

Assessing the cumulative environmental footprint in crisis and conflict situations

STUDIES in Sustainable Security

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The importance of strategic environmental assessments in crisis and conflict situations

Whereas Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) today are mandatory for many actors operating in conflict and crises areas, strategic environmental assessments (SEA) are less common. The SEA concept has mainly evolved from the recognition that many sustainability concerns can only be solved by addressing them at the strategic level, long before any project is commenced and a traditional EIA has been initiated. In short, while EIA addresses potential impacts at the project level, SEA is a systematic process that aims to ensure that sustainability considerations are integrated in policies, plans or programme initiatives. Indeed, regular EIAs have received much criticism for addressing environmental issues far too late in the decision making processes, jamming the possibilities to mitigate or prevent negative environmental impact in advance, or for that matter, leverage on the environment to better be able to deliver on the mission goals. This holds especially true for international actors involved in conflict and crises situations, where there also may be the notion that the mission, whether civilian or military, would be hampered by environmental considerations.

Challenges and opportunities with SEA in a conflict and crises context

Considering the fragility of the natural environment and the affected people in many crises and conflict situations, such as Mali, Haiti and Afghanistan, a more coherent approach including environmental considerations is required. In this respect, special SEA resourcing and capacity, as well as a common understanding of the challenges and possibilities, will be particularly needed. SEAs are challenged to cope with a huge range of decision-making situations, from the broadest international policy down to organizations goals and visions. Activities subject for SEAs although intended (or rather hoped to be) not permanent, tend to be just

semi-permanent to permanent and last for many years with the associated uncertainties of events that can unfold unexpectedly, such as droughts or floods, rapidly increasing oil prices or disease outbreaks that turn epidemic. Although a SEA cannot be as detailed and 'scientific' as a peacetime SEA/EIA, the methodology might indeed set the framework for resource allocation (e.g. budgeting, human resources/tasking) and priorities, for successful and environmentally mindful operations. Environmental and human security issues are fundamentally interconnected. Recognizing their multiple interdependencies offers a number of benefits, including fully realizing the potential of long-term trends analysis, avoiding unintended consequences, saving money and time, and producing better results due to greater community buy-in. This paper suggests that any new crises or conflict area should benefit from a coordinated strategic environmental assessment, including not only the needs, vulnerability and resilience of the affected people, society and geographic region, but the additional aggregated impacts (positive and negative) from the various actors involved.

SEA in the Swedish Armed Forces

According to directions from the Swedish Ministry of Defence, the Swedish Armed Forces (SwAF) shall report progress with regards to its work with implementing SEAs in its planning and decision making processes. SwAF has commissioned the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) to conduct a study with the aim to develop a proposal for a customized SEA approach with complementing tools. The proposed SEA model focuses on six main areas which are considered to capture some of the core issues of a strategic nature for SwAF:

- a. Impact on SwAF environmental policy, priority areas in the defence sector, thematic priorities, environmental legislation and other applicable regulations,

- b. Environmental issues that may affect the security situation
- c. Environmental issues affecting personnel and the general population
- d. Environmental effects that may impact the confidence in SwAF and Sweden
- e. Resource use from a life cycle perspective, and;
- f. Protection against financial/liability claims.

The main SEA checklist is supported by four additional checklists regarding (1) the 16 Swedish national environmental objectives, (2) SwAF environmental priority targets, (3) a checklist for strategic environmental assessments modified from the British Ministry of Defence and (4) tentative assessment criteria for 'high' and 'low' environmental impact, developed in the framework of SwAF Medical Intelligence. The SEA model has been tested against two defence processes, and was assessed as being able to capture most of the foreseen strategic issues. The proposed model represents an initial needs assessment (i.e. SEA screening) and is adapted to a time-critical process, where an assessment needs to be carried out within a matter of hours or days. If necessary, the SEA screening can be followed by a detailed SEA survey.

The enabling SEA policy environment and development towards increased cooperation

Lessons learned from the role of the environment in conflict and crises areas such as Mali, Syria, Haiti, East Africa and Afghanistan highlight the need for increased coordination also with respect to environmental issues. Today the EU as well as the UN and OECD/DAC have procedures for SEA in policy and planning. The approaches put forward in these documents are applicable worldwide although there is notable difference of the legislative power of policy and directives. The military is far from the only actor operating in crises and conflict areas. In humanitarian response, the environment is an issue that is supposed to be mainstreamed in all the sector (cluster) activities which so far unfortuna-

tely has not been very successful. However, improvements have been made recently with the updated e.g. SPHERE-standards, some environmental champion clusters such as the shelter cluster, deployment of strategically deployed Environmental Field Advisors, and environmental assessments undertaken by i.e. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For corporate businesses there have been different approaches to engage with environmental impact assessment and improve social corporate responsibility with a focus at the same time to reduce costs (leaning). The benefits are, among others, improved environmental quality, improved employee morale and commitment and lowered risk of non-compliance (of e.g. customer expectations). In order to secure sustainable operations it is crucial for the above entities to collaborate and learn from each other's environmental performance including the respective comparative advantages. In reality, however, getting an overview of the cumulative environmental footprint in a conflict or crisis area is indeed a challenge. Good first steps are EIAs undertaken by UN Peacekeeping in Somalia and Kenya.

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This brief builds upon:

- (1) Liljedahl, B., Darin Mattson, K., Johansson, J., Simonsson, L., Waleij, A. (2014) Strategiska Miljöbedömningar (SMB) i Försvarsmaktens planerings- och beslutsprocesser - Förslag till implementering. FOI-R-3838-SE
- (2) Waleij, A., Tjäder Z., Liljedahl, B., (2014) The gap between the buzz words and excellent performance; lessons drawn from the environmental footprint from military and civilian actors in crises and conflict settings. *In press*.
- (3) Liljedahl, B., Waleij, A., Attwood, J., Martinsson, E., Martinsson, E., (2013) Environmental impact assessment - United National Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) - Proposed expansion of logistics base, Mombasa, Kenya. FOI-S--4672--SE
- (4) Liljedahl, B., Waleij, A., Attwood, J., Martinsson, E., Martinsson, E., (2013) Environmental impact assessment - United National Support Office for AMISOM Camps, Mogadishu Somalia. FOI-S--4673--SE