

Preface

May, 2012

We prepared the “Comparative Analysis of Environmental Impact Assessment Systems in Latin America” in 2007. It was our first attempt to provide a systematic comparison of the EIA systems adopted at the national level by 20 countries in Latin America, as well as with the system created by the United States under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The comparative analysis focused on eight main elements of the national EIA system, namely: (1) nature of EIA; (2) institutional leadership in the EIA system; (3) screening; (4) scoping; (5) preparation of the environmental assessment; (6) public participation; (7) evaluation of alternatives; and (8) environmental management and follow-up mechanisms. As such, the analysis centered on the system’s design. While an evaluation of each system’s effectiveness and efficiency would be certainly welcome, it was beyond the scope of our research.

The analysis and a poster summarizing its findings were presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the International Association of Impact Assessment, in Seoul, Korea. We received very positive feedback from meeting participants, which can be summarized as follows:

1. A number of people considered the poster a very useful and relevant tool. Therefore, they recommended making it available online, perhaps on the Bank's website, as well as establishing a mechanism to regularly update it, taking into account that EIA is quickly evolving in the region and legal and regulatory modifications are continually introduced.
2. Several people stressed that state-level laws and regulations have a fundamental role in many of the country’s EIA system. However, they also acknowledged the challenges associated with analyzing the existing legal instruments of all states and provinces in the region.
3. Participants from outside the Latin American Region considered the analysis to be helpful to identify areas of opportunity to strengthen EIA systems in their regions. Hence, they mentioned that similar efforts should be undertaken in other parts of the world.
4. EIA advocates shared their opinions on the significant impact that the Bank and other development partners can have in assisting these countries by focusing on capacity building and institutional strengthening related to EIA, tailoring such efforts to the specific characteristics each country’s system.

We have been unable to update the analysis since we presented it in Korea. In that sense, it continues to be a draft that would benefit from incorporating new developments in the region, as well as from further discussion and feedback. Nevertheless, we are glad to share it in an effort to stimulate an informed debate on how to enhance EIA systems.

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