

Definition of terms

Adaptive management (*also known as adaptive resource management or adaptive environmental assessment and management*): A structured, iterative process of robust decision-making in the face of uncertainty, with an aim to reduce uncertainty over time via system monitoring.

Agenda 21: A comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally, and locally by organizations of the United Nations' system governments and major groups that was agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It has effectively been replaced in the global policy sphere by subsequent international agreements such as the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (which includes the sustainable development goals), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change 2015, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Alternatives: A key principle of SEA is to consider alternatives to a PPP, or elements of a PPP. This provides the opportunity to identify and explore different ways (different options, choices, or courses of action) to deliver a PPP's objectives while addressing environmental and socioeconomic issues. The timely consideration of alternatives in SEA and the planning process provides an opportunity to identify and explore ways of accommodating the future development needs of an area or sector, taking into account the intrinsic environmental and socioeconomic conditions. Alternatives should be realistic, reasonable, viable, and implementable alternatives that promote environmental and socioeconomic benefits while fulfilling a PPP's objectives. Examples of alternatives used in SEA include: PPP implementation under different economic growth regimes (e.g., high, moderate, low); use of different technologies (e.g., hydropower power versus solar versus wind, etc.); different geographic areas for implementation, etc.

Baseline data: Data that describes issues and conditions at the inception of the SEA. Serves as the starting point for measuring impacts, performance, etc., and is an important reference for evaluations.

Benchmark: A standard or point of reference against which things can be compared, assessed, measured, or judged. Benchmarking is the process of comparing performance against that of others in an effort to identify areas of improvement.

Capacity assessment: A structured and analytical process whereby the various dimensions of capacity are assessed within a broader context of systems, as well as evaluated for specific entities and individuals within these systems.

Capacity development: The process by which individuals, groups, and organizations, institutions, and countries develop, enhance, and organize their systems, resources, and knowledge—all reflected in their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems, and achieve objectives.

Civil society organizations: The multitude of associations around which society voluntarily organizes itself and which represent a wide range of interests and ties. These can include community-based organizations and non-government organizations. Sometimes indigenous peoples' organizations are erroneously lumped into CSOs. Indigenous Peoples form distinct societies, with their own laws, languages, epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies, including in the area of renewable energy.

Competent authority: The designated regulatory body charged with monitoring compliance with the national statutes and regulations regarding a country's SEA system.

Cross-boundary impacts: see Impacts

Cumulative effects/impacts: see Impacts

Decision-makers/decision-taker: Policy-making, planning, and decision-making and decision-taking systems vary, and the meaning depends greatly on national or agency circumstances and procedures. A decision maker or taker may be (i) an official responsible for broad-scale or sectoral development plans or (ii) an elected Councilor or Minister.

Direct impacts: see Impacts

Environment: Mostly used in an ecological sense to cover natural resources and the relationships between them. But, social aspects (including human health) are also often considered part of “the environment.” Issues relating to aesthetic properties as well as cultural and historical heritage (often in “built” environments) are frequently included.

Environmental assessment (EA): The umbrella term for the process of examining the environmental risks and benefits of proposals prior to decisions on them being made. Interpretations of the scope of EA also vary, particularly regarding the social dimension. It is usual to consider the physical/biological impacts of development on directly affected groups (e.g., impacts on downstream water supply, displacement, and local communities or vulnerable groups). But many institutions routinely include consideration of social impacts that are mediated by the environment (such as the human impacts of water pollution). Some agencies undertake “environmental and social assessments” or separate “social assessments” to identify adverse social impacts and promote other social goals, such as social inclusion or poverty reduction. The relative importance of the different dimensions varies depending on the issue involved. In the case of a dam, for example, it is increasingly routine in EA to consider both physical/ecological and social impacts.

