

Results of analysis of the existing and required national capacities for introducing a national SEA system in Uzbekistan

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Martin Smutny
International consultant to OSCE



Needs assessment – objectives

- To identify the current status of the environmental assessment system in Uzbekistan and existing challenges of its application to the drafts of plans and programmes;
- To determine gaps in the existing national environmental assessment system vis-à-vis the Protocol on SEA and the EU SEA Directive;
- To estimate capacities for conducting SEA processes;
- To identify the needs of the key stakeholder groups to undertake SEA, as well as priorities and specific actions necessary to introduce and further develop a national SEA system;
- To identify main target groups and a desired focus for further capacity building and awareness raising activities on SEA.

Needs assessment – approach

- A questionnaire survey among the participants of the study tour to Germany (which also served as an initial feedback to the draft questionnaire for fine-tuning the questions);
- A questionnaire survey among other relevant national stakeholders via an email communication (April – June 2020);
- Online interviews (November – December 2020) to discuss the selected topics with the respondents who had completed the questionnaire;
- Overview of the existing planning schemes in Uzbekistan and identification of a need for SEA for relevant plans, programmes and other governmental strategic documents;
- Comparison of the current situation against main elements of effective SEA system;

Main elements of an effective SEA system

- SEA legislation is in force and aligned with the Protocol on SEA;
- Procedural steps of SEA are well established and followed in practice;
- Planning, environmental and health authorities, decision-makers:
 - Are aware of their SEA-related responsibilities and tasks;
 - Have sufficient capacities to perform these tasks;
 - Allocate appropriate financial means for carrying out SEA;
- The public is aware of the opportunities to participate in SEA;
- There are practitioners/experts able to conduct SEA;
- Relevant methods and techniques are known and used;
- A quality control system is established and performed;
- Mechanism/platform enabling information sharing on SEA processes is in place.

Existing challenges

- Low awareness on environmental assessment among project developers or decision-makers;
- Insufficient data and information on the environment and health;
- Lack of capacities within governmental authorities to coordinate environmental assessment procedures;
- Weak monitoring and post-project analysis schemes;
- The lack of finances for conducting environmental assessment;
- Insufficient legal framework;
- Non-existence of national environmental assessment network or association of experts;
- Lack of expert capacities to carry out relevant environmental
- Unclear procedural steps as well as roles and responsibilities of main actors;

Legal framework for SEA

- Presently, there is not adopted national legislation for SEA in Uzbekistan
- State ecological expertise is often not carried out for the strategic documents
- There are draft legislative documents, which outline the national SEA system in accordance with the Protocol:
 - draft new Law on Ecological Expertise;
 - draft Law on Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Once in force, it will provide a sufficient basis for SEA application in the country

Procedural steps of SEA

- The draft Law on SEA outlines the following procedural steps:
 - Preliminary assessment;
 - SEA report (including determination of its scope);
 - Consultations with interested governmental agencies;
 - Public participation;
 - Transboundary consultations;
 - Taking into account the results of SEA;
 - Monitoring
- Steps above generally well reflect the steps outlined by the Protocol on SEA
- Scoping stage is not clearly stipulated, further clarification may be needed

SEA awareness and capacities of planning authorities

- No responses from the planning authorities within survey
- Feedback from other respondents indicates that the limited awareness about SEA and capacities within governmental authorities to coordinate SEA may be an issue (with a high turnover of the governmental staff as one of the challenges)
- Budgetary aspects not considered as a significant challenge on the way to introduce SEA...however, experience from other countries indicate otherwise

SEA awareness and capacities of environmental and health authorities

- Experience of the State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection with SEE (but only rarely for the strategic documents)
- There is certain level of awareness on SEA, but no practical experience with its application (also applies to the Ministry of Health)
 - Further capacity building is essential
 - Role of the regional/local authorities should be discussed

Institution / organisation	Main tasks related to SEA	Estimate of person-days needed for one SEA
State Center of Ecological Expertise/ regional centres of ecological expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuing a screening decision • Providing opinion on the scope of the SEA report (ToR) • Providing opinion on the SEA report • Entering inputs to the SEA database 	10 – 15 person-days
Ministry of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opinion on the scope of the SEA report (ToR) • Providing opinion on the SEA report 	5 - 10 person-days
Planning authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring overall coordination of SEA process • Preparing the ToR for SEA practitioners and carrying out tender procedure • Coordinating communication between SEA and planning teams • Ensuring internal quality control • Communicating with the Committee and the Ministry of Health • Coordinating public participation • Integrating SEA inputs in the strategic documents • Entering inputs to the SEA register 	40 – 60 person-days

