

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report develops the Terminal Evaluation of Project RLA/99/G31/A/1G/99 “Environmental Protection of the Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front: Pollution Prevention and Control, and Habitat Restoration”, also known as FREPLATA. The main objective of the Project is to prevent and, when necessary, mitigate the degradation of transboundary resources of the Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front, and to contribute to the sustainable use of its resources. The main funding source of FREPLATA is the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

According to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Evaluation (see Annex I), the “... main objective is to analyze and document the results obtained with the execution of the project during the period 2000-2007, and to determine its impacts, sustainability and lessons learned” (p. 2).

The TOR require that the focus of the Evaluation should be “... specifically to:

- Evaluate the achievement of project objectives, results/impacts, and products.
- Evaluate the achievements of the project based on GEF Project Evaluation Criteria, including an assessment of implementation, appropriation by countries’ environmental authorities and regional actors, participation of actors, sustainability, replicability, financial planning, cost/effectiveness, monitoring and evaluation.
- Identify the problems or circumstances that may have affected the implementation of the Strategic Action Program and the results obtained with the project, in order to guide the preparation of other phases of intervention in the long run, including potential new GEF interventions.
- Identify the main lessons learned that can be disseminated among other relevant GEF projects and among regional and national authorities and actors involved in the project which plan follow up actions” (pp. 2-3-).

The methodological framework applied to undertake the Evaluation consisted of the following four steps: i) literature and document review; ii) interviews and technical consultations; iii) design of the evaluation approach; and iv) application of the evaluation approach. The Evaluation focused on three areas of analysis: Project formulation, implementation and results. Each area of analysis was divided into sub-areas or dimensions of analysis, for which specific evaluation criteria were defined to determine the performance of the Project in each corresponding dimension.

In Chapters 5.0 to 13.0 the methodological approach is applied and the results obtained are discussed. Each of these chapters closes with the conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations resulting from the evaluation carried out. In specific terms, the areas and dimensions evaluated in each chapter are:

- Chapter 5.0: Project Formulation: Conceptual Approach.
- Chapter 6.0: Project Formulation: Design.
- Chapter 7.0: Project Formulation: Enabling Environment, Participation, and National and Bi-National Ownership.
- Chapter 8.0: Project Implementation: Institutional Capacity.
- Chapter 9.0: Project Implementation: Management.
- Chapter 10.0: Project Implementation: Follow Up and Evaluation.
- Chapter 11.0: Project Implementation: Political Compromise, and Stakeholder Participation and Support.
- Chapter 12.0: Results: Achievement of Development Objective, Immediate Objectives and Products, Unanticipated Impacts; and Sustainability.
- Chapter 13.0: Results: Situation Obtained at Project Termination.

I. Project Formulation: Conceptual Approach

1. Conclusions

The conceptual approach applied in the design of the Project is considered **highly satisfactory** in terms of the identification and characterization of the problems and situations that the Project aimed to attack; the integral and long-term theoretical and methodological approach, following the guidelines established in the GEF Waterbody-

Based Operational Program, applied in the analysis of causes, interrelationships and consequences of the environmental degradation of the Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front (RPMF); and the consideration of other relevant environmental projects and initiatives at the national, bi-national and international levels. In contrast to the preceding, the conceptual approach omitted the explicit assessment of the experiences and lessons learned in other projects involving the environmental management of transboundary aquatic systems, so this aspect is considered **unsatisfactory**.

2. Lessons Learned

As evidenced in next chapter, the sound conceptual framework used in the formulation of the Project contributed to the design of a technical proposal that relates in a logical fashion and structures in a satisfactory way each Project phase and its corresponding products and activities. However, the omission of the experiences and lessons learned in similar projects affected the quality of design of the Project, particularly in the areas of management and control related to the estimated timeframe included in the work plan to complete certain relevant activities and the institutional structure designed to implement the Project.

