



Netherlands Commission for
Environmental Assessment

SEA for Land Use Planning in District 1 of Zamboanga del Norte

Reflections on the SEA Report

THE PHILIPPINES



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Advisory Report by the NCEA

Title	SEA for Land Use Planning in District 1 of Zamboanga Del Norte Reflections on the SEA Report
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1. Introduction

In 2017 the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) gave a training on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for an audience from several regions in the Philippines. The training was part of the Shared Resources Joint Solutions programme in which IUCN NL, WWF Netherlands and the Dutch government participate. This programme aims at strengthening the power of the stakeholders' voices in government planning. SEA is seen as an important approach in this.

The audience of the training consisted of a wide variety of representatives from government, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, Indigenous Peoples and Academia. The local government units (LGUs) of District 1 of the Province of Zamboanga del Norte took the initiative to voluntarily carry out an SEA for joint land use planning in the district. This initiative was supported by the Provincial government. The Shared Resources Joint Solutions (SRJS) programme provided both financial means and technical support to the SEA.

The NCEA was asked to support the implementation of the SEA through on line coaching, participation at a number of workshops and quality review of SEA products. For this purpose a working group of experts was established consisting of:

- Mr Elmer Mercado – Philippine land use planner and SEA specialist
- Mr Peter Nelson – British land use planner and SEA specialist
- Mr Rob Verheem – SEA specialist and secretary of the expert group
- Ms Bobbi Schijf – quality assurance.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the SEA were jointly developed by stakeholders in land use planning at a workshop in Cebu in 2018. This ToR established both the institutional arrangements needed for the SEA, as well as an outline of the required process and content of the SEA. The SEA was subsequently implemented over the course of 2018, 2019 and 2020.

On 4 October 2020 a draft SEA report was sent to the NCEA with a request to reflect on the quality of the SEA. Key purpose of this reflection was to compare the report against both the Cebu ToR and international best practice, to decide on priority actions needed to complete the SEA for use in the development of the Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) of the LGUs. Furthermore, the reflection tries to distil from the SEA process any lessons that can be learned for possible future applications of SEA for land use planning in other regions of the Philippines.

In this report the NCEA describes its findings. It distinguishes between effectiveness and quality of the institutional arrangements, of the SEA process and of the information in the SEA report. Also, distinction is made between SEA elements that are considered of good quality (chapter 2) and SEA elements where some further work is recommended (chapter 3).

Lessons that may be learnt are described in chapter 4. Annex 1 describes – as examples – two topical issues in District 1 in some more detail, while Annex 2 gives an overview of how land use planning in District 1 fits into the overall (Land Use) Planning System in the Philippines.

