

Note on the results of the 3d workshop on capacity building for NGO's in Mauretania

Nouakchott, 11-14 April 2011



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Preface

Some 15 NGO's in Mauretania are in a process to get themselves organized to increase their capacities and influence in the vast area of Marine and Coastal resource management. The sea is a vital source of income, food and livelihood for the local population and the NGOs find themselves being part of an international force field that is involved in the exploitation of the marine riches. Simultaneously (inter)national stakeholders begin to see the importance of NGO's and civil society at large for the development effective and fair resource management systems.

In this setting, in summer 2009 WWF Wamer and WUR took the initiative to investigate with Mauritanian NGO's the possibilities to increase their capacity to influence the management of Marine and Coastal resources. A first workshop to identify obstacles and domains of co-operation was held in October 2009. A second workshop, in April 2010, yielded a first sketch of a capacity building program and key domains of co-operation. One year later, the third workshop was planned, with the idea to sharpen the ambitions of the co-operation in four key areas, and test a possible support with the donor community.

The agenda of the workshop was as follows:

Day 1:

1. Validate the capacity building performance grid (echelle)
2. Establish capacity ambitions, i.e. actual and future levels of the grid
3. Develop detailed capacity building program

Day 2:

4. Simulation of negotiation of fisheries agreement
5. Establish the focus for co-operation in the field
6. Discuss ambition levels: what do we want to achieve together?

Day 3:

7. Discuss co-operation mechanisms and budgeting rules
8. Formulate the messages for possible partners
9. Present the messages to external partners and funding agencies
10. Define next session and intermediary activities

The program was done in such a way that the NGO's would present their plan to potential external partners and funding agencies. The proof is in the pudding, so they would know immediately whether their messages had come across. Well, they did: potential external partners are quite interested to co-operate.

Below, I will briefly review the outcomes of the session, and reflect on its significance for the co-operation process the NGO's are in.

Charles de Monchy
Amsterdam, 22nd of April 2011

1. Validate the capacity building performance grid (echelle)

Content: the performance grid.

The performance grid was prepared ahead of time by the steering group, and discussed on Monday previous to the workshop. It provides a quite detailed overview of the performance levels in each of the capacity building areas, being:

1. Good relations with government (lobbying)
2. Prepare projects that are approved (planning, monitoring and evaluation)
3. Transparent resource management
4. Good relations with donors
5. Required expertise is available to all NGO's

The group validated the proposed sub criteria and corresponding performance levels, but they missed the discipline of interaction with constituency and target group. It was agreed to include this 6th discipline in a later stage in the final work program.

Having a set of 52 performance levels – 3 for each of the fourteen criteria – is a useful tool to plan ambitions and keep track of progress. It provides the basic tool for self – and peer assessment of NGO's.

In addition, I must say that the requirements for levels are REALLY tough: I guess that most of the organizations I ever worked for would score close to or below the BASIC level. For instance, an advanced score in the management control is only for those organizations that have linked their planning system to monitoring practice, *and* can demonstrate applied lessons from evaluations. Those are the 'happy few'.

2. Establish ambitions i.e. actual and future levels of capacities

The auto assessment grid filled in...



Each organization assessed its present level (orange card) and its ambition for four years (green card) for each of the 14 sub criteria. It yielded an overview of the diversity of the capacities of the organizations, and a detailed overview on who can be leading on what subject. This information was used to compose the working groups for the next step.

It was interesting to note 15 organizations doing a self assessment using a grid they had helped to develop themselves. There was little doubt about who belonged where, it was obvious people knew exactly what they were doing. Maybe some are a bit ambitious, because they may not realize how much effort it takes from an organization to improve one level and then *stay* there. We talked about this, but still I sensed determination. In the discussion later it was suggested that they would do a peer review regularly (each year) to check progress and reality.

3. Develop a detailed capacity program

Overview of the NGO 'School of Management'



We split up in five groups, and based on the sub criteria for performance participants decided which co-operation activities should be done so as to develop the required ambition levels.

The groups made a distinction between internal capacity building, i.e. exchange of expertise inside the Platform, and the exchange of expertise with parties outside the Platform.

I think this time the group defined its expertise development in quite concrete terms, so it became clear what courses would have to be organized, and what external partners still need to be sought.

In fact, it is nothing less than a management institute from and for NGO's.

4. Simulation of negotiation of fisheries agreement

The simulation game was one of the more exciting sessions of the workshop. Two delegations, one from Mauritania and one from EU parties, were composed, each party with its own briefing concerning position and interest.

The Mauritanian delegation was led by an experienced hand who had attended many negotiations as an advisor to the minister, and he gave valuable explanations on how the game is played in reality.

Significance:

It is my impression that the exercise helped participants to see focus on the way influence is being exercised, and where NGO's could play a role. In the reflection, the vital role of the relation with government became quite clear.

5. Establish the focus for co-operation in the field

With the game in mind, we asked participants to take another look at the co-operation activities that were already defined in the last workshop, and concentrate especially on the activities that NGO should do *together* to gain more influence. It was interesting to note that there were quite some differences between the three groups.

For the group working on the conventions, it was a straightforward exercise. They had clearly in mind what needs to be done to bring the conventions onto the table, and it was not difficult to figure out what needs to be done together to monitor conventions and advocate results.