3. Recommendations

Project proposals submitted for consideration before the GEF should explicitly include the analysis of relevant and pertinent experiences and lessons learned. In addition, the GEF should include as a specific evaluation criterion of proposals whether they consider adequately experiences and lessons learned, and if proposals incorporate them in their designs.

II. Project Formulation: Design

1. Conclusions

Regarding the *design of Project management and control*, the estimated budget is considered **highly satisfactory**. The proposed personnel, equipment and infrastructure are assessed as **satisfactory**, although a person with expertise in project management and control was not included among the Project staff. Likewise, the Project follow up and evaluation mechanisms are considered **satisfactory**, since they include a series of reports, meeting and evaluations properly programmed and budgeted, although there is no specific requirement for the Executing Unit to have internal tools for the management and control of project implementation.

While in general the work plan contains an adequate timeframe to obtain the different products associated with each immediate objective (Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis -TDA-, Strategic Action Program -SAP- and SAP Implementation Framework), it is assessed as **marginally satisfactory** because it did not include the minimal logistical and operative activities required for Project start up, and since the timeframe allotted for the implementation of some critical specific activities was clearly insufficient, in particular the ones dealing with: i) the identification and contact of key actors and institutions, and the process of design, negotiation and agreement among participating institutions on the make up and operation of the working groups that would prepare the TDA; ii) the development of the inter-institutional cooperation and coordination framework for the management of transboundary problems; and iii) the design and execution of the capacity building plan.

The institutional framework is considered **unsatisfactory** since, partially with the exception of the Consortium Direction Commission and the Coordinating Committee, the organizational structure proposed to implement the Project and coordinate the activities of different actors in general does not define clearly and specifically the responsibilities and composition of each of its constituent parts and, further, because it did not include an instance for wide consultation with specific responsibility to support the close monitoring of Project development to ensure the achievement of objectives and the work plan. The preceding statements do not dampen the positive decision to designate the CARP-CTMFM Consortium as the organization of execution of the Project, in view of its integration by international Commissions with joint work experience, and clear and indisputable jurisdiction over the bi-national administration of the Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front, established by means of a specific international treaty.

In relation to the assigned time frame to execute the Project, it resulted **unsatisfactory**, since practice showed that it was seriously underestimated.

With regards to the *Project's technical design*, the formulation of the development objective and the general purpose are assessed as **satisfactory**. Although the first part of the development objective establishes ends such as the prevention and mitigation of the degradation of the aquatic system, which are unattainable with a project aimed at preparing and approving a TDA, formulating and adopting a SAP, and strengthening and supporting the SAP implementation framework, the second portion is adequately formulated, since it is referred to the future contribution to the sustainable use of system resources. In contrast, the articulation of the Project's general purpose encloses the operation's essence, since it makes reference to the development of the SAP, based on the TDA, with the end of contributing to the prevention and mitigation of transboundary environmental problems, and facilitating the sustainable use of resources.

With reference to other components of the technical design, the logical framework is **highly satisfactory** in terms of its logical structure and the programming of the implementation of each immediate objective and its corresponding products and activities, all of which are structured, related and programmed in a detailed, logical and systematic way. The indicators, means of verification, and risks and assumptions defined are **unsatisfactory** in the sense that the majority of performance indicators are formulated in a generic and imprecise manner, and are not expressed in such a way to allow their qualitative or quantitative measurement, to a large extent the means of verification are not pertinent, no risks are specified and all assumptions are formulated in favorable terms for the development of the Project.

2. Lessons Learned

In complex transboundary projects such as FREPLATA, whose implementation involves the participation of public entities from different countries with distinct areas of administrative authority and geographical jurisdiction, as well as academic institutions and actors from the private and non governmental sectors, require intense and long processes of information, convincing, negotiation and agreement that must be duly and realistically reflected in the work plans that are part of the design of such projects, so as to prevent to the extent possible delays in the initial stages of implementation. Furthermore, the experience with FREPLATA indicates that the required information and negotiation processes must begin much earlier than the date set for project commencement.

