

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT, FROM RIO-92 TO RIO + 20 AND BEYOND

LUIS E. SÁNCHEZ¹; PETER CROAL^{2 3}

Introduction

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as Rio 92 or Earth Summit) was a landmark gathering concerning the international consolidation and acknowledgement of environmental impact assessment (EIA) as a universal approach to inform and influence decision-making on crucial socio-environmental matters. Enforced by legislation in 191 countries (Morgan, 2012), adopted by donors of international development projects, by multilateral banks and by a growing number of private financial institutions, EIA has been accepted as a solid decision support process.

What, then, could be expected, in terms of EIA, from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference)? This paper intends to explore the rationale for a reaffirmation of the role of impact assessment (IA) in sustainable development due to its unique contribution to publicly accountable decision-making. We start by highlighting the most significant references to EIA in the main documents resulting from the Rio 92 Conference. Then, we highlight a few key developments in the IA field that took place after the Earth Summit, in particular the diffusion of strategic environmental assessment (SEA). In the following section, we review one of the major conceptual assumptions of the Rio+20 Conference, green economy, and its far from unanimous meanings to argue, in the final section, that SEA, and other forms of IA, should play a role in any possible transition to a greener economy. We endeavour to address what we understand to be a major flaw a key gap in the Rio+20 process and its outcome document: a linkage between its objectives and the decision-making process.

¹ Escola Politécnica. University of São Paulo. Address: Av. Prof. Mello Moraes, 2373. 05508-900. São Paulo, SP, Brazil. E-mail: lsanchez@usp.br

² Canadian International Development Agency. Manager. Environmental Integration. Environmental Sustainability and Responsible Investment (ESRI). Strategic Policy and Performance Branch. Address: 200 promenade du Portage, Québec, QC G1R 5K5, Canada. The opinions expressed by the author are personal and do not reflect the policies and position of CIDA or the government of Canada.

Environmental impact assessment in the Rio 92 outcomes

The Rio 92 Conference stimulated national governments, international organizations, and the business sector to acknowledge the role of impact assessment in the quest for sustainable development. In the run-up period, a number of countries have reviewed or established their national environmental protection legislation to include provisions for EIA. The Conference has resulted in three documents very important for the consolidation of EIA:

(1) Principle 17 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states: *Environmental impact assessment, as a national instrument, shall be undertaken for proposed activities that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment and are subject to a decision of a competent national authority.*

(2) Article 14 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, titled *Impact Assessment and Minimizing Adverse Impacts*, establishes that:

1. Each Contracting Party, as far as possible and as appropriate, shall: (a) Introduce appropriate procedures requiring environmental impact assessment of its proposed projects that are likely to have significant adverse effects on biological diversity with a view to avoiding or minimizing such effects and, where appropriate, allow for public participation in such procedures; (b) Introduce appropriate arrangements to ensure that the environmental consequences of its programs and policies that are likely to have significant adverse impacts on biological diversity are duly taken into account; (...).

(3) Agenda 21 refers to EIA in several different chapters.

A fourth document that arose from the Rio Conference, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, does mention impact assessment, but not at the same level of prominence as the other three documents. Under Article 4.1.f, Commitments, this Convention calls parties to *Take climate change considerations into account, to the extent feasible, in their relevant social, economic and environmental policies and actions, and employ appropriate methods, for example impact assessments, formulated and determined nationally, with a view to minimizing adverse effects on the economy, on public health and on the quality of the environment, of projects or measures undertaken by them to mitigate or adapt to climate change.*

The Rio documents also have been influenced by (?) spilled over other important preexisting international conventions. Both the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971) and the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979) adopted in their respective Conference of Parties recommendations and guidelines relative to the adoption of EIA as a tool for helping parties to meet the conventions' goals.

As well, the Rio 92 Conference created a momentum that inspired other governmental, intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and business initiatives. The World Bank first adopted its policy on environmental assessment in 1989 and updated

it in September 1991. The United Nations Economic Commission on Europe and member states adopted, also in 1991, a Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, known as the Espoo Convention. This UN organization also promoted the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, which came into force in 1998. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development, which was founded on the eve of the Rio Conference “to ensure the business voice was heard at the forum”, as one of its first initiatives, publishing in 1996 the brochure “Environmental Assessment: a Business Perspective” (WBCD, 1996).

In spite of this success story, it does have shortcomings. One flaw gap in the outcomes of the original Rio Conference concerns the governance of global commons – the atmosphere, the oceans and the poles. Human activities in the Antarctica are addressed by the Madrid Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty, which entered into force in 1998, though its effectiveness remains unclear (Wood, 2003).

