Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on
Lake Bhopal Conservation and Management Project

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Impacts

Well functioning ecosystems are critical in livelihood support and poverty reduction. The overall impact of the Lake Bhopal Conservation and Management Project (LBCMP) could be rated as highly satisfactory, in terms of direct impact on stakeholders by way of improved; health and sanitation outcomes, quality of life, convenience, access to water - quantity and quality, employment and income and public awareness leading to international recognition. The project has also contributed in 'building blocks' in policy regime as evidenced by declaration of the Bhoj wetland as a Ramsar site, introduction of the ecosystems approach in wetland management, creating new institutional architecture for facilitation, coordination and management, reinforced decentralization and the principle of subsidiarity, improved environment, bio diversity and ecology. However, in terms of equity and inclusion, efforts are to be continued to maximize welfare outcomes on the marginal segments; viz; dhobis, fishermen and marginal farmers, in resettlement, and resource access- sharing and management. As ecosystem processes are often non linear and outcomes long term, the impact of the appropriateness of the sub-projects is to be monitored and analyzed. Overall, the project could be considered as an innovative best practice in environmental flows, integrating lake conservation into Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) and basin planning as the lake drains into Kaliasot River that finds its way to Yamuna (YAP). For sustainable impacts, institutional reengineering and strengthening, capacity building, awareness and analytical advocacy, adaptable and financially sustainable management practices including cost recovery, participatory environment management and catchments area programmes needs greater attention to supplement hardware- engineering solutions.

Sustainability

Policy sustainability which is country driven is the most significant contribution of LBCMP. Policy triggers for continued commitments of national and state governments in X and XI Five Year Development Plan (FYDP) towards wetland conservation and management, National Water Policy 2002, Madhya Pradesh Water Policy 2003 and the State of Environment reports of MP could all be traced back to a configuration of factors, including the pilot LBCMP. However, the sustainability concerns of the project outcomes are largely institutional and managerial. The institutional development dilemma -sewerage and water mandated for PRIs while the capacity lies with the PHED, the cleavage between de facto and dejure mandates, Lake Conservation Authority (LCA) with out adequate statutory status and resource base, weak regulatory and coordination mechanisms, poor financial sustainability, accountability and timely O&M and weak stakeholder participation are all to be addressed on a priority basis. Projects are one time interventions, where as institutionalized process elements make it sustainable. Dovetailing on going programme and investments (ADB, EPCO-DFID, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), XII Finance Commission award etc.) are critical for sustainable outcomes. Technical sustainability of project gains in incremental storage capacity and improved water quality could be achieved only through sustainable interventions in catchments, recognizing traditional knowledge and economic choices. Encouraging environment friendly agricultural practices and correction of market distortions are decisive. Effective M&E framework including process /social audit needs to be built in for on course correction and facilitate "learning by doing". Obviously, sustainable long term solutions hold the key, than 'not in my backyard' (NIMBY) interventions. The positive impact (policy, health, convenience, welfare) is to be sustained through improving overall water governance woven into the IWRM framework and to make "water everybody's business".