



# SEA

## Strategic Environmental Assessment in EU development cooperation

*A handful of **tips** to get it right!*

**Greening EU COOPERATION**  
Integrating environment & climate change

*International  
Cooperation and  
Development*

# Strategic Environmental Assessment in EU development cooperation

*A handful of **tips** to get it right!*

Published by Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development Units C2 and C6  
with the Environment and Climate Change Mainstreaming Facility

**CONTACT:**

Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development Units C2 and C6 Environment  
and Climate Change Mainstreaming Facility.  
Rue de la Loi 41, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium  
e-mail: [EuropeAid-C2-MAINSTREAMING@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EuropeAid-C2-MAINSTREAMING@ec.europa.eu)

**DISCLAIMER:**

The contents of this publication do not necessarily represent the official position or opinion of the  
European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the  
Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of information in this publication.

© European Union, 2017.

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged. Printed in Belgium 2017

PRINTED ON ELEMENTAL CHLORINE-FREE BLEACHED PAPER (ECF)

**Greening EU COOPERATION**  
Integrating environment & climate change

# Strategic Environmental Assessment

in EU development cooperation

## A handful of tips to get it right!

**SEA** is a powerful tool to enhance the contributions of a national/sectoral policy or strategy (strategic document) towards **environmentally sustainable, climate resilient and low carbon development**.

**SEA** was first piloted in EU development cooperation in 2006. Since then, more than 40 **SEAs** have been prepared. This booklet targets primarily EU officials involved in designing, managing and using the findings of an **SEA**; it brings you practical advice to make the most of this tool.



# Some basics to keep in mind

Governments and donors use different approaches to SEA.

## The approach promoted by EuropeAid:

- ➔ Aims at ensuring that EU support to the implementation of national/sectoral policies and strategies maximises opportunities to contribute to environmentally sustainable, climate resilient and low carbon development.
- ➔ Informs the EU to enhance its support programme, but also the partner Government to enhance its policy or strategy.

The SEA should provide an answer to the following questions:

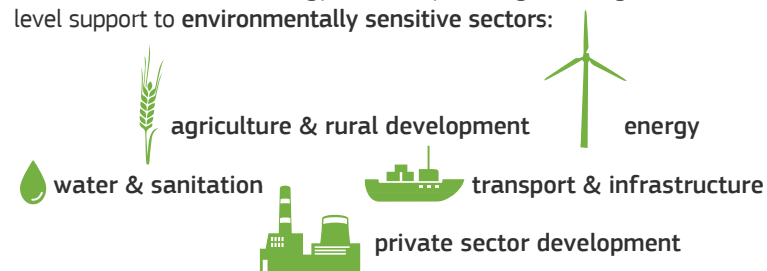
- ✓ Is it likely for the implementation of the sector strategy and/or the EU support programme to result in significant impacts on the environment? How can these impacts be avoided, mitigated or compensated?
- ✓ Does the strategic document offer an adequate response to the effects environmental degradation and climate change may have on the sector's performance? How can these concerns be better addressed by the sector strategy and the EU support programme?
- ✓ How can the strategic document and the EU support programme better grasp opportunities to contribute to environmentally sustainable, climate resilient and low carbon development?

# Be clear on whether you need an SEA



## Tip 1

- ✓ SEA is encouraged when the EU will be providing **budget support** to implement a national or sectoral strategy, or when providing other significant strategic level support to **environmentally sensitive sectors**:



- ✓ A **screening** procedure (see Guidelines: *Integrating the Environment and Climate Change into EU International Cooperation and Development*) helps to decide on the convenience of preparing an SEA.

**Please notice:** although international SEA literature emphasises that Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) applies to projects, whereas SEA applies to 'policies, plans and programmes', what we refer to as a 'project' in EU development cooperation is not what is traditionally understood by 'project' (e.g. a road, a port), but normally covers broader support (e.g. institutional strengthening, development of sector strategies, calls for proposals). This is why, in the case of EU development cooperation, SEA is applicable to programmes as well as to some 'projects', whereas EIA would normally be applicable to certain specific interventions (e.g. a road).



