

Policy Statement on Strategic Environmental Assessment

DAC HIGH LEVEL MEETING
21 MAY 2008, PARIS



POLICY STATEMENT ON STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

ADOPTED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE AT THE
DAC HIGH LEVEL MEETING,
PARIS, 21 MAY 2008

1. Poor people in developing countries are often the first to suffer from the results of poor policy, planning or investment decisions which undermine development and lead to resource degradation. The quality of development policy and planning processes will affect the long-term success of development and play a significant part in our progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The seventh MDG, in particular, commits us to ensuring environmental sustainability by making the principles of sustainable development an integral part of our policies and programmes.

2. Development assistance is increasingly being provided at the level of policies, plans and programmes developed and implemented through our partners' own institutions and systems, rather than through projects. Accordingly, the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, adopted in 2005, called upon donors and partners to work together to "... develop and apply common approaches for 'strategic environmental assessment' at sector and national levels." The *DAC Guidance on Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment* was endorsed in 2006 after intensive collaboration among DAC Members, developing country partners, the UNDP, the UNEP, the World Bank and many other agencies.

3. A growing number of countries at all levels of development have legislation or regulations prescribing the application of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and many more are introducing it as part of their policy tools. This is creating unique opportunities for improving policy making and planning by incorporating environmental considerations into high level decision making and by opening new mechanisms for intergovernmental and societal dialogue to reach consensus on development priorities.

4. Many development co-operation agencies and their partners are already making good progress in applying SEA. Early implementation experience is yielding important lessons for the future. We have found that SEA can:

- safeguard environmental assets for sustainable poverty reduction and development;
- build public engagement in decision making;
- prevent costly mistakes by alerting decision-makers to potentially unsustainable development options at an early stage in the decision-making process;
- simplify project-level Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) requirements thereby speeding up subsequent implementation of projects and programmes;
- facilitate transboundary co-operation around shared environmental resources and contribute to conflict prevention.

To further SEA implementation to guide decision-making, we will:

- encourage the use of SEA in our own development co-operation agencies;
- develop additional policy guidance on the application of SEA in relation to concerns such as adaptation to climate change, disaster management, conflict prevention, health and other issues, in order to guide our decision making processes;
- support our developing country partners with financial resources and knowledge to develop institutional capacities for applying SEA in their countries;
- continue to explore innovative applications of SEA with our partners in regional development banks, the UN and civil society organizations;
- strengthen the linkages between SEA and project-level environmental assessment procedures;
- systematically monitor SEA experience in order to progress through “learning by doing” and identify “good SEA practice”.