Another flaw is found in the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which does not consider EIA as a tool for promoting reductions on the emissions of greenhouse gases but only as a consideration in designing strategies of adaptation.

Foremost, no convention signed at the Rio Earth Summit or other international meeting fully tackles the fundamental challenge put forward by the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987, p. 313):

The ability to choose policy paths that are sustainable requires that the ecological dimensions of policy be considered at the same time as the economic, trade, energy, agricultural, industrial and other dimensions - in the same agendas and in the same national and international institutions. That is the chief institutional challenge of the 1990s.

Unfortunately this challenge has not been met since 1992.. The reasons why it happens will be discussed below.

Development of environmental impact assessment 1992-2012

The fact that EIA is legally (?) required in most countries is an indicator of the concept's success and utility (nonetheless its potential lack of effectiveness). EIA has been evolving after the Earth Summit. New countries added legislation on the matter and others reviewed or updated their previous legislation.

One significant development in impact assessment was its adoption by financial institutions. As the World Bank pioneered the use and promotion of environmental assessment, other multilateral development banks followed it and progressively approved their own policies and procedures largely influenced by the experience. A refinement of this EIA approach had happened in the World Bank Group, when the branch which specializes in financing private projects, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) launched guidelines for the environmental and social assessment of private sector projects in 2006 (updated in 2011). In addition, commercial banks launched in 2003 the Equator Principles, a set of voluntary commitments by financial institutions to systematically incorporate the results of environmental and social assessments into

certain types of credit decisions. Initially supported by ten banks, in June 2012 more than 70 private and public banks as well as export credit agencies supported the Equator Principles.

Another important phenomenon was the emergence and consolidation of strategic environmental assessment (SEA). Defined as the assessment of policies, programs, and plans (PPPs), SEA has been tuned into law in the European Union, in China and in a number of other countries and is being applied by donors of international cooperation projects and programs. SEA has resulted in a burgeoning literature in the last decade (Partidário, 2011).

In the international arena, efforts to disseminate and provide the bases of SEA's implementation are promoted by development agencies. A recent noteworthy initiative is supported by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

At the OECD DAC High Level meeting of 21 May, 2008, members adopted the *Policy Statement on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*. DAC recognizes that poor people suffer more than everyone when policies, plans, or programs are poorly designed and implemented. Such suffering is compounded by the risks posed by environmental degradation and climate change. The inability of central government planning normally amplifies the vulnerabilities imposed on the poor due to existing environmental conditions. The quality of development planning will be affected significantly unless careful attention is to be given to the relationship between policy development and the environment. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as well as the yet uncertain Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) can also be compromised if the principles of sustainable development, through the application of SEA, are not made part of the development policies and programs. Therefore, the DAC Policy Statement on SEA provides OECD members with a series of commitments on SEA use in developing countries, especially on topics as SEA capacity building, the application of SEA, the effects of SEA on development planning, and the ways SEA could be used in climate change issues, ecosystems goods and services, conflict prevention, and disaster management.

The SEA use in OECD member governments and partner countries has been growing since development assistance is increasingly being provided at the level of policies, plans, and programs, rather than through individual projects. Partner country institutions and systems for the most part are the proper place of these initiatives. Therefore, to respect this development assistance trend, the *Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness* was adopted by the donor community in 2005. The Declaration is very clear about how SEA is to be used. It calls upon donors and their partners to "...develop and apply common approaches for strategic environmental assessment at sector and national levels.". Clearly, at the highest level of OECD governance, SEA is recognized as an intrinsic planning tool to support development initiatives. This recognition was backed by the publication in 2006 by the OECD of the *DAC Guidance on Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment* (OECD, 2006). This document was developed through extensive collaboration among DAC members, developing country partners, United

Nations Environment Program (UNEP), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and a host of different development institutions and agencies.

During the last ten years a growing number of developing countries have enacted policy, legislation or regulations that dictate how SEA is to be used in development cooperation. The publication of various OECD SEA instruments such as the SEA policy and guidance has amplified the need for SEA in partner countries. However, it is the recent activity in the extractive and energy sectors in development countries, which have created the need for applying SEA. More developing countries blessed with natural resource realize that responsible and sustainable natural resource management are capable of provide long term gains in social, economic, and environmental issues for their respective societies through SEA's application. SEA will also help developing countries to determine if policy and legislative gaps do exist in a particular sector, or what kind of institutional capacity issues should be faced . SEA also builds public support for policy making and can enable transboundary cooperation around shared natural resources. Unique opportunities are now being created for improving policy, plan, and program making by integrating environmental and related social considerations into the highest levels of government decisions. This also provides new ways to reach consensus on development priorities and mechanisms among various development stakeholder groups.