## Put the **Government** in the driving seat

### Tip 2

- ✓ The best way to guarantee the environmental sustainability and climate resilience of the strategy we are supporting, is when these dimensions are integrated in the planning process from the very start, and promoted by the Government.
- ✓ The EU should ideally be supporting a **Government-led SEA process**, although often **SEAs** are promoted by the EU. In any case, the Government must have a high degree of ownership.
- ✓ **Approach the Government at an early stage** to promote the **SEA** and jointly define its scope. Prepare the **SEA Terms of Reference (ToR)** jointly with your Government counterparts!
- ✓ It is recommended to organise a workshop with Government partners and EU staff that will be involved in the process, with the aim of achieving a common understanding of the **SEA's** objectives and approach, and which may include a training component on **SEA**.

An **SEA** for the National Climate Change Strategy of Montenegro was led by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, with support from the EU, linked to the Government's own planning process. This allowed more effective uptake of the **SEA** recommendations by the Government to influence their own planning process.

## Get the **timing** right



### Tip 3

- ✓ A common shortcoming of **SEAs** is that they are often prepared late in the decision-making process. This limits the opportunities to influence the final design of the sector strategy or the EU's support programme, as key decisions have already been taken. However, even in cases where the **SEA** comes late in the planning process, it can nevertheless still bring important contributions.
- ✓ Ideally **SEAs** should be carried out **during the Government's planning process**, so as to maximise opportunities for the **SEA** to influence it. If possible seek to fit to the Government's planning cycle, rather than the EU's.

The **SEA** for the agriculture sector in Rwanda was prepared as part of the revision of the Government's agriculture strategy. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture took an important role in the **SEA** coordination, maximising thus opportunities for the **SEA** to effectively influence the planning process, as it did.

In other cases, the **SEA** came late to have a significant influence. The **SEA** for Mali's transport sector programme was conducted once decisions on the programme's measures had already been taken, which made it hard to question or improve strategic decisions.

# Coordinate with other donors



## Tip 4

- ✓ A sector may be receiving support from various donors, each of which may have its own **SEA** requirements. Other donors may be promoting **SEAs** or similar studies for the same sector; but even if this is not the case, other donors are very likely to benefit from the **SEA** findings.
- ✓ You can support the Government in coordinating with other donors active in the sector; engage them; make sure the **SEA** will be beneficial to everyone.
- ✓ Consider promoting **joint SEAs** with other donors when providing support under innovative financial mechanisms (blending) in environmentally sensitive sectors.

The scope of the **SEA** for Rwanda's agriculture strategy was agreed with the Government as well as other donors active in the sector. One of the objectives was that the **SEA** would be a single exercise satisfying the needs of the Government and key donors.

# Be clear on what you expect from the **SEA**

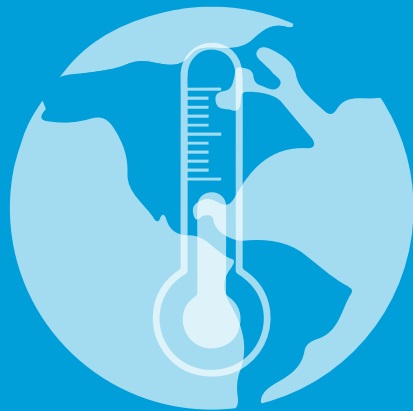


## Tip 5

- ✓ The EU environment and climate change integration guidelines provide sample ToR for an **SEA**, but these need to be **adapted to reflect the country- and sector-specific context**, as well as the entry points available to influence the Government's planning process and the formulation of the EU support programme.
- ✓ Ensure the ToR capture the concerns of the Government, the EU delegation and other donors.
- ✓ **Be realistic** about what is being required. Don't expect the **SEA** to cover everything; focus on what is most important.
- ✓ At the same time, don't be overly prescriptive. Although an initial orientation of issues to be addressed is useful, remember that the scoping phase will be identifying the key issues.

