

ANNEX 11 EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS (ESD) PROJECT

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

SUMMARY

Summary of key findings, conclusions and recommendations

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Project description
- 1.2 Background to the project
- 1.3 Purpose of the evaluation
- 1.4 Methodology
- 1.5 Constraints

2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

- 2.1 Relevance
 - 2.1.1 The level of education for sustainable development alignment with Finnish development policy
 - 2.1.2 Coherence of the education for sustainable development and its objectives with the needs and priorities of the education sector and promotion of sustainable development in the partner countries
 - 2.1.3 Validity of project throughout its duration
 - 2.1.4 Coherence of the project design
 - 2.1.5 Extent to which the project design addresses Finland's development policy cross-cutting objectives
 - 2.1.6 Exit strategy
 - 2.1.7 Risks and mitigation actions
- 2.2 Efficiency
 - 2.2.1 Delivery of projected results/outputs
 - 2.2.2 Efficiency of project implementation
 - 2.2.3 Ownership by the target schools and communities
 - 2.2.4 Monitoring system
- 2.3 Effectiveness
 - 2.3.1 Achievement of the project's expected outcomes
- 2.4 Impact
 - 2.4.1 Progress towards achieving project's overall objective
 - 2.4.2 Other impacts the project contributed towards
- 2.5 Sustainability

3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Conclusions
 - 3.1.1 Relevance
 - 3.1.2 Efficiency
 - 3.1.3 Effectiveness
 - 3.1.4 Impact
 - 3.1.5 Sustainability
- 3.2 Recommendations

REFERENCES

ANNEX 1 PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

ANNEX 2 ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE MID-TERM REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

ANNEX 3 DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

ANNEX 4 PROJECTS PREPARED BY PARTNER MUNICIPALITIES

FIGURES

Figure 1 Sustainable school concept for the Western Balkans.

Figure 2 Organisation and management structure of a school in the Western Balkans showing the main groups of beneficiaries.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

B&H	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRB	Drina River Basin
ENSI	Environment and School Initiatives
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
FB&H	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
LSAP	Local Sustainability Action Plan
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD/DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
REC	Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe
SC	Steering Committee
SD	Sustainable Development
SDP	School Development Planning
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide a final appraisal of the project, its effectiveness in achieving its expected outcomes and its wider impact. This evaluation fits into the framework of a wider evaluation of the entirety of the Finnish development interventions in the Western Balkans, which is an integral part of the Evaluation of Peace and Development in Finland's Development Cooperation, a study that also covers Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Palestine.

Evaluation background

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the Western Balkans is a four-year project running from April 2009 to April 2013, which has been financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) to a total of a little over €4,3 million and implemented by the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC).

The project's objective is to achieve improved practices in schools and communities for sustainable development in the Drina River Basin and the broader Western Balkans, through the introduction of the ESD by means of the concept of "sustainable schools", and support to 25 elementary schools and their communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Montenegro and Serbia. These countries and respective communities are situated within the Drina River Basin, which forms a massive ecosystem connecting the three countries along the 350km route of the Drina River and its tributaries. The project is intended to further education reform in the Balkans and promote changes in community behaviours that support sustainable development at the local level. In addition, the project aims to contribute to the broader goal of increased regional stability by means of cross-border cooperation between the participating communities.

The project was delivered by a step-by-step, action-oriented approach, centring on a comprehensive programme of participatory trainings with school staff and municipal planners in concepts and practical skills, backed up by mentoring in schools, facilitation of processes such as planning and intercommunity learning, and the financing of school-centred community and cross-border projects to promote sustainable development.

Key findings

Relevance and design

The project has been highly relevant in view of existing Finnish commitments and existing and emerging national commitments of the governments of Serbia, Montenegro and B&H to reform the educational system and, in light of existing gaps in education for sustainable development, awareness and skills of relevant actors to incorporate it in day-to-day classroom practices. The evaluation found several weaknesses in the overall design of the project, relating to the ambiguity of the logframe, lack of adequate indicators and lack of an elaborated exit strategy for the project.

Efficiency (including project management)

The project has been successful in delivering its projected outputs, as interpreted from the output indicators set against the three result areas in the project plan. The project's partners have benefited from the full range of theoretical and technical trainings provided, while at the same time partner schools were able to develop school development plans in an inclusive and quality manner. Exchanges and joint actions between schools from different communities, regions and countries were extremely beneficial for establishing links and strengthening bonds between institutions and people, which proved to be a good tool for further fundraising efforts. At the same time, the project offered an opportunity for structural cooperation between schools and municipal authorities but also the private sector, which opened new avenues of cooperation between the sectors for the benefit of children.

The project used available project resources strategically and efficiently. Management efforts by the REC project team were appropriate and contributed to the effective and efficient implementation of planned initiatives. The professional skills and experience, as well as the personal dedication of the REC project team members in

Serbia and Bosnia, were an important factor contributing to the effective management of the project. However, the project did not have an appropriate monitoring and evaluation system in place, which would allow emphasis to be put on capturing not only activities but also emerging results and their impacts.

Effectiveness

The project contributed, albeit to varying degrees, to all three of its planned outcomes. Strong contributions were noted in relation to strengthening available knowledge and skills in education for sustainable development, particularly for planning and programming priorities for schools and communities. Contributions to strengthening the capacities of relevant educational professionals and institutionalisation of school development planning were considerable, but they varied in their reach, depth and likely sustainability within the respective partner schools. The continuation and expansion of all project achievements is threatened by the lack of financial resources faced by most, if not all, partner institutions.

The project did not succeed in promoting and working with schools to fully pilot the sustainable school concept. The project also did not fully utilise opportunities to advocate the concept with relevant ministries in order to place it on the policy agenda. This is a missed opportunity taking into the account the agreed project framework with the donor, which stipulates the promotion and integration of the concept.

The project made a particularly strong contribution to strengthening links and cooperation between partner schools, schools and municipalities, and between schools, the private sector and donors towards sustainable development. The evidence shows that the partnerships are growing ever stronger and schools from different communities/countries apply for other funds for joint activities and exchange.

The project had a less than desired effect on contributing to improvement of the education system and integration of sustainable school concept in the target countries with regards to the sustainable school concept. While all relevant ministries were members of both the Steering Committee (SC) and the Advisory Board, this opportunity was not used to push for stronger commitment and/or policy changes in the area of sustainable development. Governments have not taken any substantive steps towards institutionalising ESD in their respective education systems nor have they prepared the way for the required allocation of funds from the national or sectoral budgets.

Sustainability

The project helped create a number of conditions likely to support the sustainability of results at local level. The project succeeded in motivating and building ownership over results among partner schools, which is a good investment in sustainability of efforts within these educational institutions. At the same time, the sustainability of all results is threatened by contextual influences beyond the control of the project. These include financial limitations due to decreasing donor interest in and commitments to development in the Western Balkans, which are likely to pose a significant challenge to the extent to which all partners, including those with strong capacities and commitment, will be able to continue and expand their current efforts. At the same time, the governments have not created foundations for education for sustainable development, threatening the sustainability of the efforts due to the lack of any related policy.

Road to impact

While available data strongly indicates that project efforts have contributed to moving existing change processes in the desired direction, a lot remains to be done before education for sustainable development is properly introduced in each of the target regions.

Recommendations

The evaluation team made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1 The MFA should ensure that developmental interventions are based on thorough context analysis and needs assessment, with elaborated results frameworks that ensure inclusion of cross-cutting objectives.

Recommendation 2 MFA should pay greater attention to issues of continuity and sustainability in project design, so that the uptake of these key developmental concepts at national and local levels are not purely coincidental.

Recommendation 3 MFA should ensure that supported projects develop exit and sustainability strategies at the onset of implementation, and that their governance structures are inclusive but still functional.

Recommendation 4 Given its accumulated experience, the REC should explore how it can continue to support the realisation of the ESD concept in the Western Balkans

Summary of key findings, conclusions and recommendations

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Relevance		
The project is aligned with Finland's Development Policy Programme 2007 and the Western Balkans Development Policy Programme, 2009–13.		
The project is aligned to national priorities for educational reforms in the target countries and responds to the identified needs and capacity gaps of stakeholders.	The project has been highly relevant in view of existing and emerging Finnish and national commitments of the governments of Serbia, B&H and Montenegro respectively to further sustainable development in the region.	
The project maintained its relevance to national and regional development and education.	1 The MFA and implementing partners should continue to base project design on thorough context analysis and needs assessment.	
The project logframe is poorly developed and at times contradictory.		
A project monitoring system was not developed.	The project's poorly designed logframe presents an obstacle for evaluability of the project.	2 MFA and implementing partners should ensure that the interventions are properly designed and monitored.
Finland's cross-cutting objectives have been only rhetorically addressed in the project document and response to them during the project implementation was purely coincidental.	Cross-cutting objectives have been only superficially addressed and not considered/reported upon throughout the project implementation.	3 MFA should require elaboration of measures by projects to ensure inclusion and empowerment of women and minority groups.
A rational plan for phasing out the project activities was not created.	The project remains a one-off event, without a clear exit strategy.	4 MFA should pay greater attention to issues of continuity and sustainability in project design, so that the uptake of these key developmental concepts at national and local levels are not purely coincidental.
Efficiency		
The project has been successful in delivering its projected outputs, in line with the budget and by a highly efficient team.	Available project resources were utilised strategically and efficiently. Management efforts by the project team were appropriate and contributed to the effective and efficient implementation of planned initiatives.	
The project had a comprehensive governance and coordination structure reflecting the need to ensure inclusive decision making for partners.	The comprehensive governance structure was inclusive but at times cumbersome and heavy.	5 Governance structures should continue to be inclusive while ensuring that they are lean and functional.

Effectiveness		
Expected outcomes have been achieved with varying degree of success.	The project has been relatively effective. Its capacity development intervention was appropriate, while support to advocacy and policymaking regarding ESD was weak.	6 The project should ensure that support and commitment of policymakers results in moves within the reform processes of the states.
Impact		
Intended impact regarding integration of concept of sustainable development into the educational system is limited.	The project has not made notable contributions towards the development and adoption of the sustainable school concept and relevant policies in the target countries.	7 REC should explore how it can continue to support realisation of ESD concept in the Western Balkans.
Sustainability		
Sustainability prospects of the project achievements at local level are high, while sustainability of the project's intervention at policy level is non-existent.	Ownership and commitment by schools to operate based on the SDP exist; policymakers' interest in and commitment to the sustainable school concept in the Western Balkans is low or non-existent.	8 A sustainability strategy for each project should be developed at onset of the project implementation.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project description

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the Western Balkans is a four-year project running from April 2009 to April 2013, which has been financed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) to a total of a little over €4,3 million. The project, implemented by the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), introduces ESD by means of the concept of “sustainable schools”, and supports its implementation in 25 elementary schools and their communities in B&H, Montenegro and Serbia, all of which are situated within the Drina River Basin, which forms a massive ecosystem connecting the three countries along the 350km route of the Drina River and its tributaries.

The project's objective is to achieve improved practices in schools and communities for sustainable development in the Drina River Basin and the broader Western Balkans, with the following expected outcomes:

- 1 sustainable school concept is developed and adopted in at least 20 partner schools;
- 2 communities work jointly with partner schools towards sustainable development;
- 3 education system and local environmental governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Montenegro and Serbia are improved and benefit from the sustainable school concept.

The project is intended to further education reform in the Balkans, with the long-term ambition of making ESD an integral part of elementary education in the Western Balkans, as well as contributing to sustainable development at the community level. In addition, as the project supports links between the participating communities, especially across borders, the project is intended to foster regional cooperation in education policy and practice, specifically in ESD, and so contribute to the broader goal of increased regional stability.

