



ENVIRONMENTAL TOOLS IN EC DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTATION

A SUMMARY of FERN, WWF, BirdLife Report 2007

The Issue

A healthy environment and the sustainable use of natural resources are essential for human development now and in the future – highlighted by Millennium Development Goal 7 which calls for the reversal of the loss of environmental resources worldwide.

The EU Development Policy Consensus 2005 explicitly makes the link between environmental sustainability and poverty reduction and emphasises the importance of improved mainstreaming of environment throughout EC Development policy and programming. Tools for improved environmental mainstreaming include the production of environmental profiles to inform EC country and regional strategy papers, the use of Environmental Impact Assessments at project level, and the use of Strategic Environmental Assessments in sector or budget support.

The active involvement of civil society is critical to improve the quality of decision-making impacting the environment and it is an EC requirement that their delegations consult with civil society on programming of EC funds and implementation in their country. Clearly, to facilitate a full and informed debate, civil society needs access to the environmental information which is being used by the Commission.

Shortcomings

In order to establish the situation in country with regard to the public availability of environmental information (such as Environmental Profiles, Environmental Impact Assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments), WWF, FERN and BirdLife contacted a number of EC delegations in the ACP countries and Asia/Latin America requesting this information.

In 2006, the EU Court of Auditors released a report on environmental integration in EC Development Cooperation which highlighted failures in the production of environmental information, lack of EIAs and SEAs, and imprecise lines of responsibility for environmental integration within delegations. This NGO survey therefore was a timely follow-up to an official evaluation of EC performance which in theory would be still fresh in the minds of officials.

FERN, WWF and BirdLife also wrote to the Commissioner for Development and the Commissioner for External Relations in September 2006 on the public availability of environmental profiles. The reply from Louis Michel established a new and clear procedure: that the environmental profiles for ACP countries should be public as soon as they had been prepared in order to facilitate civil society participation in programming and that those for Asia

and Latin America would be made public following scrutiny and approval of the CSPs by the European Parliament.

Of the 63 EC delegations contacted, 44 made reference to current or planned environmental profiles – representing major progress in the recognition of the importance of this tool – and most delegations declared that these documents are, or would be, made public although only 24 actually provided them. At the time of the survey, environmental profiles for ACP countries should have been public, yet only 19 ACP delegations provided them or sent a website reference.

However, there was far less information on the completion of EIAs (just 15 delegations mentioned that at least one EIA had been carried out) and only four delegations mentioned the existence of current SEAs. The public status of these comparatively few documents was unclear – 4 delegations said they were published on EC websites, some were available in hard copy, and in some cases, enquiries were referred to a government department within the recipient country.

Given the emphasis by the Commission on the use of EIAs and SEAs as the critical tools to support environmental integration in EC programming, there is a very little evidence that such assessments have been carried out on a systematic basis, the extent of stakeholders' participation in the process or that they are readily available for public scrutiny.

Recommendations

- **An environmental profile for every country or region within the EC's development programming process should be in place and available on the delegation's website.**
- **The Commission should agree a consistent and unambiguous approach to the provision of environmental documentation to the public in order to facilitate access and participation of civil society.**
- **EC delegations should support a culture of openness and encourage participation through the active dissemination of information, including environmental information.**
- **A centralised database of all publicly available environmental documents should be set up immediately, accessible via the internet and via a public enquiry point.**
- **In addition, EC delegations should ensure that all environmental-related documents are published, punctually, on their national websites, as standard procedure.**
- **The Commission should clarify procedures for carrying out Environmental Impact Assessments and should promote transparency and stakeholder participation as basic standards.**
- **An environmental focal point should be appointed in each delegation and their terms of reference should define the expectations in terms of environmental mainstreaming tools and public information.**
- **Training in environmental integration into EC cooperation should be a component of basis training for all delegation and HQ officials working on development cooperation.**
- **The Commission's revision of its environmental mainstreaming strategy should include indicators to show progress on the above recommendations.**

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