

**Management response to the
Tripartite External Evaluation of the
FAO GCP/VIE/029/ITA Project (IMOLA)
Hue, Vietnam**

Introduction

The project management acknowledges the assessment made by the Tripartite External Evaluation team of the GCP/VIE/029/ITA Project (IMOLA) and expresses appreciation for the quality and clarity of the TEE report. I herewith provide a management response to the main findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in the report: most of the recommendations are accepted; controversial issues that emerged during the report review process between the Organization and the GoV counterpart will be commented.

Overall management response to the evaluation. The general conclusions to which the Tripartite External Evaluation came to are shared by the FAO country office, in the way that the implementing Department of Fishery offered an overall modest assistance to the project, an erratic deployment of financial resources and facilities and lack of continuity of seconded personnel. On one hand these are structural difficulties that are inherent to any start-up phase of any field-implemented project; on the other hand, there was a good appreciation of the project achievements and support interventions at the level of the communities, in such a way that the lack of sense of ownership demonstrated by at least part of the top management was compensated by the total sympathy with lower level authorities.

Comment on findings of the evaluation. We acknowledge the assessment made by the Tripartite External Evaluation by which the development of a solid background of technical information, comprehensive enough to allow the formulation of an integrated lagoon management plan by August 2008, has been recognized. Among the achievement of the project, the committee recognized the build-up of technical tools indispensable to planning (GIS, remote sensing, GPS surveying etc.), the diversity of actions undertaken at multiple levels, even though under time and budget limitations, and the close attention to the fisher-folk communities that derive their primary livelihoods from environmental resources and suffered the most from environmental degradation.

According to the evaluators, there is a congruity between the project formulation, implementation strategy and its immediate objectives and even though there were flaws and inconsistencies in the design and drawbacks in the disbursement plan, these did not affect the overall project performance. We would like to emphasize that the IMOLA project, by deploying balanced efforts and resources in support of either community development, or technology enhancement, capacity building at all levels and experimentation aimed and largely succeeded in coping with the ambitions and expectations of a demanding and difficult project, the first one with an holistic approach and bringing a systemic (not sectoral) perspective.

The apparent contradiction perceived by the evaluators of incongruous actions resulting into an intensification of the resources use will be commented further hereafter, but in principle the issue is not fully understood as activities targeted to improve aquaculture and capture fishery were primarily aimed to mitigate the effect of an environmental emergency, such as that of massive and uncontrolled disposal of effluents and limit the damages of uncontrolled and unregulated capture.

We concur that the lack of a structured institutional analysis and stakeholder analysis is a project drawback that had some consequences in developing a streamlined network of institutional relationships and in designing a scheme of institutional roles and responsibilities at Provincial and lower levels. This issue will be considered in the upcoming second phase, along with the recommendation of a participatory planning workshop, to stimulate project ownership and promote direct involvement of the Provincial stakeholders in the process of planning.

Response to recommendations made to the Donor and the GoV. The FAO country office agrees that continued support into a second phase of the project would contribute to consolidate the achievements and achieve more tangible benefits at resource-user level. At the time of this management response, the Donor Government of Italy has granted an additional funds allocation of USD 1,000,000 to continue the activities for another biennium and the GoV has approved the extension, up to November 30th, 2008 for concluding the first phase and to the end of 2010 for the upcoming second phase. The Organization is confirmed in its role of executing agency and provider of the indispensable technical assistance. The project is being re-planned and restructured to reflect the situation at completion of the first phase and a backstopping mission has been conducted (August 2008) to contribute to this process and prepare for a definitive EOD on December 1st 2008. Effort is being made to ensure continuity of actions and staffing during this transition time. The FAO country office and the counterpart GoV agree to propose the Provincial and National Governments the adoption of a simplified procedure to approve the project second phase (addendum to the current project document) to ensure operative continuity and maximize the advantages of the existing resources.

Response to recommendations made to the project and the counterpart agency. For the **remainder of the present phase**, there is a general consensus between the FAO country office and the evaluators.

The Budget Holder recognizes the achievements in the fields of environmental and demographic surveys, fishery and aquaculture interventions, capacity building and technical planning tool development. Technical aids are in place and sound knowledge of the lagoon situation is acquired, offering a platform onto which the Integrated Lagoon Management Plan (ILMP) will be built in the coming three months. In the last few months, effort have been concentrated in the formulation of the ILMP, by making use of all acquired information and GIS-based thematic cartography, as a visual aid to present the various planning options.

The ILMP will consist of an executive summary and draft guidelines for the implementation of the plan, a companion technical paper providing scientific support to the proposed options and a set of thematic maps geographically representing a range of possible alternatives to be discussed at the forthcoming stakeholders meetings. The GIS tool will be continuously updated and streamlined, integrated with the additional datasets being acquired during the monitoring surveys of the second phase (possibly enriched with existing datasets in the Province) and used to performing adaptive management in accordance with the rapidly changing situations in the lagoon.

The Integrated Lagoon Management Plan is in its final stage of drafting and preparation of consultation sessions are being made, beginning September 2008. The presentation of the consulted and agreed ILMP is scheduled to be at the 4th and final Technical Workshop of IMOLA, at the end of the no-cost extension, in November 2008.

The institutional setting and liaisons between the former DOFI and the project FAO management has been substantially modified as a consequence of the incorporation of this latter agency into the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, with broader and more diversified functions. Although the Provincial Project Management Board remains unchanged, new interlocutors are introduced and synergy with ongoing activities in the new department and projects is enhanced.

From consultations with the GoV counterparts and given the changes in the institutional setup of the recent months, FAO recognize that the recommendation of identifying the Fisher Extension Centre (now Agriculture and Forestry Extension Centre, including fishery) as the main interlocutor for the IMOLA Project is impractical and therefore the recommendation is rejected. However, the collaborative attitude and privileged relationship with this important sub-department is maintained and synergies with the new Provincial interlocutors are significantly enhanced.

Thanks to the reiterated recommendations of the TPR and TEE missions, the GoV counterpart has agreed on the necessity to establish an IMOLA Advisory Committee, with consultative functions and gathering around one discussion table all major lagoon stakeholders. Efforts are being made to formalize the committee by the end of August 2008, for entry on duty on September 2008: among the tasks of the IMOLA Advisory Board, whenever operational, there are consultations sessions with stakeholders at various levels and a Lagoon Planning Workshop where planning options and implementation strategies will be discussed (end of September 2008).

The suggestion of completing the necessary surveys, in order to add value to existing collected data and integrate the existing GIS database with longer data time-series is retained. Complementary data collection in fisheries is being planned, to be implemented at the EOD of the new phase and similarly, interventions to streamline and optimize the current GIS tool are in place (contract with the contracted agency ready to be signed). The necessity of a hydrological survey to model the lagoon circulation is endorsed by the counterpart GoV and will be incorporated in the plan of activity for the second phase.

The issue of visibility is one of the pitfall of the project first phase: a completely renewed website, with complete documentation and thematic map atlas in downloadable format, is currently being published (end of August 2008). Similarly, visibility-enhancing interventions in the way of documentary production, television broadcasting and traditional paper publications to be distributed among agencies and the public are being promoted.

As far as the **recommendations to the project and counterpart agency for the upcoming second phase**, all of them are in principle accepted, with the following additional comments.

The formulation of the IMOLA Phase II project document is undertaken, in the form of an addendum to be submitted (once consulted with the units of the organization concerned, and approved) to the beneficiary GoV for signature, during the upcoming Tripartite Review mission in November 2008. A detailed logframe is finalized, based on which a plan of operations, responsibilities and milestone of delivery will be drafted as part of the supporting documentation of the second phase. The formulation of the development objective and immediate objectives for the IMOLA II Phase project proposed by the Tripartite External Evaluation committee is retained and in principle accepted.

In general, the sense of project ownership at the level of Provincial Authorities is rather unsatisfactory and far from being fully achieved: there is a fundamental mistrust in what the project can realistically achieve; hence, the lack of a genuine attitude to collaboration and participation from those subjects that should be the partners and facilitators in the implementation process (primarily the former Department of Fishery).

The commitment to decisively move in the direction of co-management by delegating power to the nascent Fishery Associations is also undemonstrated, although the institutional framework and regulatory instruments are in place. Ownership and commitment are better and more constructively perceived at the levels of Districts and Communes, where project interventions are more likely to be fruitful; the recommendation to maintain and intensify the range of project intervention at these lower levels is endorsed. At higher level, clear commitment of the GoV Provincial authorities and technical Department (with demonstrated action of political will to delegate management rights to communities and in principle support the plan) is a pivotal element of success for the plan itself and explicit declaration should be obtained during the process of consultations, in the forthcoming months.

Concerning specific subjects of concern of the Tripartite External Evaluation committee (micro-credit delivery and conflict between sustainable vs. intensified resource use), these originate somehow from misunderstanding and needs to be clarified.

The two microcredit scheme developed in the early stages of the IMOLA I Phase project are at present a mere theoretical option: of the two schemes, the one still viable (for the possible beneficial effects on the short term) is that in support of those disadvantaged ones that have no income, no stable dwelling and practice widespread destructive fishing in whatsoever region of the lagoon. For these, two viable options are available: one (e.g. for those that are already relocated on land) is to facilitate the process of migrating their income-generating activities towards alternatives outside the fishery sector (e.g. livestock raising) by microcredit intervention; another, is to incorporate this not negligible component of the society in the process of self-management. Yet, these options (especially microcredit) are still in under scrutiny and the comment by the Tripartite External Evaluation provides a useful insight into the matter. Training in accessing and managing credit through the conventional banking system for the better-off is in conflict with the project objectives as likely to be favouring capital-intensive resource use and is therefore abandoned.

The comment on the apparently controversial issue between sustainable vs. intensified resource use is not pertinent in our opinion, as training and experimentation conducted by the project on extensive integrated fish poly-culture was not meant in whatsoever way to intensify the production and promote the biological resource

use, but somehow to relieve the pressure from the overexploited intensive shrimp monoculture. No measures to improve capture technology or increase occupation of lagoon space have been undertaken, but rather intervention to shift capture from inland waters to inshore will be considered in the work plan for the second phase.

At last, the remark of inconsistencies and flaws in the logframe design along with an evident unbalance between the two major fishery sub-sectors and budgetary shortage (partly due to the time lag between project formulation and implementation) are all retained as considered useful lessons learnt during the elaboration of the forthcoming II-phase project document. Some of the unrealistic targets (number of training beneficiaries) were already amended at the second Tripartite Review mission and persisting inconsistencies (such as implementation of the management plan during the current phase) will be re-planned in the upcoming II Phase. So far, a prudent management of finances allowed to conclude the triennium with a modest surplus of funds that allowed a four-months no-cost extension: the more ambitious objectives have been scaled down to meet budgetary limitation and time constraints and in the future, priority to outputs and activities strictly relating to delivery of the project objective will be given.

Response to major technical recommendations. Concerning the technical issues related to the completion of the current phase, the FAO country office concurs on the formulated recommendations and provides additional explanatory comments on the following:

The GIS IMOLA geo-database has been conceived as to provide the GoV the necessary flexible tool to perform adaptive management in the plan implementation. The issue of the reference systems adopted (VN2000 vs. WGS84), raised as a concern of the beneficiary Government, is trivial and can be resolved by obtaining the appropriate conversion software through the official channels; the FAO country office will undertake action in this sense at the GoV level to obtain such a utility. At present, the conversion has been done empirically in two ways, either by using reference benchmarks data published by the GoV and by setting up a permanent network of local high-precision GPS benchmarks. The precision obtained ensures the usability of the system for planning purposes, for now.

The GIS, through its relational capabilities and system of complex interrogation, can provide a response to a number of management issues. The efforts of the project to provide advanced training on GIS and to integrate as much as possible the IMOLA database with additional datasets have only been partly successful: an comprehensive capacity-building session has been undertaken in June 2008 and the attendance by GoV officials was satisfactory; additional resources and commitment from the GoV counterpart should instead be deployed to integrate the database with other existing datasets (Hue University-Region du Nord-Pas de Calais, France, VNICZM Project, etc.) and to provide training at lower levels, possibly linking the GIS IMOLA geo-database to the Provincial Hue GIS in charge to DOST.

Additional alternative and/or additional income opportunities will be promoted only as far as they contribute to reduce pressure on the lagoon or decrease occupation of the lagoon water surface.

The issue of “sampan dwellers” and their resettlement is one of the priorities of the Provincial Government and therefore any involvement of the project in the matter is of questionable usefulness. The idea of an in-depth study is endorsed and the investigation from the anthropological and sociological standpoint has been prepared for implementation, in collaboration with the universities of Rome (La Sapienza) and Venice (Ca Foscari) (September 2008). Anything related to the relocation process, especially in the way of backing up Government actions that are underway, will be carefully considered.

