



Training on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for participants from Belarus

Evaluation report

August 2009

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1. Background

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) offers a promising methodology to promote and improve planning processes in general and the integration of environmental aspects into policies, plans and programmes, in particular. SEA has been introduced as an obligatory instrument in many industrialised countries and is meeting with growing interest in developing and transition countries too.

SEA provides support to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed to by all the world's countries and the world's leading development institutions at the UN General Assembly in 2000. MDG 7 on Environmental Sustainability resolves "to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse loss of environmental resources".

Taking this into account, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has established a Task Team on Strategic Environmental Assessment. This was established in 2004 as a response to the demand for guidance on the most efficient and effective way to apply SEA in the context of development cooperation. The product was the OECD publication "Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment. Good Practice Guidance for Development Cooperation".

Application of SEA in the Europe and the CIS region is driven by the EU SEA Directive and the UNECE SEA Protocol¹. Development in South-Eastern European countries is very much oriented towards EU integration resulting also in higher interest and demand for introducing SEA in the countries. Despite the fact that some of these countries have recently introduced SEA requirements into national legislation level of understanding of SEA concept and benefits is still not sufficient. Since both the UNECE Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment and the EU SEA Directive are very important documents for further development of SEA in SEE region, the training for trainers from SEE countries aimed to promote the practical application of the Protocol and the Directive.

¹ The UNECE Protocol on SEA (Kiev, 2003) was negotiated to supplement the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo, 1991). The Protocol has been signed by 37 States and the European Community. It will enter into force once 16 signatories have ratified it and become Parties, and several States have already done so. Once in force, the Protocol will be open for accession by any Member State of the United Nations, subject to approval by the existing Parties, and may so become a global instrument for SEA.

2. Objectives of the training course

The training course had four main objectives:

- (i) To introduce participants the concept and use of SEA and illustrate the process through a hypothetical case study on a regional development programme;
- (ii) To relate the lessons learnt from the case study to the context in the participants home country;
- (iii) To illustrate possible ways on the effective SEA implementation following the provision of the UNECE SEA Protocol and EU SEA Directive;
- (iv) To provide participants with examples of tackling specific environmental issues including the climate change within the SEA;
- (v) To obtain and discuss recommendations on future actions for streamlining SEA in Belarus and networking among relevant stakeholders.

3. Training methodology and content

The training was based on SEA training manual which has been developed by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ/InWent). This training package is based on both practical experiences with impact assessment tools in development cooperation, and the “Good Practice Guidance on Applying SEA in Development Cooperation”, the official guidance of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). It employs innovative methods by intensively exploiting opportunities for action learning and group work. Being based on the case work methodology of the Harvard Business School, the training focuses on practical approaches to SEA.

In order to a) promote principles of the UNECE SEA Protocol and the EU SEA Directive, b) to accommodate the training to the context of CEE region, and c) integrate the issue of the climate change, the fictitious case study was modified (focused on SEA for regional / sub-national development plan) and the slides regarding the requirements of the UNECE SEA Protocol and EU SEA Directive and its practical application were integrate in the PowerPoint presentations, as well as slides referring to the appropriate consideration of the climate change within SEA.

The training was run over 4.5 days (the last half-day was dedicated to the concluding presentations and wrap-up discussions) and was subdivided into several modules. In addition to the case study-based modules (see below), a series of special lectures was presented on following subjects: “Statistical and analytical tools in SEA” (presented by Mr. Lubomir Nondek, Integra Consulting Services Ltd., “Practical aspects of SEA” (presented by Ms. Martina Tuzinska Synkova, department of Environmental Assessment of the Ministry of Environment of the Czech Republic), and “SEA and Public Health” (presented by Ms. Eva Rychlikova, Czech Environmental Inspectorate). After introductory sessions the further modules were structured according to the case works from the fictitious case study (see detail schedule of agenda) i.e. participants went through following exercises:

- a. Link programme and SEA
- b. Determine the right issues and scope of assessment
- c. Analyse the baseline trends
- d. Analyze proposed development priorities and their alternatives
- e. Assess cumulative impacts of proposed development activities and propose their optimization
- f. Use effective means of participation
- g. Ensure reflection of SEA results in decision-making as well as an adequate management and monitoring system for implementation
- h. Manage SEA effectively within budgetary and time constraints

Each module was introduced by short presentation on a given SEA task focused on explanation of the task’s purpose and relevant requirements of the UNECE SEA Protocol and EU SEA Directive. The main part was dedicated to the group work followed by the presentations and wrap-up discussions (including few PowerPoint slides with summary of key issues). The discussions were facilitated by the lecturers. The groups – i.e. SEA teams (three altogether) – were established before the first group work and the participants continued working in the same group during the whole training.

The hypothetical case study was elaborated for the preparation of the Regional Development Plan of fictitious Rumburec Region. It included map of the Region as well as detail map of proposed specific projects (industrial sites), and several exhibits for group work.

This approach allowed to the participants to compare different results (from groups) and discuss other possible approaches, methods and tools. As a part of the each concluding discussion the respective case exercise results were compared with real-life examples of a similar nature (taken from different real SEA reports) prepared and presented by the trainers. Participants thus were provided with a direct insight into the practical application of individual SEA steps.

Working groups (SEA teams)



Work within a group



Presentation of workgroup's results



4. Training agenda

Date/	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Timing	16	17	18	19	20	21
Venue		Hotel Regina, Prague	Hotel Regina, Prague	Hotel Regina, Prague	Hotel Regina, Prague	Hotel Regina, Prague
09.00		Introduction and training objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to training • Presentation of participants • Learning objectives • Practical information Corners game	Evolution and current status of SEA in Belarus and the Czech Republic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main similarities and differences of the SEA systems • Presentations & discussions 	Analyze proposed development priorities and their alternatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Case work Wrap-up & Discussion on how this relates to participants' context	Assess cumulative impacts of proposed activities and propose their optimization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Case work • Wrap-up & Discussion on how this relates to participants' context 	Manage SEA effectively within budgetary and time constraints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Case work • Wrap-up & Discussion on how this relates to participants' context
10.30		Coffee/Tea	Coffee/Tea	Coffee/Tea	Coffee/Tea	Coffee/Tea
11.00		Brief introduction to SEA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic information • Evolution of SEA Introduction to case study Reading time for participants	Determine the right issues and scope of the assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Case work • Wrap-up & Discussion on how this relates to participants' context 	Continued	Continued	Closing session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap-up of the training • Training evaluation • Participants' view • Distribution of certificates
12.30		Lunch arranged	Lunch arranged	Lunch arranged	Lunch arranged	Lunch arranged
14.00	Arrivals of participants	Link programme and SEA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Case work • Wrap-up & Discussion on how this relates to participants' context 	Analyze the baseline trends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Case work • Wrap-up & Discussion on how this relates to participants' context 	Meeting with the MoE representative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical aspects of SEA • Czech SEA/EIA Information System 	Use effective means of participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Case work • Wrap-up & Discussion on how this relates to participants' context 	- End of training -
15.30		Coffee/Tea	Coffee/Tea	Coffee/Tea	Coffee/Tea	
16.00		Continued	Special lecture:	Special lecture:	Ensure reflection of SEA	



- 17.30		Evolution and current status of SEA in Belarus and the Czech Republic <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assignment of tasks• Preparation of presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statistical and analytical tools in SEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SEA and public health	results in decision-making & monitoring system <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• Case work• Wrap-up & Discussion on how this relates to participants' context	
18.00		Individual dinner	Individual dinner	Social event – dinner in the Prague City centre	Individual dinner	Individual dinner

5. Participants

The training course was held for a total of 11 participants. The participants included staff from various organizations, mainly research institutions:

