

EIA and SEA practice and capacity development

Introduction to Plenary Panel held on Wednesday, June 2 2004 Third Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention

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Scope and purpose of the session:

The plenary panel will address key themes related to the work programme for the further implementation of the Espoo Convention and preparation for the SEA Protocol. It will address three main aspects:

- EIA practice and capacity building in other settings, recognising this may be of interest to the Parties and having regard to the potential for non-UNECE countries to adopt the Espoo Convention;
- Recent experience and progress in health impact assessment (HIA) and incorporating health into EIA and SEA, recognising the increasing attention given to this relationship in the Convention and especially the Protocol; and
- Capacity building activities in support preparation for the entry into force of the SEA Protocol, recognising that this has a high priority in the work plan adopted by the Parties to the Convention.

Background:

The EIA Convention and the SEA Protocol are important as multi-lateral legal instruments that establish obligations on the Parties and signatories respectively and serve as international standards for appropriate procedure and practice. The Convention is now a mature instrument and the work of the Parties on its implementation is recognised as having played a significant role in developing the EIA capacity of countries in transition. The SEA Protocol is a new instrument and work to prepare for it has yet to begin and will comprise a series of guidance and training activities. Within the EU, these activities also coincide with those to support the implementation of the SEA Directive. More generally, EIA and SEA capacity development are likely to continue to be the focus of increasing international attention and activity in following up on the Plan of Implementation from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). For example, the IAIA Marrakesh Declaration on *Building Capacity for Impact Assessment* sets out an agenda and plan of action for addressing the pressing needs of developing countries in this area.

A frame of reference for discussion purposes

EIA and SEA capacity issues are most acute in the developing world, especially low and middle-income countries where the 'tools of the trade' and core practices are least applied and most needed to help implement sustainable development. But these issues are not confined only to the poorer countries of the South. Constraints on EIA and SEA practice among the wealthy countries of the North are well known but usually not perceived as being capacity-related. Yet some issues certainly fall into this category if *capacity* is defined as the potential ability to apply EA to internationally accepted standards, more so if this concept is taken to include *competence* or demonstrated capability in carrying out the main tasks.

From this perspective, capacity development is the process of augmenting, mobilising and enhancing the EIA and SEA capabilities of a country, organisation, professional body or group of

individuals. Specific aims are to establish or strengthen the arrangements, knowledge, tools and skills necessary to operate an EIA or SEA system to an acceptable level of performance, relative to existing human or institutional capacities. The scope of capacity development can range from establishing pre-conditions for EIA or SEA development to benchmarking good practice. In Box 1, elements of EIA and SEA capacity development are summarised in relation to components for effective systems.

This approach begins with capacity and needs assessment to identify or verify the priorities and requirements for EIA and SEA development within participating countries (perhaps using the package outlined in the UNEP *EIA Training Resource Manual*). Activities should focus on the measures necessary to build the wherewithal to operate an EIA or SEA system to the standard necessary to meet internationally accepted aims and principles of good practice (beginning with those established under the Convention and Protocol). Supporting measures include research, policy analysis, institutional design, information exchange, training and skills transfer, building networks, professional development and guidance on implementation of good practices. Where EIA and SEA training is to be undertaken as part of capacity development, it may be based on precepts and measures to assure it meets standards of good quality for this activity (Box 2).

Box 1: Elements of EA capacity and their development

Elements of capacity development	Components of effective EA systems
Supporting conditions and infrastructure for EIA and SEA	Political stability, sound governance, role of NGO and civic groups, environmental awareness of local community
Designing and strengthening institutional arrangements	Clear framework of law, regulation and policy, transparent procedure, guidance on implementation, defined agency roles and responsibilities, mechanisms for compliance and follow up, etc
Improving professional competencies and skills	Ability of practitioners to implement the EA process, apply appropriate tools and perform the main activities to an acceptable level
Benchmarking and standard setting	Referents of good practice and performance, principles, criteria and standards to indicate how EA systems and applications measure up

Box 2: Principles for quality assurance of EIA and SEA training for capacity development

- Focus on the ‘KITS’ for EA good practice – the aim is to transfer the knowledge, information, tools and skills that are appropriate and relevant to a particular situation
- Target the right people – including practitioners, managers, decision-makers, practitioners and others who have a role in or influence on EA process development and implementation
- Use appropriate training approaches, methods and aids – these should be learner-active, address relevant issues, use locally applicable tools and cases and simulate ‘hands on’ practice
- Use ‘ESP’ trainers – who are effective and experienced, sensitive to participant needs and realities and practice their EA specialization
- Give priority to training the trainers – to gain maximum outreach and transfer where capacity is low and resources are limited
- Provide for continuity – by follow up training, information updates and networks for professional exchange