Highlights

Critical environmental challenges and threats – such as climate change, pollution, desertification and loss of soil fertility, and biodiversity – must all be tackled if the holistic 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to be achieved.

Members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) share the persistent challenge of integrating, or mainstreaming, the environment into all their development co-operation activities. While integration is required to ensure sustainability in all activities, it has been difficult to achieve in practice. Most DAC members now have environmental safeguards in place to screen out negative environmental practices, and have increased their attention to climate change. However, they recognise that policies, capacities and approaches for integrating the wider range of environmental potentials and threats need to be far more robust to meet the challenge of sustainable development.

In 2018, the DAC Network on Environment and Development Co-operation (ENVIRONET) launched a peer-learning exercise to assess how environment issues are integrated into members’ strategies and programmes.

Findings

Environment mainstreaming is common practice among DAC members. This follows growing recognition that climate and environment are core to economic and social development and to achieving the SDGs. Mainstreaming enables environmental considerations to be addressed systematically across policies, plans, budgets and activities – and at all stages of the programming cycle. It facilitates a consistent approach to the environment and climate, avoiding contradictory policy choices, such as investing in both renewable energy and fossil fuels. It also allows the limited time and resources of senior decision makers to be more effectively accessed and influenced.

- **Climate** – both adaptation and particularly mitigation – has dominated the agenda of many members, sometimes at the expense of other environment issues.
- **Biodiversity, and especially oceans**, is experiencing growing interest among DAC members, despite generally starting from a low base.
- **Environmental pollution and associated environmental health issues** have generally been neglected, in spite of clear evidence of their poverty and gender links.
- **Desertification and loss of soil fertility** also warrant greater focus.
1. STRONG POLICY COMMITMENT AND LEADERSHIP

• Legal requirements for environmental integration provide an essential foundation for mainstreaming.
• Leadership at a political and senior management level shapes the focus and course of mainstreaming.
• Financial targets or expenditure commitments can create incentives to mainstream environment.
• Where climate dominates the political narrative and/or programming, mainstreaming a broader set of environment considerations within climate makes strategic sense.
• Short-term work in fragile states and humanitarian programming should not overlook the environmental aspects of fragility and conflict.
• With public-private blended finance growing as an aid instrument, there is a need to mainstream environment more effectively into this process.

2. ROBUST SYSTEMS, PROCESSES AND TOOLS

• Rigorous environmental appraisal is a key entry point for effective mainstreaming – appraisal should focus on the climate change and environment impacts on the project/programme as well as the positive and negative environmental impacts of the project/programme itself.
• Mainstreaming tends to concentrate on the planning stages of the policy and project cycle, but is relatively neglected during implementation, monitoring and learning.
• Mainstreaming can be useful for integrating multiple cross-cutting issues, and not simply as a one-way, single-issue campaign.
• Starting to mainstream early, and envisioning its outcomes, can reveal opportunities; leaving it until later makes it feel like a brake on development.

3. CAPACITY AND CONTINUOUS SKILL DEVELOPMENT

• Interdisciplinary skills and holistic perspectives help staff manage many cross-cutting issues (including environment) and are essential for mainstreaming.
• An internal environment/climate network or community of practice can catalyse the collective responsibility needed for mainstreaming within a development co-operation organisation.
• An environment/climate helpdesk or facility can be an efficient way to maintain expert capacity and to manage knowledge.
4. SHARED KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

- Understanding what works for integrating environment, what does not, and under what conditions, requires active analysis.

- Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of environment mainstreaming by most DAC members can be broadened out beyond simply tracking financial commitments.

- Organisational learning about how environment matters in the institution’s work can drive real improvements in mainstreaming.

- Engaging civil society in policy dialogue and learning in partner countries and at headquarters can stimulate social demand for environment integration – and gain access to real-world local perspectives.

5. WELL-SUPPORTED COUNTRY SYSTEMS

- Environment mainstreaming depends critically on country partners’ commitment, priorities and capacity – it should be less about outside agencies promoting mainstreaming and more about responding to demand from country actors.

- Effective mainstreaming in-country needs to take account of the national context and identify specific, high-priority environmental issues to target – rather than attempting to handle all possible environmental issues.

- Decision makers are often most effectively persuaded by economic evidence and arguments.

- Capacity support for environmental integration is particularly needed among country partners and should be at the heart of mainstreaming.

- Capacity building and policy dialogue must move beyond ministries of environment to ministries of finance and planning, as well as key line agencies such as agriculture, energy, health, transport, industry and local government.

- Key private sector actors, especially those in the informal economy, will lead the transition to an inclusive, green economy and are important partners.

- The many guides and tools available for mainstreaming need to be assessed for their relevance and suitability for country contexts and users.
GREENING DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION: FACTS & FIGURES

AID IN SUPPORT OF ENVIRONMENT MAINSTREAMING

DID YOU KNOW?
(2016-2017 average, constant 2016 USD million)

USD 34.6 BILLION of bilateral allocable ODA supported the environment, of which:
USD 3.8 BILLION supported the environment as a sector in its own right
USD 8 BILLION had environment as an explicit objective of activities
USD 22.8 BILLION had environment as an important, but secondary objective of the activity

LESS THAN ONE THIRD of bilateral allocable ODA targets the environment directly or through mainstreaming

THE FIVE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR ENVIRONMENT MAINSTREAMING

1. Strong policy commitment and leadership
2. Robust systems, processes and tools
3. Capacity and continuous skill development
4. Shared knowledge, learning and engagement
5. Well-supported country systems

IMPROVEMENT IS NEEDED IN THE AREAS OF:

- BIODIVERSITY
- POLLUTION in particular ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION ...which is a bigger killer annually than AIDS, TB & Malaria
- DESERTIFICATION & LOSS OF SOIL FERTILITY