



The Philippines

SEA for planning in Zamboanga del Norte

With rapid urbanisation in cities and town centres, increasing population, looming threats for food and health security, diminishing natural resources and intense climate change, land use management is of primal concern in the Philippines nowadays. Local governments are being pushed to formulate their land use plans to guide sustainable investments in various sectors. In District 1, Province of Zamboanga del Norte, Region IX, it was decided to integrate a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) into land use planning. A new and challenging approach, not in the least because of the political and cultural sensitivity of the area in Mindanao, where this took place.

Why SEA?

SEA is used more and more around the world. The process brings various stakeholders together around strategic-level decisions on plans, policies, or programmes. SEA helps to incorporate social and environmental considerations into decision making. It also makes the planning process more transparent and stimulates authorities to work together, in coalition with private sector and civil society, and in a formalised way.

Support for this SEA from the Netherlands

The Shared Resources Joint Solutions (SRJS) programme is a partnership between IUCN NL, WWF Netherlands and the Dutch government. The programme aims to strengthen the power of the stakeholders' voices in government planning. It provided training on SEA to variety of representatives from government, CSOs and indigenous peoples from District 1, of the province of Zamboanga del Norte. With support from the Provincial government, the participants decided to voluntarily carry out an SEA for joint land use planning in the district.

The SRJS programme provided both financial means and technical support to the SEA. The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) advised on the process.



Agreement on the start of the SEA for land use planning in District 1, Province of Zamboanga del Norte

Innovative planning

In the Philippines, this SEA process was an innovation of the usual process in planning and policy formulation. From the very start, important elements were building trust, formulating shared objectives, and taking joint ownership of SEA results. This determined the level of commitment and involvement needed for a successful SEA. Building trust and credibility was achieved through multiple actions. After an initial one-week training on SEA, a formal partnership was established between government and local NGO PARTS, to act as a local, neutral process manager. This helped to establish and mobilize horizontal and vertical support with state and non-state stakeholders, including academics. Multi-stakeholder dialogues and localised participatory activities such as consultations, workshops, and meetings, were organised. Sometimes, when the political situation so required, this was done on neutral and secured ground.

Inclusivity

The participatory planning approach that was introduced by the SEA also enabled indigenous peoples and CSOs to have their voice heard. Previously, they would not have been given the same attention. Now, their concerns relating to environmental sustainability, ancestral domains, livelihoods, and food security, were not only given attention, but incorporated into the comprehensive land use plans.

SEA's contributions so far

The SEA was undertaken in the period 2018–2020. Over this period the SEA helped the local governments in the district to jointly redefine priorities. The SEA provided: (a) an opportunity to develop more context-driven and evidence-based land use solutions, placing primary consideration on the environment; (b) a venue for stakeholders to participate in this planning process; (c) a good mechanism for dialogue and to influence decision-making to address land use issues, including

conflicts in territorial boundaries and cross-boundary concerns affecting water, food, biodiversity and climate; and (d) alliances among local governments for cross-boundary cooperation on the further implementation of the plans.



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Zamboanga del Norte

Mining and other forms of land conversion threaten the ecosystems and natural resources on which many communities and sectors in the Philippines depend for water, food and climate resilience.

Of course, the SEA does not end with a decision and a formal plan. The next challenge is the implementation and enforcement of the adopted comprehensive land use plans for District 1, Zamboanga del Norte. Being context-driven, this SEA has been an effective, relevant and convincing approach. This SEA had a long-lasting impact, and should be replicated in other planning processes.

For more information on this SEA, visit:
<https://www.eia.nl/en/projects/8029-01>

Case description provided by Nonoy Panorel of PARTS

This case has been taken from the publication “Environmental Assessment in Landscape Management: Ten Cases”. The full publication can be found here:
iucn.nl/environmental-assessment

SRJS programme partners:

