

## Introduction

*This report has three objectives: Firstly, it illustrates how SEAs can be applied in development co-operation by presenting nine detailed case studies. Secondly, it reviews the outcome of these nine SEAs by examining how the SEA process changed original policies, plans and programmes. Finally, it concludes with lessons that can be learned from these case studies, for future practice.*

## The case for Strategic Environmental Assessment in development co-operation

Individual donors have their own priorities in terms of the type of aid packages and programmes that are offered to, and negotiated with, partner countries. Factors determining the overall budget and spread of investments will include political considerations in terms of popular understanding and support amongst voters for international aid, language and cultural considerations, historical patterns of influence and commercial interest. All donors wish to see their support being effectively used and need to know that they will be able to give a clear account through properly audited systems when the time comes to report back on successes and failures to parliament.

In practice, however, it can be very difficult to ensure that a development co-operation programme will deliver its anticipated goals and to quantify the level of success. Many constraints can intervene: finance may be diverted to other programmes, budgets may be cut, planned interventions may be inappropriate to local circumstances and timescales for delivering effective change may be much longer than the programmes themselves.

As a consequence, many donor agencies are subsequently faced with practical difficulties in answering searching questions from the media, international NGOs and other critical friends at home about the effectiveness of aid programmes. This is particularly the case where development co-operation affects the environmental sector, which for most people equates with wildlife conservation, rather than the building blocks for leading people out of poverty.

While cabinet members and foreign affairs ministries may set the priorities for a fixed term development co-operation programme, the responsibility for developing programme activities often rests with embassy staff who have to respond at short notice. Frequently, such programmes will involve new areas of work in which few if any of the current embassy staff have been engaged. In a survey among embassy staff in West Africa in 2008, a programme officer commented that he had been tasked with developing an aid programme to support “the decentralisation of national government ministries and agencies to district level” in three months. This officer fully recognised the scope and breadth of the assignment, which covered health, education, forestry, agriculture, urban planning, water supply, waste management, etc. but had no knowledge of the possible environmental, social or local economic consequences which might stem from transferring power and responsibility from national to local decision-makers. This response could be applied to many programmes which have been designed in principle to support the Millennium Development Goals but where the delivery mechanisms fail to take the environment or social welfare into account.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a framework to assess the environmental, and often social, implications of development policies, plans and programmes. It is increasingly recognised that SEA is a process which helps to make policies, plans and programmes more sustainable. What is not appreciated, however, is that an SEA also provides an essential tool for improving governance and fostering institutional reform. In the above-mentioned example of decentralisation, there was no understanding of, or capacity to handle, environmental issues at a local level. This is not uncommon. Well-intentioned programmes for building new schools and clinics may fail because local political influence dictates that these buildings be erected next to a swamp, acting as the breeding area for mosquitoes carrying malaria, or in a valley side prone to landslides. Effective decentralisation of power requires a thorough understanding of local

institutions and customs, and the introduction of tried and tested methods for environmental planning, regulation and monitoring.

A properly designed SEA of, for example, a decentralisation programme, would examine environmental risks and opportunities for all types of development being considered and provide generic advice on how to avoid costly mistakes. Equally importantly, such an SEA would examine decision-making processes and make recommendations on policy and planning requirements, evaluation and monitoring, and staffing issues. It could also be used to determine which parts of the overall programme would be most likely to bring environmental, social and local economic benefits and at what relative cost, thus helping to shape the effectiveness of the programme itself. The existence of the SEA report, prepared in advance of the programme adoption, would also give both the donor and partner government clear targets and indicators for measuring success.

### **The starting point: SEA Good Practice Guidance for Development Co-operation**

In 2006, a task team of experts from OECD and partner developing countries (SEA Task Team) published a document called “*Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment: Good Practice Guidance for Development Co-operation*”. The document was designed to assist development practitioners and developing country partners who are planning to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The publication was motivated by the need to ensure that environmental risks and opportunities are given due consideration during the formulation of policies, plans and programmes which are developed by partner governments in conjunction with donors (representing the new, more strategic ways in which international aid is increasingly being provided). This change in the way aid is being provided has made the application of more familiar project-specific environmental impact assessments (EIAs) increasingly difficult, necessitating a shift towards a broader mechanism, namely the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness explicitly calls for the “development and application of common approaches to strategic environmental assessment”.

#### **The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness**

This Declaration was agreed by over 100 ministers, heads of development agencies and developing country partners in 2005. It calls for the “development and application of common approaches to strategic environmental assessment.” The work of the SEA Task Team was therefore framed by a broad commitment to development effectiveness, and better co-ordination of aid delivery. The success of SEAs in international development needs to be measured by the extent to which it has reinforced the commitments made in the Paris Declaration.

The SEA Good Practice Guidance highlights key ingredients for the successful application of the SEA methodology, applied to policies, plans and programmes, particularly when formulated in the context of international development co-operation. It identifies 12 important groups of entry points through which SEAs can be introduced. It also serves the important role of bringing consensus around a common framework for SEA.

Since its publication, the SEA Good Practice Guidance has become the standard reference guide for international development agencies and their developing country partners challenged with better integrating environmental considerations into strategic decision-making processes.

## Reviewing recent experiences

This report illustrates how SEAs can be applied in development co-operation by outlining nine detailed case studies. It reviews the outcome of SEAs by examining how the SEA process changed original policies, plans and programmes, and it present lessons to be learned for future practice.

This review can be interpreted as a monitoring report of the 2006 *Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment: Good Practice Guidance for Development Co-operation* document. It compiles case studies from Benin, Bhutan, Ghana, Honduras, Mauritius, Montenegro, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Vietnam. It highlights a range of applications from the mining sector to poverty reduction strategies, national and regional land use, and spatial planning.

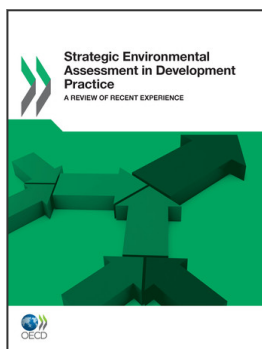
### Case studies in this review

Country	Donors	Application
Vietnam	Asian Development Bank	Quang Nam Hydropower Plan
Bhutan	UNDP, UNEP, UNDAF, Australia	Environmental Mainstreaming
Namibia	United States	Millennium Challenge Account Programme
Mauritius	European Union	Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy for the Sugar Cane Sector
Benin	Germany, Netherlands	Poverty Reduction Strategy
Ghana	Various	Environmental Mainstreaming
Sierra Leone	World Bank	Mining Sector
Honduras	Germany, IUCN	Municipal Planning
Montenegro	UNDP, World Bank, Germany	National Spatial Plan

Each case study features four sections:

- **Context** section provides the historical, economic and social background of the country, as well as the environmental challenges the country is facing.
- **Process of SEA** section provides detailed descriptions on how exactly the SEA was conducted in the case. Typical topics include capacity development, awareness-raising and stakeholder consultation.
- **Results** section analyses what has been achieved through the SEA process. In particular, it investigates how the SEA has had an impact on policy, plans and programmes.
- **Lessons learned** section provides key lessons that may be valuable for future applications of SEAs.

Although attributing development successes to an assessment process such as SEA is difficult, the OECD/DAC SEA Task Team has reached a stage where it needs to take stock and evaluate the achievements and added value of SEA application in precise terms. There is a need to examine whether the application of SEA is underwriting development effectiveness called for in the Paris Declaration. This is why this review has been undertaken.



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