Additionally, as a way of preventing potential delays in project start, as well as to avoid distracting attention from implementation-related activities, the work plans associated with complex transboundary projects such as FREPLATA should consider the time required for the establishment of the minimal logistical and operative conditions necessary for project start, such as the selection and hiring of key personnel, and securing and furnishing the physical spaces needed for the operation of executing units. The experience with FREPLATA indicates that some of these processes should initiate before the formal project start date.

The institutional frameworks for the implementation of complex projects, in particular operations such as FREPLATA involving different countries with markedly distinct political and territorial structures, should establish in a precise way the composition, objectives, responsibilities, modes of operation and periodicity of reunions of each of the instances that integrate those frameworks. The experience with FREPLATA indicates that imprecision in relation to the institutional structure for its execution translated into serious delays in the formation of some component parts of the structure, as well as in some confusion regarding the roles of some organizational instances. In addition, the exclusion from the institutional framework of an independent consultative instance with wide representation from pertinent public entities, academic institutions and civil society organizations, not directly involved in project implementation, meant that FREPLATA did not benefit from external qualified advise and guidance on its general development and whether it was on course to meet its objectives and global work plan.

The experience with FREPLATA in the conformation of a Consortium of two bi-national entities as organization of execution is worth of consideration in the design of other transboundary projects, in particular in view of the satisfactory final results attained and the high level of inter-institutional coordination and cooperation achieved (see

Chapter 12.0). This is due to the particular characteristics of the CARP-CTMFM Consortium, made up of international Commissions with joint work experience of over twenty years at the time of Project approval, clear and undisputable jurisdiction over the bi-national administration of the Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front established through a specific international treaty, a tradition of reaching agreement by consensus, high institutional convening power, which did not represent a threat to the competences of the different continental institutions of both countries with jurisdiction at the local, regional or national levels.

The previous lessons are considered critical since, as FREPLATA demonstrates, even transboundary projects with an adequate design in terms of a well-formulated global work plan, sufficient budget and personnel resources, adequate follow up and evaluation mechanisms, clear objectives and a well-structured logical framework, may be seriously affected in their implementation by the elements mentioned, in particular in their initial stages.

3. Recommendations

Recommendations are obvious regarding the need for the designs of transboundary projects to take into consideration the conclusions and lessons learned from FREPLATA.

III. Project Formulation: Enabling Environment, Participation, and National and Bi-National Ownership

The consideration of *enabling environment* components (political compromise, institutional capacity, and environmental regulatory and policy framework) in Project formulation was **highly satisfactory**. Likewise, both the level of *participation and consultation* achieved and the degree of *ownership* reached in the formulation of the Project were **highly satisfactory**.

The above highly positive aspects of the formulation of the Project played an important role in terms of the breadth and depth of the proposal formulated in the Project Document, as reflected in general in the quality of the conceptual approach and the pertinence of the majority of elements of Project design, as discussed in the previous two sections. In particular, it is important to underline the participatory approach adopted in the preparation of the proposal. All these elements constitute important lessons learned to take into account in the formulation of transboundary projects.

IV. Project Implementation: Institutional Capacity

1. Conclusions

After overcoming different internal and external circumstances that delayed the planned start of FREPLATA, the Executing Unit (EU) got sufficient personnel, budget and equipment resources, as well as an appropriate physical structure, to carry out adequately its functions and responsibilities, as established in the Project Document. When the composition and functions of the EU were precisely specified through CARP-CTMFM Consortium's Resolution N° 7/01, dated September 24, 2001, which were not clearly established in the Project Document, it achieved sufficient authority and autonomy to discharge its duties. The institutional roles and responsibilities of the entities that made up the Inter-Sectoral Working Groups created for the preparation of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA), the Strategic Action Program (SAP) and the National Action Plans (NAPs) were, in general, clearly established and accepted. Further, FREPLATA became firmly institutionalized within the bi-national, national and sub-national environmental management systems.

