The Integrated Safeguards System of the African Development Bank

The African Development Bank Group adopted an Integrated Safeguards System (ISS) in December 2013 with the aim of ensuring the social and environmental sustainability of the projects the Bank supports through the protection of the environment and people from the potentially adverse impacts of projects. Through the ISS, the Bank also helps borrowers/clients to strengthen their safeguards systems and develop their capacity to manage environmental and social risks.

ISS components

The ISS consists of four parts: (i) an overall Policy Statement; (ii) five Operational Safeguards (OSs); (iii) technical guidance in the form of Environmental and Social Assessment Procedures (ESAP); and (iv) a set of Integrated E&S Impact Assessment (IESIA) guidance notes.

More information publicly available at https://esa.afdb.org/pages/documents
With the approval of the Integrated Safeguards System (ISS), the Board of Directors of the AfDB mandated Independent Development Evaluation (IDev) to conduct an Evaluation of the ISS’s effectiveness in achieving the safeguards objectives four years after its adoption.


The Independent Evaluation of the ISS builds on that analysis with the aim of assessing the relevance and robustness of the ISS design; the efficiency of the systems, process, resourcing and incentives in place; and emerging effectiveness in achieving the safeguards objectives.

Disclaimer about this brief

This document builds on the key findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation and highlights some practices related to environmental and social management of development interventions to inspire their use and replication by project teams, both borrowers and clients and Bank’s staff. It is based on information reported in Bank’s and borrowers/clients’ reports. Factual issues have been verified with the Bank Management, but not in all cases IDev verified on the ground the actual results of the environmental and social mitigation measures.
ISS BRIEF 1: Cascading down Regional Strategic Environmental and Social Assessments (SESA) to support management of E&S risks of investments on the ground

What is SESA?

Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment is a tool to assess the E&S risks and likely impacts of policy-related lending, budget support or a range of programmatic lending plans with wider E&S footprints.

SESA is distinct from E&S Impact Assessment (ESIA) applied to individual investment projects. SESA entails a broader, upstream and long-term strategic perspective. A SESA should be highly participatory, iterative and ultimately focused on defining an institutional solution to managing potential E&S risks. The key objective is to examine ex-ante alternative options and assess the potential E&S implications – positive and adverse - of the proposed program-based operation and the institutional options for the monitoring and management of its E&S impacts over time.

A SESA usually requires the design of an E&S management framework (ESMF) to describe how E&S impacts will be addressed in each individual project site. Such individual sub-projects or components under the program are require to develop site or component specific ESIAs and/or ESMPs depending on their E&S risk profile.

The AfDB’s Integrated Safeguards System (ISS) requires regional or sectoral investment programs and policy or budget-support operations to be categorized according to their E&S risks, and SESA to be applied for those with high and medium E&S risks (ISS Guidance on implementation of OS1, page 13). SESA is well adapted and applied to the Bank’s recent portfolio of large regional infrastructure programs with wider E&S footprints.

Using SESA for E&S medium- and high-risk program-sector operations could contribute to assisting countries to transition to green growth paths.

1. Description of the context of the intervention

The Bank approved a Regional Program to enhance drought resilience and improve sustainable livelihoods of communities in six countries in the Horn of Africa. The program was classified as E&S medium-risk (Category 2) since some activities could have some negative impacts, such as building or rehabilitating water and livestock infrastructure, increased risk of accidents and disease transmission, among others.

This brief is focused on the implementation of the program in one of the six countries, where the main activities prioritized were related to natural resources management; improvement of livestock infrastructure and management; and capacity building.
2. Environmental and social safeguards issues

The program was approved based on a regional SESA and national ESMFs.

The national ESMF details the E&S mitigation and adaptation measures and includes a guide for sub-projects screening and E&S assessment, in compliance with the country environmental and health & safety regulations and the Bank ISS.

At the level of county, each prioritized investment went through an ESIA and developed an ESMP. In total, more than 140 individual ESIAs and ESMPs were elaborated for small and medium-scale infrastructure, such as water infrastructures (boreholes, water pans and others), irrigation schemes, sale yards, hay sheds and pasture sites (livestock holding grounds and quarantine stations).
3. Overall learning from this experience

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses &amp; Challenges</th>
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<td>• The E&amp;S analyses of each investment were informed by a wider E&amp;S county and national analysis, along with a regional assessment considering upstream E&amp;S impacts.</td>
<td>• In spite of the E&amp;S analysis conducted for the national component, there were still challenges to fully consider upstream water users in the compensation packages of the ESIs and ESMPs of certain infrastructures.</td>
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<td>• The ESIA process of individual investments was followed-up after construction with the creation of community committees to manage the infrastructures funded.</td>
<td>• More communication should be done to translate the findings of the SESA (regional) and ESMF (national level) to the county and local levels.</td>
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4. Related IDEV’s evaluation recommendation (2019)

Piloting Strategic Environmental and Social Assessments (SESAs) for medium- and high-risk sector program-based operations (PBOs). Provide additional guidance on the E&S screening and categorization of PBOs, and further develop how to conduct SESAs.