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Toward Guidelines on Running Multi-country, Multi-site Projects

Prepared by

Mahfuzuddin Ahmed
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 ICLARM

International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management

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**INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR LIVING AQUATIC
RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

Manila, Philippines

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1997

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Workshop Team

Adviser:	Dr. Meryl J. Williams
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Assistants:	Ms. Rowena Andrea V. Santos Ms. Maria Lucia V. Tungala
Documentation:	Ms. Miriam C. Balgos Ms. Christine Marie V. Casal Mr. Len R. Garces

21 Feb, 1998

Introduction

The International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM) aims to improve the well-being and livelihood of present and future generations of poor people in the developing world through research and related activities on improved production, management and conservation of living aquatic resources. To attain this goal, ICLARM's research projects need to be chartered in partnership with various national aquatic research systems (NARS), government and nongovernment agencies. Projects involve activities that are conducted in multiple locations, and with multiple partners. Research collaborators often come from different geographic regions and countries and, in some cases, distinct areas in each country.

Since ICLARM's entry into the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) in 1992, ICLARM has been entrusted to deal with more complex research issues concerning the aquatic resource system and people dependent upon the resources in various parts of the world. Its scope of work and list of clients and partnership base have also expanded (ICLARM 1992). Increasingly, ICLARM envisages the need to work with national systems (government and nongovernment organizations), advanced scientific institutions, the academe, individual scientists, the private sector and farmers/fishers. This realization has led ICLARM to develop a policy on partnerships in research and related activities (ICLARM 1997). While this policy offers guidance in selecting countries and sites to suit the objectives and designs of the projects, the success of projects will depend, to a major extent, on a combination of technical and managerial abilities as well as on the sociocultural and human relations related skills of concerned project staff. Appropriate guidelines on how to design and implement multi-country, multi-site projects are yet to be developed by ICLARM.

In the past, ICLARM involved itself in country, regional and global projects of various natures. During the process of implementing the projects, project staff and management must address a host of diverse problems and issues. The process of handling such problems and its consequences for the success or failure of projects yield valuable lessons for ICLARM's future involvement in multi-country, multi-site projects.

From this perspective, an in-house workshop entitled "Toward Guidelines on Running Multi-country, Multi-site Projects" was organized on 18 January 1997 (Annex 1). Specific objectives of the workshop were:

1. To review experiences and examine the lessons learned under key ICLARM projects in running multi-country, multi-site projects.

2. To identify the key points to consider in designing and implementing multi-country, multi-site projects.
3. To suggest guidelines on principles and strategies for implementing multi-country, multi-site projects.

To open the workshop, ICLARM's Director General, Dr. Meryl J. Williams, welcomed participating members of the Board of Trustees (BOT) and the staff of ICLARM (Annex 2). This was followed by remarks on the workshop topic from Prof. John Dillon, Chair of the BOT. As coordinator of the workshop, Dr. Mahfuzuddin Ahmed described its rationale, objectives and scope. Presentations by the resource speakers were divided into two groups. The first group shed light on the experiences and lessons learned from conducting multi-country, multi-site projects. Presenters were Dr. Robert S. Pomeroy (Co-Management and AFFSRN Projects), Dr. Madan Dey (DEGITA/Carp Project), Mr. Geronimo T. Silvestre (Fishery Assessment Project), Dr. Mark Prein (RESTORE) and Dr. Roger S.V. Pullin (IRM). The second group, which discussed the implementation plans, perceived problems and solutions for new initiatives, included Dr. John McManus (Population Interdependency in the South China Sea Ecosystems, PISCES) and Dr. Jan Michael Vakily (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Regions--European Union Training Project/FishBase African, Caribbean and Pacific Regions).