In spite of what was just said, the EU evidenced shortcomings in the management of the Project, specifically in carrying out the original work plan and its reformulated version, concentrating initially almost all of its efforts and resources in the TDA preparation phase, neglecting activities associated with the other two phases of the Project that should have been implemented in parallel with the formulation of the TDA. It is believed that the unavailability of personnel with expertise in project management at the EU, as well as specific project management and control tools, contributed to the noted shortcomings.

As time passed, FREPLATA showed capacity to adjust and adapt its execution to finally reach its objectives successfully. The Mid-Term Evaluation of the Project, conducted in September 2003, and the Project Management Technical Assistance, executed in March 2005, both sponsored by UNDP, were particularly important in the adjustment processes. Specifically, the results of the former contributed to the update of the global work plan, the conclusion of the TDA preparation and adoption phase, the improvement of communication and dissemination activities, the implementation of some pilot projects and the regularization of Coordination Committee meetings. The recommendations arising from the latter supported the adaptation of the Project's institutional structure to ensure higher efficiency in the SAP approval process; the creation of an instance for wide consultation, represented by the Advisory Committee; the adjustment of budget execution; more involvement of non-governmental organizations; a better information and communication flow between the EU and the UNDP Office in Uruguay; and a closer relationship between FREPLATA and other international water projects financed by GEF in the region. There was no evidence that EU progress reports, UNDP Annual Project Reports or UNDP/GEF Project Implementation Reports played a role in Project implementation adjustments.

2. Lessons Learned

Highly complex transboundary projects such as FREPLATA should count with specific project management and control expertise and tools to help executing agencies in the process of steering these operations towards the fulfillment of their global work plans and corresponding milestones. This is valid even for executing units with adequate personnel, budget and resources, sufficient authority and autonomy for decision making, and institutionalized as part of countries' environmental management frameworks.

In order to facilitate the start and execution of complex projects, the respective project documents should specify the staff, objectives and functions of executing units, as well as their management, control and operational procedures.

The external evaluations and technical support missions undertaken by competent consultants can become useful tools in the identification of limitations and shortcomings in the execution of complex projects, and the proposal of feasible mechanisms for their adjustment and correction.

3. Recommendations

In correspondence with the statements in the two previous sections, the designs of complex projects should incorporate requirements related to the expertise and tools necessary for project management and control. In addition, they should specify clearly, in relation to executing units, their composition, objectives, responsibilities and operational procedures.

External evaluations and technical support missions should continue to be conducted in a timely manner and strengthened, in view of their usefulness in the adjustments and adaptations necessary to correct shortcomings and limitations in project execution.

GEF and UNDP should evaluate the convenience of building the capacity of new project executants in the application of the administrative procedures required in the projects that they finance.

V. Project Implementation: Management

1. Conclusions

In relation to *global Project management*, it was **satisfactory** in the fulfillment of annual work plans and the preparation and timely submission of progress reports. In spite of experiencing variations in the global budget, it was timely adjusted without impacting Project implementation, so it is appraised as **satisfactory**. However, the execution of the original work plan was **unsatisfactory**.

Regarding the *institutional structure for Project execution*, its conformation and consolidation was a relatively long learning process that faced different challenges. It is assessed globally as **marginally satisfactory**, although towards the end of Project implementation it had consolidated and was in general working adequately.

With respect to *formal and/or informal communication and coordination mechanisms* implemented, they are considered **satisfactory**. Since Project start there is a close and frequent communication flow between the EU and the Consortium Direction Commission. The communication and coordination activities related to the technical aspects of TDA, SAP and NAPs preparation were implemented mainly through the Inter-Sectoral Working Groups, and the communication and coordination of institutional issues and the approval of the TDA, SAP and NAPs were conducted, as pertinent, through the Coordination Committee or the Advisory Committee.