Environmental and fishery surveys to achieve complete time series through a period of five years and full seasonality coverage (spring and summer) are in their preparatory phase for implementation in early 2009.

The IMOLA website, including a comprehensive collection of documents, thematic maps and a reference library has been redesigned and restyled and is ready for launching at the end of August 2008.

Concerning two specific technical issues on completing the mapping exercise (land-use, aquaculture activities, fishing and other layers) to the whole lagoon and to include in the exercise the vulnerability component, we concur on the recommendation and comment on the following.

In the new phase, a continued GIS assistance will be provided (contract with the Centre for Geotechnologies of the University of Siena is prepared, negotiated and ready to be signed) to undertake the surveying tasks and achieve full lagoon coverage: the objective is to provide, at the end of the second phase, an updated integral master plan covering the entire basin.

The vulnerability component will be re-designed and resumed from the preceding phase, in the way of obtaining a vulnerability map of flood-prone areas: field data will be integrated with remote-sensing information acquired from radar imagery and compiled in to multi-temporal set of thematic maps along with statistical information on the historical floods of the past 20 years. This activity will be carried out throughout the second phase; the outputs will be extended to the whole lagoon coverage and will be for use for future planning.

At last, the FAO representation concurs on the idea of a mid-term review, at least one year before the project termination, in December 2010. Given the tentative duration of two years for the IMOLA II Phase (2009-2010), this mid-term review session should be conducted in coincidence with the second Tripartite Review and 5th Technical Workshop on November 2009.

Comments on lessons learned formulated by the committee. Part of the issues raised in the “lessons learned” chapter are somehow incorporated in the previous discussions and therefore not commented further: however, some additional remarks, in the way of providing further insight into complexities of Thua Thien Hue Provincial setting, are noteworthy.

The so-called scientific-research approach has often been criticized, both from inside and outside the project, as an unnecessary exercise: we concur on the conclusion of the TEE committee that any intervention into a complex and dynamic system without the necessary patrimony of knowledge and understanding may lead to wrong choices and partial non-success.

A flexible application of the logframe methodology was the result of adaptation of project operational behaviour to the dynamic nature of the institutional and social environment in the Province. On the other hand, instability of the GoV counterpart management and lack of coordination between implementing and executing agencies did not contribute to the more rigorous application of the norms. As a rule, the need of flexibility and adaptation is more urgent in the early rather than late stages of a project, when relationships are built and operational drawbacks are nullified; therefore a more structured and streamlined scheme should be emplaced in the implementation of the upcoming second phase. In deed, monitoring and evaluation session were not consistently carried out by FAO and this did not allow periodic adjustments.

The compromise between sustainable resource use and measures aimed to increase production is indeed an issue that should be explicitly addressed in fishery projects and this is indeed a flaw in the IMOLA I design. The concept of restoring an environment to a productivity level to balance out-take of biological stock for commercial purposes incorporates the essence of such conflict and in itself, the idea of resource-use sustainability. The issue of commercial production and productivity of the natural system will be more clearly identified and addressed in the forthcoming project document for Phase II.

The concept of community-based management and co-management, although clarified in theoretical terms, is far from being accepted in the facts and in the ways it is put into practice. Flaws in the legislative framework, in policy paper and in the regulatory aspects on co-management, along with persisting top-down intervention every now and again reveal the incomplete acceptance of the model and inconsistencies on how the model itself should be applied and translated into practice, in Vietnam and likely elsewhere. The IMOLA Phase II, besides offering concrete platform onto which develop a discussion, faces the challenge of tackling the issue in explicit and practical term and bringing the co-management exercise undertaken in phase I to completion in the upcoming Phase II.

The institutional analysis attempt failed; from the project side, the objective was not pursued with the necessary determination to be brought to completion on time and to reveal its beneficial effects in the long run. As a result, there was a fundamental lack of understanding of potential, constraints and weaknesses of the implementing institution (and of the institutional setting at large) hence the personal “idiosyncrasies” that surfaced at times within the management. A close

collaboration between the project and the country office, with numerous missions and field visits, minimizing inconsistencies and facilitated the implementation; however, a more attentive backstopping would have indeed helped in assisting counterpart delivery and avoid frictions from both sides.