Dr. Williams presided over the workshop, while Dr. Modadugu V. Gupta and Dr. Roger Pullin were the panel discussants for the presentation session. Group discussions, divided into three groups, followed in the afternoon. Group 1 - Project Design Phase with Dr. Robert S. Pomeroy (Discussion Leader) and Ms. Miriam C. Balgos (Rapporteur); Group 2 - Implementation Phase with Mr. Geronimo T. Silvestre (Discussion Leader) and Mr. Len R. Garces (Rapporteur); and Group 3 - Monitoring and Evaluation Phase with Dr. Madan Dey (Discussion Leader) and Ms. Christine Marie V. Casal (Rapporteur) (Annex 3). Dr. Ahmed presented the summary recommendations based on reports from the individual groups. Prof. Dillon concluded the proceedings by giving his observations regarding the presentations as well as the workshop as a whole.

The following sections summarize key issues and constraints identified during the workshop followed by a set of guidelines emerging from group discussions.



Issues

From ICLARM's experience of conducting multi-country, multi-site projects, we identified that often, *ad hoc* approaches had been taken to implement projects. In many cases, the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation aspects are not tied together; in fact, they are seldom recognized as integral parts of a strategy for multi-country, multi-site projects. For several reasons, projects tend not to allocate sufficient time and resources to these aspects or stages, often resulting in a number of problems which in turn not only limit or hinder the project's achievements, but also fail to measure the project impact.

1. Design Phase

- Projects are not properly designed. Gaps in the project design lead to implementation difficulties and poor achievements. Logical framework analysis is seldom part of the design process. Lack of sufficient attention and inadequate knowledge about the field conditions during the preparatory stage often results in insufficient appraisal of project inputs and other requirements in the project. As a result, problems addressed by the projects are often not well defined while project resources or inputs do not match objectives.
- The capabilities of partners are not fully assessed prior to implementation. This invites unknown risks. It also hinders the identification of training needs and their timely and sequential integration into the project workplan.
- Inadequate partner inputs in the project design. Research partners and counterparts do not have the opportunity to participate actively in the planning process. Often, discussion regarding the project remains limited to exchange of ideas with higher-level authorities, and hence does not reflect practical situations in the field. Thus, research partners lack a common view on the goals and agendas and feel no sense of ownership for the research program. Very little dialogue takes place among project partners about what will work and what will not. Consequently, no viable coordination schemes among partners are put in place prior to implementation of the project.
- Inadequate resources. Program and follow-up activities are constrained by various conditionalities as well as insufficient donor funds. Furthermore, partners are often unwilling to commit their own resources in a collaborative project, possibly because they do not see projects as directly benefiting their own research program or conforming with national or institutional priorities.

- Lack of uniform methodology. Research methods are not well described in the project design. Often, methodologies are not standardized, such that data cannot be meaningfully compared across sites. Because of varying capabilities among partner agencies, even if the same methodologies are used, data sets do not enjoy uniform levels of accuracy. Training and capacity building are not seen as essential parts of ensuring a standard methodology or quality.

2. Implementation Phase

- Project leaders' skills. The skills and experience of the project leaders are in many cases insufficient to handle the multiple project-related responsibilities, resulting in poor performance and failure to accomplish desired objectives. Little or no attention is paid to improving the management skills of project leaders especially in human resources management and sociocultural interactions.
- Too many project components. Funds are stretched too thin across many project/program components, obstructing the project's ability to focus on its main objectives.
- Policies on sharing credits. The lack of clear policies on ownership and authorship of project outputs leaves partner agencies and their staff confused. They may harbor different expectations, leading them at times to make unusual demands.
- Donor requirements. Projects have to respond to increasing requirements by donor agencies. Projects must consult donors and incorporate their policies and approaches to developmental issues. This requirement poses as it may risk introducing bias that may affect the objectivity of research programs.
- Administrative support. Project management procedures and policies governing communication, coordination and administrative support fail to ensure timely and efficient delivery of these services. There had been little dialogue between technical management units of the project and administrative support units.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) Phase

- Lack of appreciation for M & E. Monitoring and evaluation are not incorporated in the project design, causing the project to lose sight of its objectives, especially in large projects with multiple components. On the other hand, regular monitoring and evaluation are limited by financial constraints. Thus, few projects execute regular and systematic monitoring.

