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Framework and operational procedure for implementing Strategic Environmental Assessment in China

Bao Cun-kuan^{a,*}, Lu Yong-sen^a, Shang Jin-cheng^b

^a*State Key Laboratory on Pollution Control and Resources Reuse,
School of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, Tongji University, Shanghai 200092, China*

^b*Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, Northeast Normal University,
Changchun 130024, China*

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Abstract

Over the last 20 years, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been implemented and become an important instrument for decision-making in development projects in China. The *Environmental Impact Assessment Law of the P.R. China* was promulgated on 28 October 2002 and will be put into effect on 1 September of 2003. The law provides that Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required in regional and sector plans and programs. This paper introduces the research achievements and practice of SEA in China, discusses the relationship of SEA and “integrating of environment and development in decision-making (IEDD)”, and relevant political and legal basis of SEA. The framework and operational procedures of SEA administration and enforcement are presented. Nine cases are analyzed and some proposals are given.

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Keywords: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); Integration of environment and development in decision-making (IEDD); Enforcing framework; Operational procedure

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86-21-65984220 (office), +86-21-65133046 (home); fax: +86-21-6598-6313.

E-mail addresses: bckwlp@163.com, baock@sohu.com (C.-K. Bao).

1. Introduction

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been implemented and made great progress in China since 1979. During 1980–1985, only 445 Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) of development project were presented, but from 1986 to 1990, EISs submitted to the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) rose to 2592. EIA enforcement rate of development projects was 61% in 1991 and grew to 90% in 2000 ([Supervision-Management Department of SEPA, 1999](#)). From 1981 to 1992, 181 Regional Environmental Impact Assessment (REIA) were fulfilled, accounting for only 31% of regional development plans, although the REIA was required throughout the country ([Shi, 1999](#)).

There has been little work or research on EIA on policy and departmental plans. However, the significance of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has attracted increasing attention from EIA experts and officials since the 1990s, and it has been generally recognized that the needs of considering environmental effects should be at the early stage of decision-making of economic policy, regional and urban master plans and sectoral plan including the sectors of transport, energy and forestry at the state, provincial and municipal levels. In this context, a number of SEA studies such as “SEA for the Law of Air Pollution Prevention and Control of P.R. China”, “the SEA for Changchun Economy and Technology Development Zone”, “SEA Capacity-building in China”, “SEA for Shanghai Transportation policy and network program”, “SEA for Western-China development” have been successively carried out in China. These studies have reflected the efforts of Chinese scholars to integrate the theoretical achievements and practical experiences from developed countries with Chinese conditions, and to develop appropriate SEA framework, institutions and methodologies.

This paper introduces the studies and preliminary practices of SEA in China, puts forward the enforcement framework and a basic procedure to implement the *Environmental Impact Assessment Law of the P.R. China* (EIA Law). Section 1 reviews the background of SEA in China, including practice and progress in project EIA and regional environmental impact assessment.

Section 2 focuses on current understanding of SEA and its three tiers, concept of integrating environment and development in decision-making (IEDD) and legal basis of SEA system.

Section 3 presents a framework for implementing SEA in China and SEA methodology.

Section 4 introduces nine SEA cases. Two SEA enforcement-modes “Internal Assessment” and “External Assessment” are applied in the SEA of Shanghai transport policy and road-network program.

The trend of SEA in China is reviewed in Section 5.

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