UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/10
23 September 1999

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment
in a Transboundary Context

Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment
(First meeting, Geneva, 4-6 October 1999)
(Item 4 of the provisional agenda)

PROGRESS REPORT OF THE DATABASE EVALUATION GROUP

Submitted by the delegation of Hungary

1.   The Database on Environmental Impact Assessment was established in 1998 at
the first meeting of the Parties to the Convention. Hungary took the lead of the
Evaluation Group to review the effectiveness of the Database so that a
recommendation on its need and its continuation can be presented at the second
meeting of the Parties (Report of the first meeting of the Parties, Oslo, 18-20
May 1998, ECE/MP.EIA/2, annex VI, item 8).

2.   Hungary hosted the first meeting of the Evaluation Group in Budapest on 17-
18 May 1999.

3.   The meeting was attended by delegations from the following countries:
Azerbaijan, Denmark, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation,
United Kingdom; and the secretariat.

GE.99-32818

4.   The following documents were prepared and used at the meeting: (a) Preliminary considerations for the evaluation (see annex I below), and (b) Proposed discussion points (see annex II below).

5.   The secretariat informed the Evaluation Group about the deadlines for the submission of documents (see also annex III).

6.   The Evaluation Group worked its way through its agenda. It discussed the present state of the Database and the experience with it. It agreed on the scope of the evaluation and developed an outline for it.

7.   The Group noted that very little information had been added to the Database since the meeting in Oslo. It had, therefore, been difficult to start the evaluation process. The Group discussed the possible reasons for the lack of new entries and considered ways of improving this situation. The Polish Database Manager would provide the authorized users (country focal points) with short manuals on entering information into the Database. The idea of nominating country data managers was put forward. A 2-day training course on how to use the Database was also considered. The Norwegian delegation informed the Group that the stand-alone version would be updated when sufficient new information was added to the Database.

8.   There was general consensus on the need for the Database. Regarding the scope of the evaluation, the participants agreed on the following major topics and criteria:

- Database structure;
- Quantity and quality of its information;
- Content of the Database;
- Number of uses of the Database;
- Capacity and willingness of countries to provide information;
- Database management;
- User-friendliness;
- Cost (cost/benefit).

9.   In view of the limited time and resources available, the participant selected the following techniques for the evaluation:

- Questionnaires;
- Homepage services analysis;
- Case monitoring;
- Homepage guest book analysis.

10.   They also agreed on an outline for the evaluation process (annex III) and decided to submit their report by February 2000 as official input for the second meeting of the Working Group.

11.   As this report needed to be presented to the Working Group for finalization and thereafter for possible adoption at the second meeting of the Parties, further updating of the report in the period between the two meetings would be required.

Annex I

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Background

1.   The primary objective of the Database is to collect information concerning project proposals encompassed by the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. It is designed to facilitate the implementation of the Convention to the largest possible extent (see Database homepage).

2.   Before the first meeting of the Parties to the Convention, Hungary was requested to consider the possibility of taking the lead in the establishment and operation of an evaluation team for the Database. The Evaluation Group is expected to report back to the Parties at their second meeting in October 2000.

Objectives and activities

3.   The objectives of the evaluation are:

        (a)   To monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Database in helping Parties to the Convention to meet their obligations, and provide relevant information for non-Parties and other interested persons and organizations;
        (b)   To prepare a report for the second meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the performance of the Database in the trial period, with recommendations on its future, in terms of its relevance, usefulness, scope, content, format and management.

4.   To this end, the Evaluation Group foresees to:

        (a)   Identify criteria and a timetable for the evaluation;
        (b)   Conduct the evaluation and deliver interim reports;
        (c)   Present its findings at the second meeting of the Parties.

Assumptions

5.   To accomplish its work, the Evaluation Group assumes that:

        (a)   Parties are cooperative;
        (b)   Information updates from Parties provide enough information for the analysis.

Approach

6.   The Database will be assessed by an international Evaluation Group lead by Hungary. The Group will provide interim reports and a final report for the second meeting of the Parties.

7.   The performance of the Database will be assessed through the analysis and the preparation of recommendations regarding:

- The usefulness of its content. Is the necessary information available for the users? Is it useful to link and/or refer to EIA national databases through the Internet?
- Its user-friendliness - may involve a user panel;
- Its maintenance. This includes the processing and management of information updates from the Parties and the technical management of information at the server site.

8.   The outcome of the meeting in Warsaw on 19-20 February 1998 will be taken into account when developing the detailed evaluation scheme. Recommendations will be made about the need to develop the present structure and performance of the system.

9.   Different techniques will be used in the evaluation, for instance:

- Interviews/consultations with users;
- Evaluate certain aspects of the Database in a workshop attended by members of the Evaluation group and invited experts;
- Questionnaires for users;
- Analyse the development of the Database homepage and content;
- Monitor how a specified case is managed through the system.

Desired output

10.   The Evaluation Group will produce a comprehensive report for the second meeting of Parties to the Convention (as set out in para.3(b)) in October 2000.

Time schedule

11.   The evaluation consists of three phases:

I.   PHASE ONE

A.   Project preparation

     1.   Study of relevant documents and information sources (June 1998)
     2.   Project scoping meeting with Ministry of Environment (10 June 1998)

        3.   Develop project proposal for Ministry (by 30 June 1998)

B.   Project inception: meeting with Ministry (10 July 1998)

C.   Project implementation: establish the Evaluation Group

        1.   Contact the donors Denmark and the United Kingdom and other interested Parties
        2.   Visit the Polish centre maintaining the Database
        3.   Develop terms of reference for the evaluation to be discussed with the Evaluation group
        4.   Invitation to the Evaluation group activities (30 September 1998)

D.   Project implementation: identify criteria and timetable for evaluation

        1.   Organize a 1-day consultation for countries participating in the Evaluation group to finalize the terms of reference (January 1999)
        2.   Prepare the document of criteria and techniques to be used in the evaluation (31 January 1999)

II.   PHASE TWO

A.   Project implementation: conduct the evaluation and deliver interim reports

        1.   Contact users and gather information with different methods
        2.   Review and document evaluation information obtained
        3.   Prepare and send first interim report (by March 1999)
        4.   Present and discuss report at the first meeting of the Working Group (by October 1999)
        5.   Identify information gaps and collect necessary information, review and document evaluation information gathered (by December 1999)
        6.   Workshop on Database evaluation (January-February 2000, to be decided)
        7.   Prepare and send second interim report (by end February 2000)
        8.   Present and discuss report at the second meeting of the Working Group (by May 2000)
        9.   Finalize and send final report (by June 2000)

III. PHASE THREE

A.   Project closure: present results at the second meeting of the Parties

           1.   Present final report at the second meeting of the Parties (October 2000)

<u>Annex II</u>

PROPOSED DISCUSSION POINTS

1.   These are the proposed discussion points for each session of the
Evaluation Group. The intention is to offer a basis for the discussions to help
the Evaluation Group reach its goals. The different sessions will provide room
for other ideas beyond the discussion points.

<u>Scope of the Evaluation Group's activities</u>

2.   The goal of this session is to clarify and agree upon the scope of the
Evaluation Group's activities related to the identification of the need for the
Database, the evaluation of its performance and the preparation of
recommendations for future developments.

- Why is it important to regularly analyse the need for the Database?
- How to analyse the need for the Database?
- How to identify the needs of different potential users for the Database?
- What is the main focus of the performance evaluation and the
  recommendations?
- What is the scope of the Evaluation Group's future activities?

<u>Updating the database</u>

3.   The goal of this session is to gather up-to-date information about the
operation and performance of the Database from the host country's perspective.
Advantages and bottlenecks will also be discussed after the short presentation
of the Homepage and related services.

- What are the general experiences with the operation of the Database?
- How were the additions to the Database processed?
- What are the Database's success stories?
- What are the lessons learned from operating it?
- What are the ideas for its future development (technical, managerial)?
- What type of support is needed for its future operation?

<u>Methods and techniques for the evaluation</u>

4.   The goal of this session is to review and select the methods and
techniques to be used in the evaluation.

- What tools and techniques are available to evaluate the Database's performance?
- What tools and techniques are available to evaluate its user-friendliness?
- What are the special techniques for evaluating Internet-based databases and related services?
- How to select the appropriate tools and techniques?
- Which tools and techniques are relevant to the evaluation?

Planning the evaluation

5.   The goal of the session is to plan the evaluation in detail.

- What tasks are necessary for the performance evaluation?
- What tasks are necessary for preparing recommendations?
- What is the schedule of tasks for the evaluation?
- What are the specific roles of the group members in the evaluation?
- How do the different elements of the evaluation fit together?
- Is there a need for improvement? How will it be integrated into the evaluation plan?
- What is the agreed communication between members of the Evaluation Group?
- What are the next steps to be taken?

Annex III

OUTLINE FOR THE EVALUATION

	Activities	Deadline
1.	Prepare Evaluation Group minutes and submit to the Working Group at its first meeting (Hungary)	June 1999
2.	Prepare overall workplan (Hungary) - Questionnaire (Hungary) - Case monitoring (Norway) - Homepage guest book (Poland, to be confirmed)	July 1999
3.	Send evaluation tools to Evaluation Group for comments (Evaluation Group and experts)	September 1999
4.	Perform evaluation (Evaluation Group and experts) - Get target audience to fill in the questionnaire and analyse information - Monitor the process of entering new information into the Database - Analyse information collected in the guestbook - Analyse Database homepage services - summarize information and prepare outline for draft evaluation report	September – October 1999
5.	Obtain feedback at the first meeting of the Working Group through informal meeting	October 1999
6.	Analyse information obtained (Evaluation Group and experts)	November 1999
7.	Prepare draft evaluation report (Hungary)	December 1999
8.	Conduct workshop/virtual workshop on the draft, including recommendations (tentatively)	January 2000
9.	Submit report to the Working Group at its second meeting	February 2000
10.	Final report to the Parties at their second meeting	October 2000