

28<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment  
**THE ART AND SCIENCE OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**  
**IAIA08 Session Chair's Report**

**Session number and name:** TF 4.3 Use of Country Systems for Environmental and Social Impact Assessment

**Day:** Thursday **Date:** May 8, 2008 **Time:** 2-3:30 pm **# Persons attending session:** approx 100

**Name(s) of Session Chair(s)**

Stephen Lintner

**Contributors**

Harvey Himberg; Panneer Selvam; Malcolm Jansen

**(a) Three current issues in application of assessment processes discussed in this session**

The issues discussed under theme of country environmental and social systems included *Equivalence Analysis* (of borrower legal and regulatory systems), *Acceptability Assessment* (of borrower institutional capacity, procedures and performance outcomes) and *Gap-Filling to Attain Equivalence and Acceptability* between borrower systems and corresponding World Bank environmental and social safeguards as set forth on World Bank Operational Policy 4.00 (Use of Borrower Systems to Address Environmental and Social Safeguard Issues in Bank-Funded Projects).

**(b) One or more emerging trends**

There is an increased trend toward convergence on the part of borrower systems with the environmental safeguard systems of multilateral lending institutions, and therefore, opportunities to make selective use of borrower safeguard systems borrowers, particularly with respect to the environmental assessment process. There is less convergence with respect to social issues such as involuntary resettlement and the impacts of projects on Indigenous Peoples. However, there are emerging opportunities to with respect to social safeguards, due to increased willingness of some borrowers to consider fundamental reforms.

**(c) Issues relating to impact assessment effectiveness:**

**(i) dimensions of IA effectiveness (i.e. what are the characteristics of effective IA?)**

The most critical areas for effectiveness of IA are robust and transparent borrower legal systems and effective public consultation and disclosure policies.

**(ii) challenges/barriers to IA effectiveness**

The key challenges to IA effectiveness are: institutional weakness of environmental authorities relative to other decision-making institutions; lack of formal channels for public consultation and disclosure; reluctance to critically examine project alternatives (including the no-project alternative) and limited accountability for outcomes.

**(iii) how these barriers might be overcome**

Legal and administrative reforms are necessary to institutionalize and integrate public consultation and disclosure mechanisms into the EA process and to address critical gaps in the assessment and management of social impacts. Institutional capacity building is necessary to improve implementation of borrower legal and administrative systems, in particular with respect to non-technical issues such as public consultation and accountability for outcomes.

**(d) Comments on the Art and Science of Impact Assessment (i.e. the relative importance and interplay between science and values/politics/subjectivity in impact assessment)**

There is a tendency among impact assessment authorities of many countries, particularly those that have recently developed strong technical capacity for impact assessment, to conduct EA, as a technocratic exercise, to the exclusion of other institutions, including other governmental agencies and civil society, which are viewed as having value and self-interested agendas, and therefore adding limited added value in the assessment process. This results in the lack of integration of stakeholder values in the assessment process to the detriment of the assessment process itself and to the credibility of its outcomes. Impact assessment practitioners at the decision-making need to develop confidence in their ability to incorporate value-laden views into the assessment process and be more inclusive of non-technical stakeholders.