The project has been delivered by a step-by-step, action-oriented approach centring on a comprehensive programme of participatory trainings with school staff and municipal planners in concepts and practical skills, backed up by mentoring in schools, facilitation of processes such as planning and intercommunity learning, and the financing of school-centred community and cross-border projects to promote sustainable development (SD). The project has been conceived as four sequential phases covering:

- 1 the development of a locally adapted methodology;
- 2 capacity building of schools and municipal partners through a programme of comprehensive and intensive training;
- 3 the implementation of ESD, primarily through planning for SD and carrying out small projects in schools and communities, funded by the project; and
- 4 networking of project participants at local, national and regional levels, as well as a process of dissemination of information on ESD and SD through the project region and the Western Balkans.

In practice all phases overlap to some extent and are interdependent for their successful completion.

ESD is an interdisciplinary and methodological approach to education which goes beyond the more commonly practised science-based discipline of environmental education, to address all three pillars of sustainable development: society, the environment, and economy. ESD has the aim of attaining a balance between humankind and nature in behaviours and lifestyles. To do this, it requires changes in teaching and learning in all their aspects, including most critically, the development of critical thinking and reflection to question assumptions and current practice, systems thinking to understand complexity and find solutions to problems, building partnerships for cooperation and collective action, and participation in decision making (and learning) for empowerment.

There is no universal model of ESD, but this project has focused on the already developed concept of the sustainable school, which has been tried and tested in many European countries, and in Finland in particular. The concept advocates a “whole-school” approach in which teachers, pupils and school staff work together towards establishing a sustainable school. The school is envisaged as an inner “circle of positive thinking” which draws others around into it. Changes in teaching and in everyday school life stimulate pupils, in particular, to encourage parents and local authorities into more sustainable actions and ways of living.

CLOSE ENVIRONMENT AS AN EXPLORING AREA, biodiversity

NETWORKING
Sustainable school project
Drina river basin
NGOs and municipal authorities
Other schools in the region
International contacts

MANAGEMENT
School directors
Sustainability teams
Cooperation with municipal authorities

ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

SOCIO-CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

ESD SCHOOL

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL CONCEPT

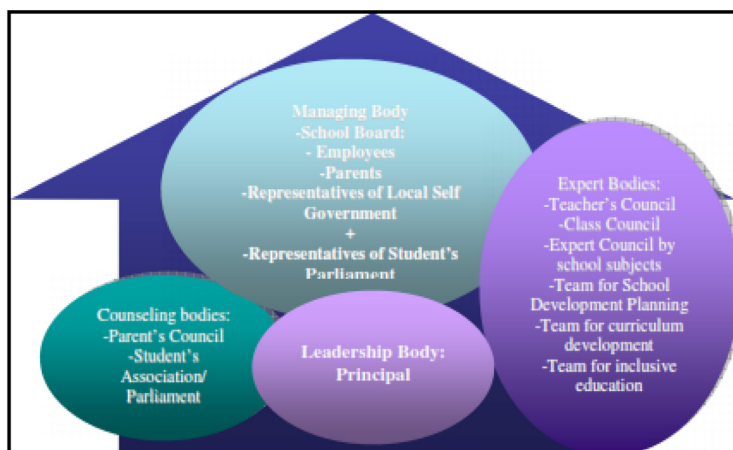
CURRICULUM/TEACHING AND LEARNING
Active and participating learning methods, integrating sustainability into all learning and school life

SAFETY AND WELL BEING
Student council-parent council
Theme days and trips
Keeping the school yard clean
Way to school and transport
Preventing bullying
Special needs students needs in learning

MAINTENANCE/SUPPLIES
Preventing waste and supporting recycling
Energy and water
Transport
School building and school yard, its maintenance and care taking
Food and health

TOLERANCE/EQUITY
Cultural environment and traditions, respect for others

Figure 2 Organisation and management structure of a school in the Western Balkans showing the main groups of beneficiaries.



155

1.2 Background to the project

Following the collapse of the region's communist regimes and the wars of secession from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and early 2000s, the countries of the Western Balkans continue to face the challenges of social reconstruction, economic and political transition, and the achievement of sustainable development. Owing to internal institutional weaknesses, and persistent ethnic and political tensions, coupled with low levels of social and economic integration between states and communities, the region remains relatively unstable.

All countries share a common development policy framework towards European Union (EU) accession, based on the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), which establishes country-specific agendas for political, social and economic reform and development as a means of preparation for possible accession to the EU.

At the time of project development, the three participating countries, B&H, Montenegro and Serbia were all taking decisive steps to reform their education sectors, harmonise environmental legislation with EU law, and decentralise development planning and service delivery to municipalities. Provision for ESD, and also planning for SD, had been made by the three countries (and all others in the region) in key national sector development policies and strategies.

Political support for the introduction of ESD through a range of national and local reforms in their respective education systems, as well as the establishment of mechanisms for regional coordination and exchange of expertise, had been emphasised in a *Joint Statement on Education for Sustainable Development* issued by the ministers for education and the environment from all South-East European countries attending the Belgrade conference on SD in 2007.

However, the challenges to converting the intentions behind general policy statements into appropriate, coherent and institutionally supported practice were many, and in broad terms common to all countries. As ESD was still a new concept to the education community in the region, there was limited knowledge and little agreed understanding of what it entailed. Institutional support and the human and financial resources to enable the integration of ESD into education systems were largely lacking. The feasibility study for this project, carried out in 2008 by Finnish consultants, identified a range of challenges relating to the lack of capacities of teaching staff, lack of teaching materials and lack of a clear consensus and coherent plan on how to promote SD at the various education levels. The countries in the region have different solutions for school development planning (SDP). While Serbia and Montenegro have SDP as an obligation for schools to develop as part of their annual planning, Bosnian educational ministries do not require SDP as part of school planning at either entity or canton level.

The issue of gender in education is still controversial. Overall, the sector is dominated by female teachers, as education is considered a female domain. However, leading positions are mainly reserved for men at both the school level and at the level of educational policymaking. Women are generally not empowered to play proactive roles in decision-making processes, and remain passive in the educational policymaking processes.

Planning for sustainable development was taking place in selected locations in the region within the framework of municipal strategic planning or local economic development planning. Most municipalities had developed or were in the process of developing some kind of local strategic document, in almost all cases as a result of their inclusion in one of the many donor-led projects for strengthening local governance as part of the decentralisation process. These projects had the merit of introducing participatory planning methodologies and advancing participatory decision-making mechanisms at the level of the municipality. However, a lack of coordination between projects and donors, and the application of differing approaches and tools, meant that local strategic planning was fragmented, capacity levels within different municipalities varied greatly and sustainable development was very likely not to be addressed in the planning process.

After the above-mentioned feasibility study was carried out in Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, establishing both the need and the political will for a regional project to promote ESD, the decision was taken to base the intervention on the Drina River Basin, which forms a contiguous but highly diverse ecological zone covering 19 946km² of mostly mountainous terrain in B&H, Montenegro, and Serbia. The area is home to 650 000 people living in a total of 60 relatively underdeveloped and mainly rural municipalities, which are subject to a

variety of trans-border environmental impacts, such as altered water flows from hydroelectric dams, intensive forestry, industrial and organic pollution (from intensive farming and the discharge of untreated wastewater), flood run-offs and ground seepage from illegal or poorly sited landfills.

Although the 25 schools and their respective municipalities had been pre-selected in the design phase, an important task during project inception, from April to October 2009, was a comprehensive situation and needs analysis of both schools and municipalities. From the 54 municipalities and 78 schools covered in this analysis, over 100 representatives from the final 25 schools selected effectively started project implementation together by attending a Participatory Planning Seminar in October 2009, at which they developed a vision statement for the project and broadly mapped out project interventions and strategic goals for their own schools.

1.3 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is twofold.

- 1 To provide a final appraisal of the project according to the standard evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC), assessing in particular its effectiveness in achieving its expected outcomes and identifying its wider impact in the project locations and the Western Balkans more generally.
- 2 The evaluation contributes to a wider evaluation of the entirety of the Finnish development interventions in the Western Balkans, which is an integral part of the Evaluation of Peace and Development in Finland's Development Cooperation, a study that covers Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Palestine. Specifically, the Western Balkans component is to provide an assessment on the overall results and lessons learned of the Finnish development interventions in the region in order to provide information to support decision makers at different departments at the MFA when considering future aid to peace and development elsewhere.

1.4 Methodology

The evaluation methodology is based on ratings of each of the five OECD/DAC evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The evaluation applies mixed methods and includes qualitative and quantitative methods and instruments, such as focus groups and interviews, as well as document review, and meetings with project staff. The evaluation was carried out in three phases:

The inception phase and the document review. The document review and the analysis of the project intervention were used for design of the research methods to be applied in the main assessment stage. This process also clarified the approach and the sample of municipalities to be visited within the fieldwork, as well as the sample of stakeholders and implementing partners to be included in the assessment process.

The fieldwork phase comprised meetings with the project team and field visits to the target communities for interviews, site visits and focus groups with selected interest groups. This phase also included follow-up interviews with the REC team. The fieldwork included coordination with the REC team and contacts with stakeholders and users. The main data collection methods applied within this phase were interviews with local stakeholders, focus groups, and follow-up interviews. During the fieldwork, visits were made to the municipalities of Gorazde and Novo Gorazde in B&H, and Sjenica in Serbia. Here, the evaluation team met with schools and municipal authorities and had an opportunity to discuss with parents. Additionally, the evaluation team conducted a focus group discussion with representatives of partner schools from Serbia, and a focus group with Steering Committee (SC) members in Bosnia.

Analysis and report writing phase. This phase was marked by follow-up interviews and requests for additional clarifications from the REC team, and the presentation of a draft report and its finalisation based on comments and inputs from the MFA.

1.5 Constraints

One moderate limitation to the evaluation process was the fact that the evaluation team could not visit a larger sample of municipalities in all three countries. This limited the ability of the evaluation team to triangulate information; nevertheless, the sample was deemed to be sufficiently representative to draw general conclusions. Another limitation was the fact that the project's logframe made it difficult to assess achievements of the project and to link these to a higher-level intervention logic. The noted constraints did not, however, negatively affect the overall robustness of evaluation findings at project level.

2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

2.1 Relevance

Relevance relates broadly to the quality of project design, concerning, in particular, the extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donors' policies. This also includes an assessment of whether the project has a clearly worked out means of exit which will ensure impact and sustainability of project gains. In a second sense, relevance may refer also to the project's continuing validity at any point during the project. Has the project logic retained its validity? Has the project managed to change and adapt in response to already achieved results or shortfalls in implementation identified by monitoring or interim evaluations?

2.1.1 The level of education for sustainable development alignment with Finnish development policy

The intended impact and expected outcomes of the project are fully aligned with the main goal of Finland's Development Policy Programme 2007, "to eradicate poverty and to promote sustainable development in accordance with the UN Millennium Development Goals" (MFA 2007, 15). In particular, it is designed to address simultaneously all three aspects of sustainable development as Finland understands it – that is, economic, social, and ecological development – but the project's focus, clearly articulated in the sustainable school concept, is ecological or environmental knowledge, understanding and practice, which are prioritised in the Policy Programme document (MFA 2007, 17). In proposing ESD as a key factor in achieving SD, the project is also aligned to the Policy Programme's assertion that "[g]ood education is the cornerstone of SD" (MFA 2007, 14).

