

Conclusion

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This concluding chapter draws together a number of themes that run through the book and presents the findings and tentative conclusions. A final section makes some recommendations for further development of SEA practice in development co-operation. This chapter is drafted from the perspective of the editors and their conclusions and recommendations are designed to stimulate further discussion and review, rather than set out a prescribed course of action.

What this review did

The goals of this review were to:

- illustrate how SEA can be applied in development co-operation through detailed case studies;
- review the outcome of SEAs by examining how the SEA process changed original policies, plans and programmes;
- derive lessons to be learned for future practices.

The first goal has been achieved through detailed description and analysis of the nine case studies. These case studies provide development co-operation practitioners with excellent cases to learn lessons from.

This chapter aims to conclude the review by summarising the outcome of each SEA application case and by deriving general lessons applicable to future practice.

Did SEA make a difference?

The case studies make it clear that once an SEA process has been launched, environmental issues are more likely to be given greater coverage alongside social and economic topics. This does not mean that environment concerns will automatically be given higher priority where difficult trade-offs are required, but does suggest that decisions are more likely to take account of SEA findings including the results of public consultations and stakeholder views.

Where an SEA is built into the process of formulating policies, plans and programmes, it is more likely to change attitudes and procedures in government. For example, the latest statement of policies on Natural Resources and Environment from Ghana has emphasised the role of SEAs: “Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and related sustainable development appraisal and impact monitoring processes will be employed at all levels to ensure that environment is both visible and mainstreamed in the text of policies, plans and programmes and related MTEFs / budgets.”

However, as each of the case studies in this volume confirms, SEAs of national policies and plans invariably place as much emphasis on social and economic factors as they do on environmental ones, and most policy-level SEAs involve a wide range of ministries, NGOs, civil society representatives and sometimes even parliamentarians as stakeholders, as described in the Sierra Leone case study. This is generally seen as a positive development that helps to place the environment centre stage along with social and economic concerns.

In many situations, commissioning agencies for SEAs will be Ministries for Financial and Economic Planning, Mining, Transport, Water and other development sectors. Technical support may come from external agencies, the Ministry of Environment or an Environmental Protection Agency, but the drivers of the SEA process are likely to be politically, commercially or industrially motivated. High-level SEAs can cover critical issues relating to political and legal reform, control of corruption, macroeconomics and financial budgeting. Therefore a strong case can be made for the inclusion of SEAs in formative work on country programmes and strategies, especially where multi-donor budgetary support is anticipated. In this capacity an SEA offers a valuable tool for supporting new approaches to multi-sector budget support.

Convincing sceptical senior administrators of the value of SEAs will usually fall to task team members and other environmental advisors. At local level, responsibility for identifying the role and need for an SEA invariably rests with individual staff who may themselves have no direct training in environmental matters, and will also be managing wide-ranging portfolios for poverty alleviation, gender reform, health, governance, decentralisation and a host of other priorities on the development agenda. A recurring problem exists in ensuring that these staff members are kept up to date and give priority access to SEA capacity building where appropriate. This suggests that appropriate training in the use of SEAs as a planning and management tool should be developed for all staff of development agencies, in addition to the current focus of awareness-raising about the merits of SEAs within partner countries.

References to the SEA Guidance

Specific reference is made to the SEA guidance in four of the nine case studies, (Benin, Ghana, Montenegro and Namibia), although the detailed methodology was only used in the case of Montenegro. Two of the case studies (Mauritius and Sierra Leone) followed EU and World Bank frameworks. However, in most if not all of the examples, the SEA guidance was referred to, along with other standard text book approaches.

Ownership and capacity development of SEA

All of the case studies have involved local stakeholders and, in most examples, local consultants have participated in preparation of the SEA. But, with the exception of Ghana, most SEAs have been led by international specialists and the actual level of engagement of government personnel has varied.

However, developing capacity to conduct SEAs requires a long-term view. It is clear that a substantial amount of motivation and capacity building will be required before most partner countries are in a position not only to manage but also to staff their own SEA programmes. This finding is not surprising, if the parallel process of developing EIA skills and good practice is considered as an example. In most countries (including the more advanced industrialised nations) five to ten years of practical experience was required before the majority of EIAs reached acceptable standards.

Key findings

Outcomes and lessons in each of the nine case studies have been reviewed in order to look for similarities and differences of view. Interestingly a consistent pattern emerges and there are no substantive areas of disagreement. The findings have been grouped together by common theme.