- Timeliness in M & E. Often, M & E are relegated to the end of project life. Problems (technical, managerial or financial) which could have been addressed during implementation are neglected resulting in less than satisfactory outcomes from the project.
- Lack of awareness of research partners. Research partners do not see the relevance or importance of M & E; thus they do not cooperate or make an effort to know how these are done.
- Biases in M & E. M & E conducted by donor consultants turn out to be less objective, hence serve a less satisfactory purpose. Sometimes, they fail to consider technical, managerial and financial limitations involved in the design and implementation of the project resulting in biased evaluation.
- Lack of appropriate indicators. M & E indicators are too ambitious and unrealistic. This also leads to unsatisfactory evaluation.

Recommended Guidelines

The design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation aspects of projects and programs should be tied together; they are integral parts of a strategy for multi-country, multi-site projects.

1. Design Phase

1.1. Involvement of donors and project partners. The design phase should involve both donors and project partners. In recent years donors have shown an increasing interest toward development and other implications of a project prior to its implementation. This raises donor expectations, including reluctance or unwillingness to accept negative results. This has necessitated ICLARM to adopt new strategies with donors which include:

- informal discussion
- education and orientation
- pre-proposal
- proposal
- donor follow-up.

With respect to research partners the range of discussion and appraisal should include the following:

- statement of informal interest
- selection of partners
- institutional and personal linkages
- participation process
- planning committee
- institutional commitment (budget)
- institutional capacity and training needs.

1.2. Guidelines for project design. ICLARM should have clear guidelines on the design of projects, recognizing however the fact that projects may not be led by ICLARM. Often, projects involve partnerships with other agencies with varying levels of ICLARM inputs, which may require different designs.

1.3. Agreement with partners. Partners should be in full agreement with the proposed research and its implementation plan. To reach a common agreement between partners, joint research priority-setting exercises are needed. Project agreements and/or letters of interest with the partners should specify ownership and operating procedures.

1.4. Comprehensiveness of project design. The design of the project should describe the following in sufficient detail:

- project concept rationale and objectives
- role of participants
- information policy
- overall and common goals
- workplan
- research methods and data analysis
- credit sharing agreement and authorship policy.

1.5. Research methodology. In designing a project, emphasis should be on the use of common methodologies for data collection and analysis so that comparison across sites have both meaning and strategic relevance.

1.6. Logical framework analysis. A logical framework analysis should be used in designing the project and should include a comprehensive appraisal of project activities and their importance. The analysis should be specific about project inputs and

outputs. Assumptions and associated risks regarding the technical, managerial and institutional conditions should be clearly stated in the logical framework analysis.

1.7. Incorporation of monitoring and evaluation. There should be a built-in process for monitoring and evaluation during and at the end of the project with clear terms of reference. Scientific advisory committees and steering committees should be established for all projects as far as possible to increase the accountability of project management.

2. Implementation Phase

2.1. Strengthening project capacity. Both technical and management aspects of the projects, including human and sociocultural aspects, need to be strengthened. In the beginning phase of a project, more emphasis should be given to improvement of technical capability, access to information and communication and capacity-building of partners.

2.2. Reduce project burden and overcommitment. Projects should not support too many components at any given point in time.

2.3. Preparation of realistic workplan. Projects must be focused. Design aspects of the project must be thoroughly examined and appraised prior to implementation. An inception report including a realistic workplan need to be prepared at the beginning of implementation.

2.4. Authorship and credit sharing. To avoid misunderstanding, ICLARM should establish a policy on authorship and credits for project partners. Such a policy should draw a clear distinction between individual authorship or scientific contribution and credits that are shared at the institutional level.

2.5. Improved administrative support. Emphasis should be given on improving and maintaining contacts/communication between administrative unit and staff performing technical and managerial functions in the project. Provision should be made for participation of administrative staff in planning and review meetings and workplan preparation.

2.6. Continuity of staff. Smooth transition of responsibilities should be ensured in the case of change of key staff during the implementation phase of the project, including involvement in the initial implementation process by staff who designed the project.

2.7. Cashflow. In negotiating projects with donors, efforts should be made to obtain grant money in advance. To avoid cashflow problems affecting project activities, donor cycle for release of fund should be taken into consideration in planning major project activities.