The project's ambition to impact on the whole Western Balkans, particularly in terms of achieving regional cooperation and policy consensus – and its inclusion of B&H, which is identified as a partner country in need of special support in recovering from violent conflict (MFA 2009b) – accord with Finland's intention to contribute to stabilising conditions in post-conflict countries. The regional aspect of the project and its approach that seeks to multiply and deepen cross-border contacts to achieve regional coordination of activities from the community to governmental levels is clearly supportive of the key outcome of "strengthened trust and confidence in the region between states and communities" expected in Finland's *Western Balkans Development Policy Programme, 2009–13* (MFA 2009a).

The project's focus on ESD leading to changes of behaviours within existing social and economic structures means that its direct link to the outcome of "increased economic activity and employment generation" is perhaps tenuous. Nevertheless, its intention to use school-based activities as a catalyst for increased community participation in municipal planning processes and enhanced responsiveness of municipalities to schools and communities should contribute to the achievement of "strengthened national and local governance" in the region.

2.1.2 Coherence of the education for sustainable development and its objectives with the needs and priorities of the education sector and promotion of sustainable development in the partner countries

Over the first decade of the century all countries in the region produced national development strategies or poverty reduction papers based on the principles of sustainable development, the various definitions of which tended to emphasise the economic and environmental over the social. In accordance with these strategies and the policy priorities laid out by the EU in the SAP, each country had embarked on education reform and made some progress towards developing national policy and strategy for the introduction of ESD. The design and implementation of the project has been extremely timely for all countries in the region.¹ Their *Joint Statement on Education for Sustainable Development* at the Belgrade conference on ESD (South-Eastern European (SEE) countries 2007) made it clear that they required practical support to convert national policy into coherent, institutionally sustainable education programmes. Apart from answering the region's call for donor support to ESD programming, the project's objectives and approach respond to four of the seven other areas in ESD identified by the conference as priorities for external assistance. These are: (a) the establishment of multi-stakeholder ESD forums in South-East Europe; (b) support for the development in local languages of appropriate and tailored ESD teaching materials and curricula; (c) the development of competencies of teachers, particularly at the school level; and (d) strengthening of regional coordination and contacts (networks and alliances) for ESD.

The feasibility study (REC 2008a) upon which the project design has been built, confirmed all of the above, but drew attention to more specific challenges facing schools and school teachers, as well as the need to provide assistance for ensuring that ESD is institutionally supported through participation by and cooperation between parents, schools, local communities and local and central government institutions. The education system in countries in the region does not integrate substantially the notion of sustainable development, while different curriculum subjects rather superficially cover this thematic area. The project also tackles the issue of school development planning (SDP) – which seems to be the main core of the project itself – as a tool for schools to select priorities and act in accordance with them. The SDP is a requirement in Serbia and in Montenegro, while such practice is non-existent in B&H. Even though it exists as practice in the two countries, it is prepared only as a formal document (copy/paste from year before) and not as a living document, which is prepared in participatory manner and used to fundraise and advocate for support to schools to improve their conditions.

In each country there are different institutional mechanisms for cooperation between local authorities and schools. For example, in Serbia, schools are financially supported by local government, while in Bosnia financing of schools comes from a higher level (canton or entity). There are not many points of contact and cooperation between two actors. During the inception period, the project carried out capacity assessments of both target schools and municipalities. This confirmed that although both expressed considerable interest in ESD, SD and the project's objectives, they still lacked the necessary theoretical knowledge and the practical skills (teaching methodologies, planning and coordination) that the project approach was intended to impart. To achieve the implementation of the sustainable school concept of ESD in the wider local community, the project concentrated considerable capacity building inputs (training, coordination, mentoring) on municipalities so that they could carry out planning for SD and work in cooperation with local schools in promoting it. The project facilitated communication and cooperation between schools and municipalities, organising the participatory process of SDP development and linking it to the local development plan, in order to make a more coherent and comprehensive local plan. This approach was consistent with the various national policies of the participating countries regarding the decentralisation of local (sustainable) development planning to sub-national government according to the EU principle of subsidiarity.

2.1.3 Validity of project throughout its duration

Over the project's four years there were no important changes in the external environment – political, economic, and socio-cultural – either at the national or regional levels which required the project to make significant adaptations to its design. Overall, therefore, the project maintained its relevance to national and regional development and education, in particular.

¹ With the exception of Kosovo under UNSCR 1244.

A mid-term review (MTR) (Finnish Consulting Group 2011) was carried out in October/November 2011. Using the OECD/DAC criteria, the MTR concentrated on assessing the project's relevance, particularly of its methodology, its success in delivering planned activities and outputs, and its progress towards achieving its objectives. It gave the project a generally positive assessment in terms of effectiveness, but identified a number of areas in which the process of developing sustainable schools adapted to their specific local contexts could be strengthened. It also suggested the need to enhance cross-border and wider international cooperation, exchange and coordination.

Subsequently, the project tackled many of the recommendations, which resulted in improved interventions (for example, improving the criteria for grants which balanced the ratio between the infrastructure and "soft" measures). There were some recommendations that were not acted upon, as outlined in analysis of follow-up actions presented in Annex 2. It is clear that project structures and the existing budget would have constrained the full implementation of the MTR's recommendations, but an important conclusion is that the project, led by the REC, was reluctant, or unable, to adapt to proposed changes in project methodology, particularly with regard to ensuring exchange of experiences and sustainability of project achievements in terms of promoting the sustainable school concept.

The fieldwork revealed that the project team was flexible and responsive to the day-to-day needs and changing realities in the field (for example, introduction of mentorship and support to schools when needed or organising grants in such a manner to enable schools to have infrastructure projects while at the same time insisting that funds be directed towards capacity building). This resulted in a high level of satisfaction among the project beneficiaries.

However, the REC did not recognise the need to deepen the project achievements and networks by connecting it with other interventions (either the REC's or those of other donors). Since further funding for project activities was not secure, the project remained a one-off event, without a clear exit strategy.

2.1.4 Coherence of the project design

The formal design of the project as set out in the logframe and expanded in project documents is at times confusing and contradictory. This creates challenges for the assessment of relevance, but also for the evaluability of the project as a whole.

Overall objective and purpose

In the original drafts of the project (REC 2009a) the project's overall objective, or the wider impact it seeks to contribute to in the longer term, is specified as follows:

ESD is an integral part of elementary education in Western Balkans and effective placement of schools in their communities to maximise potentials to reach sustainable development.

There is a logical progression to this objective from the project's stated purpose of achieving "improved practices in schools and communities for sustainable development in the Drina River Basin area, and the broader Western Balkans". However, in the Final Project Document (REC 2009b) and the Inception Report (REC 2009c), the overall objective has been changed to the following:

An increased awareness of ESD in the education community of the Western Balkans and increased awareness of SD planning processes in communities in the Drina River Basin.

This reverses the conventional planning logic, placing the expected impact of the project below the level of its projected outcomes, as raising awareness of ESD (itself not an impact) is but an initial and necessary step towards implementing ESD in the region's schools.

Curiously, both versions of the overall objective continue to be mentioned in narrative documents throughout the project's duration, and the confusion also exists (but goes unremarked) in the MTR carried out in November 2011. However, the assumptions upon which the achievement of the overall objective are predicated (which refer to governments' continuing commitment to education reform, institutional promotion of ESD

in curricula, and the availability of institutional capacity and resources to promote ESD) imply that the overall objective *should be* “ESD is an integral part of elementary education in Western Balkans”.

Outputs and outcomes

Understanding what changes the project is designed to achieve directly is also difficult owing to the unorthodox approach applied to the logframe design. In place of specifying a set of changes in the form of objectives or outcomes (at the project purpose level) which are to be achieved through logical influence of a wider set of outputs that the project will deliver, the logframe contains three “results” deriving from a wide variety of activities, which are to be measured by parallel sets of “output indicators” and “outcome indicators”:

- 1 sustainable school concept developed and adopted in 80% of the target schools;
- 2 improved sustainability practices in partner communities: communities work jointly with sustainable schools towards sustainable development;
- 3 education system and local environmental governance in B&H, Montenegro and Serbia improved and benefiting from sustainable school concept.

These three indicators are outcomes – results in the sense of being measurable. They all express states of change, so for the purposes of the evaluation, we regard them as outcomes corresponding to and necessary for the achievement of the project purpose.

Indicators

Inconsistent quality and suitability of indicators at all levels of the logframe also pose challenges for this evaluation. In some places indicators are self-referential, simply being a restatement of the thing they are measuring.

<i>Overall Objective.</i> Increased awareness of ESD in education community.	<i>Indicator.</i> Increased awareness among teachers, students, and community.
<i>Purpose.</i> Improved practices in schools and communities for SD...	<i>Indicator.</i> Increased number of and improved sustainability practices in partner communities and schools.

In others, indicators are actually a state of change higher than that to which they refer.

<i>Result.</i> Communities work jointly with partner schools <i>towards</i> sustainable development	<i>Indicator.</i> Partner communities show increased sustainability of their actions. <i>Indicator.</i> Sustainability performance of partners' schools improved [through joint projects...]
---	---

In yet others, the indicators are not relevant, and may also be difficult to apply as they are compound statements.

<i>Purpose.</i> Improved practices in schools and communities for SD...	<i>Indicator.</i> Increased satisfaction among target populations, awareness and knowledge about SD among target population.
---	--

In conclusion, the absence of suitable indicators by which to actually measure results is a weakness in project design.

Intervention logic: activities – outputs – outcomes

When applying the understanding of the logframe, the specification of outputs to achieve the outcomes is logical. Similarly, the activities as planned, and their sequencing, as laid out in the proposal's work plan (Gantt chart) are logically sufficient to achieve the planned outputs. However, it appears that the implementation plan (and the overall project design, therefore) makes insufficient provision in terms of activities for stimulating changes in teaching methods and approaches to learning in schools, and also within policymaking institutions that are responsible for determining national education policy, curricula and resource allocations to the education sector.

Beyond general and limited theoretical introductions to the concept of ESD and sustainable schools, direct inputs into teaching practice were not planned or implemented. In order for environmental education to be integrated into all subjects and school life more generally, and for teachers to encourage the critical thinking and action-oriented learning that lies at the heart of ESD, teachers require systematic assistance to develop interactive methodologies that raise the participation of pupils and encourage them to access and exploit, with discernment, a variety of non-traditional knowledge resources. It follows from the above that the project's implementation plan also provides no assistance for the everyday application of the principles of ESD through routine teaching, the running of extra-curricular school activities, lesson-based and issue-based projects, both in and outside the confines of the school, all of which require few if any extra financial resources (examples of which from Finland were made available in the *ESD Handbook for the Balkans*, developed by project expert Mervi Aineslahti (REC 2009b, 21-31)). According to the concept of the sustainable school it is these kinds of activities that help a sustainable school to become the centre of attention and fulcrum of SD activities within the whole community.

It is also fair to say that a project with limited duration and territorial coverage is not in a position to make such structural changes without corresponding changes at the policy level. For such structural changes, influence needs to be exerted at the level of policymaking and strategic decision making within government and national institutions. The ESD project did not have this as a systematic and strong component of its design. Although the project makes considerable provision for the dissemination of information about the project and ESD in general, policy dialogue is only projected to take place at annual meetings of the project's Advisory Board, which draws together representatives of education and environment ministries, as well as Finnish ESD experts. The Advisory Board, as a regionally oriented representative body with a mandate to advise the project, is clearly not a suitable substitute for planned, regular and structured advocacy and policy dialogue targeted at individual national decision-making bodies.

