

The Environmental lens project

- final report



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Introduction

The Environmental lens project has allowed people and organizations to come together! The project is a collaborative effort, where ten Swedish organizations have carried out more than 20 workshops with 350 people from 50 organizations. In this meeting space the Environmental lens has spurred discussions between grassroots organizations, unions, development organizations, businesses and governments. Of those participating in a workshop, an estimated 75% has applied the Environmental lens, changing and improving projects and programs. Through the usage and the feedback the simplicity and usability of the Environmental lens has evolved. And many organizations are now using it as THE tool for environmental mainstreaming – having integrated the tool into their PME-handbooks and by continuously arranging workshops.

Moreover, the Environmental lens in itself brings people together. It is not possible to apply it alone in front of your computer, adding an environmental paragraph into the project proposal just before the deadline is due. Instead the tool invites you to have in-depth discussions with relevant stakeholders. And with the right mix of people innovative new ideas are created. This is both the strength of the tool and its weakness. The Environmental lens is simple, but effort has to be put into making those discussions work, it is not designed to tick off another mainstreaming area from the to-do list. Thus, the future of the tool depends on dedicated people willing to invest the time and energy needed to apply the tool. The reward? Improved projects and programs that are adapted to the environment and climate change.



How it all started

Climate change and environment is increasingly on the agenda and a priority within the Swedish development cooperation. However, in practice little effort has been put into mainstreaming environment into relevant projects and programs. One of the key challenges has been the difficulty to find relevant tools and methods. There are only a few, if any, easy and accessible tools that non-environmental expert can use to integrate environment issues effectively. Tried approaches such as checklists and environmental policies have generally failed to improve the work.

Consequently some devoted staff within Swedish development organizations asked themselves; “how can it be simple for our colleagues to integrate the environment into project and programs?” To solve this and other related questions CSO’s started to increasingly cooperate. The process was supported by the Sida Partnership Forum through the arrangement of international climate and justice conferences for CSO’s and other actors, as well as through build-up support of a network for organizations aiming to integrate environmental issues. As a result, an “Environmental Integration Network” made up by CSO’s met regularly from 2009.

In 2010, inspired by the discussions within the CSO’s, Diakonia undertook a process to integrate the environment. Diakonia started out by identifying available tools but soon realized that two issues were lacking from making those tools effective. First, the available tools were not simple and hence in practice useless for stressed non-environmental experts. Second, most tools were not focusing on improving the work but only to understand existing connections. To address these gaps, Diakonia developed a rough draft of the Environmental lens in consultations with its partners.

When presented with the tool and a project proposal, the Sida Partnership Forum saw the potential of a cooperation and pushed Diakonia to include a range of organizations, not only CSO’s. This inclusive approach came to form one of the central approaches of the project. Two key organizations joined the process at an early stage; the Swedish cooperative centre and Forum Syd. The Swedish cooperative centre was instrumental in the early development of the Environmental lens, as they brought a lot of experiences from their own mainstreaming process. Forum Syd contributed with their expertise on a rights-based approach and facilitation, as well as their wide network. Together with Olof Palme International Center, The Swedish Organisation for Individual Relief (IM), Shia, Africa groups of Sweden, LO-TCO Secretariat of International Trade Union Development Co-operation, Swedish Mission Council and PMU the project was formed in early 2011. ICLD, the municipal partnership programme, also came onboard early and Sida’s Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change has been supporting the project continuously from its early days.

The project approach

The Environmental lens project was carried out in cooperation between ten Swedish development organizations during 2011 and 2012. The Sida Partnership Forum financially supported the project. The project was directed by a steering committee made up by representatives from the participating organizations, while Diakonia was the leading partner and responsible for the project management. The Environmental lens and the workshop materials were developed jointly by Diakonia, Forum Syd, and the Swedish Cooperative Center.

