



## New dynamics in ESIA mapping

*By Bobbi Schijf and Sibout Nootboom*

## What is ESIA mapping?

ESIA mapping is the NCEA’s diagnostic tool for assessing the state of a national ESIA system. Practitioners and stakeholders in a country’s ESIA system apply the tool in an interactive workshop in which they discuss ESIA performance with the help of a set of questions. The outcome is a graphical representation of the current ESIA system that informs a shared view about the strong and weak points, and where action is needed. The mapping tool is a work in progress. In nearly a decade of application, ESIA mapping has been regularly updated to reflect lessons learnt.

Figure 1 - ESIA mapping

Key elements of the ESIA system and possible questions



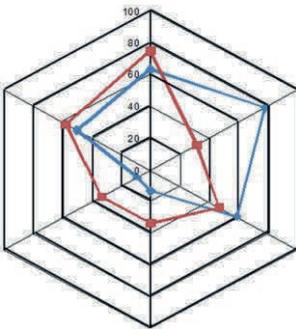


## The benefits of the mapping

ESIA mapping was developed by the NCEA in 2005, to be applied in its cooperation with different countries. The mapping workshop provides insight into what works well in ESIA, and what are the priorities for improvement. Using a country or provincial ESIA map, the NCEA and its partners can jointly identify cooperation activities. ESIA mapping can also be used to track the development of the ESIA system of a particular jurisdiction. For example, in a number of central African countries, a series of mappings was undertaken in 2005/06 and then again in 2013. Comparison of the results revealed a proportionally significant evolution, in terms both of the legislative framework for ESIA and of practice. For example, there were improvements in the production and approval of the ESIA reports as well as in environmental authorisation.<sup>11</sup>

## How does ESIA mapping work?

At the heart of the ESIA map is a questionnaire that addresses key elements of the ESIA system of that jurisdiction. It explores the regulatory requirements for ESIA, but also looks at practice. It considers the ESIA steps taken prior to project approval, but also looks at what happens afterwards: in decision making and during project implementation. The mapping questionnaire is presented in an Excel workbook of interlinked spreadsheets. When completed, the ESIA map consists of statistics, and the stakeholders' expert judgement scores on ESIA performance, all presented in a series of graphs.



<sup>11</sup> Evolution of Environmental Impact Assessment Systems in Central Africa: The role of national professional associations. By D.Bitondo, R. Post, G. van Boven, 2014. ISBN: 9789042139862

## ESIA mapping: a work in progress

Working together with a few external facilitators we have now now applied ESIA mapping close to thirty times. Each application brings new lessons learnt about the tool's effectiveness, which help when regularly updating and revising it. In 2014, for example, we added a dashboard to help tailor the mapping to each workshop audience. This made it possible to skip certain sections and concentrate on others. The name was changed from EIA mapping to ESIA mapping, to emphasise the social impacts. And the interface was simplified for ease of use. Most recently, we have adjusted the mapping to bring it in line with our system approach. An ESIA map now incorporates the capacities of key actors in the system. Also included are the system functions that are necessary for good ESIA, such as professional education and exchange. Contextual factors, such as the availability of technical knowledge, the role of the media and corruption are also noted (*see figure 1*). In the coming years we will continue to apply and improve ESIA mapping. Special attention will be given to incorporating new insights into ESIA effectiveness, aligning ESIA mapping with other diagnostic tools, such as SAIEA's EIA barometer and developing SEA mapping.



“Interpreting the facts together creates mutual understanding.”

An interview with Mr Karim Samoura, mapping facilitator

Since 2014, Mr Karim Samoura, teacher-researcher and director of the Master's programme in Environmental Management and Sustainable Development at Université Aube Nouvelle in Burkina Faso, has facilitated ESIA mapping sessions in Benin, Guinea, Mali, Togo, Burkina Faso

and Niger. We asked him about his experiences.

### What is your role in an ESIA mapping?

“As facilitator, I help ESIA agencies in the preparations for the sessions. This includes identifying stakeholders to invite, collecting data to support the discussion and helping ESIA agencies play their role in the ESIA mapping workshop with confidence. After the session, I summarise the analysis. In a second meeting with the same group, I facilitate a discussion on follow-up.”

### **What kinds of dynamics have you observed in mapping sessions?**

“The session offers stakeholders a unique opportunity to analyse their system together. It is often the first time that these people find themselves together in the same room. Civil society actors in particular may never previously have been part of such country-wide discussion. This mix of people leads to a more comprehensive big picture. Interpreting the facts together creates mutual understanding. Professional divides suddenly seem less important, for instance between environmental and sectoral ministries. Grievances from the private sector are taken seriously and taboos evaporate.”

### **What has been the outcome of the mappings?**

“Frequently, follow-up emerges, for example under the leadership of academics or associations of professionals. A second striking element is that civil society often starts to participate in ESIA more structurally. In Benin, for example, an ESIA mapping kick-started a community of practice under the leadership of the association of ESIA professionals. This community is still vibrant after three years. In Burkina, mapping coincided with an initiative to reform the ESIA authority, and many mapping participants have become a sounding board for this reform. In Togo, only three months after an ESIA mapping, the minister who had attended signed a decree to break a long stalemate about the division of responsibilities in the ESIA system. Momentum is now building to take this discussion to sub-regional level, to the West African Economic and Monetary Union.”

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