1-SEAs contribute to development effectiveness and harmonisation

The 2008 DAC High Level Meeting endorsed a Policy Statement on SEA, which highlights the value and importance of harmonised SEA approaches as outlined in the Paris Declaration and aims to signal high-level collective commitment to their implementation. The experience of using SEAs in Benin and Ghana to review their poverty reduction strategies has clearly demonstrated the value of the process in helping to ensure that aid programmes are effectively targeted, and that donors can work together more effectively. SEAs played an important role in the review of mining policy in Sierra Leone and the related assessment of the minerals sector in West Africa. The SEA not

only brought together ministries within individual governments and civil and marginalised sections of society, it also promoted increased co-operation among adjacent countries in the region. There are encouraging signs that donors are collaborating more in developing and promoting capacity-building exercises to achieve further harmonisation.

2-Long-term planning is important

Some cases emphasise the importance of long-term planning and engagement, instead of a one-shot attempt to implement an SEA. The case on **Mauritius** study notes:

“A follow-up to the SEA is essential to maintain momentum. Discussions between the donor and the government on how to use the results of the SEA in subsequent decision-making should not be neglected. Keeping momentum requires commitment from all key parties, and ongoing dialogue (EC-government) is necessary to ensure follow-up on SEA recommendations.”

The **Benin** SEA of the Poverty Reduction Strategy noted:

“Without doubt, the individuals behind the SEA cannot be underestimated. It is critical to strengthen their positive role and to build institutional memory that will guarantee sustainability of the greening process, even if such individuals were to leave...”

The report on the SEA of the spatial plan for **Montenegro** cautions that:

“Expectations for a single SEA should not be set too high, especially where the process is being used for the first time. Attitudes of key stakeholders are often entrenched and the shift towards more balanced and open planning will not happen overnight.”

3-SEAs should be linked with multi-donor budget support

Some cases identified the need for, and the benefit of, co-ordinated efforts by donor agencies. The case of Ghana noted the relevance of SEA to multi-donor budget support; a strong focus on SEA for policies already exists, and the case study notes that:

“Most SEAs to date have been funded as part of individual donor programmes and the onus for maintaining this momentum will now shift with multi-donor budget support to the Government of Ghana and its key ministries.”

The same theme is picked up in the **Vietnam** study where it is concluded:

“As was the case in this project, linking with a wide range of line agencies and development assistance programmes can also significantly increase the effectiveness of an SEA, through extensions of capacity building and follow-up technical and financial support to implementation of SEA recommendations.”

4-Donors and partner governments should be engaged

Most of the case studies have highlighted the importance of developing co-operative partnerships among donors and country partners. The EU-sponsored SEA of the sugar industry in **Mauritius** stressed the importance of active engagement of government in the

SEA. In **Benin**, the case study notes that “A high-level commitment in Benin helped to make the SEA influential.” The **Bhutan** study observed that donor interest and harmonisation is a crucial lever in securing the uptake of new policy concepts. The review of experience in **Ghana** highlights the fact that “SEAs in Ghana have been enthusiastically endorsed by donors as a valuable aid for vetting their own involvement in programmes.”

5-Flexible approaches to SEAs need to be adopted

Many cases stressed the importance of keeping the SEA process flexible, particularly with regard to the timeline. The case on **Namibia** attributes part of its success to the fact that the clients (Millennium Challenge Corporation and government) were very accommodating when changes to the terms of reference were required. Flexibility is essential for a successful SEA. The **Benin** study notes a high level of flexibility is needed to accommodate delays in the planning process.

The flexibility on the timescale is often identified as one of the success factors. The case on **Montenegro**, which had a short time span for the spatial planning SEA, notes that flexibility is the key requirement and it is harder to achieve if the SEA programme is very short. Similarly, the case on **Honduras** suggests that the timescale adopted for the SEA was too short and should be lengthened in future.

However, the **Namibia** study offered an alternative view that short timescales are both a challenge and an opportunity for the SEA. They have the advantage of creating pressure which helps teams to focus quickly on the key issues.

Flexibility is also needed for the use of the term “SEA”. The experience in **Bhutan** highlighted the negative influence that use of the term SEA can sometimes have, given its association among government ministries with EIAs as a regulatory process. The solution in this case was to apply the phrase “environmental mainstreaming” because it proved to be less politically sensitive in this context.