2.1.5 Extent to which the project design addresses Finland's development policy cross-cutting objectives

The project document states that it addresses ethnic balance in selecting partner schools and communities. Issues such as disability, special educational needs, HIV/AIDS, gender, marginalised groups and inclusiveness will be taken into account when developing training materials and grant programmes.

Improving the position of women and girls/promotion of gender equality

Lip service has been paid to addressing gender equality in the project design but also in its implementation. While the project document states that "Gender issues will be analysed and streamlined in outputs of this program" and "gender disaggregated data will be collected and analysed" (REC 2009b, 47), there is not a single mention in the Inception Report of either gender or women.

There is no record of a gender analysis having taken place at the project scoping stage or inception phase, at which relevant gendered outcomes of development and environmental impact might have been identified. Progress reports show clearly that monitoring data regarding participation, and the delivery of outputs and outcomes were not disaggregated according to gender, indicating the project's "blindness" to this issue. The project implementation did not place any particular emphasis on gender equality, empowerment, or women's participation in project activities. The relative balance of men and women participating in the project activities (trainings, meetings) was coincidental and interviews revealed that this issue was not discussed or emphasised. We therefore confirm, like the MTR analysis, that in participating schools women comprise a majority but that they do not appear to enjoy the same opportunities as men to lead the change process and/or to manage schools.

Promotion of the rights of groups easily excluded, including ethnic minorities and children with disabilities and special educational needs

The issue of protecting ethnic rights in the whole Balkans region, particularly ensuring the right to participation in reality (beyond what is stated in the law), remains complex and challenging. Not only does discrimination against ethnic minorities in everyday social interactions inhibit their full inclusion, but also power in the municipality and work place continues to rest with individuals from majority populations.

The project document states that “ethnic rights are not an issue in this region” (2009b), while continuing to outline how, in the case of B&H, a number of project partners (schools/municipalities) from the Bosniak-dominated Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H) would be invited to participate alongside partners from the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska to promote ethnic balance and cooperation. The project’s design, therefore, does not specify particular actions or methods by which ethnic equality and inclusion will be promoted. For instance, monitoring of participation of Roma children and parents, as well as those from any other minorities, has not taken place. Three of the Serbian and Montenegrin participating municipalities have sizeable Bosniak/Muslim minorities (Priboj, Sjenica and Berane), while tensions between Serbian and Montenegrin populations (with the former usually a minority) continue to be present in social life and local politics. The situation in B&H is both clearer and more complex, as effectively mono-ethnic municipalities have resulted from wartime displacement, but some of the Serb-dominated municipalities in the project have sizeable ethnic minorities (e.g. Foča: Serbs – 86,5%; Bosniaks – 13,5%).

This in itself poses a problem as it does not ensure inclusion of minorities that exist in these majority regions (e.g. inclusion of Serbs and Croats in the FB&H or Bosniaks in the Republika Srpska). Also, the project chose to work in the village of Štavalj in the Sjenica Municipality in Serbia populated by Bosniaks, who, although a minority in Serbia as a whole comprise the majority in this municipality. At the same time, Štavalj is populated by Serbs. This presents an interesting situation: while the project aims to work with minorities, and thus chooses to work in Sjenica, it still works with the majority population. Nevertheless, the project partner school in Štavalj included proactively other schools in the region, therefore ensuring that diverse populations in the region benefit from the project activities.

The document also notes that the social exclusion of the Roma, who are present as very small minorities in many of the project locations, continues and is a more pressing problem. However, the project did not make an effort to include Roma in its activities, and if such participation took place (undocumented by the project and not observed during our fieldwork), it was coincidental. The MTR noted that there was evidence that Roma families did not participate in school parents’ councils and social discrimination against Roma and their children was observed during the review’s field trips.

The project document detailed the number of children at each school with disability or a learning difficulty, but beyond this there is no evidence that the project has addressed their and their parents’ inclusion in the project’s activities.

Combating HIV/AIDS as a health problem

HIV/AIDS, allied to reproductive and sex education, is being addressed as a health and education issue in all the Balkan countries. It has not been targeted as a specific priority within the project, even though presumably it would fall within the broad embrace of ESD and SD.

2.1.6 Exit strategy

A rational plan for phasing out the project activities to facilitate a smooth handover to local and national stakeholders, and the continuation of the sustainable school concept, was not created. The project framework kept this part of the project implementation deliberately vague: “Phasing out will be conducted in a way to enhance sustainability of project results and their further/regional utilisation through additional awareness raising activities” (REC 2009b, 43). The reasoning behind such a lack of clear exit strategy remains with the REC’s orientation to a project-by-project approach,² whereby it implements projects as they come without a more systematic approach to their larger framework and impacts which REC could bring if projects were internally connected and linkages strengthened. The overall project approach in this particular instance created a significant missed opportunity of enabling longer-term perspective and support to target municipalities which would, in such manner, contribute to meaningful changes in the educational system.

On the other hand, almost all partner municipalities and many of the participating schools have employed the learning gained from the project in applying jointly for grants from other donors independently from the project, as shown in Annex 2. In this way they have built upon and continued the partnerships and collaborations established in the project. One might argue, therefore, that the lack of an exit strategy was not important in

² From the interview with the REC management.

the end and that it might even have been a strength, as it ensured that project participants took full responsibility for projects results.

2.1.7 Risks and mitigation actions

Although a properly worked out risk assessment and management plan was not carried out, the progress reports all contain a brief narrative on risks and challenges to implementation. In effect these dealt with a small number of specific, localised challenges which arose early in implementation, rather than risk, and ultimately they were not updated over the course of the project.

There is a fairly comprehensive treatment of the most obvious risks to project implementation in the logframe, which converts each risk into assumptions regarding the positive conditions that are required for implementation and the achievement of outputs, outcomes and impact. Some other risks are dealt with in passing, as it were, in the narrative of the Inception Report. For example, in order to mitigate the effect of the some of the participating communities showing insufficient commitment to the implementation process, the report suggests (a) that schools and communities should sign formally binding contracts which set out their responsibilities within the project, and (b) that a list of substitute schools/municipalities be identified as a “fall back” in case of any municipality dropping out. In the event, these measures were not considered necessary to put into effect.

At project conception stage, the MFA's *Advisor's Report on the Proposal* (MFA 2008) identified a major risk to the project in the lack of environmental education (and education more generally) knowledge and experience in REC. These particular capacities were considered to be in short supply in the Balkans. This led to the hiring of two Finnish experts in this field, although the MTR and also this evaluation suggest that they had insufficient scope in their contracts to impact heavily on project delivery – especially in the field of general pedagogy and teaching methodologies.

Bosnian consultants (Promente) employed to carry out school and community assessments during inception correctly identified a risk to longer-term impact in the community, in seeing that a basic challenge – and possibly a threat for further work in municipalities that have finalised strategic planning processes – is the gap between goals and expectation and available financial resources. At present there is no adequate central government mechanism for financing priorities developed through local SD planning processes in any of the three countries. This observation has considerable relevance to the evaluation's findings on project sustainability below.

Progress reports drew attention to a certain number of delays in the project's planning processes – in SDP, the development of project proposals and, particularly, in local sustainability action planning. A number of factors were identified for these delays, all of which could or should have been predicted as moderate risks and planned for accordingly. They included:

- disruption to municipal life owing to planned, upcoming local elections in Serbia;
- the disruption caused by staff turnover, particularly of those in decision-making positions, such as school principals or mayors;
- the challenges of coordinating the project with existing municipality capacity building programmes in a small number of locations (the Exchange III, Municipal Support Programme II in Serbia, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Montenegro);
- “routine” disruption to municipal executives caused by political divisions; and
- planning fatigue in some communities leading to lack of interest from NGOs and other non-governmental actors in municipal strategic planning.

2.2 Efficiency

Efficiency relates to the linkage from the project inputs in terms of any financial, material and human resources expended to the delivery of activities and the subsequent outputs. In other words efficiency examines what was done and whether it was carried out in a rational way with sufficient resources.

2.2.1 Delivery of projected results/outputs

The project has been successful in delivering its projected outputs, as interpreted from the output indicators set against the three result areas in the project plan. All 25 participating schools have benefited from the full range of theoretical and technical trainings provided by the project. Their success in completing school development plans through participatory processes, which were checked and adjusted to ensure their quality, suggests that they have all attained the basic capacities to introduce SDP into their schools and the wider communities in which they are situated. A caveat here, taken from the MTR, confirmed that, during the field phase of our evaluation, only a small number of schools have developed the new teaching and learning methods to apply ESD in the classroom. For example, a school in Sjenica has instituted a board intended as a means to introduce interactive teaching methodologies, even though it still promotes *ex cathedra* teaching. Target schools still apply traditional *ex cathedra* teaching methodologies without introducing significant ESD methodologies or integrating ESD more substantially in subjects. Also, schools do not promote integration of different subjects towards achieving a holistic approach to teaching on SD, even though there is awareness by teachers and principals that such a move would be beneficial for students and school development.

“School in nature” has been an underutilised practice in all schools before the project. Practising “school in nature” was enhanced in schools in Ljubovija, Priboj, Mali Zvornik and Sabac which all constructed “outdoor classrooms” (small wooden open but “huts” equipped with about 30 seats, covered with a roof) with the support of the grants. Many schools installed “outdoor classrooms” (green corners, gardens) in the green areas in the vicinity of school buildings, thus making a green space functional for outdoor teaching and development of environmental awareness, learning about conservation and proper use of natural resources. In Sabac, one part of the schoolyard was turned into a “summer classroom” with a cultivated botanical garden, which improved conditions for practising school in nature. Some schools, such as the one in Gorazde, organised “school in nature” in the neighbouring recreational area, with discussions on different subjects relating to environment and SD. However, the schools still do not apply school in nature as a systematic practice.

Similarly, all 25 municipalities have participated fully in trainings on SD and strategic planning for SD and have all worked with schools and their school development plans to produce local sustainability action plans (LSAPs) or have upgraded already existing local development plans or municipal strategies according to the same principles. This process in local communities faced ordinary challenges of varying pace and progress towards development of full-fledged documents, but the project ensured that the momentum was maintained and that a participatory approach was continued. The success and elaboration of local action plans was variable, owing to a variety of political, management and administrative tensions and complications, as well as capacity shortfalls in rural municipalities, in particular.

Schools also developed their school development plans even though there are different formal obligations for the creation of such a document in different target countries. (Serbia and Montenegro have it as an obligation for schools, while the Bosnian educational system does not require such planning documents.) There was a general agreement by interviewed schools both in Serbia and in Bosnia that the project has provided crucial support to schools to build their capacities to develop such a document in a participatory manner and to choose and address priorities. This is in contrast to usual practice where even though it is a requirement in Serbia, such a document is usually “just a formal document which is copied each year without any consideration of real needs and priorities of schools, in order to fulfil the formal requirements”.³ All interviewed stakeholders applauded the patience and persistence by the project team, with a commitment to negotiating practical solutions to local problems and also returning sub-standard work for further development. They said that this has ensured that all schools have succeeded in addressing priorities and elaborating them within their long-term planning, which in turn opened new avenues for cooperation between the schools and local communities (but also between schools from different communities).

There is no monitoring data available that indicates the quality of *completed* joint school–community projects in SD, their effect and their potential impact. However, the progress reports give detailed accounts of the process of project development, including assessments of their quality and their subject matter. From these it can be assumed that all 25 schools successfully implemented two ESD projects in cooperation with their communi-

³ From focus group discussion in Serbia.

ties, as originally planned by the project. A further six regional or cross-border projects were carried out with a minimum of two partners involved in the project each time and a minimum of one partner not previously involved in the project, from a total of 11 locations. In addition, all initiatives supported by this project were implemented in collaboration between schools and municipalities and in many cases involving other partners either from their original localities or elsewhere.

