

Exploring climate change criteria for strategic environmental assessments

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Abstract

Climate change has become a high priority worldwide at the level of governments, business, and community due to growing understanding of climate change's implications for trade, security, the economy, ecosystems, and the well-being of humans and other species. The strategic environmental assessment (SEA) process is well-positioned to systematically help strengthen treatment of climate change adaptation and mitigation in planning and development. This is due to its practical, analytical component, its participation component, and its ability to engage with ethical issues and reconcile competing agendas. This monograph explores criteria and good practices in addressing various climate change aspects in SEA and country environmental analysis (CEA). Climate change criteria are developed and applied to two datasets to provide an initial information baseline on climate change treatment in SEA and CEA, amended sets of climate change criteria for each, and an evidence-based resource for improving SEA and CEA guidance and practice amongst interested academics, professionals, and practitioners in the UK, EU, development banks, and developing countries. Overall findings are relevant to any individual, institution, or country interested in addressing climate change and climate-related natural hazards within an SEA or planning framework.

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1. Introduction

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is a systematic, participatory decision-making support process undertaken to ensure that key factors relating to the environment and sustainability are taken into account in the development of policies, plans, and programmes (PPPs). In European Union (EU) member states, SEA is explicitly required under the EU SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) to assess significant effects related to 'climatic factors,' which is increasingly understood to include climate change. Multilateral development banks

(MDBs) and international development agencies also require SEAs for many of their projects in client countries and express commitment to tackling climate change. This commitment is partly due to their mandate to reduce poverty, which is made much more challenging due to climate change's destabilising and disproportionate impacts on the poor and other vulnerable populations. Developing countries are also becoming increasingly concerned about the impacts of climate change and reducing contributions to it. This is due to growing awareness of climate change's many vexing dimensions, including environmental

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