2.8. Staff training. Emphasis should be given to training existing personnel particularly to on-the-job training. Adequate resources should be allocated for human resources development, such as degree and non-degree training.

2.9. Securing commitment of partners. The commitment of NARS partners and other project collaborators during implementation should be ascertained through formal agreements followed by review and consultation.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) Phase

3.1. Monitoring and evaluation should be a built-in component of the project design and should include log frame, milestones, indicators, risks and assumptions.

3.2. Emphasis should be given to establishing a clear objective for M & E as well as guidelines on the principles and processes of undertaking M & E.

3.3. Both technical and managerial aspects should be considered for M & E.

3.4. The project document should clearly indicate the purpose of M & E and its target beneficiaries.

3.5. Indicators should be flexible and specific. These should be designed to evolve as needed and include socioeconomic and political aspects.

3.6. Indicators should be realistic and should not be stretched over long time periods.

3.7. ICLARM's overall principles: sustainability, equity, gender role in development, participation, systems approach and anticipatory research should be considered when designing indicators.

3.8. An adequate budget for M & E should be provided.

3.9. The implementation of M & E should involve stakeholders.

3.10. Internal evaluation should be done prior to an external evaluation.

3.11. M & E of all projects should be institutionalized and made both timely and continuous.

3.12. Common understanding among the research partners should be reached for M & E, perhaps through workshops.

References

- ✓ ICLARM. 1992. ICLARM's strategy for international research on living aquatic resources management. International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management, Philippines. 79 p. + Appendix 30 p.
- ✓ ICLARM. 1997. ICLARM policy on partnerships in research and related activities. International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management, Philippines. 10 p.

Annex 1. Program

**Toward Guidelines on Running Multi-country,
Multi-site Projects
18 January 1997, Saturday
8:00 am - 5:00 pm
ICLARM Penthouse**

8:00 - 8:15	Registration of Participants	<i>Bing V. Santos/ Malu Tungala</i>
8:15 - 8:20	Welcome Remarks	<i>Dr. Meryl J. Williams, DG ICLARM</i>
8:20 - 8:25	Remarks	<i>Prof. John Dillon, Chairman, BOT</i>

Session Chairperson: *Dr. Meryl J. Williams*

8:25 - 8:40	Workshop Objectives and Expected Output	<i>Dr. Mahfuz Ahmed Program Leader, PRIA</i>
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8:40 - 9:00	Co-Management and AFSSRN	<i>Dr. Bob S. Pomeroy</i> Project Leader
9:00 - 9:20	DEGITA Project/Carp Project	<i>Dr. Madan Dey</i> Project Leader
9:20 - 9:40	Fishery Assessment Project/ Coastal Transect Project	<i>Mr. Gerry T. Silvestre</i> Project Leader
9:40 - 10:00	Research Tool for Natural Resource Management, Monitoring and Evaluation (RESTORE)	<i>Dr. Mark Prein</i> Program Leader, IAASP
10:00 - 10:20	IRM Effort	<i>Dr. Roger S.V. Pullin</i> Program Leader, BGRP
10:20 - 10:35	Panel Discussion	<i>Dr. Modadugu V. Gupta</i> Director, IRO
10:35 - 10:50	Coffee/Tea Break	
10:50 - 11:10	Population Interdependency in the South China Sea Ecosystems (PISCES)	<i>Dr. John McManus/ Ms. Menchie Ablan</i> Program Leader, AEP/ Project Leader
11:10 - 11:30	ACP-EU Training Project/FishBase African, Caribbean and Pacific Regions	<i>Dr. Michael Vakily</i> Training Coordinator
11:30 - 11:45	Panel Discussion	<i>Dr. Roger S.V. Pullin</i> Program Leader, BGRP
12:00 - 1:00	<i>Lunch Break</i>	
1:00 - 2:00	Group Discussions Group 1. Project Design Phase Group 2. Implementation Phase Group 3. Monitoring and Evaluation Phase	<i>Dr. Bob S. Pomeroy/ Ms. Miriam C. Balgos Mr. Gerry T. Silvestre/ Mr. Len R. Garces Dr. Madan Dey/ Ms. Christine V. Casal</i>
2:00 - 2:15	Preparation of Group Presentation	
2:15 - 3:00	Group Presentation	
	Moderator: Dr. Modadugu V. Gupta	

