

Joint Learning Programme on SWAP

Report on events held in 2006 - April 2007

Report prepared for the
JLP Executive Committee
and
Steering Committee

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1. Introduction

The Joint Learning Programme on Sector Programmes - JLP/SWAp in brief - started with 3 pilot events in 2005, conducted 6 regular events in 2006, and 2 more in the first quarter of 2007. 11 more events have been approved for the rest of 2007. So far, around 350 government and donor officials, and civil society representatives, have attended the events, including the pilots.

The events have been very positively evaluated by participants, with average scores consistently between "very good" and "good" on a 4-point scale. Annex 1 includes a table showing participation and evaluation summaries for the 8 regular events conducted so far.

The approach to the organisation of the events - the emphasis of active involvement of both donor and government authorities in the preparation, and the formation of "Next Step"-groups in charge of bringing issues forward to the future process in the sector or country - has proven very successful in terms of anchoring the events in the specific context.

This report summarises lessons learned in relation to the JLP/SWAp events as learning events, and present general recommendations regarding the future of the JLP/SWAp. It is overall recommended to continue to offer "certified" events, also if it means that some level of headquarter supply-drive will continue to be required. The events should be seen as inputs in the operational processes in a country/sector, rather than as focused on training of agency staff and counterparts.

A separate report has been prepared summarising the lessons learned regarding sector wide approaches. This report is directed more narrowly to the donors funding the JLP, while the other report may be relevant for a broader and different audience.

The report has been prepared by Nils Boesen a/s, Process & Change Consultancy, teamleader for the consultants recruited as facilitators for the event. The report does not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the entire team of facilitators, nor of the Executive Committee of the JLP/SWAp.

2. Overview of Events

Table 1 shows the events held so far, as well as those planned for the rest of 2007 (timing for future events is indicative only):

Table 1: Events held 2005-2007:

Country	Sector(s)	Month/year	No. of participants	Lead organising donor agency
Vietnam	Education, Health	2/2005	22	EC
Kenya	Health	11/2005	27	Sida
Kenya	Agriculture	11/2005	42	Sida
Zambia	Water	04/2006	28	Danida
Nicaragua	Health	05/2006	32	DGIS
Laos	Education	06/2006	55	Unicef
Rwanda	Multi-sector	06/2006	40	UNDP
Ethiopia	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	11/2006	20	Italy
Tanzania	Roads	11/2006	30	EC
Burkina Faso	Agriculture	03/2007	47	Danida
Yemen	Education/Water	04/2007	43	DGIS

Table 1 cont.: Events planned for 2-4. Quarter 2007

Guatemala	Education	2. q/2007		CIDA
South Sudan	Education	2. q/2007		EC
Zambia	Environment	3. q/2007		Finnida
Cambodia	Cross-sectoral	3. q/2007		World Bank
Ghana	Decentralisation, Agriculture	3. q/2007		EC/CIDA
Bangladesh	Education, Health	4. q/2007		EC
Bangladesh	Water	4. q/2007		DGIS
Bolivia	Education, Water	4. q/2007		DGIS, EC
Nepal	Education	4. q/2007		Danida
Tanzania	Forestry	4. q/2007		GTZ
Lesotho	Water	4. q/2007		Irish Aid/EC

Country-wise the events will, at the end of 2007, have taken place in 9 African, 5 Asian, 3 Latin American, and 1 Middle Eastern countries. Sector-wise, education will have been covered in 8 events, water in 6, health in 4, and agriculture/forestry in 4. In addition, we will have had 2 multi-sector events, and 1 event in roads, environment and decentralisation, respectively. 6 events have covered more than one sector.

The funding donors behind the JLP/SWAp are most actively engaged as local lead organisers (including funding the local costs of the events). It is notable, however, that several other agencies, including multi-laterals, have taken or will take the lead.

All in all there is a remarkable spread on all accounts reported here, including the size of the events who have included from 20 (Ethiopia) to no less than 55 participants (Laos).

To cater for the events in countries where English is not the dominant language, the materials have been successively translated to Vietnamese, Spanish, Lao, French and Arabic. It is beyond the competence of the facilitation team to maintain updated versions in all these languages, but at present we count on updated versions in English, French, Spanish and Arabic (a final language check is required on the Arabic version).

