



Lessons from Recognition and Reward Programmes

Recognition and reward programmes are common mechanisms used to support and encourage outstanding behaviour and actions that contribute significantly to the achievement of a given vision, mission or objective. SEED is one of many award programmes that serve to recognize and support significant contributions towards a global vision for sustainable development. This Insight explores the place of these awards in promoting sustainable development and is based on research carried out by International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), commissioned by SEED. Thanks are also due to the other reward and recognition programmes and interviewees for their valuable insights: they are listed in the Annex below.

*The **SEED Initiative** identifies, profiles and researches promising entrepreneurial approaches to locally-led sustainable development in countries with developing economies, and provides partnership building and capacity development through a tailored support programme for start-up sustainable development enterprises.*

Briefing notes on other topics in SEED's Insight series are available online from the SEED website: www.seedinit.org

Main Messages

The research found that strong founders or institutional ownership of the awards programmes seemed to correlate with the longevity and growth in the size and scope of the programmes. However, with only one or two notable exceptions, it was found that awards programmes could invest more in **monitoring and assessing:**

- the success of the programme itself;
- the impact of the award on the recipient and the success of the recipient's work;
- whether these programmes have answers to the ongoing challenges in the development field of scaling up successful small or pilot initiatives or replicating good ideas in other locations/circumstances.

Theme 3: Information for policy-makers

Lessons from Recognition and Reward Programmes



Research Focus

The SEED Initiative supports entrepreneurs for sustainable development. Its particular interest is with those entrepreneurs using a multi-stakeholder partnership approach to achieve a combination of environmental, social and economic benefits. SEED provides partnership building and capacity development support for those that show real promise of success. But there are many other recognition and reward programmes in the field that target entrepreneurs. SEED's research and learning programme, delivered by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, was asked to review lessons being learned from other such programmes.

Three main issues were considered:

- **The drivers behind these programmes:** Ownership and governance, goals and objectives, the nature of the prize and the target "winners".
- **The operational cycle:** the selection criteria and process, profile of the jury and strategies for awarding winners, and communications strategies used for sustaining engagement with winners.
- **Outcomes, longer term benefits and relevance:** what is considered to be "success" for these programmes; what are positive/negative impacts from winning the award; how is the use and impact of the award tracked; would the winners have been successful without the recognition and reward that the award provided; and do the awards and the awards programmes contribute to the challenge of scaling up or replication of projects for greater sustainable development benefits?

Main Research Findings

Drivers:

The drivers for the programmes appear to be directly connected to the original vision and commitment of the founder, or to the mandate of the host institution.

- All programmes appear to benefit from strong governance and ownership of the award programme, either by the founders of the award or by senior personnel in the institutional home for the award.
- The original goals for the awards remain constant: the programmes have expanded to meet those goals, either in terms of cash value of the award, numbers of awards provided, or additional services provided.
- All, with one exception, are looking to increase the visibility and prestige of their award.

Theme 3: Information for policy-makers

Lessons from Recognition and Reward Programmes



- While all have an “ideal winner” in mind, two are expressly committed to the extended influence that their programme will have on individuals around the world – where “everyone is a changemaker”.

Operations:

There is significant variation in terms of selection criteria and processes. The only common element is that these are reviewed and fine-tuned on a regular basis, to ensure fairness, flexibility and due diligence.

- For those awards that recognize good ideas or start-up enterprises, it was observed that the value of a cash prize can be greatly increased by providing additional communications and business management support to winners. These programmes believe that such services lead to a greater chance for the award winner’s project to succeed.
- The awards ceremony, or other mechanisms to bring the winners and even finalists together, is considered by the participants to provide added value for learning and peer-networking, although measures to assess that value added are not yet well established.

Outcomes, Benefits and Relevance:

All programmes have a clear picture of what they consider to be the benefits of the award to the recipient. How these benefits are actually measured however, and how the use of the award is monitored, is less clear. Most programmes indicated the need for significant improvement in tracking and assessment.

