Brief summary of areas of the project cycle that should be considered for projects:

At design

- Avoid complexity
- Ensure that assumptions are realistic, and that targets are not ambitious
- Understand the context (laws, institutional issues, status of decentralisation and relevant contextual factors, including the lived realities of the Basotho)
- Have an exit strategy and ensure post-project funding
- Ensure that the project length is adequate to attain and sustain objectives
- Ensure innovation is built into the project plan, and that appropriate and affordable technology is provided
- Ensure that agreements/commitments with the GoL are legal and binding
- If needed, factor in time for staff recruitment
- Have a clear statement of who will ensure the project's sustainability, and why it will be sustainable; consider what factors will ensure its sustainability

At implementation

- Ensure availability of project staff and reduce turnover of GoL counterpart staff
- Ensure availability and full tenure of foreign expert staff
- Ensure or build capacity and skill sets of local staff and of local institutions (Chiefs, Councils, etc.)
- Ensure community participation from the planning stage
- Build-in flexibility and ensure continuous review and revision
- Use local experts and NGOs
- Ensure learning and research, and record experiences

Post project

- Timely commencement of M&E, and regular application Use a simple M&E framework
- Ensure continuous review and recording as part of M&E.
- Use a standardised evaluation framework to ensure comparability of results

Finally, a vital issue for Lesotho's natural resource and Integrated Catchment Management is establishing a permanent authority to develop a long-term programme that donors and other entities can support, as opposed to piecemeal, short-term projects. This will help avoid the situation where a five-year project is initiated and makes an impact which dissipates at the end of its term. It will also prevent the problem of constant policy changes as new projects are started, and donors call for changes that they feel will suit the project they are funding. It was noted that donors often approach a project with their own philosophy and views on natural resource management policy.

Overall recommendations to ReNOKA

This review shows that project performance is dependent on the context which exists at a given point in time. This means that what is considered a failure or success may not necessarily be replicable in a different context. The impression we have from this study is that ReNOKA must be flexible in order to be able to address circumstances likely to affect the project performance. It is clear that circumstances that affect projects are located at different stages in a project's lifecycle. Therefore, it is necessary for ReNOKA and future projects to review all stages/phases of projects to ensure the early identification of potential pitfalls.

Knowledge management is key in informing project performance. ReNOKA, by asking us to undertake this study, has initiated a knowledge management system whereby we have managed to locate relevant documents, and are able to advise on how they can be located for further reference. We recommend that the tools used for this study should be used by ReNOKA, and future projects.

reNOKA
We are a river

ReNOKA ('we are a river') is a national programme and citizen movement for the restoration of land and water in Lesotho and the Orange-Senqu River Basin. Support for ReNOKA is provided through a partnership between the Government of Lesotho, the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The EU and BMZ contributions are implemented through a technical assistance project "Support to Integrated Catchment Management in Lesotho" by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

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reNOKA
We are a river

Meta-Review: Interventions for Sustainable Natural Resource Management in Lesotho, 1970-2020

Research brief

May 2022, Maseru

Overview

The Government of Lesotho, with support of international partners, has embarked on an ambitious national programme for Integrated Catchment Management. Its aim is to rehabilitate degraded watersheds across the country and to put in place prevention measures that will halt the further degradation of Lesotho's catchment areas. The program is known as ReNOKA "we are a river". ReNOKA represents a network of individuals, communities and professionals that are stronger together, fluid and growing, dedicated to the restoration of water, land, and the long-term prosperity of all communities. The vision is that livelihoods and economic development for today's and for future generations are improved through the conservation of biodiversity, land, and water resources in the catchment areas of the rivers in Lesotho. This will benefit the country, Orange-Senqu River Basin and the entire southern African region.

Study objectives

To provide an overview and analysis of the main interventions on sustainable natural resource management in Lesotho carried out by the GoL and its international partners between 1970 and 2020.

The information resulting from this review can support the aims and objectives of ReNOKA in line with climate change adaptation principles.

Specific questions addressed by the study are summarised as follows:

- What are the sources of success or failure in the projects implemented during the time under review?
- What lessons were learned that can be used to improve the performance of the ReNOKA movement?
- What are the identified constraints that must be avoided to enable the sustainability of interventions introduced by the movement?
- Is there documentation available to enable the sharing of knowledge and experience of successful interventions at the community level?
- What have the significant barriers and constraints been in upscaling successful practices identified?