In reference to the *relations and associations in the areas of inter-institutional collaboration, support and exchange*, they resulted **highly satisfactory**, since they involved the signing of 33 framework agreements for scientific and technical cooperation and 58 operational agreements for TDA formulation, as well as 16 technical cooperation agreements for SAP and NAPs preparation.

Regarding *financial planning and annual budget execution*, they were **marginally satisfactory**. Among the **unsatisfactory** aspects were the tardy disbursements of co-financers, the limited correspondence between estimated and actual annual budgets, and the limited control over the real costs of objectives and products. Among the **satisfactory** aspects were the levels of disbursement reached towards the end of Project implementation, the cost **effectiveness** of the results obtained, the expected level of total co-financing disbursements at the end of the Project, and the activities undertaken to secure funding for SAP implementation.

2. Lessons Learned

The lessons learned with respect to the implementation of the global work plan are presented in Sub-Numeral 2 of Numeral IV above.

In relation to the *institutional structure for Project execution*, the *formal and/or informal communication and coordination mechanisms* and, particularly, the *relations and associations in the areas of inter-institutional collaboration, support and exchange*, after the difficulties confronted at Project start and the learning, adaptation and adjustment processes underwent by FREPLATA in these areas described in Chapter 8.0, towards the end of Project implementation FREPLATA has been successful in establishing a institutional structure, coordination and communication mechanisms, and inter-institutional relations that reflect good international practices worth systematizing and disseminating for the benefit of other transboundary projects.

Regarding *financial planning and annual budget execution*, the main lessons learned are the following: i) lack of continuity in Project coordination can negatively affect the quality of financial planning, although sometimes this circumstance may be used to implement necessary corrective measures; ii) timely evaluations and flexibility to implement their recommendations contribute positively to good financial planning; iii) the opportune support of the Implementing Agency is fundamental for a good Project financial performance; and v) co-financing offerings made at the beginning of the project should be taken with a healthy skepticism and opportune contingency measures should be planned in case these do not come trough or undergo important delays.

3. Recommendations

Recommendations about the implementation of the global work plan are given in Sub-Numeral 3 of Numeral IV.

Regarding the *institutional structure for Project execution*, the *formal and non-formal communication and coordination mechanisms*, and particularly the *relations and associations in the areas of inter-institutional collaboration, support and exchange*, it is recommended to systemize and share the FREPLATA learning and adaptation experiences in these areas until the good management practices presently applied are adopted and institutionalized, given their relevance for similar projects.

As for *financial planning and annual budget execution*, and given the results of the analysis made and the resulting conclusions, it is recommended to take a closer look and exert a closer control of the budget from the very beginning in future similar Projects, to narrow the gap between the budgeted and executed annual expenditures. It is also important to keep adequate cost accounting by objectives and products. This will allow for a better Project execution control and a better estimate of the real Project costs. An adequate cost accounting is also important regarding the coordination activities in order to be able to make a better estimate of the percentage that these costs represent regarding the GEF contribution, as a cost-efficiency criterion. Last but not least, it is also important that the functionaries of the executing and participating organizations receive a better explanation and illustration about the concept of shared and incremental costs during the design of the SAP.

VI. Project Implementation: Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Conclusions

The monitoring, control and evaluation of FREPLATA faced deficiencies. There was no evidence about the existence of a formal project management and control system in the Executing Unit and the logical framework indicators were not used for monitoring Project activities. The Program monitoring and evaluation schedule was partially fulfilled, although the results and recommendations of the Midterm Evaluation (September 2003) and Technical Assistance for Project Management Mission (March 2005) played a relevant role in bringing about needed adjustments in Project execution. The monitoring and activity reports were made with the required regularity by the Executing Unit, UNDP, and GEF.

2. Lessons Learned

The lessons learned mentioned in Sub-Numeral 2 of Numeral IV are ratified. Also, the importance of flexibility in transboundary project execution processes and mechanisms was made evident. This is particularly important when delays and implementation problems are detected that need the adoption of corrections and adjustments.