Environmental clearance: A decision, usually issued in writing by a competent authority, to authorize a project to proceed from an environmental and social perspective. It may include terms to ensure that the project is managed in an environmentally sound and sustainable way. Note that, “environmental clearance” is as not as common in regulatory terms in the UK/Europe compared to North America.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA or ESIA): First introduced in the USA as a requirement of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) in 1969. It is a process, applied mainly at the project level, to improve decision-making and to ensure that development options under consideration are environmentally and socially sound and sustainable. As a process, EIA identifies, predicts, and evaluates foreseeable impacts, both beneficial and adverse, of public and private development activities, alternatives, and mitigating measures and aims to eliminate or minimize negative impacts and optimize positive impacts. In the early days of EIA application, the focus tended to be mainly on biophysical impacts. But nowadays, EIA also covers social impacts. The term Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) is preferred by some organizations (particularly IFIs) as it specifically makes reference to “social.” A subset of additional processes has emerged since EIA was introduced, including social impact assessment, cumulative effects assessment, environmental health impact assessment, risk assessment, and biodiversity impact assessment.

Environmental security: A condition in which a nation or region, through sound governance, capable management, and sustainable utilization of its natural resources and environment, takes effective steps toward creating social, economic, and political stability and ensuring the welfare of its population.

Environmental and Social Impact Assessment: see Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental and social quality objectives (ESQOs): Specified targets/aims agreed upon during an SEA for environmental and social quality (e.g., prevention of loss of biodiversity, improved job opportunities) that should be met when implementing a policy, plan, or program. ESQOs and associated indicators form the core element of the monitoring component of a strategic environmental and social management plan (SESMP).

Environmental impact statement: Written documentation produced after evaluating the environmental consequences, including cumulative impacts, of a proposed policy, plan, or program. It may be a separate report or part of a proposal.

Ex ante assessment: An evaluation of the environmental and social impacts of a PPP undertaken during its formulation phase by looking at the expected or intended results of the PPP and predicting and extrapolating its potential significant impacts. It is a way of assessing whether a proposed project is feasible and leaves the opportunity to consider alternatives and adjust the plan, program, or policy to avoid or enhance the results.

Ex post assessment: An evaluation of the environmental and social impacts of a PPP undertaken after implementation has begun—effectively examining the results of PPP implementation. It provides an opportunity to adjust the PPP to avoid, minimize, or enhance the results.

Good governance: Governance is the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority necessary to manage a nation’s affairs. Good governance is characterized by participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness, equity, etc.

Impacts: (can be environmental and/or social)

Direct impacts: Caused as a direct consequence of the PPP or of a component of the PPP or of downstream projects during PPP implementation. For example, road building activities can give rise to land take, removal of vegetation, and severance of farmland. The removal of gravel material from a borrow pit, for use in surfacing the road, is an obvious direct impact of road construction. In this case, the land area in which the pit site is located has been directly affected by activities associated with the road project.

Indirect impacts (also known as secondary, tertiary, and chain impacts): Usually linked closely with the PPP or with components of the PPP or downstream projects; they may have more profound consequences on the environment than direct impacts. Indirect impacts are more difficult to measure but can ultimately be more important. Over time, they can affect larger geographical areas of the environment than anticipated. Examples include degradation of surface water quality by the erosion of land cleared because of a new road and urban growth near a new road. Another common indirect impact associated with new roads is increased deforestation of an area, stemming from easier (more profitable) transportation of logs to market or the influx of settlers. In areas where wild game is plentiful, new roads often lead to the rapid depletion of animals due to poaching.

Induced impacts (a type of indirect impact): Result from activities that occur in response to socioeconomic opportunities associated with new development, e.g., as a result of: opening up access to previously remote areas and untapped resources; creating potential for employment and/or enterprises to service new settlements. Induced impacts may be attributable to a project's facilities and activities, or to "associated facilities" that are not funded by the project but without which the project would not be viable. Induced activities are not part of the project scope, design, or objectives and may not be essential for it to operate. In effect, they compound impacts from a project and associated activities and result in cumulative impacts.

Cumulative effects/impacts: The incremental impact of a project when added to impacts from other relevant past, present, and reasonably foreseeable developments, as well as unplanned but predictable activities enabled by the project that may occur later or at a different location. World Bank, (2017b).

Synergistic impacts: Another term for cumulative impacts.

Cross- or trans-boundary impacts: Impacts that are caused as a result of a PPP or its component or downstream projects and occur beyond the boundary of the area in which the PPP is focused. Boundaries can be at different scales: administrative areas at local to national level, protected areas, national borders.