Finally, at same token important developments have occurred regarding public participation in the IA process,. The Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration calls for enhanced public involvement in environmental matters, including decision-making. It goes hand in hand with Principle 17, since public participation is one of the pillars of IA and promoting access to information, one of its goals . According to Principle 10: *Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.*

Principle 10 was applied by the UN Economic Commission for Europe in the design of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, approved in 1998. Under this Convention, decision-making ought is to be informed by environmental impact assessment which, in turn, needs to be coupled with public consultation procedures.

The participation of indigenous peoples in the process is a matter of particular concern and it brings specific challenges. The International Labor Organization approved in 1989 thought the Convention 169, a legally binding international instrument which deals specifically with the rights of native and tribal peoples. it is open to ratification. In fact it gained force in 1990 after Mexico, following Norway, had assigned it. However, it has been ratified only by 20 countries, mostly in Latin America.

It was followed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, approved by the General Assembly in 2007. Both documents advanced the need for Free, Prior and Informed Consent to be obtained from indigenous people by governments employing culturally appropriate consultation approaches. As applied to impact assessment, requirements and guidance for taking seriously indigenous peoples rights and interests, are the subject of a World Bank Safeguard Policy and an IFC Performance Standard.

The Rio+20 preparatory process and its outcomes: implications for environmental impact assessment

A first intergovernmental conference to assess progress since Rio 1992 was held by the United Nations ten years after in Johannesburg. Although another Conference ten years later was not initially planned, Brazilian government advanced a proposal to the UN to host a new Summit to assess progress towards sustainable development. Accepted by the UN, the meeting was named *UN Conference on Sustainable Development* (UNCSD). This marked an interesting shift in terminology since the 1972 UN Conference on the Environment held in Stockholm -, which was the first major intergovernmental gathering on environmental issues. Twenty years later, the Rio Conference was labeled “Environment and Development”. Then in 2012 the term “environment” disappeared and instead of that the conference focus was on “sustainable development”.

Although intending to attract dozens of heads of state and several thousand participants, the Conference goals were extremely ambiguous when compared to the 1992 Earth Summit. This is not surprising since, to a large extent as a result of Rio 92, high-level intergovernmental meetings on environmental issues multiplied enormously. Both the climate and the biological diversity conventions engendered periodical official meetings or Conference of Parties (CoPs). In these meetings negotiations take place to devise strategies or to agree on rules to their respective objectives. The Kyoto Protocol, establishing greenhouse gases emissions targets, was signed in one of those CoPs. The proliferation of CoPs and other sorts of environmentally-oriented intergovernmental meetings is a post-Earth Summit trend and unknown as such in international scale pre-1992. Therefore, Rio+20 could not expect to have a similar effect on the international environment and sustainable development agenda as did the 1992 Conference.

Notwithstanding this context, many environmental stakeholders had high dreams. A strong political commitment to the protection of the oceans and a new and strengthened global environmental governance structure, including a higher status for the UN Environment Program (UNEP), were among such expectations. Impact assessment scholars and practitioners also had expectations that, in the final and official outcome document, the importance of EIA could be reinforced and especially that SEA could be recognized as a tool for achieving sustainable development or for supporting the transition to a green economy.

The International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA), a nongovernmental organization registered with the UN Economic and Social Council (Ecosoc) compounded by a network of professionals and researchers, submitted a short document stressing the role of impact assessment as a contribution to the “compilation document” - an initial aggregation of submissions intended to contribute to the Conference’s outcome document. Some key considerations advanced by IAIA about the role of impact assessment in general and strategic environmental assessment in particular are:

- it helps to ensure that high level policies, programs, and projects are designed and implemented with more sustainable outcomes while also reducing poverty and advancing green economy objectives;
- it helps to ensure that development activities of individual sectors complement each other rather than undermine themselves by providing a systematic means for minimizing potential adverse outcomes and maximizing benefits early in policy, program, and project design;
- it can alert decision makers to risks, improve community engagement, incorporate traditional knowledge, and facilitate cooperation across sectors and boundaries before strategic decisions had been taken.