- The most common practice is self reporting by the winners either through a formal progress report or in response to surveys circulated by the award programme managers. But independent verification of outcomes is not a common practice; and the self-reported data is not always mined or synthesized.
- Without this information, it is difficult to determine more broadly, across all these awards programmes, whether and how the aggregation of such awards is making a significant contribution to sustainable development.
- All of these awards programmes suggest that the possibility of scaling up an individual enterprise, or helping to replicate a good idea elsewhere, are central to the relevance of the overall programme. Many stipulate as selection criteria the degree to which the project proposed is scaleable in and of itself (demonstrated through increases in revenues or social or environmental benefits provided), or replicable by others elsewhere.
- However, although most programmes could easily cite examples of the successful scale-up of winning projects or good ideas picked up and used elsewhere, there was little evidence of specific concerted or established strategies for identifying and reporting on the success of scale-up, or strategies for both promoting and reporting on where the project might

Theme 3: Information for policy-makers

Lessons from Recognition and Reward Programmes



have been replicated elsewhere. Only two of the programmes indicated that they were conducting more formal effectiveness and impact studies that included specific measures for scale-up and replication.

Follow-up Research Questions

The research suggests that more work by individual recognition and reward programmes, possibly in collaboration with SEED, would help to:

- ensure that recognition and reward programmes achieve maximum impact,
- identify successful approaches to scale-up and replication.

More specifically:

- **How to strengthen peer networks among winners:** If peer and consultant networks are part of the benefit of winning the award, how can such networks be created and supported, beyond hosting an awards ceremony or other event to bring people together?
- **Determine the most effective types of support for winners:** Are there specific support services more relevant for developing country entrepreneurs? SEED has catalogued the types of services which SEED winners requested but what are the best ways of delivering these services?
- **How to develop improved frameworks and processes for measuring the success of recognition and reward programmes:** Is it possible to develop monitoring and assessment frameworks that will help the individual winners assess the benefits of their award; that will help individual programmes validate the reporting provided by individual winners; and that will allow aggregation of findings across programmes to demonstrate how recognition and reward can further sustainable development goals?
- **How to assess potential for scale-up and replication of winners' projects:** Are standard measures for scale-up and replication possible for different types of sustainable development projects? What might be appropriate strategies for promoting examples of success and hence stimulating replication?
- **How to foster a new community for learning among recognition and reward programmes:** Would it be profitable to institute a way of continuing the research and sharing of best practices among award programmes?

SEED Partners

SEED is a global network founded in 2002 by **IUCN** (the International Union for Conservation of Nature), the United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**) and the United Nations Environment Programme (**UNEP**). Major Supporting Partners are the governments of **Germany**, the **Netherlands**, **South Africa**, **Spain**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United States of America**.



Theme 3: Information for policy-makers

Lessons from Recognition and Reward Programmes



ANNEX: Programmes included in the study

Ten programmes were selected for review and comparison with SEED:

For Individuals	For Projects	For Businesses
Goldman Prize for the Environment	Ashden Awards for Sustainable Energy	New Ventures
Ashoka	The World Challenge	The Business in Development (BiD) Challenge
Echoing Green	The Development Marketplace (DM)	European Awards for the Environment (EBAE)
Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN)		

These programmes were selected based on a central interest that they share with SEED: the promotion of innovative solutions for sustainable development in developing countries¹ through a competitive process.

The major differences among the programmes lie in:

- the **level of integration** of benefits sought by proponents (whether all three of environmental, social and economic benefits are being sought);
- the **risk** involved (whether the award is made on the basis of potential or on proven performance); and
- **the use of partnerships** (whether the use of partnerships is deployed as a critical success factor by the award recipients)
- whether the award winners are **entrepreneurs** or are supported through **grant funding**.

However, it is not uncommon even for awards that focus primarily on conservation and environmental protection to recognize projects that also produce income generating products and services, and vice versa.

¹ All programmes award projects in developing countries, although several also award projects in developed countries.