



# SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT NOTES

ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

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## Social Assessment

*Social assessment (SA) provides a framework for incorporating participation and social analysis into the design and delivery of Bank-assisted operations. Since there are many social variables which potentially affect project impacts and success, SAs must be selective and strategic, and focus on issues of operational relevance. Prioritizing critical issues, and determining how to address them, requires consultation with stakeholders and other forms of data collection and analysis.*

### Introduction

People are the reason for and the means of development. Their cultures, societies, and organizations provide the foundation on which development programs rest. Peoples' varied needs, aspirations, beliefs and expectations are among the factors which shape their response to development activities. In the past these factors have often been analyzed separately, with the result that some issues received attention while others were overlooked.

Today, development practitioners recognize that integrated, systematic social analysis can help ensure that Bank operations achieve their objectives, and that they are sustainable and feasible within their social and institutional context. There is also a growing appreciation that stakeholder participation in the selection and design of projects can improve decision making, strengthen ownership, and help poor and disadvantaged groups.

Social Assessment (SA) is a process which provides an integrated and participatory framework for prioritizing, gathering, analyzing, and using operationally relevant social information. SA is consistent with Bank procedures and supports existing Bank policies

on Resettlement (OD 4.30) and Indigenous Peoples (OD 4.20).

SAs are carried out in a project context in order to:

- identify key stakeholders and establish an appropriate framework for their participation in project selection, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation;
- ensure that project objectives and incentives for change are acceptable to the range of people intended to benefit, and that gender, ethnicity and other social differences are taken into account in project design;
- assess the social impact of investment projects, and where adverse impacts are identified, determine how they can be avoided, minimized, or substantially mitigated; and
- develop the capacity to enable participation, resolve conflict, permit service delivery, and carry out mitigation measures in ways that are socially sound.

SAs may also be carried out in poverty assessments and country economic and sector work (CESW) in order to establish a framework

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*The views expressed in this note are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the World Bank.*

### **Box 1. Who are the Stakeholders?**

The range of stakeholders in Bank projects includes those affected by the outcome, negatively or positively, or those who can affect the outcome of a proposed intervention:

**The Borrower.** The Bank's most immediate client is the government and agencies responsible for project implementation.

**Beneficiaries.** The government's clients include individual people, communities, or organizations expected to benefit from the project or program.

**Affected Groups.** Some individuals, families, communities or organizations may be indirectly or adversely affected by Bank policies or investments. At-risk groups such as the poor and landless, women and children, indigenous people and minority groups are particularly important.

**Other Stakeholders.** Others who have vested interests in developing initiatives include donors, NGOs, religious and community organizations, local authorities, and private sector firms.

for participation and identify priority areas for social analysis. For example, SA may be used to evaluate women's access to resources, or to investigate the relationship between income distribution and land tenure or ethnicity.

### **Assessment Design**

SAs involve consultations with stakeholders and affected groups and other forms of data collection and analysis (see box 1). Deciding how much investigation is needed, what information is required, and how it should be obtained, depends primarily upon the significance or complexity of the issues and the degree of participation needed to gain stakeholder ownership of, and action upon, decisions that are made.

For example, where social factors are complex and social impacts or risks are significant, formal studies generally need to be carried out by consultants as part of project preparation. This does not mean that all problems can be solved in the project preparation process. Where there is considerable uncertainty due to lack of awareness, commitment or capacity, SAs can contribute to the design of projects which build on experience and are responsive to change.

The degree of stakeholder involvement needed also influences assessment design (see box 2). In some cases stakeholders simply provide information and no further interaction is foreseen, but often projects are improved when issues are jointly assessed and agreed, or beneficiaries are given the responsibility for

identifying problems and empowered to find solutions. Where local participation in project design and implementation is expected, participatory data collection and analysis can help build trust and mutual understanding early in the project cycle.

SAs may be carried out by a single social scientist who contacts key stakeholders and identifies and resolves issues; or, where issues are more complex or more systematic participation is needed, by a team which undertakes SA as part of project preparation. SA activities can take place throughout the project cycle, but the integration of social factors into project design works best when it begins at identification.

A variety of methodological tools can contribute to SAs including quantitative surveys, qualitative methods such as beneficiary assessment, and participatory processes such as stakeholder workshops and participatory rural appraisal. All methods should be sensitive to gender, ethnicity and other social differences (see *World Bank Participation Sourcebook, Annex I Methods and Tools*).

### **Box 2. Levels of Participation**

#### **Information Dissemination**

One-way flow of information.

#### **Consultation**

Two-way flow of information.

#### **Collaboration**

Shared control over decision making.

#### **Empowerment**

Transfer of control over decisions and resources.

Regardless of techniques adopted, most SAs carried out during project preparation tend to follow a similar process (see box 3).

### **Initial Overview**

Two of the most critical steps in SA are identifying stakeholders and defining the operationally relevant social issues that may affect project delivery and outcomes. This is generally done by listening to affected groups, experts and government officials who can identify relevant issues and who have knowledge of the larger socio-cultural, political and economic context that can affect project design and implementation. Where issues are limited in number and there is little conflict among stakeholders, information dissemination followed by consultation with

#### **Box 3. Common Questions in SA**

Who are the stakeholders? Are the objectives of the project consistent with their needs, interests and capacities?