The **SEA** for the **CAPFish** programme in Cambodia was carried out when one of the components (aquaculture) of the EU's support programme had already been formulated. Thus the ToR geared the **SEA** so as to obtain more specific recommendations for the formulation of the second component (capture fisheries).

# Mind climate change



## Tip 6

- ✓ **SEA** informs strategic planning processes which, almost by definition, look into the medium- and long-term, a time scale where we expect impacts of climate change to be most felt.
- ✓ The **SEA** should examine the climatic changes already being experienced and those foreseen for the medium- and long-term, especially in the time-span in which the results and impacts of the sector strategy are expected.
- ✓ The **SEA** should examine how climate change is expected to affect the feasibility of the sector strategy and provide recommendations to build its **climate resilience**.
- ✓ The **SEA** can also look for opportunities for the sector strategy and the EU support to contribute to low carbon development and contribute to the country's own climate change objectives and commitments.

A key recommendation of the SEA for Guyana's sugar sector strategy was the upgrading of the drainage system to future rainfall patterns expected under climate change, rather than to current patterns as originally foreseen.

# Get the right team to do the job



## Tip 7

- ✓ The team leader must have good experience implementing **SEAs**. Having a clear idea on what is expected from an **SEA** and how it should be conducted is critical. The rest of the team should provide the expertise needed on the sector and to address specific areas of attention.
- ✓ Keep in mind that **EIA** and **SEA**, although sister tools, are very different in how they are implemented, and require different sets of skills. Consultants with very good **EIA** experience don't necessarily make good **SEA** team leaders.

### Illustrating the difference of approaches between EIA and SEA

Under its sugar sector adaptation strategy, Zambia proposed developing a new and potentially highly polluting sector - ethanol distilling.

An **EIA** approach would provide recommendations on, e.g. choice of technologies for the management of distilling waste (vinasse), location of distilling facilities.

How the **SEA** approached it: recommending the development of capacities of the competent environmental authorities to deal with the environmental risks of this new industrial sector, development of appropriate environmental safeguards and standards. Specific distilleries would then require individual **EIAs** where issues of technologies and waste management options would be analysed.

# Give due attention to scoping

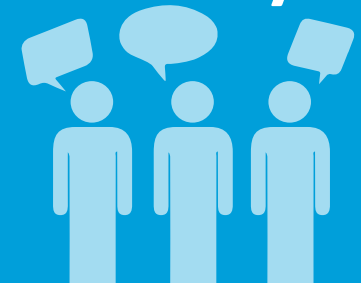


## Tip 8

- ✓ Scoping is a critical phase in an **SEA**. There are multiple interactions between environment, climate change and sector development; however, the **SEA** should not attempt to address them all, spreading out too thin. **Attention should be given to the really important issues**, those that represent opportunities to significantly enhance the sector strategy's environmental performance.
- ✓ The **SEA** should consist of two distinct phases: scoping and the **SEA** study proper. Sufficient buffer time should be allowed between scoping and the **SEA** study to allow key stakeholders to provide comments.
- ✓ The scoping phase should be participatory, and its findings validated by key stakeholders, preferably in a workshop.
- ✓ To the extent possible, allow flexibility for the reallocation of resources based on the findings of the scoping phase. Keep in mind that different areas of expertise than those originally foreseen may be required, as well as a different distribution of time allocation amongst experts.

Various thematic workshops were carried out to define the scope of the **SEA** for the Mauritius sugar sector adaptation strategy. Workshops allowed narrowing down key environmental issues and identifying sensible safeguards.

# Ensure transparency and broad participation



## Tip 9

- ✓ Transparency and public participation are key **SEA** principles. Consultations should be encouraged and **meaningful opportunities for public participation** provided, including making reports publicly available.
- ✓ **SEA** workshops are often some of the few occasions where different actors with an interest or a stake in environmental or climate change issues related to the sector strategy get together to discuss themes of common interest. This strengthens networking and inter-institutional coordination.
- ✓ Transparency of the process also allows broader communication that can feed national debates on issues of public interest. The **generation of debate** on the environmental dimension of sector strategies is often a key contribution of **SEAs**.
- ✓ **Innovative** ways to engage stakeholders can be conducive to more fruitful debate!