The project's feedback states that 60% of partner schools reported that there are plans to make joint projects that are incorporated in Local Sustainability Action Plan documents, as these strategies were developed with the participation of school representatives. The evaluation could not confirm this data.

The project document stated the expectation that schools would also undertake SD projects with other community stakeholders, such as parents, the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and media organisations. There are no project activities directly linked to this expected output, although for applications for regional grants schools were able to partner with any of the above stakeholders, as well as local authorities. However, the fieldwork revealed that the role of parents in the project activities – even the ones organised with grant funds – had been very limited.

The schools in some communities succeeded in attracting the private sector to invest in some of the priority projects elaborated in SDP, but this did not include partnering with schools. Financial support from the private sector is notable: the partner school in Foča, B&H, received support from private companies to finalise the “classroom in nature”, while approximately €4 000 was provided by the parents association. The partner school in Ustikolina received computer equipment worth €6 500 from private sources, while the school in Gorazde, B&H, received a general donation of about €22 000 from a private company for implementation of their school development plan. The partner school in Bijeljina received educational and other technical materials (school boards, computer equipment, air conditioners) and free services concerning reconstruction and improvements of school buildings. Only a limited number (three) of schools in Serbia and Montenegro received financial or in-kind support from the private sector (in Valjevo, Uzice and Ljubovija).

The project did support joint community–school and intercommunity actions, which brought benefits not only on the level of actions for promotion of environment protection and sustainable development, but also to confidence building and social cohesion. All schools agree that this was a very important and valuable benefit of the project.

In all of the above, the project has exceeded the target values for output indicators, which in general were set at 80% or 20 out of 25 schools/municipalities/locations.

One area where the project has not delivered as planned is in the wider dissemination throughout the Western Balkans of information regarding ESD, SD and the project itself. On the basis of a comprehensive, if rather abstract, project information dissemination strategy, REC committed itself to informing interested parties of ESD and the sustainable school concept, promoting project results, exchanging good practice within and beyond the project, and improving links with national initiatives by means of a specially designed and continuously updated website (www.drinanet.org) and a regular bulletin of news generated by both the project and other environmental activities in the Drina River Basin (DRB) (*Naša Drina – Our Drina*). The website has indeed been developed and is still functional, and it publishes all 45 editions of *Our Drina*. However, apart from a one-page summary of the ESD project the website records no other information specific to the project, its approach or activities. Despite the website having separate sections dedicated to the project in general, REC, each municipality, each school and the DRB and economic activities in the area, in several cases these pages remain blank, and in most they present only brief, bland profiles or histories of the presenting institution. There is no mention of the sustainable school concept, no SDPs or LSAPs, no accounts of project activities, and no listing of project results.

The bulletin is full of interesting information about a range of activities by a variety of NGOs, schools and municipalities, including cross-border initiatives, such as dam maintenance or bridge building on the Drina. These include, on occasion, mention of activities carried out by the project, but at no time over the project period is space dedicated in the bulletin to disseminating useful information regarding the project.

As a contribution to achieving the adoption of the sustainable school concept, the establishment of school-based monitoring systems for ESD and local sustainability is set as a project output. There is no evidence that schools or local communities have established such systems and are monitoring their work in any ordered or meaningful way.

2.2.2 Efficiency of project implementation

Assessment of financial side of the project

The project has been delivered in line with budget and expenditures, in most cases closely matched to initial budgets. This indicates that the original budgets were realistic and closely aligned with the work plan. Project funds have also been disbursed broadly in line with the schedule set out in the original budgets, with slight delays in some areas, particularly with the funding of both rounds of project grants. This also attests to efficient project management and realistic planning and budgeting.

Some adjustments have been made to the budgets. The single largest was a reduction of the budget for project grants by approximately €105 000, from the original total of €800 000 (13%), while the largest percentage amendment was 25% cut from the costs of the project website and maintenance (approximately €37 000). These and other smaller sums have been used to strengthen the training budget, and also the allowance for the two study visits to Finland and Germany. The budget for these latter two was strengthened by just under 30%. With a total final allowance for these two study visits calculated at around €331 000, we question whether this was an efficient use of project resources since it represents exactly half of the final total for trainings of around €660 000, or 15,5% of the total budget, in what turned out to be a project overly focused on trainings, at the expense of practice, mentoring, facilitation and learning by doing.

The MTR commented that administrative and management costs, totalling almost €840 000 or more than 19% of total project costs, were too high. It recommended a restructuring of the project budget to “return” some of these funds to project beneficiaries. This budget line has remained unchanged and we would concur that 19% is indeed considerably more than this kind of project would normally take for administration. Placing the project manager and his team in the project region might have been a way to bring project management into closer proximity with activities in the field and also to use project funds more efficiently.

Management/coordination structure

The project structure, whereby 25 municipalities from three countries participate in activities, demands a comprehensive governance and coordination structure that would ensure participatory and inclusive decision making. Also, the project had a requirement for participating countries to have ministerial representation and active involvement in the project’s direction, and the desire to include direct participants (schools and communities) in the management process.

Routine administration, management decisions, and all reporting, were undertaken by a project team comprising the project manager, field coordinators and advisors, and other REC staff based at its main office in Szentendre, Hungary. On paper, the above duties were undertaken by a management committee (Management Team in the project document), which included the principals of partner schools and mayors of partner municipalities. This body, however, only met once a year and served the dual purpose of gaining broad consensus on scoping the annual work plan and strengthening the sense of collective, local ownership and participation.

As already suggested regarding the delivery of outputs, the project team was highly efficient in ensuring the timely implementation of the project and its activities, according to budget and expected quality standards. Interviews with partners confirmed general satisfaction with the REC as implementer, and all interviewees agree that the project team was very open and flexible, accessible and ready to provide additional support where needed.

Strategic direction and responsibility for accountability (oversight of implementation, and financial and narrative reporting) was provided by a SC, composed of senior representatives from the education and environmental ministries of participating countries and the MFA, with non-voting participation from project management and senior project advisors. This body met twice a year and its meetings were always well attended. Minutes from the SC meetings and interviews with some SC members suggest that their primary function was to

ensure that participants (national governments and MFA) were fully informed of project events while also being in position to influence project direction and main decisions. For example, the decision to tighten the criteria for grants for the second round was taken by the SC. The participation of ministry representatives in the SC was also a way to maintain higher-level policy support for ESD, as well as maintain cross-border contacts.

In addition to the SC, there was an Advisory Board, which met once a year, with a remit to “provide a platform for an efficient dialogue on sustainable development in the region” (REC 2009b, 58). Slightly confusingly it had the dual “primary task” of providing “policy-level inputs on sustainable development and ESD, and to oversee the progress of this program by receiving relevant information from the SC” (REC 2009b, 58). The project plan also makes clear that the Advisory Board is also the principal arena for the project to influence national and regional education and environmental policy in favour of ESD and SD.

For all three areas, it is difficult to see how the Advisory Board contributed to the project beyond the tasks already being carried out by the SC and the project team. To a large extent its composition precluded the possibility of it creating added value, as a majority of its members were drawn from the SC who, with a large cohort of advisors and experts from the MFA and REC/project, sat alongside just four others who sat exclusively on the Advisory Board. Thus, the idea that the Advisory Board “oversaw” the work of the SC was not put into practice. Policy discussions regarding the project did not appear to differ much from those conducted (very often in close temporal proximity) in the SC. Meeting only once a year, and with its diverse membership, it was also clearly not a suitable vehicle for pursuing substantive policy dialogue with the governments of the participating countries.

2.2.3 Ownership by the target schools and communities

At an early event during the project’s inception phase (October 2009), at which over 100 school and community representatives gathered, the participants drafted the following statement indicating not only their collective support for the project’s objectives, but also their sense of responsibility and ownership of the project’s planned results:

We see schools and municipalities as joint leaders in development in the Drina River Basin and in the broader region, towards active, modern and responsible environment, that is based on the principles of cooperation and understanding in a planned and continuous manner, implement sustainable development (REC 2009c, 37).

Project activities have focused mostly on large training events, gathering representatives of all participating schools and municipalities in one place away from their communities. The action-oriented approach of trainings, the mechanisms established for seeking participants’ input in the scoping of training activities (e.g. consultative/participatory assessments of situation and needs of schools and communities, and the Management Team), and above all the freedom and responsibility accorded to schools and communities using ESD and SD principles, has facilitated local ownership of project results. The willingness of schools and municipalities to revise their SDPs and LSAP documents reinforces the assessment that local actors were accorded full responsibility for actions within their own communities.

In a similar way, it is clear that the partnerships forged for the development of project applications, particularly for the regional projects, were all instigated by the schools and municipalities themselves, and through the contacts afforded them at collective trainings and regional meetings.

Fieldwork confirmed great ownership and commitment of project partners to the project’s mission and approach. All interviewed partners state that the project was a venue for their respective institutions (schools, local government, ministry) to fulfil the needs and priorities they had in terms of improving human and material resources, building links and partnerships with other institution within and across borders, vertically (between local and national/higher level of governance) and horizontally (within and across communities). The project’s approach and responsiveness to immediate needs of partners were a great investment in building ownership over its results and also for sustainability of achievements.

2.2.4 Monitoring system

The REC did not establish (and consequently maintain) a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system for the purpose of the project, which would enable systematic and easy data gathering within the set indicators and ensuring the institutional memory is maintained. This stands as one of the main weaknesses of project implementation.

Nevertheless, the presence of detailed six-monthly progress reports throughout the project's duration indicates that the project was subject to regular monitoring of implementation of activities. Annex 8 to the Final Project Document (REC 2009b) provided an overview of the proposed approach to monitoring, which had different requirements for each expected result. In order to measure result 1, "Sustainable school concept adopted", qualitative indicators were to be further developed in the following areas: ecological and economic sustainability; social and cultural sustainability; teaching and learning; participation and cooperation. This data would be collected by schools themselves as part of participatory self-assessment. These were not developed and also not followed up in any of the succeeding project documents.

For result 2, "Communities work jointly with partner schools towards SD", it was proposed to conduct satisfaction surveys among participants, using 12 qualitative criteria developed from the mass of information generated from assessments of the situation and needs of schools and communities carried out during the inception period. We would argue that "satisfaction" is not an appropriate means of measuring the quality and outcomes of processes to strengthen capacity development and sustainable development. There is a further challenge to the proposed approach here. Progress reports suggested that the criteria would be measured by means of a baseline and then a final survey (or *ex ante* and *ex post*, as the reports describe it). To all intents and purposes this would convert a monitoring exercise into an evaluation exercise, thereby losing its application to project management and project adaptation and learning. Regardless of this observation, there is no evidence that either the baseline or final surveys were conducted.

Progress reports detail at length the decision-making process for assessing the two rounds of project grant applications. Here a locally recruited board, drawn from project participants, assessed applications according to five criteria (potential impact, approach and proposed methodology, cooperation – between participants, overall proposal quality, and capability and sustainability of proponents). This clearly defined and transparent process also served the purpose for effective process monitoring, as the scores from the two rounds were compared and analysed to establish an understanding of participants' gains in capacity and continuing challenges in planning for SD and applying the ESD concept.

For result 3, regarding education governance and the uptake of ESD in national and regional policy, various project reports from both the field and the SC and Advisory Board would provide data against what are essentially numerical indicators. The first two project progress reports contain a results matrix that includes data against most of the indicators for result 3. The problem with measuring process and quality by means of the numbers of participating actors is clear from the fact that monitoring suggested that the project had achieved and surpassed its outcomes in this area by the end of year one. The results' matrix does not appear in the project record after this time.

