

How can fruitful stakeholder cooperation improve Strategic Environmental Assessment Follow-up?, by Gachechiladze, Maia

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ABSTRACT

How can fruitful stakeholder cooperation improve Strategic Environmental Assessment Follow-up?

A case of the private-operated Forest Management Plan, Saskatchewan, Canada

Stakeholder engagement is widely seen as essential for a successful Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). SEA - a proactive evaluation of environmental and sustainability consequences of strategic initiatives prior to their implementation – strives to ensure that various stakeholder perspectives are considered early in strategic decision-making process. It is argued that by tailoring different stakeholder involvement techniques to various stakeholder groups, the evaluation process gains unique local knowledge, increases the validity of evaluation and credibility of plans and programs under evaluation, etc.

However, the practice shows that even when stakeholder engagement plan is developed, it is rarely properly conducted during the evaluation and prior to decision-making. And what happens to stakeholder issues after the implementation decisions are taken? Are they consulted upon or involved in plan/program implementation? What are the roles and inputs of stakeholders in SEA follow-up, which includes monitoring, (summative and formative) evaluation, management and communication that accompany the delivery of strategic initiatives?

These questions remain largely unexplored due to the conventional practical and theoretical focus on ex-ante SEA evaluations. Meanwhile, given their long-term effects,

the added values of stakeholder participation and cooperation in the SEA follow-up activities might significantly contribute to promoting the sustainability principles (e.g. intra- and inter-generational equity).

This paper explores the role, function and potential of stakeholder processes in SEA follow-up on the case study of a 20-year Forest Management Plan (FMP) in Saskatchewan, Canada, undertaken as a part of a PhD research. It identifies different forms of engaging stakeholders from private, regulatory and public sectors (from governmental control and self-regulation by the proponent, to advisory forums and community pressure). It looks further into various processes that underlie and facilitate or hamper the interaction among the stakeholders during the implementation of the private-operated FMP. By investigating the synergies of the stakeholder processes and SEA follow-up activities, the paper highlights such added values as continuous identification and feeding of stakeholders' views and interests into the FMP and SEA follow-up implementation, securing a right for participation and feedback in the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and management, willingness to build consensus and openly cooperate in shared decision-making, clear commitments and increased accountability by all parties, etc. The paper concludes that the combination of the various forms of stakeholder cooperation and participation has a potential to help SEA follow-up safeguard environmentally-friendly and sustainability-led delivery of (corporate) strategic initiatives.