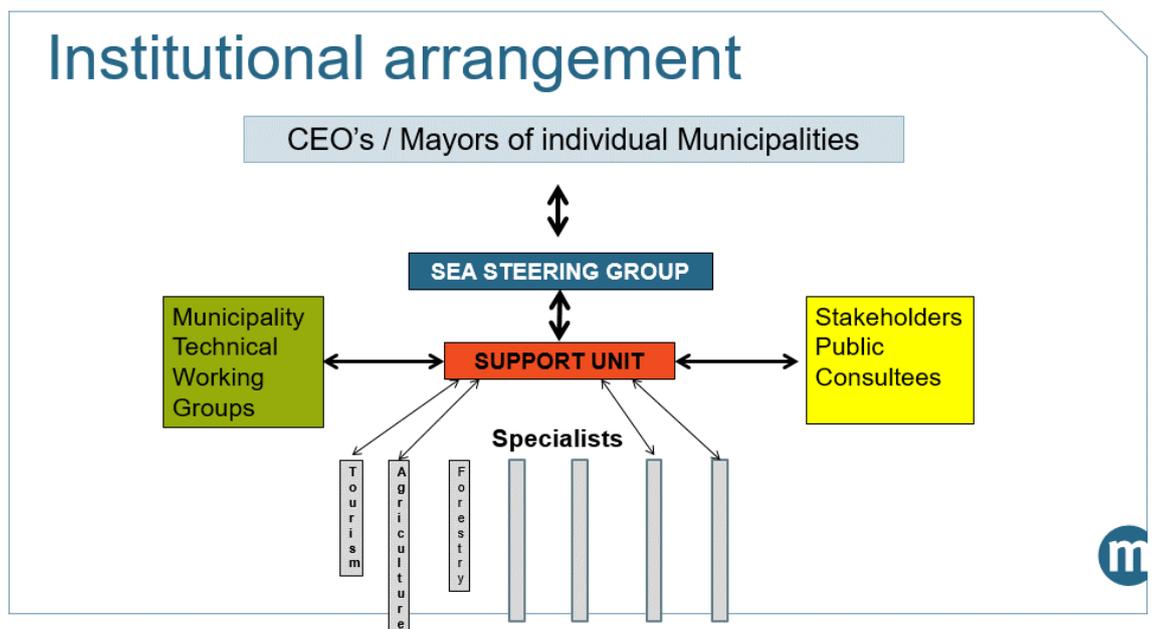
2. Good practice elements of the SEA

2.1 SEA institutional arrangements

- The SEA institutional arrangements were developed in accordance with the ToR and worked well in practice.
- The central support unit to this SEA (through PARTS) provided effective support and performed an essential role.

The institutional arrangements for the SEA (see Box 1) worked well at both district and local levels.

Box 1 Institutional arrangements for the SEA



Continuous technical briefing and clarification of the SEA process were given to LGU officials (including local sanggunian¹ members and LGU technical staff), Technical Working Group members, local stakeholders (including NGOs, CSOs and IPs²), and other local bodies/groups and stakeholders in the SEA process. This established ownership of the process by all stakeholders in the district and facilitated active participation of local LGUs and partners in the process.

¹ Sanggunians are the local legislative councils of LGUs – provincial, city and municipality. They comprise between 8-10 members, all are elected for a 3-year term alongside local chief executives – Governor or Mayor.

² Non Governmental Organisation, Civil Society Organisations and Indigenous Peoples

The creation of a separate SEA support unit composed of technical consultants and academics to conduct the different baseline and technical studies eased the burden of the technical work for the city and municipal Technical Working Groups. The support unit was led by PARTS Inc. and deserves credit for the excellent way in which stakeholders were engaged and the large amount of information that has been collected and processed in the baseline studies.

The SEA institutional arrangements meet the following elements of the ToR:

- Clear ownership of the SEA by the authorities responsible for the 8 Comprehensive Land Use Plans.
- Effective institutional arrangements developed and implemented for the SEA.

2.2 SEA process and implementation

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The SEA process worked well in practice.• The SEA process was well integrated into the CLUP formulation process.• Stakeholder participation was of high quality.• The SEA process fulfils many of the requirements of the ToR. |
|---|

Table 43 in the consolidated document shows how the SEA and land use planning processes were integrated. We judge this as a good model that can serve as an example for possible other SEAs for land use planning in the Philippines.

We judge as particularly good:

- how the SEA process was integrated in the CLUP process;
- the quality of stakeholder consultation and validation processes undertaken in the different stages, especially for NGOs, CSOs and Indigenous Peoples;
- the alignment of the SEA and CLUP technical processes. The common reference boundary maps demonstrate a sound orientation on CLUP guidelines and zoning ordinance policy formulation;
- the flexible approach to the SEA process, which made it possible to align the SEA results and findings with the CLUP formulation status of participating LGUs, in which some LGUs were at an advanced stage of their CLUP formulation process, while others were in early/mid preparation stage.

The SEA process comprises many of the elements/steps as described in the ToR, including:
Active stakeholder involvement.

Appropriate timing of the SEA, before decisions are made.

2.3 SEA content

- The SEA report gives a good description of baselines, of topical issues in District 1, of those responsible for the issues and of options for action on each of these issues.
- The same is true for the description of the formal context in which land use planning takes place in District 1, as laid down in existing plans and policies.
- The summary of the SEA report provides good insight in both opportunities – the available natural and human resources – and threats: the negative state of a number of social and economic conditions.
- The SEA report fulfils many of the requirements of the ToR.

The SEA content lives up to many elements of the ToR:

- Existing policies and responsibilities of authorities have been thoroughly reviewed.
- Most relevant planning issues in District 1 have been covered in the analysis.
- Baseline information has been gathered.
- Review of topical issues is present.
- Analysis of policy consistency is given.
- Analysis of cross cutting issues is there.

3. Good practice elements we do not (yet) see in this SEA

3.1 SEA process and implementation

- The SEA report gives little information on the strengths and weaknesses of the Comprehensive Land Use Planning (CLUP) system it tries to address.
- The emphasis of the SEA process seems to have been mostly on a participative analysis of key development issues in District 1, and less on the joint teasing out of alternative actions and their implication for short and long term planning.
- The description of the participation process would benefit from some more information on how local chief executives, NGOs, CSOs and IPs were involved.

