



Mission report, Sonja Bartelt
PRORURAL Joint Mission, Nicaragua, October 1-5, 2007

Activities: Participation in preparatory meetings, Joint mission events and meetings, bilateral talks with government and donor representatives, field trip and de-briefing meeting with main stakeholders regarding Platform engagement.

1. Main issues regarding sector-wide approach, PRORURAL:

- 3rd year of implementation
- Transition of government in January 2007.
- Integration of food security component from June 2007 onwards
- Main focus on rural finances with emphasis on women participation and infrastructure development.
- “Territorialization” of PRORURAL – start of implementing the SWAP at decentralized levels.

Current focus is the territorialization of PRORURAL, which includes substantial reform of public sector institutions at all levels. This activity is led by the Platform national facilitator (NF) carrying out an analysis of incentive and salary structures of the public sector, leading to an increased harmonization of public sector institutions towards joint planning and execution of PRORURAL.

2. De-briefing of Platform work

On October 3, I met with the main stakeholders involved in Platform activities: Ministry of Agriculture: Claudia Tijerillo (Director, Division External Cooperation) and Julio Castillo (Director, Policy Division), Maria Antonia Zelaya (recent donor speaker, SDC), current donor speaker (EC), Araceli Jimenez and Richard Anson (national and international Platform facilitator), Tiina Huvio (Embassy of Finland), Miguel Gomez (Director RUTA), Lasse Krantz (SIDA HQ).

Objectives of the meeting: mutual assessment of Platform engagement over the past two years and discussion of future roles of Platform engagement in Central America. In this regard I shared the decisions taken during the latest SC retreat and informed that the Platform will not extend its engagement after December 2007 in Nicaragua. The further development of Platform activities will focus more strongly on the “harvest of experiences” from in-country activities and joining ongoing conceptual work on application of AE principles in ARD programs with the view to focus on knowledge sharing on regional and global levels. Underneath the main issues stated:

- Work of Platform was generally assessed as more than positive from donors and government;
- Perceived as a catalyst to jump-start activities towards new approaches of working together;
- The importance of a neutral partner was stressed in order to maintain a balance between donor agendas and government (especially the work of the NF);
- Work of NF lowers transaction cost of donor speaker;
- Complements ongoing efforts;
- The importance of continuity of processes and methodologies was stressed and the need to find modalities under which these can be pursued without Platform support;
- Partner government and local donor group requested the continuity of Platform engagement through the work of a national facilitator in order to continue the work of

territorialization of PRORAL. This was also solicited with the recent letter of the Minister of Ag to the Platform.

- Subsidiary principles have been stressed and the comparative advantage the Platform has to work at global, regional and to a lesser extent at national level.

3. Analysis

- Platform engagement has created a leverage to jump-start processes in Nicaragua. At a national level, PRORUAL is regarded as most advanced of the SWAPs in Nicaragua and characterized by a strong national leadership.
- The expressed demand from donors and government demonstrate that the Platform approach has added value to ongoing processes. However, it is important to formulate and conceptualize a “phase III”, which should pave the way towards a meaningful exit of the country and a conceptualized and strategic documentation of lessons learned for dissemination and exchange at regional and international level.
- The timing of phasing out is important, as the Platform starts to be seen as an additional actor – an actor who provides a national public good, but still as an actor.
- The further evolution of Platform involvement should explore scenarios where:
 - The Platform is not anymore directly involved at national level, as it runs danger of becoming an additional actor;
 - The continuity of processes and methodologies at national level however is assured;
 - The neutrality of engagement is assured;
 - The Platform still continues to include the country representatives and partner government in its efforts towards more effective sector development through dissemination of analysis, lessons learned, workshop etc.;
 - And where the Platform can add value to the processes at a regional level without direct engagement at country level.

4. Suggestions for a way forward:

- It is advisable not to speak of the end of the Platform engagement in Nicaragua, but the start of a new phase, which includes the harvesting and transmission of experiences to other levels and processes.
- Currently, the donor group and government are exploring possibilities for the work of the national facilitator through a common fund, thus ensuring neutrality and continuity of processes. This includes the establishment of a TA pool, or financial contribution to RUTA so that RUTA can issue the contract for the national facilitator. Still tbc.
- Strengthening of existing MoU with RUTA: The Council of Ministries of Agriculture in Central America (CAC) has recently nominated RUTA to act as technical arm for the CAC division on coordination of development assistance at regional level. RUTA as such would be the natural entry point for work at regional level and those engagements would give life to the established MoU with RUTA.
- It is advisable to explore within the upcoming mission to Cambodia whether i) the need for continuity of started processes is expressed and if so, ii) whether there are similar existing structures in Asia to build upon.

5. For consideration of the Board:

I would like to bring to the attention of the Board that from my perspective during this mission as snapshot in time, the work of the Platform at country level as brought added value to national processes towards a more effective sector development. The advice as a neutral broker has created trust among national stakeholders. Limitations of our engagements are certainly a lacking communication between Platform HQ Focal Points and in-country representatives to exchange their views regarding ongoing processes and the involvement of the Platform to support those. During the de-briefing meeting the participation of Lasse Krantz as HQ representative proved to be indispensable to provide a different and accentuated view on the comparative advantage of Platform activities and subsidiary principles of engagement. There is

a necessity to conceptualize the further uptake of lessons learned, Platform analysis and engagements (CoC, indicators, SWAPs, Joint policy briefs) and join them in regional activities to add value to ongoing processes towards increased effectiveness of development assistance. I hope we will be able to do this during the Board meeting and General Assembly in Paris. I would welcome comments and views on the above mentioned items.

As last point I would like to highlight another issue: repeatedly we experience single donor agencies that do not coordinate with ongoing engagements and do not align to national structures and priorities. In Nicaragua, I have had talks with the Minister, different individuals within the Ministry and the donor representatives who report on the unwillingness of a few donors. These include Japan, Austria, USAID and IADB. I would welcome board views on whether the Platform may offer a useful mechanism at HQ level to address these issues within our membership and how. Strangely enough, especially Austria just concluded bilateral negotiations with the government, using Austrian methodology, contracts and projects.