As might be suggested from the section on cross-cutting objectives, under relevance, monitoring data has not been disaggregated for gender and majority/minority groups. This is clear from the absence of these issues in the progress reports.

2.3 Effectiveness

Effectiveness is a measure of the progress towards the achievement of project purpose or objectives. This is essentially a qualitative measure of immediate and observable change in the target groups as a direct result of project activities and the delivery of outputs.

2.3.1 Achievement of the project's expected outcomes

This section presents an assessment of the project's effectiveness against the three outcomes outlined in the project's logframe. In the absence of a suitable monitoring system based upon the collection of data against appropriate qualitative indicators, the assessment is based primarily on the available documentation and the fieldwork conducted in two of the target countries, as per methodology of the evaluation.

Outcome 1 Sustainable school concept developed and adopted in at least 20 partner schools

The project document states that the project's understanding of the concept of the sustainable school is that it advocates a "whole-school" approach in which teachers, pupils and school staff work together towards establishing a sustainable school. The school is envisaged as an inner "circle of positive thinking" which draws others around into it. Changes in teaching and in everyday school life stimulate pupils, in particular, to encourage parents and local authorities into more sustainable actions and ways of living. According to that understanding, the project needs to invest in integrating elements of the sustainable development concept and in facilitating its adoption in at least 20 partner schools. The project claims to have developed the concept of the sustainable school tailored to the local institutional and socio-cultural realities of B&H, Montenegro and Serbia (and by extension the whole Western Balkans). The fieldwork and further analysis of the project does not provide sufficient evidence that the project succeeded in motivating the schools to go beyond "understanding" the concept and developing and adopting the concept in its full meaning, i.e. beyond the SDP. The information available and feedback from the partners does not provide evidence that schools managed to integrate the content and methodology of ESD into the entirety of their teaching and management practices, including:

- elements of environmental education and the principles of economic and social sustainability incorporated into all subjects;
- uptake of interactive and participatory teaching methodologies which promote reflection and critical thinking;
- introduction of more sustainable practices in the administration of all professional tasks within schools (teaching, management, ancillary), with the inclusion of all staff in their planning and implementation;
- promoting the leadership skills of pupils;
- promoting learning through interaction with the "real world" beyond the classroom by means of extra-curricular activities and encouraging pupils to work with and influence parents and others in their communities.

All schools succeeded in developing and adopting the SDP, outlining the main priorities and strategies for development. The schools also implemented projects that put life into the SDP concept. Using project grants, schools had an opportunity to implement some of the activities related to some of the elements of SD (e.g. a school in Gorazde organised a big campaign for the collection of plastic waste, through which it raised funds to cover excursion costs for two of its students). However, none of the partner schools succeeded in fully piloting the sustainable school concept, and the project did not promote such an initiative. Given that the donor funds were directed towards promotion and integration of the concept, we regard this as a missed opportunity, particularly as the support from the relevant ministries was not used to advocate the concept and place it on the policy agenda.

Outcome 2 Communities work jointly with partner schools towards sustainable development

The project has been particularly effective in this area. All municipalities have developed LSAPs or updated similar strategic documents according to the SD principles and these have taken account of SDPs which, by and large, were completed before the broader municipal process. Broader community participation in the planning process, by means of the active inclusion of local NGOs, media and other non-governmental groups has, however, been less than desired, owing to either planning fatigue among these stakeholders in municipalities that had already conducted local strategic planning, or limited capacity (planning and understanding of SD) of the same stakeholders in municipalities new to the strategic planning process.

In addition, all municipalities have worked in partnership with and supported their respective participating schools to develop project proposals to receive grants for SD actions in schools and/or the community. Municipalities that were included in the interview process re-emphasised their commitment towards continuous support to schools. In many cases, the implemented projects brought positive changes to schools (budget savings thanks to improved infrastructure and energy efficiency in 14 schools) or improved planning, which pro-

vided a good momentum for municipalities to strengthen their support. Also, some private donors started supporting the schools, based on priorities outlined in the SDP (as mentioned above).

In the project framework, two indicators of outcome achievement refer to increased sustainability of the performance or actions of municipalities and schools, respectively. The logframe suggests that actions such as introduced waste management, organised recycling, or reduced energy and water consumption are criteria for these indicators. Strictly speaking, these indicators are not relevant to the achievement of the outcome; they actually refer to a higher level of outcome or even impact other than that specified in the outcome. That being said, there is no systematic information available to assess whether these actions are indeed taking place. However, anecdotal information gathered from the field shows that there were some one-off actions for recycling (e.g. Gorazde), and cleaning actions in different schools and communities. Furthermore, schools from all visited communities report improved energy efficiency thanks to improved infrastructure (rehabilitation of windows and improvement of the heating system). Systematic cost-benefit analysis was not conducted to see the value for money of such actions and leverage of the project.

Outcome 3 Education system and local environmental governance in B&H, Montenegro and Serbia improved and benefiting from the sustainable school concept

The basis for the positive assessment of effectiveness for outcome 2 is also applicable to local environmental governance. The achievements in cooperative planning for SD between municipalities and their schools indicates increased responsiveness to community demands by municipalities, and increased participation in decision making (local development planning) by the local community (schools and other stakeholders). In addition, it is clear that the project's activities have contributed significantly to the exchange of information and experiences between schools and communities in the DRB, both within and between each participating country.

Regarding the adoption of the sustainable school concept by schools and educational institutions more broadly within the Western Balkans, and the further promotion of education policy in the participating countries, it may be concluded that the project had much less than its desired effect. Even though the project had representatives of all relevant ministries both in its Steering Committee and Advisory Board, it did not succeed in using this opportunity to push for stronger commitment and/or policy changes in the area of SD, despite the project demonstrating many lessons learned and good examples of practice which could have been used as a basis to put the ESD on the policy agenda. Governments have not, however, taken any substantive steps towards institutionalising ESD in their respective education systems or prepared the way for the required allocation of funds from the national or sectoral budgets.

2.4 Impact

Impact measures the success of the project in realising the overall objective of the project; that is, the overall long-term and sustainable changes brought about by the project. In short, the lasting difference to the original situation. Although it is increasingly common to ask for assessments of impact in final evaluations, logically one would not expect impact to become apparent until considerably later, at which time it might be measured with an ex post evaluation.

2.4.1 Progress towards achieving project's overall objective

The project stated its desired impact to be:

ESD is an integral part of elementary education in Western Balkans and effective placement of schools in their communities to maximise potentials to reach sustainable development.

This can be seen as containing two parts: (a) ESD as an integral part of elementary education in Western Balkans, and (b) effective placement of schools in their communities. The analysis of impacts will therefore look at these two components.

ESD as an integral part of elementary education in Western Balkans

Even though there is rhetorical commitment by relevant governmental bodies to integrate ESD into the educational system, so far educational methodologies and approaches have not demonstrated this. Teaching meth-

odologies have not changed significantly since the 1990s and they still follow classical *ex cathedra* teaching in relative isolation from the outside context in which students (and teachers) exist. The ESD project, while being of significant support to schools, did not bring any critical contribution to changing this structure. There are two reasons for this. First, it worked only with a very small number of schools in the three countries, so the project simply piloted some new techniques, and a larger scale project is needed to take on the lessons learned and bring them to a new level. Second, the project did not invest sufficient efforts in the policy arena, which impacted on the level of buy-in and commitment of the relevant government partners to undertake necessary reforms. On a positive note, the project brought positive impacts on schools which developed SDPs, as their working conditions, placement in communities, etc., have become better as discussed in the analysis of the second element of impact.

Effective placement of schools in their communities

The project has contributed towards raising awareness of ESD in the communities where it was active and also in other communities that were included in the work indirectly (through grants implemented by schools). Also, awareness of SD planning has been increased and local governments do cooperate with schools in developing both the SDP and local development plans. Interviews with school management show that schools gained confidence and recognition from communities, which positively influenced their openness to the community and motivation to embark in new projects and initiatives.

2.4.2 Other impacts the project contributed towards

The project's support to the renovation of schools and the introduction of more energy-efficient heating systems has brought important impacts in terms of savings and more generally in recognition by the local self-governments that schools are improving conditions. The local self-governments (e.g. Gorazde, Novo Gorazde, Sjenica, etc.) offered investment of saved funds for other needs of the schools, which is a good additional fund for schools at times when they need it for reconstruction, etc. However, the project team and consequently the evaluation team could not provide exact figures on the savings per year that were achieved by the project. Such data would be a valuable advocacy and fundraising tool for all partners involved.

The project did initiate more positive treatment of schools by local authorities, some of which increased funds for schools as a result of cooperation. While all schools, including those involved in this project, receive regular support from municipalities in Serbia and in Montenegro as stipulated by legislation, still, some partner schools tended to receive higher support during the final year of project implementation (Uzice, Serbia, with an increase of 7%; Valjevo, Serbia, with an increase of 5%; Mojkovac, Montenegro, 7%). The project estimated that on a general level, 60% of partner schools in these two countries experienced an increase of support coming from municipalities of 4% on average. However, the evaluation team could not confirm/triangulate this data.

Two partner schools in B&H, the entity of Republika Srpska, in Bijeljina and Rudo, recorded an increase of around 10% of the municipal support. The evaluation could not confirm the link between this increase and the project.

Elementary schools in the FB&H do not receive any formal support from their municipalities but are financed by the respective cantons. It follows that all support that they received from their municipalities has resulted from actions taken within this project and have been allocated as "new budget lines" in municipal budgets. All partner schools from the FB&H received in-kind support from their municipalities. Generally, the project records show that:

- the partner school in Foča received about €15 000 in support to pave their school yard and surrounding areas and open their day care centre;
- the partner school in Ustikolina received about €20 000 for various projects; the partner school in Gorazde received about €5 000 from their municipality in 2012 and this amount has been increasing on a yearly basis;
- the partner school in Novo Gorazde had their new gym, adjacent facilities and water supply system financed by the municipality at about €100 000; and
- the partner school in Trnovo received about €3 000 for their environmental projects.

There have been no environmental analyses, and it is not expected that such a project will bring significant environmental changes.

2.5 Sustainability

Sustainability relates to whether and how the outcomes at the project objective level will continue over time after the end of project support. It also refers to whether the project's longer-term impact on the situation will be maintained in the wider community.

There are three key aspects to achieving sustainability of results: (a) continuing and adequate financial resources; (b) an appropriate institutional framework to maintain ongoing activities; and (c) the integration of new and best practice into behaviours. We have acquired evidence that participation and ownership felt by schools and municipalities is bringing sustainability of project gains, particularly within the individual schools. The project's investment in improving the school and community planning, prioritisation and project implementation has brought significant changes in behaviours and the ways schools operate, which, as confirmed during our interviews with schools, is sustainable. School principals and teachers agree that the SDPs and projects are now fully integrated in schools and that they continue updating them and initiating new projects, even though the project has finished. As for the uptake of ESD within the school, as discussed in the previous section, this has not lived up to the point desired by the project; sustainability in this area, therefore, is not expected as the project schools have not made significant adaptations to teaching practice.

With regard to the broader sustainability of the project – that is, the integration of ESD and the sustainable school concept in the national education systems – the evidence suggests that this is not happening. The project did not influence national policies in any significant way and it has had minimal input into or influence over education institutions charged with teacher training, establishing curricula, and ensuring the quality of education.