The project had a two-pronged approach. Number one: teach the Environmental lens to different actors within the Swedish development cooperation, so that they can apply the tool practically in their work. Number two: develop the tool through their feedback. Both approaches were carried out simultaneously, which allowed the project to progressively improve the usability of the tool and at the same time, early in the process, contribute to more sustainable projects and programs. A webpage was set-up to provide stakeholders with information about the project and the latest versions of the tool.

An additional strength of the project was the focus on partners and the cooperating countries. Environmental lens workshops were carried out in Cambodia, Tanzania, Kenya, Bolivia, Bangladesh, Lithuania, Jordan, Zambia and Burkina Faso. The diversity of the participating organizations was wide; including local grassroots organizations, unions, municipalities and companies. This made it possible to adapt the tool to different types of organizations. A fictive country and four different cases were developed, which provided a uniform learning environment for the participants. A rights-based approach and gender perspectives were included in the training material.

To ensure a remaining impact of the Environmental lens, all participating Swedish organizations were encouraged to integrate the lens into their respective PME-systems. The project gave each organization technical support through in-depth discussion on how to achieve this. The project also facilitated information exchanges between the organizations on how to apply the Environmental lens.



The project results

The overall target of the project was; “The Environmental lens is proactively used in programs and projects within the Swedish development cooperation and contributes to more sustainable projects and programs.” The following table summarizes the result of the project; the left column is an account of the proposed activities/outcomes/impacts, while the right column is an account on what was actually achieved.

Planned Activities	Actual Activities
7 workshops	20 Workshops in 10 different countries, most of them 2 days each.
1 Environmental lens	1 Environmental lens in English, French and Spanish.
1 Webpage	All material related to the project is freely available on www.environmentallens.org
1 Final conference	Instead of a Final conference, a 3-day Training of Trainer workshop was carried out.

Expected Outcomes	Actual Outcomes
50% of the workshop participants implement a concrete change in their projects and programs as a result of participating in an Environmental lens workshop.	75% of the workshop participants have used the Environmental lens in a way that it contributed to a concrete change in a project or program. This was measured on the 6 originally planned workshops abroad.

Expected Impacts	Actual Impacts
The Environmental lens is used by 6 of the participating organizations and by 2 partner organizations, and contributes to concrete and ongoing changes.	More than 6 of the participating organizations and 2 partners have integrated the Environmental lens into their PME-systems and/or are continuously arranging Environmental lens workshops, resulting in changed projects and programs.

Activities:

Around 20 workshops have been carried out as a part of the Environmental lens project, much more than the planned 7 workshops. Approximately 350 persons have participated in these workshops, representing over 50 different organizations. About half of the workshops have been 2-day workshops outside of Sweden. In those mostly CSO' and their partner organizations participated, but also other types of organizations including H&M, KappAhl, International

council of Swedish Industry, Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change, Swedish Civil Contingency Agency, and ICLD. The other workshops have often been shorter, tailored for a specific organization.

Instead of the final conference a 3-day "training of trainer" workshop in Sweden was arranged at the Sida Partnership Forum. The project also arranged information exchanges on the integration of the Environmental lens, and gave tailored advices on how to integrate it into PME-systems.

The original English version of the Environmental lens was translated into Spanish and French. A webpage, the www.environmentallens.org, was set-up to communicate the results and to provide updated versions of the Environmental lens to interested organizations. Until today the webpage have had 890 unique visitors, which on average spent 4 minutes on the site, adding up to over 4000 pages views. The Environmental lens was also spread to other organization by active communication work.

1 Environmental lens. Workshops in 10 countries. 50 participating organizations. 890 unique visitors on the webpage. 350 workshop participants. 20 workshops directly arranged by the project.

Outcomes:

The outcome target was that half of the workshop participants should implement a concrete change in their projects and programs as a result of the workshop. Each participant from the originally planned workshops (Bangladesh, Kenya, Jordan, Zambia, Cambodia and Bolivia) was asked to fill in a form at the end of the workshop on how they planned to use the Environmental lens. After around 6 months this was followed up through e-mail. 75% of the participants had used the Environmental lens in a way that it contributed to a concrete change in a project or program.