Indicator: A signal that reveals progress (or lack thereof) towards objectives. Provides a means of measuring what actually happens against what has been planned in terms of quantity, quality, and timeliness.

Indigenous peoples: Distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy, or from which they have been displaced. The land and natural resources on which they depend are inextricably linked to their identities, cultures, livelihoods, as well as their physical and spiritual well-being. They often subscribe to their customary leaders and organizations for representation that is distinct or separate from that of the mainstream society or culture. Many Indigenous Peoples (IPs) still maintain a language distinct from the official language or languages of the country or region in which they reside; however, many have also lost their languages or are on the precipice of extinction due to eviction from their lands and/or relocation to other territories (World Bank, 2023.). The term indigenous peoples is commonly used by MDBs (e.g., IFC (2012b)) and the United Nations (see: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/indigenous-peoples-at-the-united-nations>).

Indirect impacts: see Impacts

Irreversible Negative Impact: An impact that cannot be undone in time using reasonable means.

Iterative: The act of repeating a process, usually with the aim of approaching a desired goal, target, or result. Each repetition of the process is called an "iteration," and the results of one iteration are used as the starting point for the next iteration.

Just Transition: A concept first used in the 1980s by US trade unions to protect workers affected by new water and air pollution regulations. The trade union movement developed JT as a framework to encompass a wide range of social interventions needed to secure workers' rights and livelihoods for those economies shifting to sustainable production, primarily combating climate change and protecting biodiversity. In recent years, the concept has gained traction with reference to meeting climate goals by ensuring the whole of society—all communities, all workers, all social groups—are brought along in the pivot to a net-zero future and that no one is left out of it. (See Annex 20).

Lead agency: Any government ministry, institution, department, parastatal, state corporation, or local authority in which any law vests functions of control or management of any element of the environment, natural resources, or social service.

Limits of acceptable change (LAC): Extremes in environmental or social quality beyond which society would find further change unacceptable. LAC relates to a level of environmental quality (usually biophysical) or social quality that is either desired or would be tolerated by society (often a qualitative value).

Mainstreaming/Upstreaming: Integrating environment into development planning processes.

Marine spatial planning (MSP): A public process of analyzing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives that are usually specified through a political process. Ehler and Douvère (2009) provide a clear, straightforward step-by-step approach to setting up and applying MSP (see also: spatial planning).

Mitigation: Measures to avoid, reduce, restore, and, if necessary, offset significant adverse impacts on environmental or social receptors. The sequence of mitigation follows the mitigation hierarchy (see below).

Mitigation hierarchy: A framework, or sequence of actions implemented, for managing risks and potential impacts. The hierarchy usually encompasses: to anticipate and avoid, or where avoidance is not possible, minimize, and where residual impacts remain, compensate/offset risks and impacts. Once a project comes to the end of its useful life, then restoration/rehabilitation of the land/ecosystem at a site is usually required.

Monitoring: At a project level, monitoring means a program of systematic, objective, and quantitative measurements, observations, and reporting of projects that may have environmental and social impacts. For SEA, monitoring recommendations should be broader and include, e.g., assessing environmental and social conditions and trends, observing PPP development and implementation, and developing information for reporting to national policy-makers, planners, international forums, and the public.

Non-government organization (NGO): see CSO.

Plan: A purposeful, forward-looking strategy or design, often with coordinated priorities, options, and measures that elaborate and implement policy.

Policy: A broad statement of intent that reflects and focuses the political agenda of government and initiates a decision cycle. A general course of action or proposed overall direction that a government is pursuing or intends to follow; a policy guides ongoing decision-making.

Policies, plans, and programs (PPP): Have different meanings in different countries according to the political and institutional context. Also, in a particular country or jurisdiction, there may be instruments that are not labelled as a policy, plan, or program but which have a similar meaning or intent, e.g., a strategy that may be similar to a plan. These should be treated as a PPP and be subjected to SEA (if the law or regulations require this).