Governments and international organizations also supported impact assessment, including Canada, Ghana, and the World Bank. However, by no means has SEA or IA in general been recognized as such in the outcome document.

From an initial document, which gathered and assembled contributions from governments, international organizations, and major civil groups, a draft document has evolved through several discussions. In the Rio Convention Centre, more than 20,000 people - government delegations, UN staff, major groups’ representatives and journalists - met from the 15th to the 22nd of June, 2012. A special pavilion hosted side events promoted by governments and major groups, while open and closed meetings took place in other rooms. Hundreds of side events were also promoted by businesses, academia and civil society, including a “People’s Summit for Social and Environmental Justice” held at the very same place of the “Global Forum” in 1992, the civil society meeting.

To many observers, especially from civil society organizations, the outcome of the Rio+20 was disappointingly modest. The final declaration entitled “The Future We Want” - a 53 page long document containing 283 paragraphs (<http://www.unccd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>) (Box 1) – was considered by many a weak and uninspiring document. Indeed, NGOs dubbed it as “The Future We Don’t Want” (<http://rio20.net/en/documentos/the-future-we-don%E2%80%99t-want-some-thoughts-after-rio20>).

 Box 1 – Structure of the Rio+20 outcome document

Chapter	Length
I. Our common vision	13 paragraphs
II. Renewing political commitment	
A. Reaffirming the Rio Principles and past action plans	5 paragraphs
B. Advancing integration, implementation and coherence: assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development	23 paragraphs
C. Engaging major groups and other stakeholders	14 paragraphs
III. Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication	19 paragraphs
IV. Institutional framework for sustainable development	
A. Strengthening the three dimensions of sustainable development	2 paragraphs
B. Strengthening intergovernmental arrangements for sustainable development	10 paragraphs
C. Environmental pillar in the context of sustainable development	4 paragraphs
D. International financial institutions and United Nations operational activities	6 paragraphs
E. Regional, national, subnational and local levels	7 paragraphs
V. Framework for action and follow-up	
A. Thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues	141 paragraphs
B. Sustainable development goals	7 paragraphs
VI. Means of implementation	1 paragraph
A. Finance	16 paragraphs
B. Technology	8 paragraphs
C. Capacity-building	4 paragraphs
D. Trade	2 paragraphs
E. Registry of commitments	1 paragraph

Disagreement is found regarding many key issues, including “green economy” - a central concept at this Conference. Not only is its meaning not widely agreed, but its rationale is not shared by a number of CSOs (Bosselmann, Brown and Mackey, 2012) and even among UN bodies, as exemplified by contrasting the relatively optimistic view and proposals of UNEP (2011) with those advanced in UNRISD (2012), which calls upon careful consideration of its social dimensions.

The Rio+20 outcome document repeats previous commitments, as in the example of paragraph 99: *We encourage action at the regional, national, subnational and local levels to promote access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters, as appropriate.* This is a short version of Principle 10 of Rio Declaration. Other paragraphs sound quite cynical, e.g. *We reaffirm that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and we express profound alarm that emissions of greenhouse gases*

continue to rise globally (190), in face of the several decades of sustained unsuccessful attempts to reach an agreement to curb greenhouse gases emissions

The outcome document has only one direct mention to impact assessment, under the “Oceans and Seas” subsection (part of V. A. Thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues): *We also commit to enhance actions to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems from significant adverse impacts, including through the effective use of impact assessments* (paragraph 168). A related topic is the recognition of the importance of technology assessment, under the “Means of Implementation” section: *We recognize the importance of strengthening international, regional and national capacities in research and technology assessment, especially in view of the rapid development and possible deployment of new technologies that may also have unintended negative impacts, in particular on biodiversity and health, or other unforeseen consequences.* (paragraph 275).

Technology assessment (TA) is one form of impact assessment which, for many years, had been stimulated by the Office of Technology Assessment of the US Congress. Although this office was closed in 1995 (see <http://www.princeton.edu/~ota/>) and political support for TA dramatically decreased worldwide, it is still seen by academics as a powerful tool for supporting decision-making procedures (Vanclay and Porter, 2009).

Although these paragraphs are a welcome reaffirmation of the importance and role of IA, they are extremely timid both in scope and reach. In addition, the generic wording of these and other paragraphs of the outcome document allows for multiple (though possibly contradictory) interpretations that will have to be explored and debated.

The Rio+20 outcome document lacks the desirable connections with the decision making processes. Governments and private agents take daily decisions that impact our collective future. There are tools and procedures for assessing to which extent those decisions advance sustainable development objectives. Impact assessment provides such linkages in a structured and accountable way.