3. Evaluation of Events, and Tracer Studies

The average scores of evaluations made by participants are included in annex 1. The overall average is shown in table 2:

Table 2: Overall average evaluations of 8 events (pilots not included):

1. Achievement of the objectives	1.9
2. Relevance of the event to my work	1.6
3. Balance "theory"/ "practice"	2.0
4. Mix of methods used	1.9
5. Materials provided	1.7
6. Quality of group work exercises	2.0
7. Facilitator's performance	1.5
8. Logistics and overall organisation	1.8
9. Overall average	1.7

(1= very good, 2 = good, 3= fair, 4 = not satisfactory)

Donor representatives tend to be slightly more critical (0,1-0,3) in their evaluations than government and civil society participants. All in all, the evaluations are largely at the same level across events, with Laos getting the lowest evaluation score and Nicaragua the highest.

Generally, the lowest scores and most critical comments have been given to group work and balance between theory and practice. The events in Lao and Burkina Faso scored lowest here - in Lao both the

novelty of the concepts, the translation needs and the large audience may explain this somewhat lower outcome. In Burkina, at the request of the organisers, the 3-day event had been shortened to 2 days, with a 3rd day devoted to discuss the future activities in the sector, simply leaving insufficient time for proper group work.

Though the exit-evaluations indicate a high level of general satisfaction, they do nothing more than that, and they may also reflect a level of politeness. To gauge the effectiveness of the events, it has been intended to conduct tracer-studies, where short questionnaires were sent to participants through the lead organising agency approximately 3 months after the event. In addition, the organising committee was requested to meet briefly (30-45 minutes) and answer a limited number of questions regarding the event.

Unfortunately, this intent of follow up has been highly unsuccessful: in only one country (Zambia/Water) did the organisers meet and respond, and only 5 participants (out of a total of 146) responded to the questionnaire. It is being considered by the Executive Committee if and how the tracer studies could be made even simpler or administered in a manner stimulating higher response.

One option would be to ask only the organisers to respond to a questionnaire, making a focus group meeting voluntary - though the focus group meeting in itself can be a valuable event in the further development of the SWAp process in the sector, as evidenced in the report from Zambia quoted in box 1:

Box 1: Excerpts - Zambia focus group meeting

“There was no senior level meeting resulting directly from the event as originally planned and prepared for by the Next Steps Group. However, important issues that the sector was struggling with for years were later resolved in an internal inter-ministerial meeting without Cooperating Partner participation. Representatives of the two key ministries confirmed that the JLP added to the pressure to have such a meeting and hence finally to the resolution of these issues.”

“The representatives from the two key ministries in the sector as well as the two lead Cooperation Partners were in agreement that the event did add considerable value to the discussion and understanding of PBA in the sector. Particularly valuable was that the participants of the event learned to look beyond the sector and learned to appreciate how the PFM reforms will affect the sectors in the medium and long-term (e.g. increasing competition between the sectors and GRZ’s priorities). People now feel comfortable to talk about Sector Programmes and feel competent to advise their seniors (Dir. and PS level) accordingly. Thanks to the distribution of all documents of the event on a CD, the participants now know

where to find information on SWAP, MTEF, PFM etc.”

Though the exit evaluations are poor at judging future impact of the event, there are positive expectations expressed by participants from various events:

Box 2: Expected effects of the events - sample comments from evaluations

- The event has energised the ongoing formulation processes of a rural development sector programme (Burkina Faso)
- The understanding of what a sector programme needs will allow for a much better dialogue in the future (Yemen)
- The event will change our approach to harmonisation (Ethiopia)
- The event will help us to be more focussed in planning of work (Tanzania)
- Such a joint event should be held annually to monitor progress in the sector programme (Nicaragua)
- Several donors said the event would help them to support the MoE in a better manner (Lao)
- The event will help in negotiating with donors (Rwanda)

However, not all participants have felt empowered by the event. In one case, asked “will you be in a position to take specific actions to promote a sector approach as a result of this event?” - the participant answered: “No. I am here on behalf of my boss”.

4. Preparation of Events

The preparation of the events in-country continues to follow different patterns, from intensive, early and tightly organised processes involving both government and donor partner, to less organised patterns with rather late buy-in by government partners and an underestimation of the time needed to ensure relevant participation.

In two recent cases (Ethiopia and Tanzania), the development partner organisers had clearly not succeeded, despite intentions, to bring the government solidly on board. This had significant negative consequences for the events (in terms of minimal government participation in Ethiopia, and in terms of unadjusted expectations and follow-up in Tanzania).

The latest round of events have thus confirmed the earlier report's finding that the preparatory phase demands intensive communication between the facilitators and the in-country organisers. Lessons learned are:

- Importance of dialogue about participation (numbers, levels and distribution between national and development partners). While country ownership on these decisions should be respected, tradeoffs need to be clearly understood. Clear and timely indications of mix and numbers are required to give facilitators a chance to prepare.
- Importance of dialogue about presentations of country experiences with SWAp, either in the sector(s) or by other sectors (content, timing, relevance etc.). Organisers have not always understood the importance of this (or had the resources to organise it)
- Importance of exploring status of the SWAp processes before arriving in country, through document reading and some e-mail based Q&A.
- The in-country preparation before the event should be systematically designed to include interviews with national and development partners about the status of the SWAp in the sector(s) and about possible "hot issues" that the event should address.

