



Potential for Using the EIA/SEA Process as a Vehicle for Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction

Background

Attention to disaster risk reduction (DRR) is increasing globally, primarily due to the realisation that disasters offset development gains. The adoption of Hyogo Framework for Action in 2004 put DRR firmly on the global agenda, and its importance has since been re-articulated in the outcome document of the 2012 Rio Conference on Sustainable Development.

While there is no fundamental disagreement on the importance of DRR, there is insufficient understanding of how it can, in practise, be mainstreamed into development planning. Indeed, DRR activities are often undertaken as stand-alone project initiatives, generally under the guidance of a disaster management agency. As a result, the DRR approach does not systematically permeate government policy and public or private sector investment, which in turn causes additional risks to be created by projects and plans that are not sensitive to disaster risk.

UNEP's Proposal

UNEP is recommending that the well-established process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (and/or Strategic Environmental Assessment) is used as a vehicle to hardwire DRR into development planning, for the following reasons;

1. Most countries around the world has legislation on EIA and many have legislation on Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA); therefore, the legal framework exists;
2. There are two to three decades of experience in most countries on EIA implementation, so Government agencies, NGOs, consultants and the private sector are familiar with the approach;
3. EIA already factors in the potential impacts from the investment/project on the surrounding environment, which can trigger potential disaster situations. Introducing DRR would expand the EIA scope to assess how externally-triggered disasters could impact the project/investment, which may in turn also impact the environment. EIA already identifies potential measures to mitigate environmental impacts, which could be expanded to also consider how proposed mitigation measures could reduce disaster risks.
4. In a number of recent disasters, many industries (medium and large scale) which had undertaken an EIA process were heavily impacted by disasters, leading to further environmental impacts (eg. Floods in Thailand in 2011 impacted many factories which had conducted EIAs). It was thus evident that the EIA process, as implemented currently, is not able to factor in disaster elements adequately.

Operationalising the Proposal



The suggestion to incorporate DRR into EIA/SEA processes is not entirely new. A number of countries (eg. Philippines, Sri Lanka) and agencies (Asian Development Bank and Caribbean Development Bank) have already issued guidelines on how to integrate DRR into EIAs and SEAs. However, these efforts are not yet widely mainstreamed and systemically practiced. UNEP is proposing a series of complementary actions to strengthen efforts to integrate DRR into EIA, as follows:

1. Compile case studies from countries/agencies who have undertaken this approach to evaluate experiences and lessons learned and to identify major gaps and opportunities in the approach;
2. Advocate for mainstreaming DRR through EIA, at various international fora, including the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Sendai, 2015), and advocate for this approach to be included in the post-2015 global framework on disaster risk reduction (successor to the current Hyogo Framework for Action);
3. Work with countries, agencies and institutions which are interested to increase reach and scale-up implementation of the approach, for instance through developing and delivering capacity building or trainings on DRR in EIA at both country and regional levels;
4. Documenting experiences and lessons of applying DRR through EIAs and disseminating through case study publications.

It is in this context that UNEP is seeking to present this approach to the meeting of the parties of the Espoo Convention.

Points for Discussion

1. Does this sound like an idea which could be discussed in the forthcoming Meeting of Parties of the Espoo convention in 2014 ?
2. What are the anticipated obstacles of bringing forward this initiative and how could they be overcome ?
3. What background work, both technical and diplomatic, is needed prior to the MoP to maximise chance of success?
4. What is likely to be the interest among MoP members to participate in a meeting of technical experts on EIA/SEA and DRR?

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