



Report on Quality at Entry and Next Steps to Complete Design for the Mekong River Commission Integrated Capacity Building Programme (ICBP)

A: AidWorks details

Initiative Name:	Mekong River Commission Integrated Capacity Building Programme (ICBP)		
AidWorks ID:	INH730	Total Amount:	AUD 6 million
Start Date:	Mid 2009	End Date:	Mid 2011

B: Appraisal Peer Review meeting details *completed by Activity Manager*

Initial ratings prepared by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Graham Rady, AusAID ASIA Division Quality Advisor – Kirsty McMasters, AusAID Design and Procurement Management Group – Robyn Renneberg – Capacity Building expert (independent appraiser)
Meeting date:	– 24 April 2009
Chair:	– Phillippe Allen – Minister Counsellor, Bangkok
Peer reviewers providing formal comment & ratings:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Graham Rady – AusAID ASIA Division Quality Advisor – Kirsty McMasters - AusAID Design and Procurement Management Group – Robyn Renneberg – Capacity Building expert (independent appraiser)
Independent Appraiser:	– Robyn Renneberg – Capacity Building expert (independent appraiser)
Other peer review participants:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Simon Buckley, First Secretary, Vientiane Post – John Dore, Mekong Regional Water Advisor, Vientiane Post – Neal Forster - Quality Adviser, Mekong Desk – Graham Rady, AusAID ASIA Division Quality Advisor – Kirsty McMasters, Design and Procurement Advisor Group – Anne Joselin, Sustainable Development Group – Kenneth Harri, Program Officer, Mekong – Robyn Renneberg, Capacity Building expert – Amphavanh Sisouvanh, Program Officer, Vientiane Post – Kenneth Harri, Program Officer, Mekong Desk

C: Quality Rating Assessment against indicators

completed by Activity Manager / Peer Reviewers / Independent Appraiser

Quality	Rating (1-6) *	Comments to support rating	Required Action (if needed)
1. Clear objectives	4	<p>The Goal of the ICBP is long term and visionary. However, it is unlikely that it will be achieved over the four years of the programme. Rather, progress should be made <i>towards</i> achieving the goal. The wording of the goal unnecessarily includes how it will be achieved. There was agreement that the language needed to be tightened.</p> <p>The Objective implies a focus on individual human resource development rather than a broader change agenda. This should be reviewed to ensure an appropriate balance between human and institutional capacity building.</p> <p>The design provides a detailed description of the links between inputs, outputs and outcomes, but perhaps too much so. Over specification could result in a lack of flexibility and an inability to respond to emerging issues.</p> <p>The Outputs provide a good basis for documenting preliminary suggestions about the expected changes that might represent success.</p> <p>Considerable thought has gone into the Outputs required to achieve the desired change and this aspect appears to be strong.</p>	<p>Language in the goal and objective statements needs to be tightened to reflect the broader capacity building development agenda, focused both on both institutional and human capacity building.</p> <p>Consider reducing the level of detailed specification in the design.</p> <p>Reword outcome statements so that they more accurately reflect the desired results.</p> <p>Reword outcomes 1 and 2 so that they document the intended changes/ results/ outcomes and explain the work to be done.</p>

C: Quality Rating Assessment against indicators*completed by Activity Manager / Peer Reviewers / Independent Appraiser*