In Mauritius, the **SEA** stimulated debate about environment in the sugar industry, which had been muted in the past.

Successful ways to engage stakeholders that go beyond standard workshops have included blogging (**SEA** for the sugar sector in Trinidad & Tobago), world-café (**SEAs** for the sugar sector in Swaziland and Zambia), interactive radio broadcasts and Internet consultations (**SEA** for the transport sector in Mali).






# Recommendations must be focused and duly discussed

## Tip 10

- ✓ A key responsibility in managing the **SEA** is to ensure that recommendations are **focused, relevant and realistic**. They should be kept at a strategic level, avoiding temptation to analyse potential impacts of individual interventions in detail.
- ✓ Recommendations should be **prioritised**, clearly indicating to whom they are addressed.
- ✓ Sometimes the best solution to an environmental issue lies in the hands of an authority other than the sectoral authority that leads the **SEA** process. In such cases appropriate communication channels should be identified, where policy dialogue can play an important role.
- ✓ Adequate fora should be identified to **discuss the findings** with the relevant authorities and within the EU delegation, and **decide how recommendations will be taken forward**.

The findings of the **SEA** for the agriculture sector in Rwanda significantly informed the design of the €200 million sector reform contract. The **SEA** has also become an important reference for both central- and district-level spending on feeder roads and the ongoing design of the feeder road development policy and strategy.

The recommendations from the **SEA** of Jamaica's sugar reform strategy on green cane harvesting, drip irrigation and application of environmental regulations in sugar, rum and ethanol factories were integrated in the revised Joint Cooperation Strategy.



# Think strategically! Promote a national **SEA** system

## Extra Tip

- ✓ The most effective way for **SEA** to influence national policy-making and planning processes is when these are promoted by the Government itself, guaranteeing ownership and a better timing of the **SEA vis-à-vis** the planning process.
- ✓ The EU can seek opportunities to promote the development of national **SEA** systems and strengthening of capacities. Keep in mind that some other donor may already be promoting such support, in which case efforts should be coordinated.
- ✓ If a national **SEA** system is effectively implemented, when the Government approaches the EU seeking financial support to the implementation of their sectoral strategy, we would expect environment and climate change to be already well integrated. The EU's role could then be limited to quality-check the degree of integration and reflect relevant **SEA** findings in its support strategy.

The EU supported the development of the national **SEA** system in Chile, which included the preparation of two pilot **SEAs** and the development of capacities.



# Where to get more **support?**

**Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development,**  
Units C2 and C6 Environment and Climate Change Mainstreaming Facility

Address: [Rue de la Loi 41, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium](#)

Environment and Climate Change Mainstreaming Facility  
E-mail: [EuropeAid-C2-MAINSTREAMING@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EuropeAid-C2-MAINSTREAMING@ec.europa.eu)

#### REFERENCES:

*Integrating the environment and climate change into EU international cooperation and development.*

Tools and Methods Series, Guidelines No. 6. February, 2016.

*Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment. Good practice guidance for development cooperation.*

DAC Guidelines and Reference Series. OECD, 2006.

#### HOW TO OBTAIN EU PUBLICATIONS

##### Free publications:

- via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>);
- at the European Union's representations or delegations. You can obtain their contact details on the Internet (<http://ec.europa.eu>) or by sending a fax to +352 2929-42758.

##### Priced publications:

- via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>).

##### Priced subscriptions (e.g. annual series of the Official Journal of the European Union and reports of cases before the Court of Justice of the European Union):

- via one of the sales agents of the Publications Office of the European Union ([http://publications.europa.eu/others/agents/index\\_en.htm](http://publications.europa.eu/others/agents/index_en.htm)).