3. Recommendations

The recommendations mentioned in Sub-Numeral 2 of Numeral IV are ratified. It is also recommended that formal project monitoring and control mechanisms be established in the executing organizations of transboundary projects. This could be accomplished by the incorporation of “SMART” logical framework indicators as well as other specific monitoring and management indicators. It is considered of importance to explore the use of integrated information systems associated to transboundary projects for the monitoring, management and control activities.

VII. Project Implementation: Political Commitment and Stakeholder Participation and Support

1. Conclusions

The *political commitment and support* to FREPLATA provided by the key governmental institutions is considered satisfactory, especially that provided by the CARP-CTMFM consortium and the organizations that supported the SAP.

As for the *stakeholder participation and support*, it can be considered as significant as a whole only near the end of the Project, even if some civil society and private sector representatives participated early in the Project in the elaboration of technical documents and as beneficiaries. Additionally, no evidence was found of their participation in other institutional FREPLATA arrangements beyond the Inter-sectoral Work Groups and the Technical Advisory Group. Academic institutions, however, evidenced a broader participation in the elaboration of technical documents and in the institutional framework of FREPLATA since the beginning of the Project. The participation of non-governmental stakeholders is therefore considered to be **marginally satisfactory**. However, the support received from NGOs that had knowledge about the project is **satisfactory**.

2. Lessons Learned

Civil society and private sector organizations should be fully involved from the very beginning of transboundary projects. This will allow for better support, greater enhancement of technical document content and depth, and better knowledge of the Project beyond the public sector and academic involvement. It may also prevent last minute surprise rejections of Project components or proposals due to lack of understanding of Project aims and purposes. The level of participation in the Project reached by academic institutions, the mechanism used for their involvement and the resulting high technical quality of the results produced are considered to be good practices that should be systemized and shared, as stated in the respective chapters of the main report.

3. Recommendations

Complex transboundary projects such as FREPLATA should make an all-out effort to involve relevant civil society organizations from the very beginning of their execution.

The mechanisms and modalities used by FREPLATA to incorporate the academic sector since the beginning of the Project should be systemized and given ample diffusion.

VIII. Results: Development Objectives, Specific Objectives and Products; Non-anticipated Impacts; and Sustainability

1. Conclusions

The Project results, as a whole, are **satisfactory**. Among specific **satisfactory** results are the level at which Specific Objective 1 was achieved, the high quality of the TDA, the significant participation of national technicians and scientists in its development, the endorsement given by the governmental institutions to the SAP and the way in which the SAP is related to the TDA, the success of the National Coordinator figure, the quality of the activities performed for reaching Specific Objective 3, and the way in which the Project contributed to the bi-national understanding, collaboration and cooperation in and between the governmental institutions of both countries. In addition, the Project produced a series of highly positive non-anticipated impacts.

The important future effort that will be needed to effectively implement the SAP notwithstanding, the solid institutional collaboration and cooperation work performed, the technical information base developed, the advancement in institutional and legal instruments achieved, and the priority actions and investment projects identified as products of FREPLATA, lay the foundation and delineate a **highly satisfactory** long-term sustainability perspective as a result of the Project.

Among the weak points of the Project are the low level of representation in the SAP of actions and projects presented by some of the stakeholders and a lack of specific commitments about meeting quantitative objectives in the SAP, as well as a relative weaker participation of municipalities and other civil society stakeholders in the support and strengthening activities of Specific Objective 3 of the Project.

2. Lessons Learned

The following lessons learned deserve mention:

- i) Given prevalent conditions existing in most participating countries, projects should not be overly optimistic and ambitious regarding what can be achieved, as well as regarding the time-frame during which their objectives and goals could be achieved.
- ii) It would be convenient to have all the necessary organization that is required for the execution of this type of projects in place well in advance of the initiation of the Project proper. Its consolidation might take some time.
- iii) When there is limited clarity and overlap regarding the jurisdictional definition and functions of the executing agencies involved, as well as rivalries, it is important to have a direction-setting organization operating in a neutral plane that is well respected by everybody involved and with high capability for conflict solving and negotiation.