For an SEA to add value to a CLUP it is important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of both the SEA approach and the existing CLUP system. This can be analysed with questions such as: what are the limitations of CLUPs? How much influence do they have in practice in guiding development? What is the quality of existing CLUPs? What are the resources available to local authority planners? Answers to these questions are important to help understand how an SEA can best assist in developing and strengthening a CLUP.

Furthermore, the description of the SEA process would benefit from more information as to:

- how stakeholders were involved in the formulation of trade-offs, priorities and recommendations for land use planning and their integration in local CLUPs;

- how SEA findings and recommended options will feed into the broader provincial land use development planning process (see annex 2), or the proposed adoption of an integrated river basin management plan (IBRMP);
- the engagement of local chief executives in the SEA phases;
- the engagement of Indigenous Peoples and NGO/CSO consultation and validation meetings in the SEA stages;
- if and why NGO/CSO/IPs consultations were done jointly or separate of each other;
- the extent to which discussions of issues, plans and options with other sectors and local leaders were undertaken.

3.2 SEA content

- Although the SEA process was highly participative and included valuable discussions between many of the relevant stakeholders in District 1 and the province, the results of these discussions are less clearly described in the SEA report.
- The SEA is strong in terms of data gathering and provides a good first analysis of these data. However, it is less clear to what degree the SEA team managed to synthesize findings into concrete proposals for dealing with the most critical issues. An exception is the proposed adoption of an integrated river basin management plan.
- A number of elements of the ToR appears to have received less coverage in the report than might be expected, including: land use issues within individual CLUPs, cross cutting issues across the LGUs, alternatives, analysis of population growth and tourism issues, record of individual consultation responses, including how stakeholder views have led to special SEA studies.

The SEA report would benefit from more information on:

- The results of stakeholder interviews, discussions, conferences etc. What are concerns, what are preferences, what are visions?
- Identified trade-offs, compromises and synergies: where do people want the same thing, where opposing things, what are suggested compromises and synergies? For example, where do CSOs/indigenous peoples agree with government authorities and where do they disagree? And what are diverging or converging views amongst LGUs?
- How do discussions, trade-offs and identified synergies lead to suggested alternatives and recommendations?
- What are the priorities? The compiled list of 'things to do' is quite long. What should be done first, what later? What are 'must haves' and what are the 'nice to haves'? Also in light of available capacities and resources at LGU level?

If possible, the SEA could describe to which extent the thinking of CLUP planners has developed as a result of participation in the SEA. Do they think that the content of their plan has been (or will be) significantly altered as a result of the SEA findings? If so, what is the nature of the changes they have introduced, or will introduce in plans? The same question is relevant for land use planning at the provincial level: how has the thinking of provincial planners been influenced through participating in the SEA?

Several of the SEA baseline reports (for example, on the Polanco Landscape and Ecosystems) refer to challenges which need to be tackled on a District-wide or even Provincial basis. How are – or will be – these issues addressed in the final CLUPs? An example from Polanco is the conclusion that most of the sand and gravel extracted from the rivers for the construction industry is used not only in District 1 but also in the adjacent province of Zamboanga del Sur. Most of the benefits are gained outside the municipality but the adverse environmental effects are felt within it. What policies will the CLUP include on these issues?

Because in-depth analysis of the base line findings is not yet included in the SEA report, it is difficult to prioritize critical concerns for future planning in the district. Annex 1 gives two examples of the kind of analyses that would be recommended to be included in the SEA, or as a next stage of the SEA. Further analyses is particularly recommended in the following areas: agriculture, population, water and pollution, flooding, population growth and housing, roads, mining and tourism.

It is important for further analysis to lead to outcomes that are relevant at LGU level. Many of the detailed analyses contained in the SEA report are relevant for consideration at national and provincial level, but they may have less to offer in terms of direct and practical help to the small staff of planners employed in an individual municipality (even when supported by their technical working group) when they are seeking to draw up firm proposals in their land use plan. It may be worth considering preparing two levels of recommendations in the SEA: the first relating to actions needed within individual LGUs and the second applying to activities at a district-wide or provincial (or even national) level.