Types of strategic documents to be subject to SEA

- State development programs;
- Certain types of urban construction documentation related to spatial planning:
 - Documentation on planning development of the territory and parts of the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan including
 - Documentation on planning development of the territories of the regions of the country (planning schemes for developments parts of the territories of the Karakalpakstan republic and oblasts; planning projects for rayon (groups of rayons);
 - Documentation on development the territories of the human settlements (general plans of settlements; city and town lines projects; sectoral schemes of development of the human settlements territories);
- Some other strategic documents (concepts , action plans, measures and other), which by its nature should be considered programs or plans.

Estimate of future SEAs

- Several SEAs at the national level in coming years
 - Update of the Strategy of Actions (2021 – 2022),
 - Updates of the state programmes in 2022, and
 - Updates for sectoral strategic planning documents before 2030
- A significant number of SEAs can be expected at the sub-national levels – there are more than 300 administrative-territorial units in Uzbekistan, where the development programmes and spatial planning documents exist and should be updated on a regular basis.
- The SEA should be applied at the regional level, while screening can be considered at the district and city levels.
- Several tens of SEAs per year can be expected – importance of the role of the regional SEE centres

SEA awareness and capacities of decision-makers

- Only limited opportunities for decision-makers so far to get familiar with SEA so far
- Low awareness on environmental assessment among project developers or decision-makers ranked high in the survey among the existing challenges for carrying out environmental assessment
- As mentioned during the interviews, the Cabinet of Ministers should be provided with more detailed information on SEA and its benefits.

Public awareness on SEA

- Similar to the decision-makers, only limited opportunities for the public to get familiar with SEA so far
- The donor-funded capacity building activities on SEA in Uzbekistan have mainly invited governmental officials from planning agencies and environmental and health authorities, some EIA practitioners and very few representatives of NGOs and educational institutions.
- Thus, the public awareness regarding public participation opportunities within the SEA procedure can be considered as limited
- The draft Law on SEA envisions the opportunities for public discussions and feedback during the SEA steps – for effective public participation, awareness raising is highly needed.

Practitioners/experts able to conduct SEA

- The survey results suggest that Uzbekistan has sufficient expert potential to carry out SEAs on regular basis, experts can be recruited from
 - EIA/OVOS practitioners or companies performing EIAs
 - Academic/research institutions
 - CSOs
- Providing training and methodological support on SEA to national research institutes, the national environmental experts, and CSOs and should be considered as one of the crucial elements in developing good national SEA practice.
- Optimally, experts should receive training on SEA and establish their network before the draft SEA provisions enter into force.

Relevant methods and techniques are known and used

- The respondents of the survey were unaware of the existing guiding documents on SEA
- Capacity building on methods and techniques to be used in SEA thus will be required, potentially as part of the pilot SEA projects
- Further national SEA practice, including examination of data availability, will help identify and develop SEA methods and techniques most suitable for the planning practice and the content of the plans and programmes developed by the governmental authorities of Uzbekistan.

A quality control system is established and performed

- The draft Law on SEA mentions that environmental and health authorities are supposed to provide opinion on the SEA report, which can be perceived as an element of quality control system.
- Also, public participation can be considered as certain form of the quality control.
- The experience from other countries shows that for effective quality control there may be a need for the guidance/quality control criteria.

Mechanism/platform enabling information sharing on SEA processes is in place

- The draft Law on SEA proposes that the electronic SEA register should be established to publish documents related to SEA, including
 - The draft and the final text of the strategic document;
 - An explanatory note on how the results of SEA have been taken into account;
 - Documents related to the preliminary assessment;
 - The ToR defining the scope of the environmental report;
 - Results of SEA;
 - Documents related to monitoring.
- Developing and launching similar register is a challenging process.
- Debate about its design, functions and technical features should be initiated in parallel with the draft Law on SEA

Needs for introducing the SEA practice

- SEA has proven its potential to support transitions to “green economies” as well as to effectively address the climate change-related issues
- Its application can help to achieve the Strategy for the transition of the Republic of Uzbekistan to a green economy in the period of 2019 – 2030 (and it may also support more effective strategic planning)
- Introduction and development of SEA is strongly linked to finalizing and entering into force of the draft Law on SEA
- Also,
 - An efficient institutional setting for the SEA system has to be established
 - Awareness of all relevant stakeholders of the principles of SEA application, its benefits and costs have to be increased

Thank you for your attention!