The SEA task team has itself debated the choice of name early in its work, but recognised that the term “SEA” is increasingly widely used as an acronym without the need for a full explanation. SEA is often understood to encompass a family of related tools that can be adapted to suit a particular purpose. There is generally a relaxed view about the choice of title as long as the process embodies the key principles defined in the SEA guidance. One such example is the fact that the World Bank sometimes uses the terms SEA and social and environmental strategic assessment (SESA) interchangeably.

6-Take baby steps when carrying out SEAs

Being overly ambitious from the very beginning can be a risk, especially when the country lacks experience of conducting SEAs. In both Honduras and Vietnam, the case studies concluded that pilot SEAs should be carried out and should avoid being too ambitious. In particular, the Honduras case noted that too many municipalities had been included in the initial SEA of the spatial plans. As a result, the required level of commitment and resources was higher than could be sustained without external financial and technical support.

7-Encourage public participation

Several studies noted the significant contributions made by individuals and public bodies, although full public participation can be difficult to organise in strategic-level assessments at the national level.

The **Honduras** case notes that a high level of public participation was achieved with effective workshops. Similarly, the case on **Montenegro** noted that the groundswell of public support for the SEA in Montenegro has been very striking and augers well for future planning processes.

8-Emphasise technical capacity

Local technical capacity was often noted as both a major success factor and a challenge to SEA applications. For example, the **Namibia** report credits much of the SEA's success to the fact that the SEA implementation team was able to call on a mix of local and international experts and the availability of senior professionals was important in delivering a rigorous and analytical SEA on time. In contrast, the **Honduras** study notes that one of the limitations was the capacity of local technicians who would require substantially more training to continue the process (once the donors withdraw). In **Vietnam**, it is suggested that donors should consider giving basic secretarial support to SEA processes.

9-The need for a new SEA methodology under special circumstances

The need for further development of SEA methodology and approaches has been identified in two case studies: Montenegro and Sierra Leone.

The case of **Montenegro** highlights the complexity of an SEA of spatial planning that requires a balanced treatment of social, economic and environmental factors (noting that this is what decision-makers require for planning purposes). This emphasises the integrated assessment or sustainability appraisal approach to SEA rather than concentration on biophysical environmental issues which occurs at the other end of the SEA range of methods and approaches.

The **Sierra Leone** case study highlights the considerable difficulty of conducting an SEA in a fragile state. The case raises an observation that conventional single-issue SEAs are likely to fail in circumstances where a country has no institutional memory or capacity and is subject to frequent changes in government or administrative structure. In these circumstances it is argued that:

“...[T]he main lesson emerging from the SESA points to the need to avoid thinking of SEAs as a short-term process leading to the preparation of a report to influence decision-making. Instead, SEAs need to be a sustained process focused on one or a few key sectors under a framework for long-term policy dialogue and the protracted effort of institutional strengthening.”

The World Bank has recognised that environmental issues are invariably linked to institutional failings and has been pioneering a new approach to institution-centred SEA (I-SEA) that is particularly focused on governance issues.

10-SEA may reveal sensitive issues on resource distribution.

In Honduras, the SEA and planning processes revealed how access to natural resources is distributed among members of the municipality, exposing significant inequalities. Although this has not led to conflict, thanks to professional facilitation, national and local governments need to be aware that sustainable development sometimes involves difficult negotiations between interests.

11-The economic benefit of SEA needs to be recognised to secure support from industries.

In Mauritius, the sugar industry was concerned about the potential costs of implementing mitigation measures and that implementation of SEA recommendations could slow the transfer of funds. In such a context, highlighting economic value was important to secure support from the industry. Key economic benefits were made explicit by the SEA report and this swayed the industrialists.

Policy recommendations for development agencies

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are made concerning the practice of SEAs in development co-operation.

Development partners should initiate hands-on SEA pilot- and demonstration projects, integrating them into their ongoing development co-operation programmes and capacity-building activities. Currently, SEA good practice is still more talked about than carried out in development co-operation. Having considered the evidence provided through case studies and training programmes, it can be concluded that substantial momentum has been developed in promoting SEAs among partner countries. This can be sustained by working with partner-country institutions to identify and respond to their particular requirements for strengthening SEA process and practice.