- Research Economic Institute of the Ministry of Economy of Belarus
- Institute for Urban Planning
- Central Research Institute for Complex Use of Water Resources (CRICUWR)
- Institute for nature management of National Academy of sciences
- Belarus State University, Legal department
- Scientific Practical Centre on Bioresources, National Academy of Sciences
- Institute for nature management of National Academy of sciences
- Belarus Research Center “Ecology”

As a part of the introductory sessions, the participants were asked to formulate their expectations from the training. As summary below shows, the participants expected to learn about following topics and issues:

- How to ensure effective involvement and cooperation of responsible authorities
- How effectively implement and enforce relevant legislation
- Incentives for introducing and applying SEA
- Different ways to develop capacity for SEA application
- Methodologies and procedures used in SEA, in particular how to conduct scoping
- How to apply public participation in SEA
- How to build relations with responsible authorities
- SEA legislation and practice in the Czech Republic
- SEA in the context of urban planning
- Linking SEA to socio-economic planning

6. Summary of the training outcomes

As mentioned above, each training module consisted from short introduction of the topic and case work, group work on the assigned task, presentations of the results and facilitated wrap-up discussion. The presented results showed that it is possible to use different approaches and tools to fulfill the tasks of the case study. Groups were encouraged to use flipchart for preparation of the presentations (since the preparation of the presentation on flipchart papers better facilitate the discussions within the group compare to work with the laptop and MS PowerPoint), and resulting visuals further helped to facilitate discussions among the groups.

Evolution and current status of SEA in participants' country

The participants prepared the overview of the evolution and current status of SEA in Belarus focused on:

- *Relevant legislation and other documents (methodologies etc.):* As of today, Belarus has no legal framework directly referring to the SEA, though legislation exists on application of combination of EIA-like procedures for the project level environmental assessment (so called "OVOS), conducted by developer and a "State Ecological Expertise" – review and approval of the project by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. The preparation of SEA legislation is now under consideration in Belarus.
- *Existing practice:* A few examples of the pilot SEA application were mentioned – funded by the international agencies (UNDP). For example, Strategic Environmental Assessment of the 2006-2010 National Tourism Development Programme of the Republic of Belarus. The need for further pilot SEA application was emphasized, since the practical examples can prove the usefulness and benefits of the assessment and so serve for capacity building in this field.
- *Procedure:* The procedures applied in practice in cases of the pilot SEAs in Belarus followed the internationally recognized standards (including stages of screening and scoping, impacts assessment and preparation of SEA report, and decision-making (approval of the plan/programme assessed).
- *Key actors (planning authorities, decision-makers, environmental and health authorities, public involved):* The ministry responsible for environmental protection and related matters is also responsible for environmental assessment in Belarus. Other key actors are: sectoral ministries responsible for preparation of strategic documents, other authorities (national, regional and local levels) as decision-makers, and general public including NGOs.
- *Key issues (problems / benefits / what works well / what shall be improved?):* The main issues mentioned include:
 - need of further capacity building, especially experts and state officials
 - awareness raising on SEA concept and benefits for decision-makers, public and NGOs
 - need for development and implementation of SEA legislation in order to provide legal basis for the development of SEA practice beyond the pilot projects

Generally, a need for further support of the improvement of the situation was expressed within the discussions – both as regards to designing and implementing necessary legislation and capacity building of administrative capacities (SEA authorities) and other relevant stakeholder groups (planners, NGOs, public). The need for further assistance in carrying out pilot assessments and development of guidance was also expressed,

Determine the right issues and scope of the assessment

The discussions following the presentations of the case work results were focused on the problems with the identification and specification of relevant environmental themes and objectives and their modification for the specific assessment. The different approaches towards scoping (e.g. use of checklists, criteria systems) were discussed. Specific attention was paid to the climate change and other crosscutting issues as well as to the question to what extent the SEA should cover social and economy issues.

Baseline analysis

The discussion following the case work exercise focused on the issues related to the data quality and interpretation. On the basis of the case work as well as their own experience participants discussed frequently occurring data flaws and techniques for their mitigation. A sound and careful approach towards the data sources and their interpretation was stressed. A need to acknowledge clearly all uncertainties and data gaps experienced during the analysis in the final SEA report was pointed out. An involvement of experts with a local knowledge was suggested as a good way of reducing the risk of data misinterpretation.

