



Evaluation Summaries

Support to “Sustainable Rural Infrastructure Development Services for Poverty Reduction in the Asia Pacific Region” (ASIST AP)

Quick Facts

Countries: Asia and Pacific, with special focus on Indonesia, Timor Leste, Lao PDR, Sri Lanka and Cambodia.

Evaluation: Final Evaluation, Dec 2008

Mode of Evaluation: Independent

Technical Area: Rural infrastructure works

Evaluation Management: The ILO ROAP, Bangkok, Thailand.

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Project Start: January 2005

Project End: December 2008

Project Code: RAS/04/12/SID

Donor: Sida, Sweden USD 1,110,977

Key Words: employment, local resource based infrastructure interventions, community development, capacity building, development projects, technical cooperation, participatory development, local economic reconstruction and development, poverty alleviation, sustainable development, urban development, small enterprises, construction industry, road transport, environmental protection, natural disasters.

Background & Context

The Sida component of ASIST AP

The Sida contribution to ASIST AP can be viewed as general financial support to the overall ASIST AP programme, but it has its

own project document and logframe with specific outputs.

The Goal of this component is to contribute to the poverty reduction goals of different countries in the Asia Pacific region.

The Regional Objective is to improve the access of the rural population to basic, social and economic goods and services through the effective use of local resources.

The nine specific **outputs** to be realised are:

1. Improved capacity of decentralized Government units to more effectively deliver (pro-poor) sustainable rural infrastructure.
2. Local organization provided with a voice in the planning and implementation of infrastructure works.
3. Innovative contractual mechanisms tested and established.
4. Rural infrastructure maintenance procedures developed and in use.
5. Local resource-based approaches disseminated and incorporated.
6. Collaboration with international institutes and universities.
7. Poverty focused approaches incorporated into Government policies and strategies.
8. Development and dissemination of materials documenting best practices in relation to the delivery of rural infrastructure services.

9. Gender audit of technical materials conducted.

The Sida component of the programme focuses on the regional ASIST AP activities and specific country activities in Indonesia, Timor Leste, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Sri Lanka.

ASIST AP ways of working

ASIST AP achieves its objectives through four technical fields of operation:

1. local level participatory infrastructure planning,
2. labour-based technology,
3. small-scale and community contracting,
4. labour-based maintenance.

ASIST AP works at both local and central levels:

- At the local level it focuses on institutional capacity building of local partner institutions in such areas as local access planning, technology choice, the development of small-scale contracting and labour-based equipment supported infrastructure maintenance.
- At the central level it contributes to policy and strategy development to ensure that investments in rural infrastructure maximize the impact on poverty reduction, income generation and local skills development.

ASIST AP provides technical assistance and advisory support to the ILO country programmes and projects; hence it is not an implementer.

Present situation of project

The programme has been running, in full operation, for a period of eight years split into two phases. When entering the second phase, 2005 to 2008, funding ceased unexpectedly from DFID. With reduced funding the management had to reduce its staffing gradually from five to two.

The programme is now at a cross-roads as external donor funding is ceasing at the end of

the year. However, internal ILO funding has been secured and in fact to the amount that the programme can now be expanded again.

Despite the low level of funding during the period under review, good progress has been made in several cases, and ASIST AP has been instrumental in mainstreaming:

- The local resource based approach to road works in Timor Leste, Indonesia and Cambodia.
- Participatory infrastructure planning in Cambodia and Lao PDR.

Purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess what impact the Sida contribution had on the overall ASIST AP programme. It also provides recommendations for future directions of the programme. As the Sida support ceases at the end of 2008, this report will also serve as the completion report for Sida.

The evaluation covers the regional work carried out by ASIST AP in 2005 to 2008 with particular assessment of the activities carried out in Indonesia, Timor Leste, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Sri Lanka.

It was not possible to disaggregate Sida funded activities from the rest as the activities as these had been cross-funded over these four years in order to make appropriated use of available funding.

Methodology of evaluation

Information has been drawn from three main sources: a desk based review on selected documentation; interviews with ILO staff and other stakeholders; email questionnaires to ILO staff and those knowledgeable about the programme but external to ILO.

Main Findings & Conclusions

- The programme is relevant and fits in strategically with all the DWCPs of ROAP and the framework of EIIP. The programme has evolved from being

somewhat alienated in the past to become an integral part of all the ten countries for which there exist DWCPs. ASIST AP is further appreciated by development partners and called upon for project designs by organisations such as the WB and ADB, showing its strategic role.