Policy reform: A process in which changes are made to the formal “rules of the game”—including laws, regulations, and institutions—to address a problem or achieve a goal such as economic growth, environmental protection, or poverty alleviation. Usually involves a complex political process, particularly when it is perceived that the reform redistributes economic, political, or social power.

Program: A coherent, organized agenda or schedule of commitments, proposals, instruments, and/or activities that elaborate and implement policy.

Project: A set of tasks that must be completed in order to arrive at a particular goal or outcome. In terms of environmental and social assessment, it refers to a development activity or initiative (including those that involve construction). For renewable energy developments, a project might encompass the following:

- Hydropower schemes (reservoir-based, run-of-river, micro schemes)
- Wind farms (onshore or offshore)
- Solar farms
- Geothermal power plants
- Tidal power developments
- Bioenergy production (mainly growing bioenergy crops)
- Associated infrastructure may also be included (e.g., transmission lines, access roads, electricity storage facilities, ports, harbors, and terminals, etc.)

Proponent: In an SEA, the proponent is the authority or organization (often a government ministry or department) that has lead responsibility for preparing or implementing a policy, plan, or program. In EIA, the proponent is the organization, company, or individual that is proposing and developing a project.

Receptor: A receptor is a component of the environment or social fabric that could be adversely affected by the implementation of a PPP, e.g., habitats, biodiversity, land, soil, water, air, and climate, material assets, cultural heritage and landscape, communities, human health, rights, etc.

Responsible authority: The organization that prepares and/or adopts a plan or program subject to an SEA.

Scenarios: Scenarios are a technique for presenting alternative views of the future. In SEA, simple scenarios are sometimes used (e.g., low economic growth, medium economic growth, or high economic growth) to compare how the impacts of an individual PPP or, in some situations, a suite of PPPs may differ in nature, extent, and severity under different possible circumstances. Modelling is sometimes used to predict how different scenarios might unfold. For an SEA of a PPP concerned with the energy transition, it might be useful to develop scenarios of the nature of the transition (what energy resources will be developed and where) during different timeframes (e.g., near-term, medium-term, or long-term). The process of scenario planning is well developed and can involve various actors to identify significant events, drivers of change, and contrasts; responses to change may differ according to actors' different motivations. Scenario development allows us to think systematically about and understand the nature and impact of the most uncertain and important driving forces affecting our future (see Annex 9).

Scoping: An early stage in SEA to review the context and extent (spatial and temporal boundaries of the SEA) and identify key environmental and socioeconomic issues, providing an opportunity to focus the report on the important issues to maximize its usefulness to the authorities, decision-makers, and public. Scoping should identify baseline and other data requirements and initiate collection, identify any critical information gaps, and determine the relevant criteria for assessment. It should also determine the scope of the analyses needed and identify the stakeholders to be involved (and how). Furthermore, scoping should involve identifying alternatives (to the PPP or elements of the PPP) to be assessed and identifying relevant environmental and social quality objectives (ESQOs), targets, and indicators. It may also involve a review of the policy, legal, and institutional framework.

Sectoral guidelines: All guidance documents, including codes of best practice, published by government ministries or agencies.

Sectoral strategy: A policy framework, for the long- and/or medium-term, which has been adopted by a government as a plan of action for a particular area of the economy or society.

Spatial planning: Spatial planning systems refer to the methods and approaches used by the public and private sector to influence the distribution of people and activities in spaces of various scales. Spatial planning can be defined as the coordination of practices and policies affecting spatial organization. Spatial planning is synonymous with the practices of urban planning in the United States but at larger scales, and the term is often used in reference to planning efforts in European countries. Discrete professional disciplines that involve spatial planning include land use, urban, regional, transport, and environmental planning. Other related areas are also important, including economic and community planning. Spatial planning takes place on local, regional, national, and international levels and often results in the creation of a spatial plan (see also: marine spatial planning).

Stakeholder: Those who may be interested in, potentially affected by, or influence the implementation of a PPP. Stakeholders may include government (national and local), local communities, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, and, in the context of development cooperation, donor agencies.

Steering committee: a broad-based, multi-stakeholder committee for the SEA to: provide oversight, advice, support, and guidance; facilitate access to critical information; review reports; build ownership of the SEA process amongst key actors; and advocate for the uptake of its recommendations.

Strategic action: refers to an action taken to implement a policy, strategy, plan, or program.

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA): A systematic process for incorporating environmental and social considerations across different levels of strategic decision-making—plan, program, and policy levels. It encompasses a family of approaches on a continuum from institutional assessment to impact analysis and spatial mapping. Some organizations prefer the term Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) (notably IFIs).

Strategic environmental and social assessment (SESA): see Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic environmental and social management plan (SESMP): Sometimes called a Strategic Environmental Management Plan (SESMP). A plan (either stand-alone or sometimes as a section of a SEA report) that presents strategies and procedures to enhance positive and prevent, minimize, or mitigate adverse environmental and social impacts associated with a PPP and projects or activities likely to arise during implementation of a PPP. These procedures should include measures to ensure compliance with relevant safeguards. The SESMP should set out: (a) the roles and responsibilities of different jurisdictions, authorities, and actors in implementing the SESMP; (b) a simple performance monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the environmental and social impacts of the PPP and subsequent development projects/initiatives, with monitoring indicators and a corresponding evaluation procedure and methodology; (c) steps required to enhance benefits or to remove or reduce risks and negative impacts; (d) a stakeholder consultation procedure for the monitoring and evaluation mechanism; and (e) guidance and recommendations for project-level EIAs.

Sustainable development goals: An intergovernmental set of 17 aspiration goals with 169 targets—contained in UN Resolution A/RES/70/1 of 25 September 2015. They cover a broad range of sustainable development issues, including ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, combating climate change, and protecting oceans and forests. The SDGs replace the former Millennium Development Goals.

Sustainability: A social goal for people to coexist on Earth over a long time. Specific definitions of this term are disputed and have varied with literature, context, and time. It is often described as having three dimensions (or pillars): environmental, economic, and social, and many publications emphasize the environmental dimension. In everyday use, *sustainability* often focuses on countering major environmental problems, including climate change, loss of biodiversity, loss of ecosystem services, land degradation, and air and water pollution. The idea of sustainability can guide decisions at the global, national, and individual levels (e.g., sustainable living). A related concept is sustainable development, and the terms are often used to mean the same thing. UNESCO distinguishes between the two terms, considering “*sustainability*” as a long-term goal (i.e., a more sustainable world), while using *sustainable development* to refer to the many processes and pathways to achieve it.”

Synergistic impacts: see Impacts.

Target PPP: The particular policy, plan, or program that is the subject of the SEA.

Threshold: Levels that should not be exceeded; points at which irreversible or serious damage could occur, either to ecosystems and/or to social systems (health, safety, or wellbeing). The threshold concept is commonly invoked as a necessary component of environmental assessment and, more broadly, land-use decision-making. Many consider thresholds as objective and finite stopping points at which a harmful activity or development trajectory should cease because further activities will result in an unacceptable change or risk to the environment. Although ecological thresholds can play an important role in environmental assessment, they are not a simple solution to complex socioecological decisions, nor do they ensure objective decision-making. A threshold, even if precise, is only one component of the assessment process. In contrast to the often-naïve expectation of precise and definitive science-based thresholds, management or significance thresholds recognize a continuum of risk that can be weighed against socioeconomic interests. That risk continuum can guide the incremental increase in monitoring and precaution that should accompany the review and implementation of individual projects or land-use change that results in cumulative effects across watersheds. Johnson and Ray (2021).

Tier: A layer or ranking in a hierarchy, as in policy, plan, or program.

Tiering: addressing issues and impacts at appropriate decision-making levels (e.g., from the policy to project levels).

Valued environmental and social components (VEC): The IFC defines VECs as environmental and social attributes that are considered to be important in assessing risks; they may be:

- physical features, habitats, wildlife populations (e.g., biodiversity)
- ecosystem services
- natural processes (e.g., water and nutrient cycles, microclimate)
- social conditions (e.g., health, economics)
- cultural aspects (e.g., traditional spiritual ceremonies)

While VECs may be directly or indirectly affected by a specific development, they are often also affected by the cumulative effects of several developments. VECs are the ultimate recipients of impacts because they tend to be at the ends of ecological pathways.