What social and cultural factors affect the ability of stakeholders to participate or benefit from the operations proposed?

What will be the impact of the project or program on the various stakeholders, particularly women and vulnerable groups? Are there plans to minimize or mitigate adverse impacts?

What are the social risks (lack of commitment or capacity, incompatibility with existing conditions) which might affect the success of the project or program?

What institutional arrangements are needed for participation and project delivery? Are there adequate plans to build the capacity required at the appropriate level?

affected groups may suffice. However, where there is considerable uncertainty or social issues are complex, systematic and participatory data collection and analysis are generally required (see box 4).

### **Assessment Design**

Where systematic data collection is needed, the second step is to design an appropriate methodology for data collection with the individuals or organizations that will conduct the SA. In most cases it is necessary to define the population to be studied, types of data and

sampling frames to be used, and the arrangements for information dissemination, consultation and participation of affected groups. This information should be summarized in the TOR for project preparation. Selection of contractors generally involves an evaluation of institutional capacity, of experience with beneficiary or affect populations, and of experience with SA methods and tools.

### **Data Gathering**

Gathering data, often in local languages, requires the identification, selection, training and supervision of local researchers and interviewers. Where local institutions lack requisite experience, training and close supervision by experts are required. It is important to pre-test data collection instruments under close supervision to ensure that they are appropriate for both data gatherers and informants, and that operationally relevant information will be obtained. In situations where beneficiary involvement and commitment are needed, participation in data collection and analysis are important to build trust, ownership and local capacity.

### **Data Analysis and Dissemination of Findings**

Analysis should focus on questions of operational importance. Knowledge of the country and Bank procedures helps speed analysis and ensure relevance; however, it is also important that findings be discussed with affected people to ensure that conclusions and recommendations are appropriate. SA designers generally allot too much time to data collection and too little time to analysis of findings and stakeholders discussions of the results and their implications.

### **Incorporating Data Into Project Design**

Useful data are assembled in a format which is relevant to planning and implementation. One method of providing operationally relevant material is through an action plan. Action plans specify what social measures and institutional arrangements are to be incorporated in the project; how they will be carried out and monitored; and how changes which occur as the project is implemented will be addressed and included. The action plan, informed by the data and analysis in the SA,

should be incorporated into the overall project. Sometimes these plans take the form of, or are prepared in conjunction with, resettlement or indigenous peoples development plans.

### **Key Outputs**

SAs carried out during preparation should contribute to: (a) clarification of project objectives and the means to achieve them; (b) a strategy for ongoing participation and for developing commitment and capacity at appropriate levels; and (c) mitigation plans where adverse social impacts are expected. Recommendations on these matters should be discussed with stakeholders and affected groups to ensure that they are appropriate and acceptable.

### **Support For SA**

Social issues are invariably complex. Making realistic assessments about what is possible and how social objectives can be met takes country knowledge, technical skills and time. For these reasons task managers generally seek technical support for SAs from specialists skilled in participatory processes and social analysis. Securing this support early in project identification helps to ensure efficient use of time and to avoid delays later in the project cycle.

The Bank's Technical and Country Departments have strengthened their capacity to provide support for participation and SA, and information and support is available from ENVSP. Training in SA and participatory methods is available to both technical staff and task managers.

### **Documentation**

In order to promote transparency and accountability, Bank procedures encourage the disclosure of information at each stage of the project cycle. To summarize key information in readily accessible form, internal project processing documents should, from an early stage, include information on the social objectives of the project and the means to achieve them. Topics to include are: key social

issues; adverse impacts, if any; mitigation plans as needed; and the type of consultation and participation which has already occurred and which is planned. Project changes resulting from public involvement should be carefully recorded.

### **Building In-Country Capacity**

Participation and social analysis are easier where there is in-country capacity. This capacity is greater where countries have enabling policies which support social objectives such as poverty alleviation and participation, and where bureaucracies are oriented to client or beneficiary-centered development. Professional skills can be strengthened through support for training of in-country social scientists and community development professionals, as well as through institutional strengthening of civil sector research organizations and NGOs.

#### **Box 4. Social Factors Affecting Poverty, Participation and Project Success**

##### **Demographic Factors**

The number of people, their location, population density, etc.

##### **Socio-economic Determinants**

Factors which affect incomes and productivity such as risk aversion in the poorest groups, land tenure, access to productive inputs and markets, family composition, and access to wage opportunities and labor migration.

##### **Social Organization**

Organization and capacity at the household and community levels affecting participation in local level institutions, both informal and formal, as well as access to services, flow of resources, an ability to deliver/receive development goods and services.

##### **Socio-political Context**

Context affecting development goals, control over resources, priorities of implementing agencies and commitment to project objectives.

##### **Needs and Values**

Stakeholder attitudes and values which determine whether development interventions are needed and wanted, or, where conflicts exist, necessitate adequate mechanisms to promote awareness and provide incentives for change.