3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Conclusions

3.1.1 Relevance

The project has been highly relevant in view of existing and emerging Finnish and national commitments of the governments of Serbia, B&H and Montenegro respectively to further sustainable development in the region. The evaluation found it to be relevant in relation to the goal of educational reforms that aimed to integrate sustainable development concepts into the teaching process. It also addressed important gaps in the existing knowledge and capacity of development partners.

The project's main shortfall was a poorly designed logframe, which posed challenges to evaluability of the project and exposed some contradictions between proposed and actual achievements. In addition, the failure of the project to establish a comprehensive M&E system prevented systematic data gathering within the set indicators, therefore the project could not ensure that lessons could be drawn for future application of ESD and community processes in sustainable development planning and implementation. The lack of a sound exit strategy makes this project a one-off event without clear idea of transfer of responsibility and follow up on the reforms started in the target region.

Finland's cross-cutting objectives have been only superficially addressed and not considered/reported upon throughout the project implementation, resulting in the fact that inclusion of and empowerment of women and minorities in the project activities was coincidental. HIV/AIDS has not been targeted as a specific priority within the project, even though presumably it would fall within the broad embrace of ESD and SD.

3.1.2 Efficiency

For the most part, the project achieved all of its envisaged outputs, and made a contribution to planned outcomes. Particularly strong contributions were noted in relation to strengthening partnerships between municipalities and schools. All municipalities, with school inputs, have developed LSAPs or updated

similar strategic documents according to the principles of SD and these have taken account of SDPs, which were by and large completed before the broader municipal process. Broader community participation in the planning process, by means of the active inclusion of local NGOs, media and other non-governmental groups has, however, been less than desired.

Available project resources were utilised strategically and efficiently. Management efforts by the project team were appropriate and contributed to the effective and efficient implementation of planned initiatives. The governance structure was rather cumbersome, reflecting the project's outreach to three countries and 25 respective municipalities. The professional skills and experience, as well as flexibility and openness of the project team, were an important factor contributing to the effective management of the project. The team was able to use available resources strategically and efficiently. Nevertheless, the REC did not put in place an appropriate system to monitor and report on project progress, thereby inhibiting a full understanding of activities and emerging results. The project logframe also failed to provide useful guidance in this regard.

3.1.3 Effectiveness

The project has been relatively effective. Its capacity development intervention was appropriate, while support to advocacy and policymaking regarding ESD was weak.

Contributions to strengthening local environmental governance were also notable. The achievements in cooperative planning for SD between municipalities and their schools indicate increased responsiveness to community demands by municipalities and increased participation in decision making (local development planning) by the local community (schools and other stakeholders). The planning process and subsequent project implementation has had benefits for environmental protection and sustainable development within municipalities. It has also succeeded in many places in mobilising community resources in favour of SDPs or LSAPs, from municipal authorities and the private sector in particular.

In addition, it is clear that the project's activities have contributed significantly to the exchange of information and experiences between schools and communities in the DRB, both within and between each participating country. This has been useful for building communities' confidence across social and political boundaries and contributing to increased stability within the DRB.

3.1.4 Impact

Intended impact regarding integration of concept of sustainable development into the educational system is limited. The project has not made notable contributions towards the development and adoption of the sustainable school concept, if one takes its full definition that encompasses changes in teaching methods and approaches and the management and administration of schools. This can be attributed to the absence of planned activities in the project to introduce new teaching methodologies and new approaches to learning and to promote reflection on how to apply the sustainable school concept to the routine of daily school life in ways that go beyond the project-oriented approach of SDP.

The project also fell short in its ambition to introduce the benefits of the sustainable school concept and ESD to the wider community in B&H, Montenegro and Serbia, and to influence education policy. Insufficient time was dedicated to promoting the project within communities beyond the DRB, while the project design made no provision for advocacy and facilitating policy dialogue at the ministerial level.

3.1.5 Sustainability

Sustainability prospects of the project achievements at local level are high, while sustainability of project's intervention at policy level is non-existent. Financial limitations due to decreasing donor interest in and commitments to development in the Western Balkans are likely to pose a significant challenge to the extent to which all partners, including those with strong capacities and commitment will be able to continue and expand their current efforts.

Experiences gained during project implementation are relevant to other REC programming in the area of sustainable development in similar contexts. The REC has not yet fully used the opportunity to draw upon les-

sons and insights deriving from the project to inform organisational learning and theory building at the corporate level. The project allowed the REC to explore comparatively new terrain such as working with educational authorities on the sustainable school concept, while at the same time engaging with actors from local governments and environmental institutions. To date, the REC has not yet fully tapped into additional opportunities for learning to inform its wider work.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The MFA should ensure that developmental interventions are based on thorough context analysis and needs assessment, with elaborated results frameworks that ensure inclusion of cross-cutting objectives.

The project demonstrated that basing the intervention on well-researched and identified needs can bring benefits of maintained relevance of the efforts throughout the life of the project. MFA should continue with the practice of basing their funding on comprehensive needs assessments to ensure the funded projects are relevant to the needs and capacity gaps of partners and beneficiaries.

Recommendation 2: MFA should pay greater attention to issues of continuity and sustainability in project design, so that the uptake of these key developmental concepts at national and local levels are not purely coincidental.

This will entail ensuring that:

- project design is results-oriented and that results and project processes are measurable;
- project approaches are participatory in the fullest sense, passing on responsibility for the achievement of results to project participants;
- monitoring systems capture the lessons learned from implementation which are then used to inform policy dialogue and further initiatives in other communities;
- project design includes activities to strengthen communication between policymakers and the community and school level, and that time and resources are allocated to communicating project results to policymakers by means of awareness-raising activities, advocacy, and policy dialogue.

Recommendation 3: MFA should ensure that supported projects develop exit and sustainability strategies at the onset of implementation, and that their governance structures are inclusive but still functional.

Where the schools themselves have taken the initiative to seek further funding, this is not directly attributable to the training and capacity provisions of the project. The well-demonstrated success of the project and the leverage this affords could be better exploited and integrated into the design and implementation of other similar interventions.

Recommendation 4: Given its accumulated experience, REC should explore how it can continue to support the realisation of ESD concept in the Western Balkans.

Limited progress has been made towards the long-term goal of making ESD an integral part of elementary education in the Western Balkans. The project has laid valuable foundations that can and should be built upon. Without further external institutional capacity building and financial support many of the achievements made to date are not likely to last or contribute to further and more significant changes. Institutionally the REC is now well placed to capitalise on its experience and should therefore explore how it might be able to provide continued support to regional actors. At the municipal level, and within the DRB, it has the opportunity, afforded by its experience and acceptance on the ground, to continue promoting ESD, through both a re-application of the SDP approach, but also its extension, on the basis of the sustainable school concept, to changing teaching methodologies, management practices and everyday behaviours in schools according to the principles of sustainable development. At the institutional level, having already forged strong, cooperative relationships with relevant ministries of education and the environment, it has the potential to play a significant role promoting the uptake of ESD in national policy and strategy.

Moreover, the REC should explore how it can draw upon project specific experience to inform overall organisational learning and theory building in this field of knowledge.

REFERENCES

Finnish Consulting Group 2011 *Mid-Term Evaluation of the ESD Project*, November 2011, FCG: Helsinki.

MFA 2007 *Development Policy Programme 2007: Towards a Sustainable and Just World Community. Government Decision-in-Principle*, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Helsinki, Erweko Painotuote Oy 2008, 38 p. <http://formin.finland.fi/public/download.aspx?ID=24014&GUID={41C62727-0F60-4794-B744-F40E9460D79F}> (accessed 14 August 2014).

MFA 2008 *ESD: Advisor's Report on the Proposal*, opinion helm pp. 116–29, 9 December 2009, Ministry for Foreign Affairs: Helsinki.

MFA 2009a *Western Balkans: Finland's Development Policy Framework Programme for the Years 2009–13*, Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Erweko Painotuote Oy: Helsinki.

MFA 2009b *Development and Security in Finland's Development Policy: Guidelines on Cooperation*, Ministry for Foreign Affairs: Helsinki. <http://formin.finland.fi/public/download.aspx?ID=54259&GUID=%7BE36EC6CF-76C1-40F6-97FA-2327609BD69A%7D>

REC 2009a *ESD: Program Proposal*, March 2009.

REC 2009b *ESD: Draft Final Program Proposal*, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, November 2009.

REC 2009c *ESD: Inception Report*, November 2009.

ANNEX 1 PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

Name	Organisation/Institution
Srdan Sušić	Senior expert local initiatives, REC
Aleksandra Saša Solujić	Expert, REC
Andrea Bevanda-Hrvo	Project Manager, REC
Lejla Šuman	Project Manager, REC
Zorica Korać	Expert, REC
Steering Committee members	
Mehmed Cero	Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism, B&H
Džemko Ruždić	Federal Ministry of Education and Science, B&H
Radmila Kostić	Ministry of Spatial Planning, Civil Engineering and Ecology of Republic of Srpska, B&H
Zdravko Marijanović	Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Srpska, B&H
Jelica Ristić Ćirović -	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Serbia
Local communities	
Enver Adžem	Head of Department for Development, Spatial Planning and Communal Affairs, Municipality of Gorazde, B&H
Almir Sijerčić	Director, Primary School “Husein Ef. Đozo” Gorazde, B&H
Aida Čengić	School Secretary, Primary School “Husein Ef. Đozo” Gorazde, B&H
Sabina Džebo	Pedagogue, Primary School “Husein Ef. Đozo” Gorazde, B&H
Ezrenka Trnčić	Parent, Primary School “Husein Ef. Đozo” Gorazde, B&H
Emina Hadžić	Parent, Primary School “Husein Ef. Đozo” Gorazde, B&H
Emina Bašić	Parent, Primary School “Husein Ef. Đozo” Gorazde, B&H
Nermina Avdović	Parent, Primary School “Husein Ef. Đozo” Gorazde, B&H
Dalibor Nešković	Mayor, Municipality of Novo Gorazde, B&H
Tomislav Čarapić	Head of Sector for Economy and Social Affairs, Municipality of Novo Gorazde, B&H
Momir Radojičić	Director, Primary School “Vuk Karadžić” Novo Gorazde, B&H
Brankica Nikolić	School Secretary, Primary School “Vuk Karadžić” Novo Gorazde, B&H
Tomislav Čarapić	Parent, Primary School “Vuk Karadžić” Novo Gorazde, B&H
Ljiljana Košarac	Parent, Primary School “Vuk Karadžić” Novo Gorazde, B&H
Rafajlo Jelisavčić	School principal, Primary School “Slobodan Sekulić” Užice
Goran Bojičić	School principal, Primary School “Sestre Ilić” Valjevo
Ljiljana Jekić	School principal, Primary School “Braća Ribar” Mali Zvornik
Milenija Marković	Educational inspector, City of Užice
Jelica Stojanović	Head of the city administration for social services, finance, property and inspectorate, City of Valjevo
Rade Rakonjac	School principal, Primary School “Branko Radičević” Stavalj
Knežević Snežana	Chemistry teacher, Primary School “Branko Radičević” Stavalj
Papić Alija	Physics teacher, Primary School “Branko Radičević” Stavalj
Popović Brane	Mathematics teacher, Primary School “Branko Radičević” Stavalj
Pejčinović Marina	Teacher from Primary School “Branko Radičević” Stavalj
Zornić Murat	Teacher from Primary School “Bratstvo-jedinstvo” Duga poljana
Biočanin Vanja	Literature teacher from Primary School “Sveti Sava” Bare
Ćatović Suada	Chemistry teacher from Primary School “Sveti Sava” Bare
Avdić Hedija	Pedagogue from Grammar School “Jezdimir Lović” Sjenica
Baždarević Murat	School principal of the Grammar School “Jezdimir Lović” Sjenica