<p>2. Monitoring and Evaluation</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Despite some scope for improvement, considerable thought has gone into the M&E arrangements. The Design and Monitoring Framework (Annex 2) is strong.</p> <p>Good use has been made of qualitative indicators (which often are more appropriate when dealing with capacity building) and these are blended with sensible quantitative indicators.</p> <p>There was an acknowledgement that this type of activity will need much more than 'results information' about achievements to 'prove' performance. There is an appreciation in the design document of the need for information to improve performance, e.g., planning studies like annual needs assessments for individuals and organisations and learning arrangements like learning networks and case studies.</p> <p>A need for further elaboration and analysis of the budget to determine if the funding allocated for M&E was adequate. The main weakness was the lack of clarity on what exactly the budget was being spent on.</p> <p>It was also agreed that annual reporting was not adequate, and that more frequent reporting would be necessary and that six monthly reporting would be a minimum.</p> <p>The M&E framework provides a sound basis on which to track and measure progress. Some data sources and reporting will generate considerable work so should be used sparingly.</p> <p>Baselines are very important for assessing capacity building programmes. Using the <i>MRC Independent Organisational, Financial and Institutional Review (OR)</i> as a baseline for organisational development is sensible. There is also benefit in establishing a baseline for each individual as proposed. However, the resources required to do this will be considerable and should be used sparingly.</p> <p>Annual reporting to the Steering Committee is not adequate enough to allow it to fulfill its oversight role.</p> <p>The process for establishing the review and evaluation process is sound and should encourage buy-in from stakeholders.</p>	<p>Elaborate on what the current M&E budget will fund.</p> <p>Insist on six monthly reporting to enable AusAID to better monitor progress and the interaction with the 2 year Results Based Monitoring activity currently under implementation within the MRC (with AusAID and GTZ funding).</p> <p>Overall responsibility for the M&E function should be allocated to one of the senior staff of the ICBP team.</p>
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C: Quality Rating Assessment against indicators

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3. Sustainability

4

A rating of 4 is now suggested against this criteria given further work on the design by the MRC. **Initial rating of 3** was a result of other concerns by peer reviewers related to the:

- phrasing of Goals and Objective,
- individual verses institutional capacity building, and
- need to curtail the ambitiousness of the program.

Peer reviewers agreed the sustainability of the proposed program was difficult to assess from the data available.

It was also agreed that the most significant challenge for the ICBP will be to establish sustainable change in institutional capacity across the whole of the MRC - including MRC Secretariat, National Mekong Committees and Line Agencies - to enable the fulfilment of the MRC's mission efficiently and effectively.

The suggested time-frame for the activity was also questioned in terms of sustainability; arguably it will require a commitment over more than a decade to achieve the ICBP's Goals and Objective.

During implementation it would be useful to track relevant member country human resource development expenditure and retention of trained staff as an indication of likely sustainability.

The design should be amended to be more realistic about the extent of challenge involved and hence the long timeframe required to achieve sustainable change in institutional capacity across the whole of the MRC.

Development partners need to appreciate a decade plus commitment is required and so sustainable change against the current Programme Objective in 4 years is unrealistic.

The achievement of the ICBP programme Objective in 4 years is unrealistic and should be amended.

C: Quality Rating Assessment against indicators

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4. Implementation & Risk Management	4	<p>The main concern was the merit based selection issue for MRC Secretariat staff. It was recognised that this was a concern many development partners hold and that it was a very difficult one to resolve.</p> <p>The implementation and management model is relatively straightforward and includes all key stakeholders. Roles and responsibilities are specified and will be refined during the implementation planning. There are clear lines of accountability and a mechanism for resolving high level issues (the Steering Committee). It was agreed that at a minimum there needed to be a separation of implementation and management roles.</p> <p>The role of the ICBP Programme Coordinator will be critical in managing a very complex environment on a day to day basis and all members of the ICBP team will need strong skills in coordination and negotiation.</p> <p>The Steering Committee may be unwieldy given its large size. However, this is probably unavoidable given the range of stakeholders. It does mean that it will need proper secretariat support and an effective Chair. It was strongly agreed that the CEO should be chair of the ICBP Steering Committee.</p> <p>Implementation arrangements appear to be harmonized. However, there is some question about the integration of the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) Phase 3 program.</p> <p>Program risks are identified. <i>Implementation</i> risks that should be included are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – that the ICBP places too much attention on training course provision and training systems implementation at the expense of the more strategic aspects of the program – that the workload associated with the implementation is high; the programme might be unable to respond to emerging issues, and – there is much activity generated by the ICBP; recipient organisations and individuals might become overwhelmed (i.e. they might not have the absorptive capacity for ICBP activities). <p>The document indicates that ICBP needs US\$5.5 million (A\$7.5 million). However, AusAID has only plans to provide A\$6 million. This funding gap should be dealt with in the design document.</p> <p>Output 4.7 is closely related to the parallel initiative to establish a results-based monitoring (RBM) system within the MRC Secretariat. However, it is not clear what is being done through the ICBP and why support for only one year is required, when the RBM system will be rolled out over a number of years (2-3). This important work appears to be under-funded.</p> <p>Roles and responsibilities are adequately dealt with.</p>	<p>Revise the design document to reflect a separation between the strategic and implementing roles.</p> <p>Further work is needed on the MDBA proposal to ensure it is part of, rather than parallel to, the ICBP.</p> <p>An explanation of how the current funding gap will be dealt with should be included in the final draft of the design.</p> <p>The design should clarify what is being done under Output 4.7; an explanation as to why funding is not provided for in subsequent years for this important work on RBM.</p> <p>These and other already identified implementation risks should be outlined in the Risk Management Matrix.</p>
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C: Quality Rating Assessment against indicators