- Sida's contribution has been crucial for this second phase as other external sources of funding ceased unexpectedly. The ILO core funding has, however, increased over the years, but it has not been enough to keep the programme on course as intended. The reduced funding, due the withdrawal of DFID funding, forced the management to gradually reduce its number of staff from five to two experts. In general, the scarce resources have been used wisely by using all three sources of funding (DFID carry-over funds from the pervious period, ILO and Sida) in a common basket for meeting the demand from the countries in the most efficient way.
- The programme has not only been affected negatively by the reduction of funds it has also suffered from being called upon for the numerous natural disasters having occurred in the region. The ASIST AP has been strategically placed and has responded quickly to these requests. This has of course eaten into its resources, but the crisis responses have also provided opportunities for ASIST AP to collaborate with new partners. ASIST AP's added value to this is not so much for the immediate relief, but more importantly for design of initiatives for the medium and long-term restoration of livelihoods and development of the local economy.
- The outputs of the programme are all relevant, but they will not lead to a fulfilment of the immediate objective

as it is beyond reach. The Sida objective was far too optimistic for such a short period of implementation, and it is also vague in its definition. Most outputs have been delivered to a large extent and this is commendable given the circumstances ASIST AP found itself in with reduced funding and "distractions" in the form of natural disasters. The results can, however, not be directly attributed ASIST AP as the programme works through national projects, which have their fair share of the successful implementation.

- The programme has added leverage to many of the projects carried out by the ILO through its expertise and its network of contacts. It has also assisted project managers in their dialogue with country offices and the ILO headquarters. Without this support the projects would not have made such good progress. The programme has, accordingly, filled an important role in the support to projects that deal with infrastructure works for local development.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

The text below is organised in the order of lessons learned and recommendations:

- The management capacity has been inadequate due to shortage of funds and its work can be characterised as fire fighting and keeping the programme afloat and providing as much services as possible. It has not always been possible to make the right priorities and to provide services required and some countries have, accordingly, been given less attention than originally envisaged. This is not sustainable in the long-term as a programme of this nature requires: adequate resources in order not to spread too thinly across the member countries; to have its staff in the field

to a large extent, not only to accommodate the immediate needs of the stakeholders, but also to be “on the ground” for stakeholder dialogues on further initiatives.

- The programme needs a flexible strategy over a longer period of support to ensure methods and approaches are sustained in the member countries. This requires more substantial funding, which leads over to the next lesson learned.
- ASIST AP will be reliant on ILO funding and needs to explore these opportunities. As many donors seem less inclined to earmark funds for specific programmes, it is likely that the ASIST AP will have to operate within the internal ILO funding mechanism such as the new complementary RBSA funding. Another way of funding would be to get direct funding from projects for specific tasks to be carried out by ASIST AP. The survey indicates that ILO country offices and projects are willing to pay for such services falling outside the normal scope of the ILO backstopping. This is heartening and should also be taken further by designing projects with a technical component for ASIST AP. It should be noted that this should be in the form of well defined activities with tangible outputs as to distinguish them from the normal technical backstopping that the ILO offers. By doing so, it is likely that ASIST AP could attract additional funding for expansion of the team.
- There is a clear need for the technical competences that ASIST AP holds in the field of infrastructure work. And ASIST AP’s role is not only to backstop projects technically, it has an important role to fill in the design of new initiatives for jobs and infrastructure development as its

approach offers vast opportunities for employment in both urban and rural areas. The programme brings valuable elements into the equation of fulfilling the DWCP outcomes. The potential for job creation in the infrastructure sector is acknowledged by all three constituents of the ILO; the demand has not been stronger in many years.

- A demand driven focus requires a revisit of the four pillars. A long-term programme must be designed with flexibility to allow for changes to take place, and ASIST AP has shown that this is possible. However, the programme has so far mainly been focusing on the conditions in the rural areas. Now there is a change of focus among many IFIs towards development work in urban areas, and it is likely that urban environments will attract more attention than it has in the past. The same applies to environmental issues which receives great international attention. The evaluation therefore recommends that the ASIST AP management revisits the four pillars to accommodate these demands. The four pillars holding the platform of ASIST AP can already today be trimmed down as three of them are basically part and parcel for the same thing - the execution of labour-based or local resource based infrastructure works.
- A demand driven focus also requires a revisit of the country demands and potentials. Some of the countries that were given less support in recent years, may have big potential, such a country would be India. The evaluation recommends that the countries are once again screened to find out where it is likely to yield a high return on the investments made.
- Impact of local resource based infrastructure interventions. After some

30 years of operation in this field there is still a lack of proof of the impacts these interventions have on the community at large. And the burning question is – why does it not happen naturally (a bigger question than the evaluation can accommodate)? In order to bring about policy, institutional and philosophical change it is important that the ILO show the impacts. Studies of this nature and the dissemination of their findings can be very useful in influencing governments and major lenders to change policies and practices. The ASIST AP, and the ILO for that matter, is a small player in the development field, but its role can be pivotal in creating more decent work for large number of people at the same time as the much needed local infrastructure is developed and maintained locally.