A result of working with the Environment Lens in Kenya is the establishment of a "green" resource center in Ihanda. The resource center serves a whole community at a district level but also people from outside of the district, reports Forum Syd in Kenya.

For the Swallows partner Shidhulai in Bangladesh, the Environmental Lens has given their staff new possibility to work closer and more participatory with the issues concerning climate justice and rights. The experience of working with the Environmental Lens has strengthened and improved the right based approach work in Shidhulai and their forming of human rights associations.

The Palestinian International Business Forum used the Environmental lens to adopt an environmental policy. Actions planned are e.g. environmental friendly production of milk packages, and increasing conscious consumption of

Palestinian enterprises' goods or services in the local market, as an alternative to imported goods where possible.

Ton, an organization that works with child trafficking in Burkina Faso, clearly saw the linkages between the environment and their focus of work after they had performed the Environmental Lens analysis; the climate change results in droughts that forces children to leave their communities in order to improve their life situation which ends in child trafficking. The planned actions at Ton are several; awareness rising on the consequences of climate changes and possible livelihood alternatives such as using improved seeds.

Impacts:

The impact indicator of the project was “The Environmental lens is used by six of the participating organizations and by two partner organizations, and contributes to concrete and ongoing changes.” The result is that more than 6 of the participating organizations (for example Diakonia, Forum Syd, Swedish Cooperative Centre, The Swedish Organisation for Individual Relief, PMU and Swedish Mission Council) have integrated the Environmental lens into their PME-systems and/or are continuously arranging Environmental lens workshops.

The successes of Forum Syd's work with the Environmental Lens are several: 1) The Environmental Lens has been useful for the development of the policy regarding environment, 2) all country strategies will have an outcome level on “sustainable use of natural resources”, 3) the Environmental Lens and other tools that will be developed using the Environmental Lens have been and will be used further in developing programs in most country offices, 4) a strong understanding has been developed on how environmental issues are intertwined with right based work, gender and social accountability, and 5) today Forum Syd has the capacity to educate others in these topics.

Swedish Cooperative Centre is revising their PME guidebook. The Environmental Lens is a “model” method of the new edition. It will include an image, a summarized text and a request to use the tool. Today the Environmental Lens is incorporated in the planning processes of the programs and projects. The next step for SCC is to incorporate the Environmental Lens into the monitoring and evaluating part.

Also, more than two partners to Swedish organizations, for example the Transport Union in Uganda (partner to LO-TCO) and Shidhulai in Bangladesh (partner to the Swallows India-Bangladesh) are continuously using the Environmental lens.

The ATGWU truck driver union in Uganda has been working with the Environmental Lens for some time now and has reached both concrete change at the local level and promising ones on a regional and national level. After the Environmental Lens workshop the union launched an awareness raising campaign aimed to engage the truck drivers to take responsibility for the climate change. The Ministry of Transportation has acknowledged the campaign and is now adopting it in their own climate change campaign.

These and other examples (all available on www.environmentallens.org) show that there has been an increased capacity within the Swedish development cooperation to integrate the environment into projects and programs. The more in-depth impacts of the Environmental lens project may however be seen in a few years time. New organizations are continuously discovering the Environmental lens, sometimes without being in contact with anyone related to the project. This is an indication that the tool fills a gap, and that its current users recommends it to others. There are also signals that the Environmental lens has changed the way environmental mainstreaming is perceived, shifting the focus from checklists and environmental paragraphs towards in-depth discussions with relevant stakeholders.

“The Environmental Lens has increased the cooperation between organizations resulting in joint workshops, trainings, campaigns and advocacy work. And by the creative approach of the tool, new ideas are generated giving an extra dimension to a more classic Environmental Assessment. The Environmental Lens offers both a concrete tool and a network to guide Sida’s partner organizations to create more sustainable development programs and projects.” – Sida’s Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change

The Environmental lens

So what’s the fuss about?