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5. Analysis and lessons	4	<p>The main concerns raised against this criteria relate to the articulation of the 'lessons learnt' in the ICBP design document.</p> <p>The draft ICBP design usefully outlines the history that has shaped the proposed design, including the work that has already been done to assist with the capacity development of the MRC and its partners. It confirms the MRC's mandate and the stakeholder commitment to, and alignment with, the ICBP.</p> <p>However, the lessons section is weak. It does describe lessons from the Independent Organisational, Financial and Institutional Review (OR), but it does not outline lessons learned from current and previous MRC activities.</p> <p>It was agreed that there needed to be further clarification that the ICBP was building on previous lessons learned with MRC programs over a sustained period. It was agreed this matter was mostly editorial, rather than substantive, and it could be addressed through some editing to the draft document.</p> <p>Peer reviewers agreed there should be lessons available on capacity building from the Junior Riparian Project (JRP), the training provided under the current phase of the ICBP and the MRC's Operating Expenses Budget, the Gender Mainstreaming Project experiences of the Strategic Liaison Partnership (SLP) between the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC), and the experiences of other MRC programs in recent years. These should be distilled and included in the ICBP design</p> <p>The analysis on pages 14 and 15 (and then again on 16 and 17) are very repetitive. Analysis on pages 14 and 15 should be written in terms of envisaged changes; text on 16 and 17 should be focus on what will be done/ delivered.</p> <p>Better integration of gender equality in the design based on assessment of current capacity/situation within the organisation would strengthen the quality of the analysis underpinning gender initiatives.</p>	<p>The section on 'lessons learnt' should be strengthened, with a focus on the critical insights generated by earlier MRC capacity building initiatives. This should be also link explicitly to an explanation of how these insights have informed the design of the new ICBP.</p> <p>Revise the analysis text on pages 14-17 and 16-17 to reduce the repetitive nature and to more clearly distinguish between these sections of the report.</p>
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* Definitions of the Rating Scale:

Satisfactory (4, 5 and 6)

- 6 Very high quality; needs ongoing management & monitoring only
- 5 Good quality; needs minor work to improve in some areas
- 4 Adequate quality; needs some work to improve

Less than satisfactory (1, 2 and 3)

- 3 Less than adequate quality; needs to be improved in core areas
- 2 Poor quality; needs major work to improve
- 1 Very poor quality; needs major overhaul

D: Next Steps completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the Appraisal Peer Review meeting

Provide information on all steps required to finalise the design based on <i>Required Actions</i> in "C" above, and additional actions identified in the peer review meeting	Who is responsible	Date to be done
1. Formal feedback was provided to MRC on the outcome of the QAE peer review; with a request to revise the document to improve key areas of the draft design before re-submission to AusAID.	Simon Buckley/ John Dore	29 April 2009
2. MRC re-submitted the final draft of ICBP design to AusAID; including a table that outlines how it has amended the draft design in light of AusAID feedback from the QAE peer review (see section E below for summary on improvements to final draft design)	MRC Secretariat/ ICBP Program Coordinator	15 May 2009
3. Final QAE report is submitted to QAE peer review Chair (Allen) for approval.	Simon Buckley/ Philippe Allen	20 May 2009

E: Other comments or issues *completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the APR meeting*

Attachment A to this QAE report is the revised ICBP design document submitted by the MRC on 15 May 2009. Attachment B is a matrix prepared by the MRC that outlines the revision made to the ICBP design following feedback from the QAE peer review.