- iv) The organization for Project execution must be flexible and adaptable although staying within the basic rules of the financing institutions and the national policy guidelines of participating countries.
- v) In this type of projects it is convenient to have from the beginning a check and balance entity (commission or committee) to steer and provide the right direction and to balance interests and activities within the Project.
- vi) The way in which the execution of the TDA was set encouraged the interest and empowerment of national technicians and scientists, but not those of civil society or population in general.
- vii) The development of this type of diagnostics, as an integral part in the preparation of a SAP, needs a clear definition of its fundamental purpose right from the very beginning. Otherwise, there will be a risk of unnecessary prolongation of research activities, expense overrun, gathering of information irrelevant for the SAP and omitting information that the SAP needs in order to be effective.
- viii) The way, in which the SAP was prepared with ample national institutional participation from the very beginning, encouraged empowerment and involvement from those institutions. An important contributing factor was the figure of the National Coordinators and their participation which achieved a better communication between the Project Executing Unit and the national institutions of both countries.
- ix) The interest of the civil society and the private sector in this type of Project is not spontaneously generated. It has to be promoted from the very beginning of the Project. A way to achieve their interest is by allowing them to participate in decision-making regarding the role that they see themselves playing in Project execution.

3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made regarding the SAP:

- i) The comprehension and usefulness of the SAP document would be greatly enhanced by a revision of some parts of the text in the report and its annexes. Some portions originate mainly from the National Plans and their relation to the text in the SAP report is not always evident.
- ii) It would be convenient to clearly specify what is the situation expected at the end of the SAP execution, as compared with the original situation or baseline.
- iii) During the interviews, it was evident that the number of projects submitted by the institutions for inclusion in the SAP was greater than the number actually selected and included. It would be convenient to explicitly state the prioritization and selection criteria.
- iv) The SAP document states its objectives and action guidelines, but does not include the Project themselves. These can be seen only in the National Plans. It would be convenient to summarize them also within the SAP text. By finding them only in the National Plans, the reader may get the erroneous impression that they represent only a shopping list from the national institutions portfolio. This erroneous impression must be eliminated by a more explicit linking of the actual actions and projects with the strategic guidelines of the SAP.
- v) It would be convenient to include within the SAP document an implementation plan as well as specific monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- vi) During SAP discussions, specific and valuable strategies for biodiversity and pollution control were discussed and adopted. It would be convenient if these strategies were reflected in the SAP document as well as the ways in which they contributed to the SAP integration.
- vii) The SAP elaboration process is a rich experience full of lessons learned that could be used in other projects. It is important to document these lessons. It is also important to present a time-line detail of the different steps that were followed for the elaboration of the SAP until reaching the endorsement of the national institutions of both countries.
- viii) If the SAP is to be used as the basis for requesting additional funds from GEF, it would be necessary to revise the fulfillment of the incremental-cost concept.

Regarding the activities for strengthening the SAP implementation framework, the following recommendations are made:

- i) These activities include a variety of courses and training activities, meetings, workshops, seminars, and gatherings, the organization of drawing and Photo contests, exhibitions, samples, round tables, excursions and the participation and/or sponsoring of activities of other related organizations. These are included and

can be found in the well constructed FREPLATA Integrated Information System. However, its usefulness and diffusion would be greatly enhanced if, like the TDA and SAP, these activities were cohesively presented in a report showing a coherence of actions, participants and beneficiaries, as well as expected and obtained results.

- ii) The FREPLATA database is very good and is being used by several national organizations. The idea of integrating it with the data bases of the national environmental organizations in both countries is worthwhile to enhance its benefits.
- iii) It would be convenient to strengthen the participation of the municipalities and civil society entities in the SAP implementation activities. One way to achieve this, although by no means the only one would be to promote projects favoring the strengthening of the RIIGLO as well as projects generated by civil society entities in collaboration with national and/or provincial institutions.