The Environmental lens is a tool to integrate environmental/climate change issues into projects and programs. It consists of two different analyses. The first analysis corresponds to the question “Do we do things right?” It is a straightforward analysis of how a project/program impacts the environment and how the environment impacts the project/program. The result of that analysis will change approaches and practices. The second analysis answers the question “Do we do the right things?” This is an in-depth analysis of how to address the negative impacts on rights holders, the causes of environmental problems, and the lack of capacity of the rights holders. This analysis has the potential to change the strategic focus of the project/program. The Environmental lens is preferably used in the planning process.

“Overall, the Environmental Lens has in its simplicity given somewhat of a “wow” experience for us and our local partners, since the tool doesn’t demand lot of time for getting a handful of results. And it’s amazing that viewing the environment from two different perspectives gives us a *real* understanding of the impact that the environment has on our lives”. – Andreas Alexanderson, program coordinator at PMU

The Environmental lens is a type of Environmental Impact Assessment, however it focuses the efforts into a qualitative participatory process. It enables non-environmental experts to come together and discuss the connections between the environment and their projects/programs, through easy brainstorming exercises. From those discussions new ideas are developed. The related weakness is that the discussions need to be effectively facilitated for the process to work. Applying the brainstorming exercises correctly, allocating sufficient time, and putting together the right group demand an effort. Applying the Environmental lens will always be more time-consuming than just adding a non-committal paragraph on the environment in a project proposal. The scope is also wider than a classic Environmental Impact Assessment, as the environment’s impact on the project/program is analyzed. The tool is freely available on www.environmentallens.org

The Environmental Lens	Classic Environmental Impact Assessment
Considers the impact that the environment may have on the project, and turn these into opportunities.	Does not consider the impact that the Environment may have on the project.
Is carried out with all stakeholders thus enabling them to follow the process from start to completion.	Is carried out by EIA experts who deliver their report to the government and to the project implementers.
Analysis from the Uganda Crane Creameries Cooperative Union in Uganda	

Lessons learned

The Environmental lens project has showcased that interesting ideas are discovered when people come together and discuss. A tool should facilitate and structure discussions in a smart way, not deliver ready-made answers. This increases the possibility that the findings are integrated into projects and programs, as people are more committed to use their own ideas. The focus on discussions and the practical brainstorming exercises may also prove valuable for other methodologies. An interesting new project would be to use the Environmental lens methodology on other mainstreaming areas.

The quality of the analysis mainly depends on the participants and the facilitator. The facilitator's role is to inclusively bring together the different ideas into one analysis. The analysis benefits from a diverse group of participants. If the group is too homogenous, or if the group lacks knowledge about the local conditions, the number of ideas will be fewer and less relevant. Ideally, several local stakeholders and the rights-holders (the target-group) should be engaged in the workshop analysis to ensure a rights-based perspective.

The Environmental lens is only the initial step on the path towards more sustainable projects and programs. It will give an increased knowledge and capacity, as well as new ideas for improvements. The next step is to establish some of the ideas. The success factors for that step are commitment at all levels – from the Swedish development organization to their local partners.

The road forward is to continue to arrange Environmental lens workshops. They should preferably be carried out with the same inclusive approach as demonstrated by the project, where several different organizations participated. Connected to this, another key intervention is to educate more facilitators to ensure that organizations themselves have the capacity to carry out workshops. Networks between organizations are also vital, to facilitate learning and explore synergies.

Also, there is potential to apply the Environmental lens on more arenas. One opportunity is to develop a multi-stakeholder methodology, where for example a wide range of actors could analyze a governmental plan. Another opportunity is to develop Environmental lens workshop material adapted to the community level, using a more visual language to convey the methodology. Several actors are already committed to work with these areas, to make the Environmental lens even more useful.

The reward? Discussions that improves your results. Download on www.environmentallens.org