Below is a summary of the substantive changes made in the final version; page references refer to changes in Attachment A.

Clarity of Objectives

- The wording of the Goal has been revised to more clearly reflect programme intentions with all reference to "how to" removed (p.18).
- The programme Objective has been reworded to better reflect the organizational level capacity development (p.18).
- Outcomes statements have been reworded (pp.18-19; Annex 2).
- The level of detail has been reduced specifically removing the annexes on the work-plan and the activities relating to each output.

Monitoring and evaluation

- The process for establishing individual capacity baselines is now further elaborated (pp.31-32).
- Six monthly reports will be provided.
- Overall responsibility for the M&E function has been allocated to one of the senior staff of the ICBP team: the ICBP Program Coordinator.
- US\$170,000 has been allocated for baseline preparation, mid-term review and final evaluation over the life of the program.
- Additional budget is allocated to the development of the overall Results-based M&E system for the MRC under Output 2.3; this now totals US\$460,000 over four years.
- The work on the results-based monitoring and evaluation system will be led by the Technical Coordination Unit. Training related budget will include the monitoring and evaluation of the associated activities and budget allocated to reporting will also include an allocation for M&E.

Sustainability

- The text on sustainability has been revised to reflect the extent of the challenge, the long timeframe required and to provide an indication of financial commitment from the national Governments (p.23).
- Other adjustments to the program goal and outcomes (mentioned under 'Clarity of Objectives') above work towards resolving problems associated with sustainability identified in the QAE peer review.

Implementation & Risk Management

- The separation between the strategic and implementing roles has been clarified in the design.
- The CEO will Chair the ICBP Steering Committee (p.26)
- The current funding gap is expected to be US\$ 1.3 million. During the first years of the programme, any shortfalls in the budget will be addressed through prioritisation of activities in parallel to exploring additional funding sources.
- Output 4.7 (RBM) has been re-allocated and is now within Output 2.3. The budget allocation (US\$460,000) consists of US\$250,000 for the development of the RBM system and an allocation of US\$70,000 for years 2-4 to cover the riparian component of the M&E specialists salary and a contribution towards the backstopping of the process implementation and monitoring of the operation.
- Additional text has been incorporated on p. 7, 11 and 21 to provide more detail on the MRC-Murray Darling Basin Authority Strategic Liaison Partnership. A joint MRC & MDBA review of the draft proposal is now incorporated to prioritise the scope of the work-plan and to ensure that the activities are integrated fully into the ICBP.
- A detailed risk management strategy has been included in the draft design; this addresses key risks detailed by QAE reviewers (Annex 4)

Analysis and Lessons

- The lessons learned section of Chapter 1 has been strengthened; additional text is included in Chapter 2 (p.12)
- The key lessons from the Mid Term Review of the MRC Gender Mainstreaming Project have been incorporated into the lessons learned section (p.8).
- Leadership and management capacity building have been given greater priority. Analysis on leadership and management from the Organisation Review has been introduced in Chapter 2 (p.12).
- Capacity building on leadership and management has been raised to be a specific Output under Outcome 2: "Leadership and Management competencies strengthened within MRC (Secretariat & Governance bodies) and NMCs."
- In relation to repetitive text on pp.14 -17 in first draft and related matters (identified above under 'Analysis and lessons'), these sections have been re-worked with a merging of sections 2.3 and 2.5 of the original design document.

F: Approval completed by ADG or Minister-Counsellor who chaired the peer review meeting

On the basis of the final agreed Quality Rating assessment (C) and Next Steps (D) above:

☒ **QAE REPORT IS APPROVED**, and authorization given to proceed to:

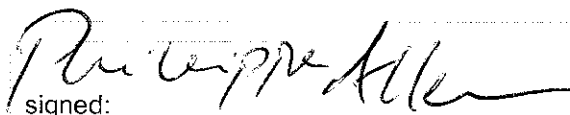
☒ **FINALISE** the design incorporating actions above, and proceed to implementation

or: ☐ **REDESIGN** and resubmit for appraisal peer review

☐ **NOT APPROVED** for the following reason(s):

Phillippe Allen, Minister
Counsellor, Bangkok

signed:



26/5/2009
< date >