The benefits of SEAs to development policy making should be better documented and demonstrated. Clear evidence of such benefit will add momentum to promote the implementation of SEAs. In particular, this effort should be directed at political leaders and senior managers, who are increasingly aware that an SEA is an administrative requirement as part of the approval chain, but have not necessarily grasped that an SEA is also a practical tool that can make development assistance more robust, successful and effective.

Development partners need to further harmonise their approaches to SEA to be consistent with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Uncoordinated and fragmented approaches to SEAs are obstacles to its wider application. Despite positive advances by all stakeholders, development partners need to turn the spotlight on themselves and focus their attention on the way in which they plan, co-ordinate and execute their SEA processes and development programmes. This might represent an area for practical exchange among donor and partner countries to monitor progress and review experience, possibly under the auspices of the SEA task team (reflecting the lessons from Vietnam where several donors have co-operated in support of a locally led initiative as documented in this report).

SEAs should be used to strengthen the linkage between Millennium Development Goals and budgetary support. Since the Paris Declaration, budgetary support has increasingly become a major instrument of aid, and funds are ever more frequently paid directly to the relevant ministry. While recipient governments are

required to stipulate carefully how they intend to allocate the development assistance, there is currently no built-in mechanism to ensure that such development plans guarantee a certain level of environmental sustainability (MDG 7). SEAs can be used to ensure that MDG 7 targets are explicitly incorporated within direct budget support mechanisms, as well as in sector-wide approaches (SWAs) agreements. More research and experience are needed to foster such applications.

Development partners need to strengthen SEA monitoring and follow-up, notably on capacity development. Experience from a number of the case studies indicates that notwithstanding any agreements that may be in place, many developing countries lack the necessary institutional stability and continuity to promote and sustain SEAs with their own resources. The donor community needs to confront this issue of continuity and legacy of SEA capacity-building programmes, focusing on whether a viable SEA regime has been established within partner countries. Such monitoring and follow-up of SEA activities can enhance learning from experience and better link SEA with obligations under the Paris Declaration.

Development partners need to discuss and disseminate SEA good practices with emerging economies. The role of SEAs is critical in the emerging economies, such as Brazil, Russia, India and China, that are likely to shape our common economic and environmental future. However, partly because these countries are no longer priority targets for development assistance and capacity building by the donor community, little knowledge exists about SEA development in emerging economies. Comparative work on SEA practice in these countries is urgently needed.

Where next?

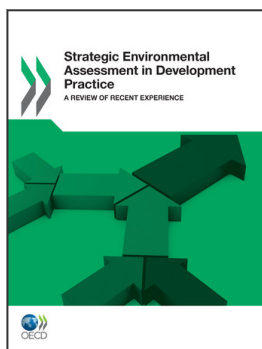
Through the SEA guidance, the SEA task team achieved a general consensus on the fundamentals of SEA as applied to international development. Using the SEA guidance as a foundation for implementing SEA in practice will not guarantee better development outcomes, but it will certainly improve its prospects.

This publication has shown how the application of SEAs has had a significant, positive influence on development outputs, outcomes and effectiveness in a diverse array of circumstances and countries. The uptake of SEAs is steadily increasing; the lessons learned are helping to refine SEA practice and improving its effectiveness. Critical barriers to the greater use of SEAs are, as the World Bank's work shows, frequently institutional and attitudinal. One of the essential needs in overcoming such barriers is the communication of success stories which can act as advocacy tools. This publication has provided some of these.

The SEA task team tracking mechanism is being used to keep abreast of donor and partner country activities. A second volume of case studies is already under consideration as the SEA task team's tracking system records around 100 examples of SEA implementation. A massive amount of information on trends and developments in environmental management is already available through bilateral and multilateral development agencies, although currently it is dispersed among individual agencies. Pulling this information together can help development agencies and their partners gain a coherent appreciation of progress in SEA practice, *e.g.* with regard to co-operation and harmonisation consistent with the Paris Declaration. This publication has initiated a process of such progress reporting, with the aim of improving SEA practice and enhancing common, harmonised approaches to SEA in the development community.

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From:
**Strategic Environmental Assessment in
Development Practice**
A Review of Recent Experience

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264166745-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

Sadler, Barry, Jonathan Hobbs and Peter Nelson (2012), "Conclusion", in OECD, *Strategic Environmental Assessment in Development Practice: A Review of Recent Experience*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264166745-16-en>

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