



Integrated Strategic Environmental Assessments in Post-Crisis Recovery and Reconstruction

Rationale for Integrated Strategic Environmental Assessments

In the aftermath of disasters and conflicts, affected countries often experience a sense of urgency and intense political pressure to rapidly reconstruct and re-start development. National expertise that enable countries to develop and “build back” more safely and sustainably may be limited.

In a post-conflict or post-disaster context, dozens of development projects are often proposed simultaneously. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which is conventionally applied to ensure that new development does not cause adverse environmental impacts, could be delayed considerably, as the number of new proposed projects overwhelms the regulatory capacity of governments. Even when EIAs are possible, often they are done in parallel so that cumulative environmental impacts are rarely addressed.

New development activities in such contexts can therefore have negative environmental impacts, which in turn can undermine prospects for long-term growth and may create or exacerbate local vulnerabilities to disasters and other types of shocks. It is therefore critical that a technically-sound and efficient decision-making tool is made available to facilitate implementation of development projects, without compromising environmental sustainability or increasing local vulnerabilities to disasters and conflicts over resources.

To address this challenge, UNEP has modified a tool used in sustainable development planning - the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). SEAs provide a framework to systematically identify and evaluate the environmental consequences of proposed policies, plans or programmes, to ensure that environmental sustainability and disaster resilience are appropriately addressed at the earliest possible stages of decision-making.

Similar to EIAs, SEAs assess and mitigate potential environmental impacts. The main difference is that EIAs are generally applied to specific projects, while SEAs are often applied to a national policy for an entire sector, to national plans, or to programmes covering a geographical area (e.g. state or regional development scheme). SEAs assess environmental impacts of development activities across broader spatial contexts and seek to ensure environmental sustainability over the long term.

A modified SEA tool was pilot-tested in 2010-2011 in Sri Lanka in order to establish a sustainable development framework for its Northern Province, shortly after the end of the 30-year conflict. Presented as an *Integrated Strategic Environmental Assessment* (ISEA), the tool supported decision-making and development planning, while assuring environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction.



What is the main output of the ISEA?

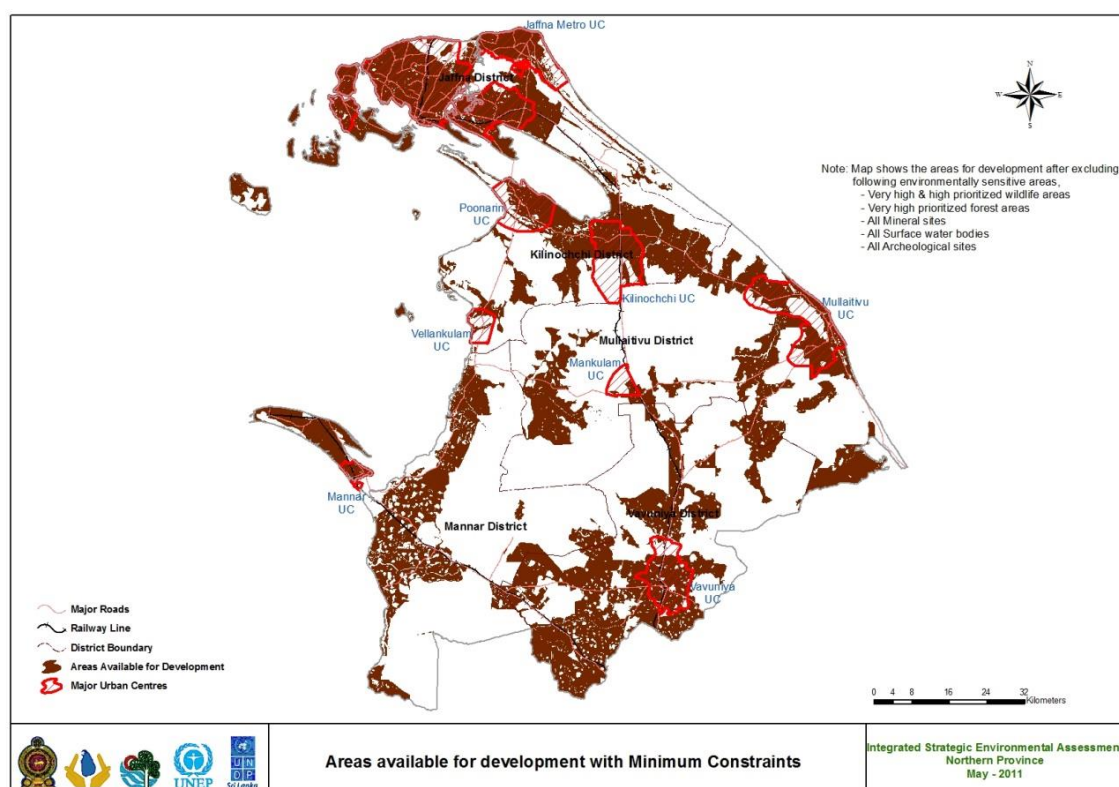
A nationally-driven process, the ISEA brings together key development actors and produces a development “opportunity” map for guiding public and private investments, within agreed upon environmental sustainability and disaster resilience parameters. The opportunity map allows decision makers to say “Yes” to development, while ensuring that development plans do not harm the environment or increase disaster risk. The ISEA report will also identify key environmental resources at risk (e.g. forests, water, coastal areas) from proposed development investments. Through the ISEA approach, countries develop knowledge and hands-on experience in integrating environmental sustainability and disaster risk as part of reconstruction and development planning.

