

CIVIL SOCIETY COMMENTS ON INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIC SECTOR

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“Hard” versus “soft” infrastructure

“Hard” infrastructure refers to the large physical networks necessary for the functioning of a modern industrial nation, whereas “soft” infrastructure refers to all the institutions which are required to maintain the economic, health, and cultural and social standards of a country, such as the financial system, the education system, the health care, the system of government, and law enforcement, as well as emergency services.

While we have witnessed significant allocations for the infrastructure sector: 1) overall lack of investments in organizational development, 2) lack of in-country knowledge management and 3) adequate planning and coordination with other sector has hindered the sustainability of these investments.

The complete disregard for environment and social impact assessments, the expected impacts of climate change projections (sea level rise, changes in rainfall) **and** the economic benefits of investments in natural resource management as a way to 1) reduce infrastructure maintenance costs and 2) reduce conflicts associated to land and access to natural resources **has hindered** the sustainability of these investments.

Worldwide investments in Climate Change has led to funding agencies presenting traditional infrastructure programs under the guise of climate adaptation. Examples of such is the use of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Funds which include Least Development Country Funds;

Partners have accessed funds on behalf of Timor-Leste’s but have failed to follow the priority ranking set forward under our National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA), which clearly states “food security” and not “climate proofing infrastructure” as priority investment for this multimillion dollar fund, **partners here are to blame.**

Healthy ecosystems and their associated ecosystem services provide the enabling conditions to sustained development of the sector. Degraded catchments influence road maintenance costs, irrigation maintenance costs, impact the way in which people produce and are linked to markets. Furthermore, a recent study by JICS has shown that Timor-Leste has the highest deforestation rate in Southeast Asia, this in fact influence water cycle and quality with subsequent impacts on the cost of infrastructure required for Timor-Leste to achieve MDGs related to access to water;

Recommendations

- That partners provide more support to practitioners mainly Government to enable them to learn from lessons learnt, review local context, acknowledge it, set forward and/or revise: 1) vision, 2) strategy and 3) develop the necessary organizational culture to enable implementation of projects and programs in an integrated fashion.
- Assign an organization to lead the process of facilitating information sharing and to support coordination across sectors as well as to build better interfaces between the State and citizens (either individually or through Civil Society organizations).
- Ensure that funds for Climate Change Adaptation are used in accordance to priorities set forward by the National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) which was one of the documents used to inform the Strategic Development Plan; Development partner should stop “cherry-picking” priorities based on what they think is important.
- Development partners ensure all infrastructure development according to international instruments framework and adapt to local context.
- All infrastructure development design and constructions must consider people with special needs in order to guarantee safety and accessibility of people with special needs.
- Development partners help the government, civil society and private sectors to obey all legal requirement on environmental policies, guidelines in all infrastructure development to ensure healthy environment and sustainability infrastructure.
- Provide support to organizations which can **build capacity of local NGOs and Community Based Organization (CBOs) to work creating some of the enabling conditions for sustainability of investments in infrastructure**. An example being natural resource management (reforestation, restoration, bioengineering, integrated coastal zone management, integrated catchment level management) and or support in **social accountability**