Similarly, budgetary shortcoming could have been reduced by a more thorough assistance. However, the way the project Phase I was concluded, all negative circumstances being considered, bespeaks of a considerable success and this will be patrimony for the conduction of the second phase.

Management response to evaluation recommendations for project GCP/VIE/029/ITA								
Recommendation	Further donor funding required (yes or no)	Acceptance by Management			Comment on the Recommendation	Action to be taken		
		Accept	Partially Accept	Reject		Action	Timing	Unit Responsible
Further assistance required for additional two years	Yes	Yes			The Donor already allocated funding for additional two years	None	07/2008	N/A
Project needs re-planning and re-structuring with continuity of staff	No	Yes			Ongoing after funding from Donor	Re-planning ongoing for IMOLA II Phase. Contracts being extended for staff continuity	08/2008	CTA
FAO should maintain its implementing role	No	Yes			FAO maintains its commitment to implement the project	None	N/A	CTA
Focus on completion of ILPM	No	Yes				Being drafted	08-11/2008	CTA
Revise institutional setting/liason between DOFI and project	No	Yes			Lack of political back-up from counterpart and poor institutional response	Institutional analysis planned early in the new phase	09-12/2008	CTA/DARD
Set-up a Project Advisory Board	No	Yes			Lack of political back-up from counterpart	Advisory Board being established and formalized	09/2008	CTA/DARD
Organize an integrated planning workshop	No	Yes				Being prepared	10/2008	CTA
Complete necessary surveys	No	Yes				Planned in the new phase. Included in the Phase II work plan	2009	CTA
Improve project visibility	No	Yes				Actions taken during the past six month. Visibility-enhancement activities re-planned in Phase II	08/2008	CTA

Conduct a planning exercise and formulate a log-frame for second phase	No	Yes			Finalized in August 2008, during the visit of the LTO	Done	08/2008	CTA/ LTO
Focus on outputs and activities related to the delivery of the project objective	No	Yes			Issues considered in the formulation of the new logframe	Done	08-09 /2008	CTA
Resolve conflict between sustainable resource management and intensified lagoon resources use	No		Yes		Commented in the text: no real intensification of resource use that might conflict with sustainable management	None	08- 09/2008	CTA
Discourage microcredit interventions	No		Yes		Scheme in support of the poorest still in the phase of being considered	Pending	N/A	CTA
Lower the institutional level of project interventions to communes and districts	No		Yes		Done to a large extent in Phase I, continued in Phase II	Pending	2009-10	CTA
Resolve incongruities between planned activities and available funds	No	Yes			Will be considered in the budgeting phase	Ongoing	08-09/ 2008	CTA
Maintain and update the GIS facility as a tool to adaptive management	No	Yes			Continued assistance from agency in charge (CGT) prepared. Recruitment of staff prepared	Agency being contracted and staff being recruited	2008-09	CTA
Discourage alternative/additional income opportunities increasing pressure on lagoon resources or occupy additional lagoon surface.	No	Yes				Phase II strategy: considered in the work-planning of Phase II	N/A	CTA
Support social study on "sampan" dwellers	No	Yes			Prepared through agreements with University La Sapienza (Roma) and Ca' Foscari (Venice)	Contracts prepared for signature, pending decision of NPD	09-10/ 2008	CTA

Complete fisheries survey to cover multiple years	No	Yes				Planned in the second phase (pending)	2009	CTA
Improve the IMOLA website	No	Yes			Website redesigned and being published		08/2008	CTA
Promote the share with IMOLA of existing dataset for inclusion in the GIS	No	Yes			There has always been reluctance in sharing information. Only partially successful (with DOST)	Action being taken through collaborative effort between IMOLA and DOST	2008-09	CTA/ DARD
Complete mapping exercise (aquaculture, fishery, land use, etc. in communes where information has not been gathered.	No	Yes				Planned in the Phase II	2009	CTA
Complete survey on people's vulnerability to floods	No	Yes			Being considered a multi temporal analysis of the past 20 years through remote sensing to develop vulnerability zoning and emergency plans	Being considered for inclusion in the Phase II logframe	2009	CTA
Include a mid-term review in the second phase.	No	Yes			To be done in November 2009, prior to Tripartite Review meeting	Being agreed and planned in the Phase II Project Document	10/2010	CTA/ FAOR/ TCAP