Key findings

- There is an extensive body of information on lessons learned and recommendations made available from past projects. Still, it has not been systematically analysed in a manner that can be useful for new projects.
- Although most projects reviewed noted lessons learned and recommendations from preceding projects, there is no evidence of their application in subsequent projects.
- A failure in natural resource management (NRM) has been the underutilidation of individuals and institutions which have demonstrated success in field, and have proven success with agricultural improvement initiatives by the GoL and its cooperating partners in Lesotho.
- There are several success stories in the NRM sector that, in some cases by design, have been largely ignored. In other cases, efforts have been made to frustrate their efforts. Chief among these are the Machobane Farming System, which is the most climate-smart agricultural system, and the Bethel Business Community Development Center's permaculture-focused soil and water conservation programme, which is the most appropriate approach for the arid areas of Lesotho.
- The literature reviewed has many examples of successful NRM initiatives by individuals and independent institutions in most parts of the country that should be applied by new donor-funded projects.

Bases for projects success (international experience)

- **The time frame** - A period longer than ten years
- **Farmer involvement** - Farmers were fully involved in both planning and implementation, and every effort was made to meet the individual capabilities of different farmers
- **The approach to cost-sharing** - The work was divided into productive and non-productive elements, coupled with simple systems of subsidies
- **Assured funding** - The availability of a realistic annual sum for ten years, to enable the implementation of long-term plans
- **Technology** - Introduction of new technology must be suitable for the context and should be locally tested
- **Admin** -
  - Appropriate project organisation, administration, and staffing
  - Simple, straightforward system of command and communications established
  - Staff responsibilities clearly defined, ensuring workload does not exceed capacityGeneral specializsd technical staff within appropriate fields are appointed
  - Low levels staff movements during the life of the project

"A vital issue for Lesotho's natural resources and ICM is establishing a permanent authority to develop a long-term programme that donors and other entities can support, as opposed to piecemeal, short-term projects"

Requirements for project success (Lesotho experience)

- Adoption of conservation practices appears to depend at least as much on socio-economic factors as on the physical effectiveness of the practices
- Farmers and other land users need to be involved from the start in planning conservation schemes. - the involvement must be genuine, the farmers must understand what is possible, and must be involved in consultations and the negotiation of agreements
- Farmers will only adopt and continue to utilise conservation methods if they can see some direct benefit in doing so
- Land tenure systems have a bearing on which conservation practices, if any, land users will accept. For example, stopping stubble grazing after harvest will not be universally adopted in Lesotho
- Soil conservation practices and techniques advocated for must be practical and appropriate to local conditions
- Implementing soil conservation programmes can be costly in time and labour. Therefore, a combination of incentives, subsidies, and disincentives is required
- Experience indicates that soil and water conservation interventions are successful only in those cases where governments are committed to seeing long-term programmes through to conclusion

Conclusions

Results of an extensive review of lessons learned and recommendations made from project documents and independent reviews show that for projects to succeed, attention needs to be focused on three key aspects, namely project design and appraisal, project implementation, and the context applicable on the ground. Key issues to address at the design phase include:

- The tendency to underplay the coordination problems of the various ministries involved in project implementation
- Baseless assumptions that are not backed up by robust data; this is often attributed to the lack of availability of data from baseline studies and other credible sources
- Setting of overly ambitious/optimistic targets, particularly relating to the rates of adoption and the rate at which progress will be made
- Overly complex designs make implementation and monitoring problematic
- Underestimation of the time it will take for the project to commence, even working efficiently and effectively
- A short project period/duration does not allow the momentum of project achievements to be sustained
- The assumption is that the GoL will provide skilled counterpart staff

Projects are designed by external experts who import ideas from other places and contexts, assuming they will be easily replicable in Lesotho. In terms of implementation, some key issues to address include, among others:

- Delays in the deployment of the local and international staff seems to be one of the main issues that negatively impact project performance
- It is not possible to always find a local team with the requisite skill levels
- It is also necessary that the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) develop a system where staff have a clear delegation of authority, and are accountable for their actions to allow them to make decisions timeously without going back to the PIU for authorisation
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be made part and parcel of implementation, and should start simultaneously at the stage of project commencement
- There is a need to develop project evaluation frameworks that have a minimum set of standards that all stakeholders should use to ensure uniformity in evaluations, which allows for comparability