The following elements of the ToR for the SEA do not get much attention in the report:

- Land use issues within individual CLUPs: although these are well covered in individual specialist reports, they are not so clearly expressed within the consolidated report.
- Cross cutting issues and alternatives: an attempt was made in the report, but the final process of distilling what actions should be taken – including responsibilities, timescales and likely costs and benefits of such actions – is not addressed in detail.
- Analyses of the consequences of population growth and development of the tourism sector is not well developed.
- There is no record of individual consultation responses.
- Limited discussion on the need and development of a monitoring and reporting mechanism in the adoption and implementation of the SEA findings and recommendations.

4. Lessons learned

This chapter summarises some lessons learned on SEA during the execution of this SEA. Focus is on those lessons that are particularly valuable for possible future SEAs of this kind, to be undertaken in other parts of the Philippines.

Lessons learned on the Institutional arrangements

- The institutional set up used for this SEA worked well in practice and can serve as a good template for possible future SEAs for land use planning in the Philippines.
- This SEA is a great example where government and NGOs, CSOs and IPs worked together on the execution and implementation of the SEA.
- To have a central and dedicated SEA support team is essential for the success of the SEA. Its central position enabled it to be the 'spider in the web' connecting the interests of the different stakeholders. Its dedicated SEA role ensured sufficient capacity for the organisation and implementation of the SEA.
- As to the structure of the SEA support team: ideally this should be a mix of professionals, including academics, and practicing consultants in environmental assessment, engineering and land use development. This mix should include expertise in integrating social, economic and environmental findings into a single document.
- The SEA report on page 20 and 21 offers some very valid comments on the issues of staffing, capacity, local expertise, resource demands and time and budget to conduct an SEA.
- To secure high level support at the start (in this case: support by the governor at provincial level) is of key importance to a successful SEA.

Lessons learned on SEA Process design

- This SEA has proven to be an effective instrument for an inclusive and participative strategic planning process in the Philippine context. The process design was well thought out and can be an inspiration for others to follow.
- Commitment and active participation were strengthened by the local ownership of the SEA process. This was achieved through frequent and regular briefings and orientation meetings with local officials, technical and planning staff, council members, sectoral and stakeholder groups (including NGOs, CSOs and IPs).
- The SEA process can be used by LGU Planners to aid discussion of challenges and potential solutions that affect more than one LGU. This analysis at district level will strengthen their analysis and advice for land use planning in their respective LGUs.

Lessons learned on SEA Content

- It is challenging to find the right balance between meeting technical analytical requirements, and keeping the focus on the issues that are distinctive for the CLUPs. For a future application of SEA, it would be advisable to build in a priority setting exercise earlier in the SEA process. This exercise would reflect on analysis so far, decide where the crucial trade-off and options are, and then concentrate further analytical work on those.
- The SEA and the land use planning process would have benefited from a more explicit analysis of the existing Land use plans in District 1 and the province of Zamboanga del Norte. This would help address questions such as: what is going well and what less well in District 1? Which existing policies are effective and should stay the same? What are the most burning issues that are not yet addressed in the existing land use plans?

Annex 1: Examples of more thorough analyses that would benefit the discussion of critical issues in the SEA

Agriculture

A major land use throughout District 1 is agriculture. There is an historical emphasis on copra production, which is threatened by changes in global markets and the aging character of most coconut plantations. Farmers are prohibited from felling old palms and replanting. The essential questions for the district are: What are the anticipated future trends? How should the local economy be revived? What alternative crops can be considered? How can new markets be developed and what trading opportunities exist?

These are all questions that need to be addressed by the relevant authorities, but the conclusions and directives will bear directly on future land use planning decisions at District, Municipality and Barangay level.