Hence, one outcome of the Rio +20 Conference that has potential implications to IA in general and SEA in particular is the agreement to start a process of establishing Sustainable Development Objectives (SDO). Although not a part of the initial set of goals of the Conference, SDO were incorporated in the agenda after a proposal has been made by Colombia. At a certain point during the pre-Conference period, there was some hope that a set of core objectives could be adopted at the Conference, but the challenges of reaching an agreement on the objectives that should have been pursued rapidly became clear. Since the deadline to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is 2015, there was time to agree on new sustainable development objectives.

A key difference between the SDO and MDG process – and a reason why agreement on the SDO is and will remain difficult – is that the former are intended to apply to every country, while the latter are goals for the developing countries only. SDO are potentially important to SEA because policies, plans, and programs (or PPPs, the subject of strategic assessment) could be assessed in terms of how do they converge to or deviate from reaching the SDO.

Impact assessment in the transition to a greener economy and the way ahead

Regardless of an agreement on the meaning of a green economy, or on the need and urgency to set out a shift from growth, as the driver of development, to degrowth, as a means to reduce mankind's ecological footprint (Jackson, 2011), changes in consumption patterns must also be made (Munasinghe, 2012). Impact assessment and especially strategic environmental assessment can tackle with the still unaddressed "chief institutional challenge of the 1990s" (in the words of the Brundtland report) of choosing sustainable policy paths. As the effectiveness of SEA is being better understood through theoretical proposals and lessons from case studies (Loayza, 2010; Doren et al, 2013), it has been proving valuable in providing fresher and contemporary approaches to development.

That the Rio+20 Conference has not acknowledged the role and potential contribution of SEA to policy choices is something regrettable. Notwithstanding, work is now being done in development agencies and developing countries to show how SEA can increase (?)green growth initiatives. In three cases, out of the six UNEP's "enabling conditions" to pave pathways to a green economy (UNEP, 2011), SEA can be especially relevant:

- (1) to prioritize government investment and spending in areas that stimulate greening of economic sectors;
- (2) to limit government spending in areas that deplete natural capital;
- (3) to employ taxes and market-based instruments to promote green investment and innovation.

In addition, there is a growing business case for both project EIA and SEA. Many companies, all over the world, both in developed and developing countries, are struggling against obstacles in obtaining approval for new projects, especially in the natural resources sector. The emerging concept of "social license" conveys the idea that in some cases a government approval is not enough and that the consent of host communities is needed to establish long-term and strong relationships (Prno and Slocombe, 2012) that enables continuous operation.

Impact assessment aims at facilitating more accountable and transparent decision-making thought building in its environmental, social and economic consequences. The main challenges ahead are:

- (1) Maintaining acquired gains and building on progress achieved to date by showcasing the many contributions of IA to better decisions, i.e. decisions where IA makes a difference, as avoiding impacts and achieving effective mitigation and compensation.
- (2) Expanding IA to encompass initiatives potentially affecting global commons - in particular the oceans and seas beyond the coastal zone.

- (3) Consolidating SEA in jurisdictions where it has already proved successful and expanding its acceptance into places where its contribution has not been yet fully appreciated.
- (4) Expanding both project and strategic assessments beyond the perspective of “doing no harm” to “doing good” or “ensuring net gain”.

But the biggest challenge of all remains what the Brundtland Commission has expressed: mainstreaming sustainability into policy making.

Conflict at all levels can no longer be accepted as part of the development and decision-making process. The continuing global economic crisis and the fast deterioration of ecosystem's goods and services, call for all actors in the decision-making and development process to use impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment more aggressively. The use of IA or SEA is no longer about protection of the environment; rather it represents a shift in the way business and policy making that respect global realities are made. SEA and IA should show that profits can be made, jobs created, and, at same time, that a balance can be achieved among societal needs and the planet's ability to provide them.

