

Strengthening Environmental Impact Assessments in the Lower Mekong

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. AID Regional Development Mission for Asia
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Davis Jones, US EPA



Regional Leaders Support a Sustainable Future



“...consider social and environmental consequences, including the use of environmental impact assessment...in infrastructure investments” [and believe that]

“...strengthening regional capacity for sustainable development [to] include public participation will increase regional cooperation on trans-boundary impacts.”

- *LMI Joint Statement August 2015*

EPA's Goal for MPE:

- To strengthen environmental protection in the Lower Mekong through supporting regional efforts to improve EIA processes and enforcement.



Objectives:

- Provide technical assistance and build capacity in the implementation and enforcement of EIA processes,
 - *increased capacity of civil society*
 - *public participation*
 - *environmental information*
- Support social and environmental safeguards community of practice for the Lower Mekong Region

Potential Activities

- Regional Collaboration
 - EIA Directors Meetings
 - Regional Technical Working Group on Public Participation
- Technical Support & Country Consultations
 - Support for Cambodia's new Environmental Code
- Capacity Building
 - Principles of EIA Review and other modules with AIT-Hanoi

Lower Mekong EIA Directors Meeting

- Thailand: Environmental Streamlining to address lengthy review process
- Laos PDR: Beginning to require proponents to fund third party compliance monitoring to assist govt. reviewers
- Cambodia: Developing new environmental code to address outdated and inefficient procedures
- Vietnam: Requiring line ministries to develop Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) to improve planning and strategic decisions

EIA / Enforcement Forum

Dominican Republic

- Share experiences, best practices, and challenges in EIA systems
- Identify common challenges and opportunities.
- 14 countries: Dominican Republic, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Peru, Puerto Rico, USA
- 12 recommendations for the Ministers



Systems to Improve Quality of EIA

- Reforms of environmental review and permitting should seek both efficiency AND effectiveness
- Decentralization can improve efficiency but requires capacity in satellite units
- Graduated system of review ensures appropriate but efficient development of performance requirements, accountability and information for sound decision making.
- Multi-faceted problem requiring an “all of the above” set of solutions.

Information Disclosure and Public Participation

- Automation, GIS and internet access aids efficiency and public access to information but Plans and resources are needed to fully implement and sustain technology
- Transparency, independent validation, monitoring and enforcement ensures program integrity
- Conflict prevention and resolution needs to be a top priority. It is one of the most significant causes of delay and uncertainty for investors.

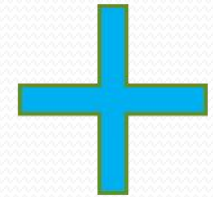
Implementation of Environmental Management Plan and Monitoring

- Seamless linkages are needed between pre-construction project level environmental assessment and other functions, including operating permits, compliance monitoring and enforcement.
- Fees for financing the administration of EIA, permit, compliance monitoring and enforcement are attractive for ensuring adequate resources.



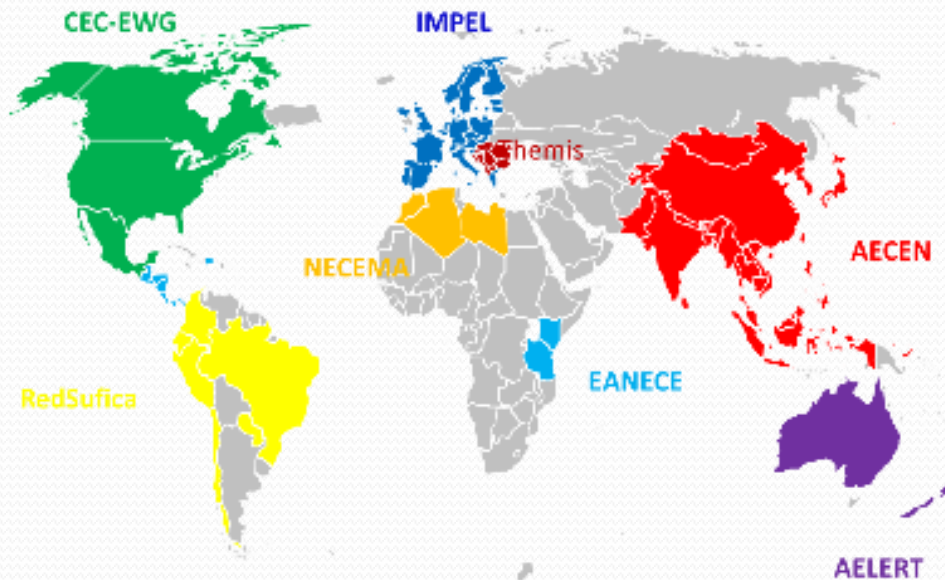
Upstream EIA/SEA

- Re-orientation of EIA programs is needed to enhance *beneficial* impacts in addition to reducing or eliminating negative impacts.
- Collaborative high level agreements between the Ministries of Environment and other Ministries and levels of government are essential.



Utility of Networks

- Participants recognized utility of informal exchanges and mutual assistance in EIA, permitting, enforcement, GIS/IT support and public outreach.



Lower Mekong EIA Directors Meeting

Thailand, Vietnam, Laos PDR, Cambodia

May 9, 2016

Asia EIA Conference 2016

17 Asian Countries and development partners

May 10, 2016



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