



Integrated Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka (ISEA - North)

LESSONS LEARNT REPORT

Integrated Strategic Environment Assessment for the Northern Province (ISEA-North) Lessons Learnt Report

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ISEA – North was conducted under the leadership of the Central Environmental Authority (CEA) and Disaster Management Centre (DMC) with the participation of key stakeholder agencies, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

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List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CEA	Central Environmental Assessment
DIA	Disaster Impact Assessment
DMC	Disaster Management Centre
DWLC	Department of Wild Life Conservation
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ESDR	Environment Sustainability and Disaster Resilience
GIS	Geographic Information System
GSMB	Geological Survey and Mines Bureau
IDP	Internally displaced persons
ISEA	Integrated Strategic Environmental Assessment
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LLRC	Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission
NCP	North Central Province
NEA	National Environmental Act
NWS&DB	National Water Supply and Drainage Board
PTF	Presidential Task Force
SCDP	Strategic Cities Development Project
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEO	Strategic Environment Objectives
UDA	Urban Development Authority
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN Environment	United Nations Environment Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WB/IFC	World Bank/International Finance Corporation
WRMP	Western Region Megapolis Planning

Preface

Integration of environmental sustainability and disaster resilience, including climate concerns, is an important and challenging aspect in post-conflict or post-disaster development and reconstruction towards “building back better.” Such opportunities also provide Governments and development partners options to adopt systematic multi-sector and multi-stakeholder inclusive approaches based on informed planning tools to ensure the protection of natural, cultural and heritage resources during the reconstruction phase. In parallel, such approaches can be used to incorporate climate and disaster risk considerations more effectively.

This was the post-conflict and post-disaster challenge faced by the Government of Sri Lanka, at the end of a 30-year long protracted armed conflict that devastated the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Over 330,000 displaced people had to be resettled. The coastal belt of the Northern Province had also been heavily impacted previously by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.

UN Development Programme and UN Environment joined forces with several Government Ministries/Agencies to develop a framework for the sustainable and resilient reconstruction of the Northern Province. This approach was named the “Integrated Strategic Environment Assessment for the Northern Province of Sri Lanka” (ISEA-North).

The ISEA-North started in the latter part of 2009 was completed in 2012 while the final report was released in 2014. The maps, data and recommendations were made available to agencies from the inception as an when the materials were ready, to help the reconstruction process in the Northern Province.

Five years after the implementation of the ISEA-North in Sri Lanka, UN Environment is implementing a new project with the support of IUCN Sri Lanka to learn from the ISEA process in the country, where it originated.

The aim is to share the ISEA experience within Sri Lanka so that the full use of ISEA-North could be realized. At the same time the project is planning to strengthen national capacities to implement ISEAs in two other countries: Cote d’Ivoire and Nepal.

Funded through the UN Development Account as a two-year south-south cooperation, this initiative, “Enabling sustainable and resilient development planning in post-crisis countries by mainstreaming environment and risk reduction into development planning (2015-2017)”, was developed with the objective to share best practices and challenges faced when applying ISEAs among the three countries and in two regions, Africa and Asia.

This report summarises the material collected by IUCN Sri Lanka on the ISEA experience in Sri Lanka in the form of a case study. Initial findings were shared and validated at national and district levels. The material presented needs to be referenced along with the Final ISEA-North Report (<https://goo.gl/kJRV5N>) and the “Map Compendium “ that comprises of a full set of maps related to the ISEA-North process (<https://goo.gl/YcwFbq>).

Executive Summary

This report discusses the lessons that emerged during the development and implementation of the “Integrated Strategic Environment Assessment for the Northern Province (ISEA-North)”, which was developed as a planning tool to mainstream environment sustainability and disaster resilience in the post-conflict development of the Northern Province in Sri Lanka. The active participation of key stakeholder agencies provided the “integration” ability.

The ISEA-North, which started in November 2009 was completed in 2014, to support the “building back better” process by saying “yes” to development, but with adequate environmental “safeguards.” The multi-sector and multi-stakeholder approach used in the ISEA-North was considered as a replicable model for post-conflict/disaster recovery programmes by the United Nations. In 2015, the UN Development Account allocated funds to UN Environment and IUCN to document the ISEA-North experience, several years later. In Sri Lanka, the context it is revisiting the ISEA-North implementation experience is to improve future actions and designs of any new efforts.

Among the key findings, it was clear that the joint leadership provided by the Central Environment Authority (CEA) and the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) made it possible to combine environment management and disaster resilience in the Northern development and to access the support from UNDP and UNEP.

The systematic approach was well received in the country during the ISEA-North formulation, and covered three phases: (i) the baseline phase (generating and combining old and new information); (ii) the development phase (compiling proposed development plans,

reviewing potential conflicts between development and conservation, adding disaster potentials including climate change) and; (iii) the assessment phase (agencies together prioritizing land uses, discussing constraints on different options and agreeing on optimal land uses). It is a unique and a challenging approach after a massive disturbance. The “Opportunity Map”, one of the key products of ISEA-North is an effective tool for decision making and project approvals.

The ISEA frequently competed with the notion to rebuild fast and resettle the affected. As such, ISEA process continuously engaged decision makers to explain the value and progress. It worked well at the national level including the endorsement by the Presidential Task Force (PTF) for rebuilding North.

ISEA-North information was used extensively at the national level in declaring archaeological sites, national parks, location of resettlements and cities, etc. This success led to the adoption of the ISEA approach to one of the largest developments, namely, the “Western Region Megapolis Planning.”

Mainstreaming of ISEA – North findings and recommendation at district and provincial levels was less than expected, partly due to the inability to legalize the ISEA-North recommendations. Targeted advocacy and engagement of senior Government officials and policy makers on ISEA and staff capacity building were two key factors contributed for less adoption of ISEA. Continued training and capacity development may have improved the success of ISEA-North. Nevertheless, even in year 2016, the ISEA-North materials are considered useful by district level officials. They recognize the value of ISEA outputs in the post conflict period to ensure sustainability and resilience of affected populations.

1. Introduction

In May 2009, following the cessation of over 30 years of conflict in Sri Lanka, there was significant need and political pressure to jump-start the reconstruction and development process in the Northern Province of the country and to deliver immediate development benefits to the affected communities. Along with the urgency of reconstruction, including resettlement of displaced populations, it was recognized that reconstruction and new development should not cause negative environmental impacts and jeopardize the

long-term sustainability of development in the Northern Province. Moreover, new development offered an opportunity to incorporate nature-based solutions and disaster resilience considerations in planning.

The proposed rapid resettlement and development included investments in infrastructure, roads, railways, telecommunications, among others, as well as restoring public administration and planning systems to stimulate investment and growth.



Figure 1: At the end of 30 years of armed conflict

This rapid development also brought new challenges to natural resource availability, its priority uses and long-term sustainability

was a need for a technically sound, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to facilitate implementation of the proposed

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