IX. Results: Situation Achieved at the End of the Project

1. *Did the Project contribute to a long-term process oriented to face the transboundary externalities caused by the sectoral activities?*

It made an important contribution by creating awareness in technicians and middle-level managers in the national and provincial institutions of the fact that the solution of the problems confronted by them requires a bi-national approach.

2. *Were the foundations laid out for both countries to continue with this process on a long-term basis?*

If there was a unanimous opinion among all the persons that were interviewed, it was about the contribution of the Project to the cooperative and collaborative work within and between both countries. It is considered one of the main achievements of the Project.

3. *Are both countries in the position to undergo activities and implement accords for the reduction of impacts from main transboundary pollution sources?*

The foundations are in place. However, additional support is still needed to build from them and consolidate the achievements that have been reached.

4. *Are both countries in the position to internalize the external costs of transboundary pollution in the local and bi-national policies, promote the harmonization of their respective national legislation and catalyze the necessary investments?*

The answer is affirmative. It can be construed by the way in which the SAP was developed and the endorsement given to it by the institutions in both countries.

5. *Will the environmental quality of the bi-national water body be improved in the long-term, reaching lower water and sediment pollution levels, as well as an improved conservation of river and marine biodiversity?*

There is still work to be done, but the perspective is of improvement.

6. *Was a Transboundary Diagnosis Analysis (TDA) made?*

It was made and it is of good quality. It is one of the main achievements of the Project.

7. *Was a virtual Information Center (VIC) established, including an Integrated Information System (IIS) with a Geographical Information System (GIS)?*

It was established and it is of good quality. It is another of the main achievements of the Project.

8. *Was an Strategic Action Program (SAP) prepared for the definition of policies, legal norms, institutional adjustments and priority investments?*

It was and included a high degree of involvement and participation of the national and provincial institutions of both countries. Its endorsement by both governments is considered one of the main achievements of the Project.

9. *Was a portfolio of priority projects for Program execution prepared?*

National Plans were integrated for both countries including project portfolios. The integration of these National Plans is considered one of the non-expected Project achievements.

10. Was an advanced stage reached for procuring the necessary financing from governments and bilateral and multilateral financing institutions?

A request for financing the SAP implementation has been already presented to GEF by both countries.

11. Was the SAP execution framework strengthened and the capability of key stakeholders reinforced?

A proposal was presented to both countries and the capacity of the Commissions as well as those of the national and provincial institutions was strengthened. To a lesser degree, those of the municipalities and other stakeholders.

12. Do both Commissions, as well as the key national and local institutions with an improved capacity to deal with issues related to the regional administration of transboundary environmental problems?

Yes, because of the achievements of the Project Specific Objective 3. This capacity, however, still needs strengthening and support.

13. Was the perception and awareness of transboundary environmental issues increased in a wide variety of stakeholders at the national and local levels?

It was increased, although it still needs support to extend this perception and awareness to a wider population audience.

14. Was a follow-up system of the short and long-term impacts established to evaluate the results of the implementation of the SAP, including a set of indicators and a monitoring system?

It was partially established. Common water quality standards were agreed by both countries as part of the pollution control strategy, and the monitoring activities were included in the SAP. However, indicators for international waters have not yet been established.

15. Were the necessary elements established to evaluate, after the priority projects defined in the SAP are started, if there was a reduction of water and sediment pollution discharges in order to decrease the export of contaminants to the high seas, increasing the protection of the tranzone population species of commercial importance, improving water quality for a wide spectrum of shoreline inhabitants, strengthening the biodiversity conservation in the area by protecting vital breeding and food areas of key species, improving the system integrity on the long-run?

Common water quality standards were established. The SAP, however, does not include commitments to reach objectives or quantifiable numeric indicators to measure the achievement of those goals or to measure the expected situation at the end of the SAP.