Flooding

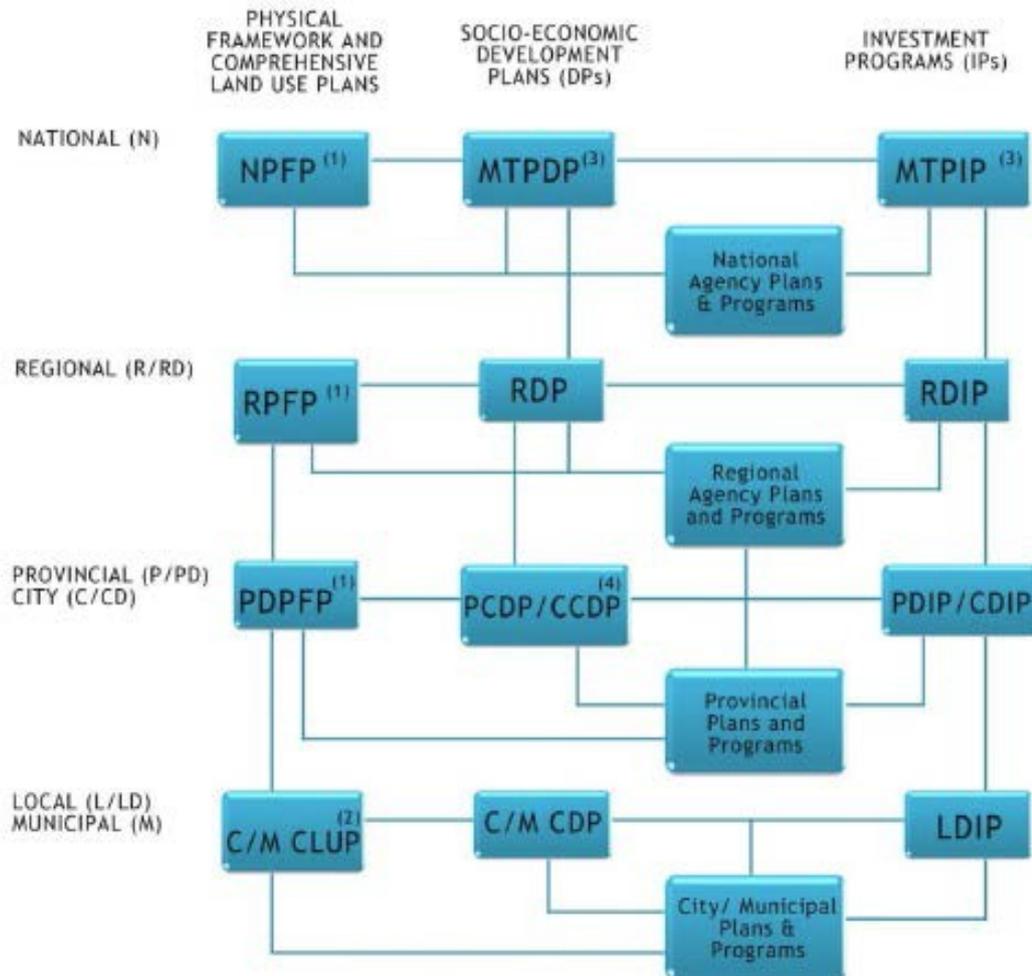
Another pressing concern in District 1 is the extent of flooding from major rivers, which threatens both lives and livelihoods. The solutions to this threat have so far consisted of building dykes and flood retention walls along the lower river channels. However – as international experience shows – this can potentially exacerbate the problem by preventing flood water dispersal. There is a considerable focus in the SEA recommendations on the role of higher level institutional bodies and the need for ‘provincial’, ‘ecosystem’ or ‘river drainage basin’ scale planning. Complementary to this, the SEA could also aim to provide advice on preventive measures, as noted in the bullet on priorities in the main text.

It would seem that rivers in District 1 are not included in any national hydrographic survey and there is virtually no data on river discharges under either ‘normal’ or ‘extreme’ events. No assessment has been made of land and vegetative cover of key watersheds to establish the rate of deforestation and identify areas for rehabilitation and restoration. The same is true for the impact of the deterioration of forest areas in local watershed areas to flooding and drought management, domestic water supply and water quality.

A key recommendation from the SEA could therefore be to consider the establishment of a proper instrumentation and monitoring framework with meteorological stations and river gauging equipment, so that accurate records of river flows can be established. This information will be of fundamental importance when planning future flood defences which will be necessary in the face of climate change.

A second recommendation to consider would be the identification of priority watersheds for rehabilitation and reforestation. These could be part of ecosystems-based measures to adapt to climate-related flooding and drought, and to improve water quality and biodiversity.

Annex 2: Hierarchy and linkage of plans in the Philippines



NOTES:

- (1) PFP = (N/R/P) Physical Framework Plan
- (2) CLUP = (P/C/M) Comprehensive Land Use Plan
- (3) MTP = Medium Term Philippine (DP and IP)
- (4) CDP = (P/C/M) Comprehensive Development Plan

Source: HLURB (2006), CLUP Preparation

Comprehensive Development Plans are 6-year sector-based implementation plans that are meant to implement the strategies and directions identified in the CLUP. The CDP is further broken down into 3-year local development investment plan (to coincide with the 3-year tenure of elected LGU officials) and budgeted yearly through an annual investment plan (AIP).