Integrated Strategic Environmental Assessment in the Northern Province: Sri Lanka's experience

Background

Following the end of the 30-year conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009, there was significant political pressure to demonstrate immediate development benefits to the affected communities and jump-start reconstruction activities. In 2010-2011, UNDP and UNEP collaborated with the Government of Sri Lanka in order to establish a development framework for the Northern Province.

The ISEA tool was tailored to the local context in the Northern Province, taking into account environmentally-sensitive areas and disaster risks. This process involved more than 25 national government agencies and the Provincial Government working together to understand the natural resource base after the conflict and to provide strategic information to support to the intended, accelerated development in the Northern Province. Academia, civil society and the private sector were also part of the consultations.



3. Improved cooperation and coordination amongst government agencies

The need to produce data in a standardized format and identify priority land uses gave rise to greater dialogue and cooperation among government agencies contributing data. The sharing of information between agencies resulted in better integration of environmental and disaster risk considerations in early stages of decision-making.

4. Improved processes for development planning

Better data and cooperation between government agencies allowed proposed developments to be directed towards the most environmentally suitable locations. This led to the improvement of a number of infrastructure plans and proposed developments. For instance, urban planning became more targeted, taking into account water scarcity and risk of drought, and mining areas were selected away from important elephant habitats. The Opportunity Map also took into account sensitive marine habitats, such as mangroves, lagoons, coral reefs and seagrasses, and analyzed marine habitat data alongside disaster prone areas, which paved the way for identifying eco-tourism zones. The process thus allowed for more transparent and rational decision-making, when formulating or approving development plans.

Highlights of the ISEA-North outcomes

The ISEA has left an important legacy in Sri Lanka, for instance:

- All government agencies, led by the Forest Department, agreed to prioritize land uses in the Northern Province, and release certain areas for resettlement and development;
- Government agencies agreed to maintain wildlife corridors and protect archaeological areas from infrastructure construction, mining and other developments;
- The urban plan of Mankulam City was modified to avoid building in a sensitive open forest. Similarly, the protection of an important forest patch was included in the Kilinochchi Urban Development Plan;
- Forest and Wildlife Agencies jointly established continuous elephant corridors and wildlife sanctuaries (Chuddikulum and Elephant Pass) as a result of dialogue between the two agencies;
- The National Water Supply and Drainage Board demarcated protected water resources and established a reservoir to supply water to the Greater Vavuniya area;
- The ISEA database is being used by government agencies and donors to develop humanitarian assistance plans, water supply schemes for the Jaffna Peninsula, and promote tourism in the Northern Province.

The ISEA approach in Sri Lanka was

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