Group 1. Project Design Phase	<i>Dr. Bob S. Pomeroy</i>
Group 2. Implementation Phase	<i>Mr. Gerry T. Silvestre</i>
Group 3. Monitoring and Evaluation Phase	<i>Dr. Madan Dey</i>

3:00 - 3:30 *Coffee/Tea Break*

3:30 - 4:00 Presentation of Summary Guidelines *Dr. Mahfuz Ahmed*

4:00 - 4:05 Closing Remarks *Dr. Meryl J. Williams/
Prof. John Dillon*

End of Workshop

Annex 2. List of Participants

BOARD MEMBERS

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Dr. John Dillon | 5. Dr. Joan Joshi |
| 2. Dr. Nyle Brady | 6. Dr. Volker Hilge |
| 3. Dr. Britha Mikkelsen | 7. Dr. Mohamed Shariff |
| 4. Dr. Nyawira Muthiga | |

RESEARCH AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

- | | |
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| 1. Dr. Meryl J. Williams | 21. Ms. Brenda Katon |
| 2. Dr. Peter R. Gardiner | 22. Ms. Carmen Ablan |
| 3. Dr. Roger Rowe (DDG, Africa) | 23. Ms. Zoraida N. Alojado |
| 4. Dr. Modadugu V. Gupta | 24. Ms. Miriam C. Balgos |
| 5. Ms. Susan Bonetto | 25. Mr. Len R. Garces |
| 6. Dr. Mahfuzuddin Ahmed | 26. Ms. Sheila Vergara |
| 7. Dr. John McManus | 27. Ms. Christine Marie V. Casal |
| 8. Dr. Roger S.V. Pullin | 28. Mr. Gaspar Bimbao |
| 9. Dr. Mark Prein | 29. Ms. Maritess Tiongco |
| 10. Ms. Joanna Kane-Potaka | 30. Mr. Lambert Meñez |
| 11. Dr. Robert Pomeroy | 31. Ms. Natalie Macawaris |
| 12. Dr. Madan Dey | 32. Mr. Rodolfo Reyes |
| 13. Dr. Jan Michael Vakily | 33. Ms. Pascualita Sa-a |
| 14. Dr. Villy Christensen | 34. Ms. Armi Torres |
| 15. Mr. Geronimo T. Silvestre | 35. Mr. Francisco Torres, Jr. |

16. Dr. Maria Lourdes Palomares
17. Mr. Paulino Manese
18. Mr. Felimon Gayanilo, Jr.
19. Ms. Arlene Garces
20. Mr. Emmanuel Genio

36. Ms. Teresita Lopez
37. Mr. John Marie Gacutan
38. Ms. Kathleen Kesner
39. Ms. Rowena Andrea V. Santos

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Annex 3. Working Group Assignment

GROUP 1 - PROJECT DESIGN PHASE

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Rapporteur: Miriam Balgos
Members: Nyle Brady
Volker Hilge
Peter Gardiner
Modadugu Gupta
John McManus
Joanna Kane-Potaka
Susan Bonetto
Zaida Alojado
Brenda Katon
Jojo Genio
Sheila Vergara
Taile Macawaris
Kathy Kesner

Toward guidelines on running multi-country, multi-site projects. 1997. M. Ahmed, R.A.V. Santos, M.C. Balgos, C.M.V. Casal, L.R. Garces and M.L. Tungala. ICLARM Conf. Proc. 55, 13 p.

TITLES OF RELATED INTEREST

A brief for fisheries policy research in developing countries. 1997. M. Ahmed, C. Delgado and S. Sverdrup-Jensen. ICLARM. 16 p.

Fisheries co-management and small-scale fisheries: a policy brief. 1994. R.S. Pomeroy and M.J. Williams. ICLARM. 15 p.

The INGA planning meeting. 1997. Manila resolution: strengthening partnerships to advance the science of fish breeding and genetics and development of national fish breeding programs. ICLARM Conf. Proc. 54, 12 p.

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