The environmental groups became clear that they have to develop common approaches towards awareness creation of target groups and lobbying, and develop common priorities to protect certain areas.

The group working on the value chain had more difficulties to identify actions that can only be done by the Platform, and not by one or more of the partners. We noticed during the discussions - both in the subgroup as in the plenary - that each proposed action in the value chain has a close relation with the economic interests of at least one of the participating groups. And there may even be opposing or non parallel interests at play.

For instance, one NGO proposed to promote subsidized gasoline for all small scale fishermen ('equal access to the resource') but this generated a difficult question whether or not the Platform was there to promote the interest of some member groups. Finally, the group concluded that the Platform could investigate the issues at stake, but leave defending interests to individual NGO's. In the future, it will be quite a challenge for the Platform to gain a role in this important play.

6. Discuss ambition levels: what do we want to achieve together?

We spend quite some time discussing what we want to achieve together on the field in four years time. Again, the discussion was: is the Platform a kind of clearing house for projects that are done by NGO's, or is there an added value to co-operation.

In the end, we settled for the following ambitions:

Value Chain:

The Platform will introduce measures (policy and/or management) that have a noticeable impact on

- Managed transformation sites for fish
- Professionalization of traders (Mareyeurs)
- Eco-labeling of fish products

Coastal management:

After 4 years, an increased awareness on the added value of coastal environmental management has been translated in practical protection measures along the coast of Mauritania.

Conventions:

After 4 years, all parties concerned by the conventions on fisheries and environment are informed on how and to what degree they are being implemented.

7. Discuss co-operation mechanisms and budgeting rules

All the co-operation activities need to be financed in one way or another, and it is clear that some external contribution will be needed in the coming years.

That poses the question on what kind of activities are liable for external funding, what internal funds will be raised and how are the accounts between contributors and beneficiaries of capacity building activities going to be settled.

As an example, we budgeted a capacity building activity, and it became clear that the following rules were needed:

Collaboration rules are needed for the following questions:

1. What work is eligible to be paid for by the Platform, and what costs can be charged when implementing capacity building activities?
2. How much will be the Membership quote, and how (if at all) will it depend from the size of the NGO?
3. Will there be any contributions required in return for the capacity building activities, or will it always be free of charge?
4. How can members contribute (in kind by the members), and how will the accounts be kept?
5. How is the external funding being used (to pay for what) and how will this evolve if the internal income of the Platform increases?

It was hoped that the rules will be made in such a way that allows the Platform to build up some funds of its own in the coming period.

8. Formulate the messages for possible partners

When we aligned the messages that the different groups were to give to the audience in the afternoon, an interesting debate was released concerning the role of NGO's (or Civil Society at large) in public affairs.

It was agreed that the role of the Platform would be to enable NGO's translate the high level 'policy' of the Government into practical, and workable 'measures' concerning resource management to the benefit of the people. The concept of 'catalyst' was mentioned, which implies that the Platform of NGO's can stimulate and speed-up developments that otherwise would take much more time to conclude.

The discussion raised several fundamental questions, like "Who manages the natural resources in this country?" A response was that the State, Civil Society and companies, and Civilians are the main levels for the players in the field. This yielded another – more fundamental – question: "What is Civil Society?" We pondered a little bit on that one, but we did not have the time to treat the subject properly. The presentations had to be cleared before arrival of the guests that afternoon. But it was great fun to align the messages.

Thus charged, the four groups prepared their presentation for the potential partners. It was a proper fine tuning exercise, which worked out quite well in the end.

9. Present the messages to the partners

In the afternoon, WWF (in the person of Mohamed) had invited key persons from institutions like World Bank, IMF, EU, CPM, Cooperacion Espanola, GTZ, and more. They all came, and were entertained in a setting called World Café, each group giving a 10 min. presentation and subsequent discussion. The subjects were Value Chain Management, Coastal Environmental management, Monitoring of the Conventions and the NGO 'School of Management'.

The environment group in action



Mohamed explaining the 'NGO School of Management'



Reactions from external partners were positive: The all declared to be interested to co-operate in the future. One representative was reported to say he was pleasantly surprised by the focus of NGO's on influencing the resource management system, translating policy into positive practice. "I expected the usual explanations about single NGO projects. This is really different and more interesting."

I think NGO's have made their point, and presented an idea that was appealing to partners.

10. Define next session and intermediary activities

Before we embarked on the last actions, Mohamed gave a wonderful presentation of the Co-fish (Co-Peche) website, explaining why this will be a great help for the Platform in the future. Many NGO's declared on the spot that they wanted to be linked up. We decided to take Co-fish up in the program proposal.

The following actions were agreed to take place before September this year, when our next meeting will take place.

Subject: validation of the proposal.

Action		
1 Formulate the rules of co-operation	Ibra Wane, Mme Kattoum, M. Ahmed	15 of May
2 Prepare the draft proposal	Petra, Mohamed	?
3. Operationalise the budgets	2 Reps from all 4 groups	?
4. Organise a budgeting course	Ibra Wane and 4 groups	June 2011
5. Propose the juridical form and governance model for the Platform	Contact group (M. Kane, I. Wane, Mme Kattoum, Mohamed Taleb	July 2011
6. Organise the Co-Peche group	Mohamed	June 2011