Analyze proposed development priorities and their alternatives

Drawing on the results of the case work exercise the participants debated appropriate means of comparing development alternatives. Pros and cons of simple matrix-like techniques vis-à-vis more complex tools such as models were debated. The nature and quality of the strategic document itself, the reasonability of suggested alternatives and the level of their elaboration are of key importance for the decision on approach and methods to be used within the SEA.

Assess cumulative impacts of proposed activities and propose their optimization

Based on case work example, participants focused on possible cumulative effects of different interventions on individual environmental elements. The problem of how to compare direct impacts of specific projects and indirect effects of more general activities was discussed (examples were provided by the case studies). The participants were interested in various techniques suitable for this type of evaluations.

Use effective means of participation

Participants within their group work outlined several strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of the public participation, stressing out the need for transparency and the information availability from the initial stages and throughout the whole SEA process. A suitability of different means of participation for different stakeholder groups was debated as well as the differences in level of details of information provided to different groups.

Ensure reflection of SEA results in decision-making & monitoring system

The problem of the SEA influence on the actual decision making is of critical importance. The following principles were suggested in the discussion to ensure the SEA outcomes are taken into account: The employed methods and the form of presenting outcomes must be understandable for the decision makers. The SEA should intensively communicate with the planners so that the SEA proposed modifications could be considered at as early stage of the plan drafting as possible. The issue of as to what extent the SEA team should work

together with the planners was also discussed. The follow-up activities and monitoring are key tools for assuring that the SEA outcomes were actually taken into account.

Manage SEA effectively within budgetary and time constraints

The case work mock budgeting exercise stimulated a fruitful debate on resources allocation within a SEA project. The pros and cons of employing short-time experts vis-à-vis having a broader team of core experts were discussed. A close cooperation with the authorities and plan developers helps to avoid dual work and reduce some of the costs of data gathering and public participation

Special lectures

The lectures on statistical and analytical tools applicable in SEA and public health issues in SEA facilitated discussions on methodological problems and scope of application of SEA respectively. Meeting a representative of the Czech Ministry of Environment, who delivered a presentation on current issues and concerns related to the practical operation of the Czech SEA system, provided participants with yet another perspective for their thinking about the SEA.

Further special presentation (delivered directly by trainers) was focused on the Czech internet based SEA/EIA information system. The presented information system enabling public to access the full documentation of individual SEA processes including all related documents and records from the public hearings was praised by the participants as a good model for the future development in their respective countries.

7. Course evaluation

The course was evaluated by using the evaluation form (see annex II) at the end of the training. The overall rating² is provided in the table bellow.

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	average rating
working methods				1	4	6	5,5
workshop content				3	8		4,7
learning aspect			1	4	3	3	4,7
trainers					3	8	5,7
group dynamics			1	3	3	4	4,9
applicability in your working area		1	2	2	2	4	4,5
degree of expectations met				5	5	1	4,6
organisation, logistics, venue					5	6	5,5
time-table				2	3	6	5,4

Rating scale: 1=very bad; 2=bad; 3=regular; 4=good; 5=very good; 6=excellent

Following suggestions for the further improvement of the training result both from the evaluation discussion with the participants and from observations of the trainers:

- To further expand the use of illustrative examples taken from the real SEA reports as a supportive material during the slide presentations and as well as during each sum-up evaluation and discussions for individual modules.
- To focus more on methods and techniques applicable in the very environmental assessment, to allocate time on demonstration of practical use of certain techniques such as CBA or multi-criteria analysis.
- To replace a hypothetical case study of a fictitious region with a real SEA case.
- To introduce individual work exercises, in addition to the group work.
- To extend the course with some internet-based follow up package including the possibility of on-line consultations and providing further studying materials
- To focus more on differences between SEA and EIA

² Numbers in cells express the number of participants scoring given category by rating indicated in the first cell in column. The following rating scale was used: 1=very bad; 2=bad; 3=regular; 4=good; 5=very good; 6=excellent (columns in the table).

