Evaluation of Initiative for Sustainable Landscapes Program (ISLA)

Evaluation Report Summary

UNIQUE forestry and land use

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Client

IDH - The Sustainable Trade Initiative

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Introduction

This report represents the end-term evaluation of the Initiative for Sustainable Landscapes (hereafter: ISLA) which was implemented by IDH during the period 2015-2020. ISLA was funded by a grant of 21.3 million euro provided by the Dutch Government. It was implemented in six landscapes in Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Brazil. The mission of ISLA was to "bring together public and private stakeholders in vulnerable landscapes, looking beyond the farm level, to jointly ensure sustainable use and governance of land and water resources". The vision was for public-private partnerships to jointly invest in land and water in order to secure livelihoods, and produce agricultural commodities, while safeguarding natural resources.

ISLA's Theory of Change (ToC) has evolved over time. The first version (from 2014) was revised in 2017. The latest ToC is from July 2020. IDH's original landscape approach is based on three pillars (also referred to as Result Areas):

Change in business practices: IDH works with private sector companies to develop and pilot new business models that reduce negative effects and leverage the positive effects of agricultural production on the environment and communities living in the landscape. When successful, scaling is expected by companies implementing these business models across their operations and/or by attracting additional investment from blended finance facilities.

Improved landscape governance: In the landscapes where the Program is implemented, IDH convenes the private sector, public sector, communities, and civil society to develop a multi-stakeholder vision and action plan for a sustainable landscape. Since 2017 IDH applies the term "Production, Protection, and Inclusion Compacts" (hereafter: PPI Compacts) for these multi-stakeholder landscape coalitions and plans. The multi-stakeholder governance platforms are expected to influence changes in policy and enforcement and should ideally be institutionalized for long-term continuation beyond the duration of IDH support.

Field-level sustainability: New business models and policies are piloted in practice with co-funding by IDH. This includes smaller trust-building / no regret interventions at the start of the project to gain trust from the stakeholders and show action beyond talking.

The ISLA program evaluation addresses key questions based on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria on the program's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, expected impact, and sustainability. Multiple sources of data and analysis are triangulated to build a comprehensive, contextualized perspective and integrated understanding of how the ISLA project design and implementation contributed to behavioral change and development outcomes. Information sources include: (i) ISLA program evidence, (ii) ISLA project case studies with field data collection, (iii) key informant interviews, (iv) online survey of stakeholders, (v) remote sensing.

II. Findings

Relevance

The ISLA program was relevant in each country and landscape. It addressed key agri-commodity production and environmental protection needs and priorities of the stakeholders in the landscape. It further filled a gap in the stakeholder landscape by bringing different parties to-

gether, sharing knowledge and pointing to challenges those stakeholders needed to fix. The inclusion of the private sector in the landscape approach has been relevant because the natural resource management issues are being addressed more effectively with private sector involvement and financing (see also section on efficiency). The majority of the private sector recognizes the landscape approach as a useful and meaningful tool to address the sustainability issues in the sector and use the multi-stakeholder process to create trust and use the opportunity for dialogue with stakeholders. Overall, there is a strong consensus among stakeholders that the multistakeholder approach results in actionable targets.

Coherence

The IDH landscape approach has been complementary and coherent to IDH's value chain approach in the landscapes where the ISLA program has been implemented. The majority of stakeholders agree that the ISLA program has been complementary and coherent to government policies in the landscapes where the Program has been implemented. In general, it was compatible with interventions of other partners and the alignment with other donor funded development programs was good.

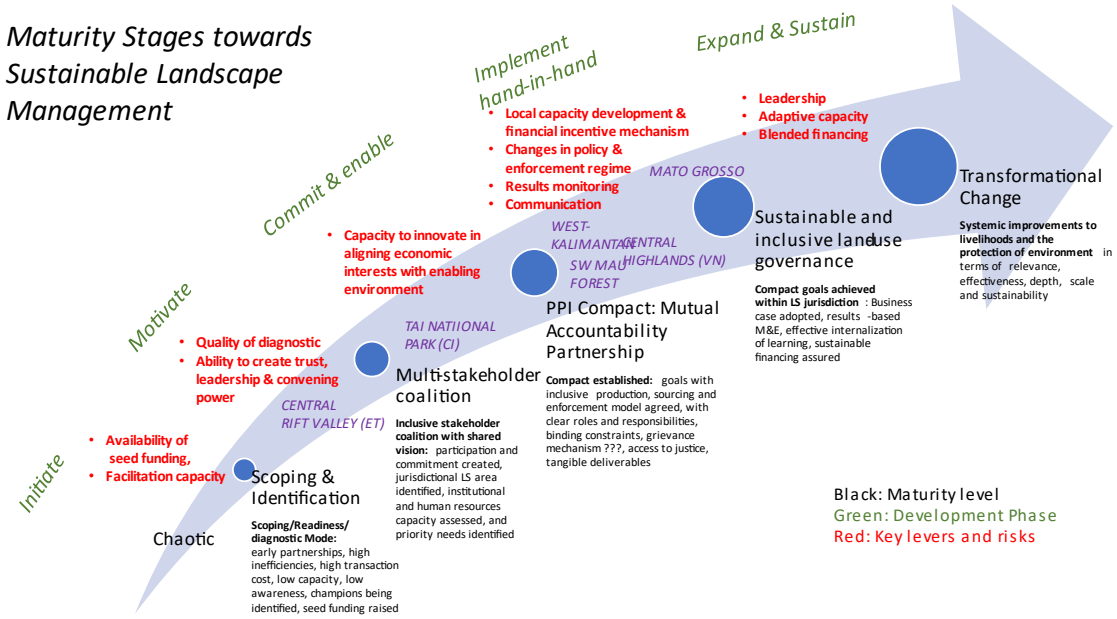
Effectiveness

ISLA has been effective. Overall, ISLA has been successful in convening multi-stakeholder coalitions playing a key role in sustainable landscape management. In terms of the output targets under Results Area 1, change in business practices, the ISLA program has performed very well across four landscapes in Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya and Vietnam where targets have been exceeded, in some cases by many multiples of the original target. There is slightly lower achievement of program targets for Ethiopia and Ivory Coast, although the achievements are still satisfactory against a background of challenging circumstances, particularly in Ivory Coast.

Results show that governance has improved over the implementation period of ISLA. The contribution of ISLA to an improvement of policies is nuanced and depends on the country context.

To some extent land-use planning and policies informed by sustainability goals were set by research or data collection commissioned by the multi-stakeholder coalition. However, the need for studies to set goals is quite different for each country. For example, Brazil is very advanced in its policies and regulations, and in Vietnam detailed problem analysis and best practices guidance (e.g. on water use and irrigation) were developed before the ISLA program. Accordingly, in both countries, the program places stronger emphasis on the implementation of policy, legislation, and standards; including their reflection in landscape or local level planning documents like the Green Growth Plans or investment programs (e.g. the World Bank funded VnSAT program).

ISLA countries have accomplished different "maturity stages" in their journey towards sustainable landscape management. The evaluation of results evidence is showing that overall, the six ISLA country programs have reached quite different stages on their overall impact pathway.



Additional information compiled with the support of ISLA was or will be very helpful in the African countries. In Kenya research was the basis for the development of Ndoinet Forest Livestock Management Plan covering a large part of the landscape. In Ivory Coast the development of the SRADT for Cavally was supported by IDH.[1] In Ethiopia, the sub-basin study will provide important evidence for the central rift valley water allocation plan, which in turn will be guiding for landscape level development and land use plans.

In Indonesia, IDH ISLA supported the development of the provincial Green Growth Plan by facilitating dialogue, understanding, and collaboration between different stakeholders, including provincial and district governments, companies, civil society organizations, and academics. The process started in 2016 and the GGP was launched in 2018. Other important plans and regulations were developed with the support from IDH.

Field level sustainability

The ISLA field level projects have contributed to sustainable natural resource management; sustainable agricultural production; and inclusion of smallholders and local communities in the intervention landscapes. While the projects are too small to have tangible effects at landscape level, they are important "tools" to provide proof of concept to potential investors and encourage upscaling of successful interventions.

[1] Schéma régional d'Aménagement et du Développement du Territoire (English: Regional Land Use Planning and Development Plan)

Spin-offs and scale-ups

Early spin-offs and scale-ups can be observed within the IDH portfolio, where both (i) elements of the advanced ISLA ToC and (ii) landscapes with scale-up potential (Mato Grosso, West Kalimantan, and Central Highlands in Vietnam) find its way into other IDH programs and complementing initiatives such as SourceUp. In addition, other development partners show interest in replicating the convening process for creating new landscape coalitions in Cote d'Ivoire and Vietnam. IDH has been quite successful to scale the outcomes, findings, and networks developed as part of the ISLA program beyond the direct intervention landscapes. There are 3 compacts being developed in Colombia and one more in Maranhão State in Brazil that are using Mato Grosso as a good example for replication. A series of small landscapes are being worked on in Vietnam building on the experience from the High Lands; the ISLA program in the Central Rift Valley and particularly on Lake Ziway is being slowly replicated in another landscape on Lake Tana in Ethiopia.

Efficiency

ISLA spending was found to be cost-effective and successful in mobilizing significant amounts of co-financing. Program funds were nearly matched by other sources of funding. Private sector made up the largest portion of co-financing, with about 31% of total funding. Other co-funding contributed an additional 15%.

Source of funding for ISLA program

Source	Total (EUR)	%
ISLA program Cost	15,004,898	53%
Private sector co-funding	8,675,203	31%
Other co-funding	4,500,864	16%
Total	28,180,965	100%

Source: ISLA funding information. Note that totals include 2014 to 2020 budget.

Impacts

Impact has been assessed via the UNIQUE online survey, field visits and interviews as well as GIS analysis focusing on land use. While there is a sound evidence base for outcome achievement in most ISLA landscapes, evidence for impacts is more variable. Survey data on management practices and farm profitability shows positive impacts on the environment and livelihoods. GIS analyses of deforestation and land use change are early at this stage of implementation but seem to indicate positive impacts.

According to the perspective of project stakeholders the program has achieved multiple impacts. Improved soil and water management practices were the most commonly reported impact, with 75% of respondents showing this impact. Improved well-being of communities, potential to replicate impacts in other landscapes, and better enforcement of conservation laws were other commonly reported impacts. Seventy nine percent of respondents reported that the ISLA program resulted in reduced deforestation and over 40% of respondents reported an improvement in land tenure for smallholders and forest communities.

Sustainability

ISLA investments are likely to be sustainable. In Vietnam, Indonesia, Brazil and Kenya the ISLA program helped to set up landscape governance mechanisms in such a way that they become able to continue beyond the support of IDH. Overall, stakeholders are fairly optimistic that project activities and collaboration among coalition partners will continue after the ISLA program has ended. Interviews supported the claim that private sector participation will continue after the project.

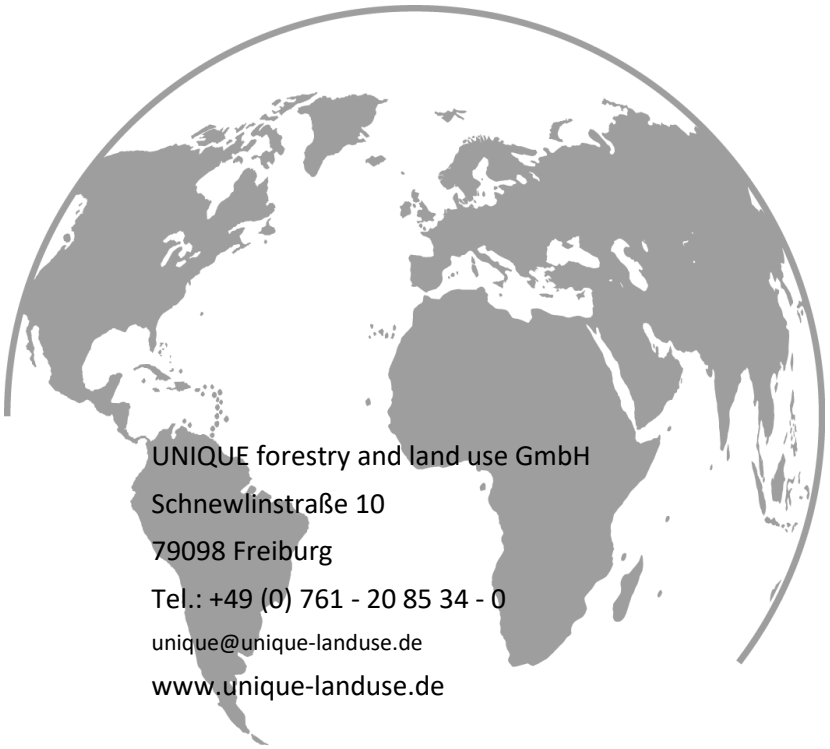
III. Key Learnings and recommendations

The evaluation highlights a few key learnings:

- The political economy within a country or landscape can create challenges to the convening body. It can slow down any progress in securing stakeholder commitment. Long-standing presence and legal status of the convening body in the landscape influences credibility with governments and trust with the private sector, and thereby can accelerate the engagement process.
- ISLA realized rather early that it is less of having adequate policies that prevents forest protection, but more so the capacity to enforce environmental regulations. This assumption was corrected as the strengthening of enforcement was included into the implementation design.
- ISLA posits that *pilot-based learning and knowledge dissemination of improved (business) practices leads to scaling up of investments inside and outside the program*. This link in the causal chain is implicitly assuming that (i) pilots are successful and farmers will adopt; (ii) local people have the power and authority to make restoration decisions; (iii) a financial mechanism will emerge driven by off-take market opportunities; (iv) the enabling environment in large is suitable for scaling up.

For future ISLA-type projects it will be important to:

- Assess whether a potential neutral brokering institution with real convening power is already in place because building that up from scratch makes a huge difference in effectiveness and efficiency.
- Routinely conduct a risk assessment as part of project preparation recognizing governance risks and identifying appropriate mitigation measures.
- Work with partners and try to de-risk the investment climate for farmers and businesses.
- Build landscape-specific ISLA Theories of Change nested in an overall ToC;
- Strengthen the evidence-base for outcome measurement;
- Strengthen target setting; and
- Conduct regular self-assessment of the coalition building and management process.



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