Reacting to the problems experienced in some events, the JLP Executive Committee is now sending a list of “joint commitments” to the in-country organisers when the approval of an event is communicated. This supports the subsequent dialogue between the facilitators and in-country organisers.

5. Timing of Events

It has been difficult to accommodate the desired timing of events expressed in the applications. This has particularly been the case with the new batch of events approved in February 2007 for the entire year - quite a big group wanted the events earlier than it is possible to deliver, and a time-horizon of up to 9 months from approval to implementation is not optimal. If future application rounds are made, they should preferably be semi-annual (e.g. deadlines and approvals in October/November and April/May, respectively, permitting implementation not later than 3-6 months after the deadline for applications).

6. Logistics

The logistic arrangements continue to be generally satisfactory. The practical tools prepared by the facilitators to help in-country partners to organise the work function well, and the in-country organisers have invested considerable resources (not least effective support staff) to make the events work on the practical level.

Except in Nicaragua, Ethiopia and Yemen, all events have been residential. Residential events are still preferable, but the programme may have to be adapted, e.g. shortened 1-2 hours if the 3rd day has to be short to enable participants to return to the capital.

7. Participation

Though the initial expectation for the JLP was a more or less even participation between development partner and government staff, with some participation of civil society, government staff continues to outnumber development partners (see annex 1 for details). After a rather slow start, civil society participation has picked up considerably, getting to an average around 20% for the last four events (though Yemen did not count on civil society participation). The facilitators have been pushing stronger in this area, requesting organisers to invite relevant non-state actors, but it may also seem that the awareness of the importance of having civil society involved in sector wide approaches has increased.

The gender balance is flatly not there, and less so in the latest events than in the first batch. It is of course not the task of the JLP/SWAp events to change the gender balance in the SWAp processes, but the skewed participation demonstrates that gender equality is a distant ambition in many countries and sectors.

The level of participation has been uneven - from events with rather high level participation (director generals, directors, task managers and deputies from development agencies), to events with mostly technical and operational level staff.

The facilitators consistently insist that participation from ministries of finance/planning be sought, but this is not always bringing them to the table. In both Rwanda, Yemen and Burkina Faso their presence was highly valuable, and their participation continues to be crucial to link sector policies and plans to the resource allocation processes.

Presence of district level officials - and/or local government representatives - continues to be extremely valuable, but does not always materialise. Civil society representatives may then get the role of being the voice of the local level and realities (Ethiopia).

The lessons recorded in the previous report largely stand confirmed. Updated, they are:

- Though facilitators can manage nearly conference-size numbers of participants, this does reduce participation in plenary debates, and groups will only sporadically report on their work. We shall continue to make it clear to organisers that participation beyond 30-35 is at the cost of less participation, and a more conference-like event.
- It is important that the organisers carefully compose the participation in terms of seniority levels, sector organisations, cross cutting ministries, local levels and civil society. The ideal participation pattern cannot be generalised across countries and sectors, and also depends on whether or not a senior level event is held after the 3-days event. This said, there should be a critical mass of management level staff present for the 3 days (second or third level in the public sector hierarchies, matched by participants from donor agencies).
- Domestic stakeholders should be expected and encouraged to outnumber development partner representatives, because this is crucial to foster the domestic debate about the sector's achievements and challenges, and to ensure a balanced participation in discussions. This may run counter to the foundation of the JLP/SWAp events as also being perceived and funded as donor

staff training. While it continues to have that function, it is much more an input in the delivery of development assistance among other with learning and partnership strengthening effects, and the events should be considered as such (see the concluding discussion for more details).

- It continues to be important to respect that decisions about participation are taken at the country level, this helps ensure ownership, crucial for future action based on the event's learning. This said, it clearly has an effect that the facilitators and the Executive Committee insist that a balanced and broad representation be pursued.

8. Senior Level Events

With the last round of events, the occurrence of senior level events have picked up. They have been held in Lao, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Burkina Faso and Yemen.