8. Acknowledgements

The original training was developed by a consultant team consisting of Jiri Dusik, Alfred Eberhardt and Felipe Perez supported by Harald Lossack, Axel Olearius (GTZ) and Jan-Peter Schemmel (GTZ).

The set of PowerPoint slides for this particular training, incorporating the requirements of the UNECE SEA Protocol, was prepared by Jiri Dusik with inputs from Nicholas Bonvoisin (UNECE), and further modified by Martin Smutny, Michal Musil (Integra Consulting Services Ltd.) and Henrieta Martonakova (UNDP) in order to integrate relevant requirements of the EU SEA Directive and issue of the climate change.

The present fictitious case study on the Regional Development Plan of Rumburec Region has been prepared by Integra Consulting Services Ltd. (Martin Smutny and Michal Musil) in cooperation with Jiri Dusik, Henrieta Martonakova (UNDP), Nicholas Bonvoisin (UNECE) and Axel Olearius (GTZ).

The set of examples of particular SEA tasks from existing real SEA reports has been compiled by Integra Consulting Services Ltd. (Martin Smutny and Michal Musil) with inputs from Henrieta Martonakova.

The training has been conducted by Martin Smutny and Michal Musil from the Integra Consulting Services Ltd., and Henrieta Martonakova (UNDP).

Annexes

Annex 1: List of participants

Name	Position	Institution
Pavel Halauko (Mr.)	Engineer	The Institute of Regional and Urban Planning
Natallia Dankova (Ms.)	Head of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection	Scientific Research Economic Institute of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus
Vadzim Zubrytski (Mr.)	Head of Sector of Industrial Norms	RUE "Belarusian Scientific and Research Center "Ecology"
Marharyta Kazyrenka (Ms.)	Researcher	National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Institute for Nature Management
Vladimir Korneev (Mr.)	Chief of sector (laboratory of water monitoring)	Central Research Institute of Complex Use of Water Resources
Ruslan Novitsky (Mr.)	Head of Department of Monitoring and Cadastre of Wild Animals	The State scientific and production amalgamation "The scientific and practical center for bioresources"
Elena Sanets (Ms.)	Senior Staff Scientist	Institute for Nature Management of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus
Alena Shushkova (Ms.)	Researcher	Scientific-Practical Centre on Bioresources, National Academy of Science of Belarus
Yauheni Kalenda (Mr.)	Engineer	The Institute of Regional and Urban Planning
Elena Laevskaya (Ms.)	Associative Professor of Law Department	Belarusian State University
Vadim Lojetchko (Mr.)	Task Coordinator	UNDP/EC Project "Building capacity for Strategic Environmental Assessment and environmental conventions implementation in Belarus"

Annex 2: Evaluation form

SEA Training for experts from Belarus
 Prague, August 17 - 21, 2009

EVALUATION FORM

Dear participant!

Your opinion is very important to us. Therefore we kindly ask you to fill in this questionnaire for us. Your comments and recommendations will help us to improve the SEA training.

Please rate each of the following categories between 1 and 6 and mark the corresponding column.

(1=very bad; 2=bad; 3=regular; 4=good; 5=very good; 6=excellent)

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6
working method						
workshop contents						
learning aspect						
trainers						
group dynamics						
applicability in your working area						
degree of expectations met						
organisation, logistics, venue						
time-table						

In this part of the evaluation, you are kindly requested to give us your opinions and comments on the different aspects of the workshop.

Working method:

Workshop contents:

Learning aspect:

Trainers:

Group dynamics:

Applicability in your working area:

Degree of expectations met:

Organisation, logistics, place:

Time-table:

Suggestions for improvement:

Would you recommend this SEA training to others?

Interest and possibilities of continuing the learning / training process after the workshop has ended: