

Participants of the Asia Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Conference 2016 welcomed the chair's summary below. They agreed that realization of both environmental conservation and economic growth is important for sustainable society and recognized that EIA has increasingly played an essential role for achieving it. While many Asian countries have introduced EIA systems, there is still room to improve the systems and to strengthen, as the region faces rapid economic progress and associated infrastructure and industrial development. The participants were encouraged to strengthen EIA system nationally to achieve sustainable development across Asia. They recognized mutual learning among countries is to be one of the meaningful ways to promote sound implementation of EIA, and expected to continue communication and cooperation among the participants through the strengthened networking which evolves from this conference.

Chair's Summary

Asia EIA Conference 2016

Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, 10 May 2016

1. Government officials from 15 Asian countries (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Viet Nam) met at the Asia Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Conference 2016 on 10 May 2016 in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan to enhance and improve the EIA system and its implementation in Asia. The conference was organized by the Ministry of the Environment Japan (MOEJ), in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and in cooperation with United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). Around one hundred participants attended including representatives from international organizations (International Finance Corporation (IFC), Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), World Bank and others); private sector; academics; and NGOs. The conference was co-chaired by Herath Gunatilake (ADB) and Hideyuki Mori (Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, IGES).
2. We organized a workshop in February 2015 in Japan, and as a follow up, this conference was organized with the overarching theme of *"Enhancing EIA as a sustainable development planning tool in Asia,"* the conference aimed at strengthening the mutual learning to address key challenges in Asia by promoting exchange of lessons, matchmaking needs and good practices with other countries and/or development agencies through the network of participants.

Opening remarks and keynote speeches

3. The opening remarks by the Vice-Minister for Global Environment, Masaaki Kobayashi, MOEJ reminded participants of the critical role of EIA in achieving sustainable development in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit's adoption of "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" in September 2015. Herath Gunatilake, ADB, highlighted how multilateral environmental agreements made in 2015, particularly the Paris Agreement and the adoption of the SDGs, would change the development landscape in Asia and the Pacific. He stated that EIA remains essential to the region for ensuring that major developments are sustainable, and that SEA and cumulative impact assessment can be important tools for countries adapting to the challenges posed by climate change and increasing urbanization. Prof. Sachihiko Harashina stressed the importance of collaborating with the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA). The keynote speeches by Dr. Stephen Lintner enlightened the participants to the great potential of EIA and its future vision towards sustainable development, and Mr. Davis Jones (USEPA), underlined the importance of EIA as a tool for ensuring social and environmental safeguards are considered as countries expand their infrastructure and industrial development. The participants recognized that EIA has increasingly played an essential role for fostering sustainable development.

Thematic group discussion

4. Participants acknowledged the significant research findings from the seven-country study conducted by IGES. The presentation of results shed light on common and unique challenges and opportunities across the seven countries. The results were summarized in four areas: systems to improve the quality of EIA; information disclosure and public participation; implementation of environmental management and monitoring plan (EMMP); and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and upstream EIA. Thematic group discussions were conducted in these four areas, where selected country representatives shared good practices and participants discussed the root causes of existing challenges of EIA implementation, good practices, and recommendations.
5. In many study countries, although EIA systems are in place, the quality of EIA suffers from insufficient technical implementing capacity and unawareness of project proponents on requirements to a varied extent and there is a lack of sound incentives to conduct EIA. Establishment of an EIA review committee including experts and ministry representatives in Myanmar and introduction of a sustainable finance mechanism which integrate EIA into credit/loan decision-making processes in Indonesia were presented as good practices.

Participants suggested that commercial banks follow international standards, and incentives such as lower interest rate be provided to project proponents of good performance. They use of an expert committee system to provide advice can be better implemented by considering the number, expertise, representation of sectors with regard to committee membership, as well as their accountability for effective and efficient operation.

6. Regarding information disclosure and public participation, insufficient or inadequate information disclosure and access, limited and inadequate public participation, insufficient attention to diversity of stakeholders were found as root causes of challenges. A smart-phone application to access EIA-related information in Thailand and a transparent and participatory process included in a new draft EIA law in Cambodia were presented as good practices. Establishment of a web-based information system and importance of informal consultation was suggested and scoping of stakeholders and best methods of information disclosure/participation, not only formal but informal consultation from early stage were advocated to address to promote meaningful and effective public participation in EIA decision-making.
7. As for implementation of EMMP, similar to the EIA quality issue, weak enforcement and a lack of capacity often hampers the implementation of EMMPs. In addition, weak linkage between the approval and implementation of EMMP was identified as a critical issue. As good practices in strengthening the linkage, an introduction of a concession agreement which includes part of EIA to ensure implementation of environmental and social measures in Lao PDR and prioritized monitoring under the limited budget in a hydropower project in Viet Nam were presented. Some possible ways to improve the situation were suggested, including better understanding of how to use approvals, licenses and permits, as well as stringent penalties on non-compliance to ensure EMMP implementation. Agencies can also seek to increase capacity through exploring new technology to increase their level of monitoring of projects through on-line monitoring equipment.
8. In the area of SEA and upstream EIA, inadequate legal systems, lack of experience, and minimal baseline data were identified as root causes of problems. Use of SEA to select an optimal landfill site in Korea and an upstream EIA process to identify wind power sites in Japan were presented as good practices. Increasing hands-on experiences for SEA and upstream EIA, and collection and sharing baseline data were discussed to clear up the root causes and improve SEA and upstream EIA. Also, treating SEA as a living document with continuous update from EIA and monitoring results would be a significant improvement on current practice.

9. All participants welcomed the comments from international and regional agencies including ADB, IFC, JICA, and the World Bank in strengthening environmental and social safeguard systems. These organizations provide various support including assistance to develop guidelines and to establish EIA related institutions, and capacity development programs for national and local governments and consultants. Speakers from international and regional agencies shared their latest efforts in strengthening safeguard systems and expressed their intention to continue strengthening their initiatives and support. Experts suggested to promote mutual learning among all relevant stakeholders and stressed the importance of the role of local governments in EIA.

Panel discussion

10. With the outcomes of the group discussion and exchange with development agencies, a panel discussion was conducted by government officials from each of the eight Asian countries to see how EIA and related policies can play an enhanced role in a broader perspective according to three sub-themes: (i) EIA as a project planning tool for embedding environmental consideration into infrastructure and industrial development; (ii) EIA as participatory and consultative decision-making process; and (iii) SEA as a policy planning tool for sustainable development.
11. The panelists recognized that establishment of a legal system and contract system for EIA is fundamental and important for environmental enforcement and they noted the necessity for more stringent enforcement. Innovative compliance measures are being introduced in some countries but overall the level of compliance needs to be improved. Meaningful public participation is key and the consideration of regional, ethnic, religious, and gender diversity capacity building, and empowering multiple stakeholder groups with sufficient information are crucial and should reflect the specific situation of each country. For example, the effort of developing implementable regional guidelines for public participation on EIA in the Lower Mekong countries were shared as an important platform. EIA in an earlier project phase before any decisions are made and SEA could be effective approaches to integrate environmental and social consideration into policy making, yet more examples and experience are required. The panelists recognized there are several emerging issues including cumulative impacts, SDGs, climate change and biodiversity, and acknowledged the need to explore these issues further in the field of EIA. As transboundary effect is also critical in Asian region, cooperative action among related countries would be required.

The way forward

12. The participants appreciated the opportunity to share challenges and good practices and discuss future opportunities with representatives from other countries in the region and international organizations at the conference. The participants also expressed their interest in joining similar discussions in future and called for further collaboration by all concerned stakeholders, including national and local governments, their affiliated institutions, international organizations, private sector, academics and NGOs to strengthen EIA systems and their implementation in the region. The value of continuing communication and cooperation among the participants through an Asia EIA network and/or a conference was shared by participants. It was recommended that consideration should be given to the development of an institutional community of practice for EIA within Asia. Linking with existing networks such as Asian Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Network (AECEN) and Joint Community of Practitioners Meeting on Environmental and Socially Sustainable Infrastructure is expected to contribute to scaling up collective efforts in the region. The participants expressed appreciation to MOEJ, co-chairs and IGES for organizing the conference. The co-chairs expressed appreciation to all the participants for active discussion and MOEJ for organizing the conference. The results of this conference will provide useful input to the International Association for Impact Assessment 2016 (IAIA16).