In all cases, they have proven extremely valuable in bringing messages from the events "up the ladder". This has had a double function: firstly, it has focused the work of the Next Steps Groups that are formed during the 3-day event with the purpose of collecting "items for the future agenda". The fact that the group know that it will have to make a formal presentation helps a lot. Secondly, the discussions in the senior level events do put issues on the agenda, whether this is done explicitly or implicitly. Even in the case where the next step group had not got its act together, this experience was in itself a strong message to senior levels that they needed to put more efforts in the sector processes to strengthen the SWAp. Though the message was negative - that the SWAp stood much weaker than perceived by development partners and authorities - this message stood clear cut and evident for everybody after the senior level event.

Lessons learned are therefore:

- Senior level events continue to be a highly relevant offer, and country organisers should always and routinely be encouraged to plan them as a normal part of the "package".

9. Training of Local Facilitators

It is now standard procedure to offer to involve local facilitators in the events, with the objective of enabling them to repeat the events in the sector, or in other sectors. So far, the offer has only been

accepted in Ethiopia, and in the end it turned out to be expatriate advisers and donor staff being the potential trainees. After the event, a short session was held to discuss the process aspects of the facilitation.

Though it has not been widely accepted, it is recommended to keep the offer on the table.

10. Further Observations on Event Objectives and Effects

The function of the learning event continues to vary in the very varied country processes:

- The event may serve to bring an ongoing SWAp forward in the sense of allowing national and development partners to discuss and broadly agree on future steps that would deepen the process. This was partly the function in Nicaragua, Zambia, Rwanda, Burkina Faso and Yemen.
- It may in a more limited sense bring contentious issues and blockages on the agenda, without offering immediate solutions. This, however, would be the first step in dealing with these problems. The events in Zambia, Tanzania and Ethiopia had this effect.
- In other cases, the events have served to ensure a broader buy-in among what is hopefully a critical mass of government officials in the sector, thereby enhancing government capacity to lead the process and the donors. Lao mainly served for this purpose.
- Finally, the events have in some instances allowed useful cross-fertilisation of experiences from one sector to another. This has been evident in multi-sector events (Rwanda, Yemen) but also where other sectors have been presenting their experiences (Ethiopia).

Facilitators should try to detect the balance between these non-exclusive objectives, which are all valid contributions to harmonisation and alignment processes in the sector/country.

11. Content, Methods and Processes

Across the events, there is general satisfaction with the content presented. A separate module on decentralisation is now available. This has proven valuable in several instances, particularly in Rwanda and in Ethiopia. The slide set can either be integrated in the other modules or kept as a separate module.

It is increasingly rare that the few formal exercises are used. The events work best when the modules consist of a country/sector/local presentation (20-40 minutes), a conceptual presentation (20-40 minutes), group discussions about issues and challenges in the sector (30-60 minutes), and a plenary wrap-up (20-30 minutes). There are handouts with questions to stimulate the group discussions.

There is still a challenge in getting the balance totally right between presentations and debates, or between concepts and practices. It depends on the audience, and cannot be prescribed - a group well-acquainted with the concepts and relatively far into a SWAp process will be able to work in groups with less guidance and for longer time, while settings where participants are less familiar with the SWAp thinking demands more introduction, and more structured groups processes.

Consistent with the experiences, our slide set has gradually been reduced. We presently have 74 slides in the main set for 3 days, of which around 20 are for the introductory first overview module, leaving less than 60 substantive slides for the 5 substance modules. We are thus moving away from using the slides to "teach" or to "train", they serve instead as a proposal for framing the subsequent discussions.

We are constantly revising the background documents and handouts to be included in the package. The materials have been made available at www.nilsboesen.dk, where the latest set of slides, handouts and background materials can be downloaded. It is expected that Train4Dev soon will get a website running where the materials can also be accessible.

12. Facilitators

In light of the approval of 11 events for the rest of 2007, the group of facilitators have been expanded through a selective search for senior level consultants with documented facilitation skills and insight in and experience with sector wide approaches. The group of potential facilitators have thus expanded to around 10. We are still thin in French-speaking facilitators, but no French speaking countries applied for events in this round. We will thus be able to cover the 2007 events.

13. Main Recommendations - The Future of the JLP SWAp Events

The demand for the JLP/SWAp events has been strong - there were 15 applications in February 2007, of which 13 were approved (some as joint events). The JLP/SWAp events are, seen from the country/sector viewpoint, heavily subsidized, but they are not free goods - the organisers have to invest considerable time (sometimes the commodity in most scarce supply) and some money.

On the supply side, the JLP/SWAp product has now been rather thoroughly tested, and a number of particular strengths are worth noticing:

- the JLP/SWAp events, through the emphasis of a local input, only happens when there is local commitment and ownership - which means when the JLP/SWAp event is seen as a useful element in the SWAp process.
- The events, by drawing heavily on local presentations, seek to ground themselves carefully in the local context, and tailor the content to the demand.
- The combined effect of forming Next Step groups and include Senior Level Events is that the events become forward looking stock-taking exercises. They are in this sense learning events, but they have little resemblance with traditional supply-driven training.
- The events are perceived to be neutral by the virtue of the many donors behind them - it is not one donor's product or concept.

