework agreements with seven other UN agencies i.e. UN-Habitat, FAO, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and ILO. These are administered by MFA's UN Section in contrast to the UNEP framework agreement which is administered by the Section for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Measures are being taken to introduce a "two stage" UNEP framework agreement where a finite programme agreement (UNEP's programme periods are two years) is subordinated to a general, overall UNEP framework agreement without a time limit. This will simplify and speed up the procedures and process of finalizing revised agreements,
9. UNEP has become increasingly dependent on external donor funding as opposed to funding from UN sources. Individual trust funds, together with earmarking, are becoming increasingly important. Individual donors specify focal areas and topics with criteria which UNEP must meet. UNEP points out that donors seem unable to coordinate their requirements which often leads to an imbalanced and disjointed UNEP programme of activities.
10. There is an increasing tendency for UNEP's programmes to reflect the predilections of individual donors rather than those of UNEP's Governing Council. On the other hand the use of trust funds ensures predictability of funds and lower administrative costs.
11. The recent Bali Strategic Plan seeks to improve UNEP's technological support and capacity-building activities. However the evaluation team is of the opinion that the Plan is over-ambitious in relation to available expertise and resources and risks "turf wars" with other competing agencies which have been established from the outset to be operational. It does, however, provide for coordination mechanisms with UNDP and the GEF.

Recommendations

- The UNEP framework agreement should be brought in line with the other UN framework agreements in the proposed "two stage" process. That is, a general UNEP framework agreement with no time-limit, under which there should be a multi-year (e.g. two year) framework cooperation agreement which is area focused.
- It may seem logical for responsibility for the framework agreement within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be transferred from the section for the Environment and Sustainable Development to the UN section, where all the other UN framework agreements are located. However, it is recommended that it remains located in the section for the Environment and Sustainable Development, provided the focus of the agreement is on UNEP's normative activities. These activities are closely related to the multilateral environment conventions that this section manages within the MFA.
- Retaining this arrangement requires that the present good communication with the UN section on environmental activities, addressed under framework agreements with other UN agencies, be secured so as to secure avoidance of duplication and ineffective use of UN framework agreement funds.
- The new agreement should be structured as a multi-year Norwegian trust fund.
- In the formulation of the new agreement greater attention should be paid to the sub-programme priorities of the UNEP Governing Council.
- The number of sub-programmes to be supported should be reduced for ease of administration and monitoring, for reduced likelihood of duplication, and for better targeting.
- The framework agreement should enable UNEP to acquire a comparative advantage in key cross-cutting areas not properly addressed and covered in activities of other multilateral agencies.
- The new framework agreement should require all communication leading towards the programme compositions to go through UNEP's programme coordination management unit, which is now charged with internal coordination of activities.
- Under this new framework agreement model, it is imperative that UNEP mainstream the following; regular monitoring as part of the project/programme management, regular reviews of all projects/programmes as needed, and in-depth evaluations of selected activities as well as thematic evaluations. The framework agreements should clarify requirements for a supervision mechanism, reviews, evaluations and reporting.
- The agreement should also state that the volume of Norwegian support depends on the quality of UNEP's performance as documented by achieved results. Such monitoring, review and evaluation activities cannot be meaningfully undertaken unless it is agreed what sort of indicators and data must be regularly collected and processed in order to make it possible to compare activity impacts (not only output and outcome) to a "without activity" baseline.
- A natural UNEP-role following from its mandate to undertake and implement activities that "*inspire, inform and enable nations....*" would therefore be to develop and have in place indicators to monitor the extent to which the activities achieve such results compared to baselines without such UNEP actions. UNEP should therefore begin to systematically establish and enforce a system of monitorable performance indicators developed from counterfactual benchmarks for each project.

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