ANNEX 2 ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE MID-TERM REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Actions recommended by the mid-term review	Final evaluation assessment of action taken
<p>More locally based support for those schools and municipalities, which need it most. Reduce number of big, collective training sessions.</p> <p>Training to continue to end of project (not stopped in 2011).</p>	<p>The project introduced follow-up mentoring for schools, which was a good addition to the trainings for larger groups.</p> <p>Done.</p>
<p>Whole-school approach to be advanced – project to find ways to include all staff in capacity building.</p>	<p>No significant change was introduced following the MTR. The mentors worked with the core team for ESD, while interviews showed that the whole-school approach could not be applied due to many reasons, inter alia the level of interest and capacities of some teachers to be involved.</p> <p>Review of documentation showed that small project grants claimed to ensure whole-school involvement, while fieldwork confirmed that whole-school approach did not.</p>
<p>Training of school leadership specifically directed at principals and vice-principals to be a focus on capacity building in remaining time.</p>	<p>This training was implemented as an integral part of the study visit to schools and communities in Croatia. This event was organised in Croatia from 1 to 5 April 2013. Participants came from 11 partner schools and municipalities implementing regional grants. The majority of participants from schools were school principals and deputy principals.</p>
<p>Competitive funding should be considered carefully – plans to make second round of project grants questioned as project should find ways to provide more support to the less capacitated schools.</p>	<p>Second round grants divided into (a) school/municipal grants and (b) regional grants. All schools awarded grants under a), while regional grants made competitive with only those achieving a minimum score on relevance, potential impact, feasibility etc. receiving funding.</p>
<p>Further joint elaboration of the sustainable school concept – through systematic contacts with Environment and School Initiatives (ENSI) schools and project's international experts.</p>	<p>The project team's feedback shows that most international partners involved in the project were ENSI members. All visited schools during two study trips in Finland and Germany were ENSI member schools. In addition, over 10 ENSI members and leaders were actively involved in the Final Regional Conference "Sustainable schools and Local Sustainable Governance in the Western Balkans".</p>
<p>More systematic feedback to all stakeholders and beneficiaries to be given – e.g. about course evaluations, on planning of training and capacity building.</p>	<p>The project did provide more consistent feedback to all stakeholders about different activities of the project. The interviews revealed that the project partners/beneficiaries were happy with the level and timeliness of information sharing.</p>

<p>More emphasis should be given to joint capacity building and sustainable structures to promote sustainable development strategic planning in municipalities. In particular:</p> <p>Make use of information and capacity exchange between the 25 participating municipalities (upon principles of Aalborg Charter).</p> <p>Make use of experiences of international sustainable municipal networks, e.g. Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) – for longer-term support to the project.</p>	<p>The project did promote the information and capacity exchange between the municipalities, which resulted not only in building links but also in joint projects of municipalities from neighbouring states. However, no systematic efforts were invested by the project to make use of experiences both gained through the project and through other networks.</p>
<p>Infrastructure development should not be the focus of school and municipal grant spending – rather the next round of grants should focus on developing sustainable practices and capacity building.</p>	<p>Done. Each application in round 2 could only apply for a maximum of 20% for infrastructure and equipment.</p>
<p>Programme spending should be reconsidered – to reduce administration costs and maximise the amount going directly to final beneficiaries.</p>	<p>No change. Proportion of funds allocated to main budget line remains in line with original budgets.</p>
<p>More attention should be paid to ensure fostering of gender equality and especially women's participation opportunities.</p>	<p>The project did not put any special emphasis on gender equality or women's participation per se. it happened that the project did have practically equal participation from men and women.</p>
<p>Role of Finnish added value should be reconsidered – with particular reference to further elaboration and demonstration of the sustainable school concept.</p>	<p>No evidence of substantive change. Response was to put Finnish experts closer to participants at Third Regional Conference and organise a further study visit to Finland [no evidence this happened].</p>
<p>Financial audit should be conducted as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Done. Carried out immediately.</p>
<p>MFA <i>could</i> use their environmental and educational experts to monitor the project – during the final part of project.</p>	<p>Did not happen.</p>
<p>Initiatives to influence initial teacher training in the future – in cooperation with the education ministries from all three project countries, investigate ways to transfer best practices from project to pre-service teacher training.</p>	<p>No substantive action. Once again, responsibility deferred to planned Third Regional Council and a planned training with teacher training institutes.</p>
<p>Cross-border cooperation in SD planning should be strengthened.</p>	<p>Special grants for cross-border projects provided in second round of project grants. The project initiated other cooperation opportunities, whereby a number of projects were prepared by partner municipalities (and won), particularly from Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) funds.</p>
<p>Measures to ensure sustainability should be clarified – a schedule of measures to ensure sustainability of project and results to be developed, and incorporated into revised implementation plan.</p>	<p>No evidence this has taken place.</p>

ANNEX 3 DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

MFA 2008 *Environmental Education Development Programme in the Western Balkans*, Ministry for Foreign Affairs Feasibility Study, February 2008.

MFA 2008 ESD: Quality Board Meeting Minutes, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, December 2008.

MFA 2009 Agreement between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Regional Environmental Centre, February 2009.

REC 2009 Project Memo, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, April 2009.

REC 2009 Project Memo, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, May 2009.

REC 2009 Project Memo, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, June 2009.

REC 2009 Assessment of Situation and Needs of Schools in the Drina River Basin, September 2009.

REC 2009 *Local Sustainable Development Strategic Planning Processes and Practices in the Drina River Basin*, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, October 2009.

REC 2009 Project Memo, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, December 2009.

REC 2010 *ESD Progress Report 1*, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, April 2010.

REC 2010 *ESD Progress Report 2*, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, December 2010.

REC 2011 *ESD Progress Report 3*, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, May 2011.

REC 2011 *ESD Progress Report 4*, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, November 2011.

REC 2012 ESD Plan of activities and budgetary plan for the period 1 March 2012 to 6 April 2013, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, February 2012.

REC 2012 *ESD Progress Report 6*, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, October 2012.

REC 2013 Plan of activities for the period 1 November 2012 to 30 April 2013, Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, January 2013.

South Eastern European (SEE) countries 2007 *SEE Joint Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)*.

ANNEX 4 PROJECTS PREPARED BY PARTNER MUNICIPALITIES

The following initiatives/projects⁴ received support from different sources and are direct results of capacity and network building during the implementation of this project:

- Valjevo, Serbia, is preparing the proposal “Roma project – social inclusion for sustainability” with partners from Bijeljina, B&H, intended for IPA support;
- Berane, Montenegro, in partnership with municipalities of Rožaje, Plav, Andrijevica and Bijelo Polje from Montenegro implemented the Development of the Regional Business and Education Centre project for the period 2012–17;
- Berane, Montenegro, applied to the IPA financing mechanism with the Modernization of Communal Services and Building Related Capacities project with partners from B&H;
- Berane, Montenegro, and the Regional Development Agency implemented The Year of the Cultural Route Bjelasica, Komovi and Prokletije project. This was implemented with partner schools and municipalities from Andrijevica, Plav, Bijelo Polje, Mojkovac and Kolašin, all in Montenegro;
- Mojkovac, Montenegro, partnered with the municipality of Istok, Kosovo, to implement the project, Building Local Recycling Yards and Education of Primary School Teachers and Students from Mojkovac and Istok municipalities;
- Mojkovac, Montenegro, and NGO Democratic Centre “New Hope” from B&H implemented the Let’s Save our Rivers project;
- Mojkovac, Montenegro, in partnership with municipalities of Kolašin, Žabljak, Šavnik and Danilovgrad from Montenegro implemented the General Environmental Protection of the Sinjajevina Mountain project;
- Mojkovac, Montenegro, implemented the Refurbishment of Sports Halls in Mojkovac project;
- Foča, B&H, partnered with municipalities of Plužine i Žabljak, Montenegro, to implement the Environmental Awareness Raising for More Sustainable Future project;
- Gorazde, B&H, and municipality of Prijepolje partnered to implement the project “Apiculture – activities for the sustainable future”;
- Novo Gorazde, B&H, and the city of Visegrad Women’s Association implemented the Interaction of Local Communities and Local Development project;
- Rudo, B&H, partnered with the municipality of Priboj, Serbia to implement the IPA-funded Environmental Protection: A Prerequisite for a Sustainable Future project;
- Trnovo, B&H, submitted the proposal to USAID B&H for the Classroom Practices for a Better Tomorrow project;
- Bijeljina, B&H, partnered with the municipality of Bogatic, Serbia to implement the Installation of Public Solar Charges in City Centres project;
- Bijeljina, B&H, and the Elementary School “Vuk Karadzic” from the same city implemented the Enhancing Energy Efficiency in the Elementary School “Vuk Karadzic” project, with funds from the relevant ministries of the Republic of Srpska, B&H;
- Bijeljina, B&H, implemented the project to Enhance Energy Efficiency by Replacing Conventional Lights with LED Lights in Public Environments in Majevička, Knjeginje Milice, Njegosëva and Svetog Save Streets with its own funds;
- Bijeljina, B&H, implemented the project to Enhance Energy Efficiency by Replacing old Windows and Doors in Three Elementary Schools in the city of Bijeljina;
- Bijeljina, B&H, and Bogatic, Serbia, partnered to implement the Cross-border and Shared Natural Resources: The Way Forward project;
- Bijeljina and Tuzla, B&H, implemented the project “Ready – Saved” with funding from UNICEF in B&H;
- Bijeljina, B&H, joined the consortium of partners (Athens, Greece; Belgrade, Novi Sad and Nis, Serbia; East Sarajevo, B&H; Tirana, Albania; Rijeka, Croatia; and Sofia, Bulgaria) to implement the project “Cooperation Across Borders for a Sustainable Future”;
- Zabljak, Montenegro, applied for two IPA-funded programmes with municipalities from B&H and Serbia;

⁴ In certain cases exact titles of projects are missing and only partnerships are listed. This is mainly due to a relatively short time available for collecting this information.

- Zabljak, Montenegro, implemented two major infrastructural projects concerning waste water treatment and a city sports centre with partial funding from the Government of Slovenia;
- Uzice, Serbia, and Tuzla, B&H, participated in an IPA project that introduced primary waste selection in all primary and secondary schools in these two communities in 2013.

The following projects were submitted to different donor organisations/programs but did not receive funding or are still waiting for the final decision on funding:

- Priboj, Serbia, with partners from Rudo, B&H;
- Ljubovija, Serbia, with partners from Bratunac, B&H;
- Novo Gorazde, B&H, partnered with Trebinje and Gorazde from B&H;
- Novo Gorazde, B&H, partnered with Berane, Montenegro;
- Novo Gorazde, B&H, partnered with the city of Skopje, Macedonia;
- Novo Gorazde, B&H, implemented the project “FOR the future” in partnership with the municipality of Tuzla, B&H;
- Cajetina, Serbia, partner schools Milivoje Borović and Dušan Obradović from Zabljak, Montenegro, applied for IPA project but did not get funding. These schools got funds from their respective ministries of education for several reconstruction projects totalling €20 000;
- Osecina, Serbia, prepared a project proposal in Roma inclusion and submitted it to the Open Society Foundation.

Ljubovija, Serbia, partner school applied with a project proposal to restore one part of the school buildings to the Vlade Divac Foundation and with two proposals: Basis of Healthy Childhood, and With Internet into the World to the Novak Djokovic Foundation.