

Chapter 1

SEA in developing countries: Uptake and development

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This chapter aims to provide an overview of the most recent uptake of SEA in developing countries. Nine case studies that follow this chapter present a good range of application of SEA in developing countries, but do not reflect the sharp increase in SEA application in developing countries since 2009. SEA is one mainstreaming approach that has played a valuable part in integrating environmental considerations into key policy documents, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), as well as strategies and budgets for key economic sectors.

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Increased uptake of SEA by developing countries

This chapter aims to explore the most recent changes that have occurred within the field of environmental assessments in developing countries. The nine case studies that follow this chapter represent examples of SEAs which were carried out in the “early days” of SEA implementation. In 2009, developing countries started to sharply increase their use of Strategic Environmental Assessments, and this chapter focuses on these recent developments. The OECD DAC ENVIRONET SEA Task Team regularly surveys SEA activities in developing countries, and currently tracks over 150 separate initiatives.

Environmental and social considerations have not always been central to the national and sectoral policies in some developing countries. In certain countries, weak planning capacity may result in policies lacking strategic perspective with regards to the integration of the overall national objectives and goals; in worst cases, the achievement of one cluster of sectoral goals can compromise the achievement of goals of other sectors.

The environment is now recognised as an integral component of economic development and societal well-being. Conducting an SEA can assist governments in anticipating how the implementation of development plans and policies may impact on the environment. SEAs can be used as tools to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into policies, plans and programmes for better development outcomes. SEAs can contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into key policy documents, such as *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers* (PRSPs), as well as strategies and budgets for key economic sectors.

In countries with a strong history of integrating environmental issues into planning and decision-making, SEAs are merely a new tool to support advanced environmental integration and mainstreaming approaches. In recent studies stakeholders identified the top mainstreaming tools as (in decreasing order): environmental impact assessment (EIA), cost benefit analysis, ISO standards, and SEA, monitoring and indicators. EIA is the only tool that has been formalised in law in almost every country, so most people are aware of it, but stakeholders also identified a very wide array of other mainstreaming tactics, processes and tools. In other words, SEA is just one approach that has emerged from the West and is being formalised in many developing countries.

Many developing countries have started to legislate for the inclusion of SEAs within their policy making and planning processes. This is a huge step forward, and will contribute greatly towards the development of their capacity to carry out SEAs and enshrine environment sustainability into development plans. SEAs are improving the environmental awareness of key actors, who, through training in SEA and “learning by doing” are gaining new skills and capacity.

Why is SEA valued?

The increasing demand for SEAs is most likely due to the increasing burden of project-level EIAs in developing countries. There is a growing realisation that conducting an SEA earlier in the decision-making process will address some of the policy issues that can stall the EIA process later, at the project level. In keeping with the rationale for EIAs, governments are viewing SEAs as instruments that can assist in demonstrating the value of environmental assets. This is supported by the groundbreaking work of the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity project, in conjunction with international environmental and economic institutions (www.teebweb.org).

Regional development banks and donors have increased the application of SEAs at the planning level for sector programmes and plans. Results of SEA implementation at this level include:

- better integration of inter-sectoral objectives and considerations in each plan;
- better inter-sectoral co-ordination among the different agencies that intervene in domains that are by nature multi-sectoral, such as tourism;
- increased incorporation of stakeholders' views at an early stage of planning, ensuring better programme buy-in by local authorities and communities;
- enhanced incorporation of environmental aspects that are often disregarded in sectoral plans, such as energy efficiency, green building and vulnerability to natural disasters;
- increased incorporation of social considerations into development plans, thus increasing the development effectiveness of aid investments.

A good number of countries supported by the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI) have recently deployed SEAs as an analytical tool for the development of the PRSP process. In many cases, key actors in the mainstreaming process have been trained in SEA to develop their capacity to internalise the environmental mainstreaming process. Last year, the PEI programme facilitated a study tour for several West African countries, allowing them to share experiences of how SEAs can be used at the early stages of environmental mainstreaming programmes.

There is no doubt that the implementation of Strategic Environmental Assessments was initially encouraged by donor agencies. However, over the years, state agencies in developing countries have recognised the need for better tools to integrate environmental concerns into the planning process. SEAs are now considered a useful tool in the toolbox of many development practitioners. Donors are starting to take advantage of the SEA process too; this has led to higher demands for SEA implementation within their own development decision-making. This trend is in line with stipulations in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (section 41-42) and is a requirement of the recent 2008 OECD DAC Policy Statement on SEA.

Bringing SEA to higher and more strategic decision-making levels

In the past five years, meteorological events due to climate change have accelerated the frequency of severe weather-related events. This has led to increased demands for disaster management planning, both at state and district levels, which in turn has resulted in development agencies looking for (and applying) environmental assessment tools. In the last two years the use of *vulnerability assessments* and *climate adaptation planning* to address climate change has increased significantly. While most of these types of assessments are currently being undertaken at state level, a few pilot projects at the district level have also been noted. It is anticipated that within the next few years, more and more districts will undertake these assessment and planning exercises using SEAs.

Many different approaches have recently been described as Strategic Environmental Assessments. This is legitimate up to a point, but partner countries and the development community must ensure that standard planning exercises such as land-use planning are not being interpreted as SEAs. For SEAs to be truly effective, they must be used in genuinely strategic policy, plan and programme initiatives.

It must be noted that most environmental issues fall under the remit of the State, and are governed by their respective Constitutions. It is therefore the central government that can make the biggest difference on environmental integration. Now is the time to call on each stakeholder to accelerate the role they have played to date in advancing better integration of environmental factors in development planning. What is needed is a focused and co-ordinated effort to sustain the momentum achieved by all major stakeholders in development co-operation, this includes:

- encouraging more frequent requests from partner governments to institutionalise SEAs, and muster the political will to follow the process through;
- providing capacity development in SEA methodology that focuses on “learning by doing”, rather than on traditional training courses;
- implementing effective SEAs and environmental governance systems that involve government, civil society, private sector and the media;
- demonstrating clear links between well-functioning ecosystems, sustainable economic development and poverty reduction.

Examples of SEA practice in developing countries

Below are several recent examples (2009-2011) of the implementation of SEAs in developing countries:

Asia

- The People’s Republic of China has passed a central law requiring SEAs for development plans and is implementing extensive SEA training.
- Indonesia is increasing its capacity in SEA for sectoral decision-making.
- Vietnam is applying SEAs in its sectoral reform programme.
- Cambodia is using SEAs for its decentralisation reform programme.

Africa

- Responding to requests, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Ghana organised a two-day training course on SEA in a developing country context at the Tenth Meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA).
- The Tanzanian Vice President’s office is exploring the possibility to increase the use of SEAs in the natural resource sectors.
- Namibia uses SEAs to manage the current uranium rush.
- The Zambia Environmental Protection Council took the initiative to carry out two SEAs on tourism in the Victoria Falls area and the Kasaba Bay area (without any external support). Zambia has also successfully applied SEAs in the mining, chemical and sugar industries. The central government is now considering the legislation of SEAs due to the benefits experienced in the aforementioned sectors.
- Guinea Bissau has recently passed a federal law for SEAs and EIAs. The Guinea Bissau government received training support from the WWF, which trained the National Assembly with respect to hydrocarbon development.

- Morocco and Tunisia have used SEAs for impact assessments and strategy development with regards to large-scale investment programmes.
- Mali has applied an SEA within the national programme for small-scale irrigation, and has found the methodology also useful as a climate assessment tool.
- Following the discussion of SEAs at a Conference of Parties of the Convention for Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region (Abidjan Convention), a recommendation was adopted to encourage member states to implement SEAs for the development of policies governing the hydrocarbon industry.
- The WWF, with support from the Regional Program for Marine and Coastal Conservation in West Africa, has begun a programme to promote the socially and environmentally sound development of offshore oil and gas reserves through the use of SEAs.
- Eskom, a major power utility in South Africa, is using SEAs for high-level infrastructure planning.
- Kenya is undertaking SEA scoping studies for the Lamu/Tana regional development and Mara River policy options. Local SEA practitioners are developing skills for these SEA initiatives.
- The Government of Mauritania organised SEA training for civil society organisations.
- Senegal has developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) to provide SEA capacity building.
- In Sierra Leone, UNEP and the WWF organised a week-long workshop on SEAs for over 100 participants representing the media, government and civil society. Sierra Leone is now considering legislating SEAs, conducting district-level SEAs, conducting an institutional-level SEA with the Sierra Leone Environmental Protection Agency and providing SEA training for members of the parliament and the media.
- Mozambique is using SEAs for private sector development in the natural resource sector. Climate change issues are being integrated into the SEA.

Latin America

- Peru applied SEAs to the development of its energy policy and has introduced SEA legislation.
- Regional development Banks have received requests for SEA capacity building in Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Guyana and Suriname. South American countries recognise the increased international demand for their natural resources and the efforts needed to ensure that development does not compromise social and environmental objectives.

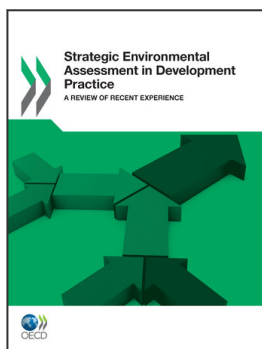
Caribbean

- Trinidad and Tobago has applied SEAs for a waste water management strategy and is considering the development of an SEA unit to address the oil and gas sectors.

Governments are investigating how SEAs can be used to develop plans and policies to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Middle East

- Iran has been working with the UNDP to promote the use of SEAs in development planning. This has resulted in the establishment of the Environmental Assessment Centre, which will be inaugurated in 2011. Environmental impacts of strategic decisions have been explicitly mentioned in the Law of the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan of Iran (2011-16). SEAs will be established at national and sub-national levels and within sectors.



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