They should therefore neither be perceived as nor funded as donor agency staff training events. Instead, they should be recognised as development assistance proper: as valid inputs in the ongoing SWAp processes, similar to e.g. short term analytical work, reviews or other elements. As such, they should ideally be fully funded by those who demand the services.

However, such a change might have three negative implications: First, the so to speak "certified" and uniform approach across countries and sectors ensures that lessons learned are taken into account and discussed through the upwards accountability structure from facilitators to Executive Committee and Steering Group. It thus in principle ensures a uniform quality of the product, and the option to discuss this with policy-level staff in the funding agencies.

A free-market viewpoint would of course counter-argue that quality would increase and the price go down if competition between suppliers was stronger. However, this is the second problem: the market for these services is very small and very imperfect, and the incentives to stay in the market for the facilitators (who are all proven senior level consultants with no problems in filling their order books) will be small. Having one or two events annually would not warrant the effort to update or develop materials, keep several language versions ready etc.

Thirdly, the JLP/SWAp events are strongly attached to the Paris-agenda, which is not just a decentralised exercise of harmonisation and alignment in aid receiving countries, but also an exercise driven by and between donor headquarters.

It is the estimate that without some continued centralised process, the JLP SWAp events will rather quickly die. If SWApS and PBAs are still on the policy agenda, this would be a loss. It is therefore the overall recommendation that the JLP SWAp events be continued.

It is recommended that the funding donors consider to prepare moving the events out of the Train4Dev umbrella (or at least make it explicit that this is not staff training, but development assistance). Funding should thus come from development budgets, rather than staff training budgets.

The financial burden sharing between countries/sectors and a core group of contributing donors can of course be changed, so that e.g. a fixed or real-cost based amount is charged to country/sector funds for facilitator services, travels etc. However, a core funding should be maintained to ensure updating and maintenance of materials, reporting across events - as presently done. It should also be realised that the administrative burdens in such a set-up with additional cost-sharing arrangement could be considerable.

In a scenario with a changed cost sharing arrangement, a possible set-up could be the contracting of programme management services comprising:

- maintenance of application and information materials, circulation of calls for applications through the Executive Committee, acting as Secretariat for this.

- initial screening of application to ease approval (if direct event costs are to be fully paid for by the country development partners, approval as such would not be required)

- revisions/updating of materials in key languages
- maintenance of a roster of qualified consultants, and “pairing” of these to events.
- reporting across events

There would of course be a need for further detailing alternative set-ups, should it be decided to continue the events in some form or another.

May 9th, 2007.

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Annex 1: Summary of Participation and Evaluation ¹

	All events	Zambia	Nicaragua	Lao	Rwanda	Ethiopia	Tanzania	Burkina Faso	Yemen
No. of participants	295	28	32	55	40	20	30	47	43
% government/donors/civil society	63/29/8	68/29/3	66/34/0	76/22/2	88/12/0	15/60/25	53/20/27	53/28/19	56/44/0
% male/female	79/21	71/29	44/56	87/13	75/25	90/10	93/7	87/13	77/23
1. Achievement of the objectives	1.9	2.0	1.2	2.2	1.7	1.8	2.0	2.0	2.0
2. Relevance of the event to my work	1.6	1.4	1.1	1.8	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.9	1.5
3. Balance "theory" / "practice"	2.0	2.0	1.4	2.4	1.9	1.9	2.2	2.6	1.9
4. Mix of methods used	1.9	1.8	1.4	2.1	1.8	2.0	1.9	2.1	1.7
5. Materials provided	1.7	1.5	1.2	2.0	1.5	1.7	2.1	1.8	1.7
6. Quality of group work exercises	2.0	2.1	1.5	1.9	1.5	2.3	1.8	2.6	1.9
7. Facilitator's performance	1.5	1.5	1.2	1.6	1.5	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6
8. Logistics and overall organisation	1.8	1.6	1.2	2.3	1.6	1.5	2.1	1.9	2.1
9. Overall average	1.7	1.7	1.3	2.0	1.6	1.7	1.9	2.0	1.8

(1:very good; 2: good; 3: fair; 4: unsatisfactory). The next steps groups was not assessed in Nicaragua, but was highly successful.

¹ Different evaluation formats were used for the events, to accommodate harmonisation of evaluation procedures for different Train4dev activities. In addition, through human error, an early draft version was used in Rwanda, making full comparison across events difficult