

Background

The goal of the Latin America Development Programme 2004-2009 is “to contribute to the elimination of poverty in Latin America , in particularly in rural areas and amongst indigenous people”. It has three objectives, with emphasis on Millennium Development Goal 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger):

- to build capacity of communities or development focused institutions to foster sustainable rural livelihoods and/or good governance (development impact)
- to build partnerships that will foster sustainable rural livelihoods and/or good governance (engagement)
- to build the New Zealand Agency for International Development's (NZAID) capacity to make an effective contribution to the elimination of poverty in Latin America (capability building).

The Programme has a geographic focus on three sub-regions (Central America, Andes, Southern Cone plus Brazil) and two thematic priorities; sustainable rural livelihoods and good governance. It emphasises indigenous peoples and cross-cutting issues (human rights, gender, and environment). There are five delivery mechanisms: multilateral projects, non-governmental organisation partnerships, partnerships for sustainable development, inputs to policy development and short term training awards.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the mid-term review was to assess progress in implementing the Programme and identify lessons and opportunities for improving it during its final two years as well as highlight lessons for other NZAID regional /non bilateral programmes.

The objectives of the review were to:

- assess the extent to which the Programme is on track towards achieving its goal and development objectives
- assess the extent to which NZAID is on track towards meeting the Programme's engagement objective and associated outcomes
- assess the extent to which NZAID and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade have the capability to manage the programme effectively through to 2009-2010
- assess the extent to which the Programme has been managed in a way that is consistent with strategic operating principles
- make any recommendations for improving outcomes/performance measures, engagement, capability and programme implementation and management over remaining years of the programme.

Main Findings

Development Outcomes and Alignment to Programme Goal and Objectives

The review found that in almost all cases the programmes, activities and modalities were in line with the Programme strategy. In most cases activities and programmes were focused in the three sub-regions identified in countries with a low Human Development Index or with poor communities (remote areas or indigenous populations) in more developed countries. Almost all activities and projects were in the areas of sustainable rural livelihoods area and

good governance with the only exceptions being a few scholarships. All five delivery mechanisms were utilised in implementing the programme. Expenditure over the four years (2004-05 to 2007-08) had totalled approximately NZ\$20million and had been spent on eleven main programmes, three World Food Programme activities and 80 scholarships.

The review found that it was too soon to comment in detail on development outcomes but preliminary information suggested that all programmes positive development outcomes were being achieved. It also indicated that cross-cutting issues (gender, human rights and the environment) had been well addressed in all programmes through the proposal development process and use of monitoring and evaluation plans.

In the area of scholarships the review found that of the 80 awards, 59 students came from the Southern Cone countries and a further eight from Mexico. Thirty awards were for subjects that could be categorized as good governance and 48 for sustainable rural livelihoods. The other two were for public health. It concluded that English language requirements acted as a filter which eliminated many potential candidates from poorer (and indigenous) communities.

Engagement

The review found that there was a good fit between the strategy, programmes and partner perceptions of what was relevant to their work. The regional focus of the programme was also appreciated. While the design/proposal development stage was often drawn out, and at times frustrating, partners nevertheless appreciated NZAID's approach to partnership (open and respectful). It was felt that greater engagement over time would help build trust and an understanding of the needs and realities of each partner.

Management

Developing the programme has involved a number of NZAID staff, primarily the Programme Manager, and overseas Posts, New Zealand organisations and their partners in Latin America. Feedback on reports (often detailed) was appreciated by partners. The review found that in-country expertise had also been used appropriately and that there was potential for their greater involvement in future. There were some issues around processes in NZAID where funding was delayed because of requirements for changes to work-plans and contracts or requests for further information to that provided in reports. It also found that monitoring and evaluation were strong in the programmes but needed to be improved in relation to scholarships, Short Term Training Awards and Head of Mission Funds.

Key Issues and Learning for NZAID

An important issue that was identified in the review was that a coherent programme can be developed from a clear strategy. However implementation requires time, resources and clarity of processes and expectations. Many of the programmes took time to get off the ground which was in part due to partners not being clear on what was required by NZAID, and NZAID not having the local contacts or knowledge to trust or interpret information. Both these issues should be addressed in time as long as sufficient resources are applied to programme management.

One area of concern identified was “slow and inflexible” administrative systems in NZAID that adversely affected some projects. A number of recommendations were made to address these issues while maintaining the integrity of systems.

Perhaps the main lesson for NZAID from the review was that a thorough planning process, use of planning tools, and the development of monitoring and evaluation plans and indicators had contributed greatly to the majority of programmes being on target to achieve planned outputs and outcomes. While plans evolved to respond to the realities of programme contexts, as is to be expected, good planning had enabled such analysis to be done and relevant changes to be made.

Follow-up

The review made seven recommendations all of which NZAID agreed with and is acting on. In particular NZAID will:

- focus future funding in Central America and the Andes
- not hold any further rounds of its Latin America Development Assistance Facility
- further review the Scholarships programme to ensure that opportunities are provided to students who lack access to higher education due to impoverished circumstances.

It noted that a very successful ‘Learning Mission’ was recently hosted by NZAID with its New Zealand non-governmental organisations and their Nicaraguan non-governmental organisation partners, and that NZAID was scoping a second Learning Mission for partners in the Andes. NZAID also indicated that it would make a number of modifications to its current delivery mechanisms, and improve its own capability to operate effectively in the region.

To request a copy of the full report email aidevaluation@mfat.govt.nz and quote the reference number - Eva0811.