References

- BOSELNANN, K.; BROWN, P.G.; MACKEY, B. Enabling a flourishing Earth: Challenges for the green economy, opportunity for global governance. *Review of European Community & International Law*, v.21, n.1, p. 23-30. 2012.
- DOREN, D. van; DRIESSEN, P.P.J.; SCHIJF, B.; RUNHAAR, H.A.C. Evaluating the substantive effectiveness of SEA: Towards a better understanding. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, v. 38, p. 120-130, 2013.
- JACKSON, T. Societal transformations for a sustainable economy. *Natural Resources Forum*, v. 35, n.3, p. 155-164. 2011.
- LOAYZA, F. Strategic environmental assessment in policy and sector reform : conceptual model and operational guidance. Washington: The World Bank. 2010.
- MORGAN, R.K. Environmental impact assessment: the state of the art. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, v. 30, n.1, p. 5-14. 2012.
- MUNASHINGHE, M. Millenium Consumption Goals (MCGs) for Rio+20 and beyond: A practical step towards global sustainability. *Natural Resources Forum*, v. 36, p. 201-212. 2012.
- OECD, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. *Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment: Good Practice Guidance for Development Cooperation*. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2006.
- PARTIDÁRIO, M. Strategic Environmental Assessment. Key Citation Series. Fargo: IAIA. 2009.

PRNO, J.; SLOCOMBE, D.S. Exploring the origins of 'social license to operate' in the mining sector: Perspectives from governance and sustainability theories. *Resources Policy* v. 37, n.3, p. 346-357. 2012.

THIAW, I.; MUNANG, R. Rio+20 outcomes recognize the value of biodiversity and ecosystems: Implications for global, regional and national policy. *Ecosystem Services*, v. 1, p. 121-122. 2012.

UNEP, United Nations Environment Program. *Towards a Green Economy. Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication. A Synthesis for Policy Makers*. Nairobi: UNEP, 2011.

UNRISD, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. *Social Dimensions of Green Economy*. Geneva: UNRISD. 2012.

VANCLAY, F.; PORTER, A. *Technology Assessment. Key Citation Series*. Fargo: IAIA. 2009.

WBCSD, World Business Council for Sustainable Development. *Environmental Assessment: A Business Perspective*. Geneva, WBCSD. 1996.

WCED, World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

WOOD, K. The Uncertain Fate of the Madrid Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty in the Maritime Area. *Ocean Development & International Law*, v. 34, n. 2, p. 139-159. 2003

Submetido em: 15/08/2012

Aceito em: 11/09/2012

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT, FROM RIO-92 TO RIO + 20 AND BEYOND

LUIS E. SÁNCHEZ; PETER CROAL

Abstract: The 1992 Rio Earth Summit was of paramount importance in the consolidation and international dissemination of environmental impact assessment, officially recognized as a tool for informed decision-making towards sustainable development (Principle 17, Rio Declaration) and for protection of biodiversity (Article 14, Convention on Biological Diversity). A significant development afterwards was the strengthening of strategic environmental assessment in the design of policies, plans and programs. Both forms of impact assessment can establish the necessary connections between one goal of the Rio+20 Conference – reaching an agreement on the transition to a green economy - and the underpinning decision making processes. Although the Rio+20 Summit has faced challenges to acknowledge its potential, impact assessment should be strengthened in support of both government and business decisions.

Keywords: Impact assessment. Strategic environmental assessment. Rio+20 Conference. Environmental decision making

Resumo: A Cúpula da Terra de 1992, no Rio de Janeiro, teve a maior importância na consolidação e disseminação internacional da avaliação de impacto ambiental, oficialmente reconhecida como uma ferramenta de auxílio a decisões rumo ao desenvolvimento sustentável (Princípio 17 da Declaração do Rio) e para a proteção da biodiversidade (Artigo 14 da Convenção da Diversidade Biológica). Um desenvolvimento posterior significativo foi o fortalecimento da avaliação ambiental estratégica na preparação de políticas, planos e programas. Ambas as formas de avaliação de impacto têm a capacidade de estabelecer os necessários vínculos entre o objetivo declarado da Conferência Rio+20 - alcançar um acordo quando à transição para uma economia verde - e os processos decisórios subjacentes. Embora a Rio+20 tenha encontrado dificuldades para reconhecer seu potencial, a avaliação de impactos deveria ser fortalecida em apoio a decisões governamentais e privadas.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação de impacto. Avaliação ambiental estratégica. Rio+20. Decisões ambientais.

Resumen: La Cumbre de la Tierra de 1992 fue de la más grande importancia en la consolidación y diseminación de la evaluación de impacto ambiental, oficialmente reconocida como una

herramienta para la toma de decisiones informada hacia el desarrollo sostenible (Principio 17, Declaración de Río) y para la protección de la biodiversidad (Artículo 14, Convención de la Diversidad Biológica). Un avance posterior importante fue el fortalecimiento de la evaluación ambiental estratégica en la preparación de políticas, planes y programas. Ambas formas de evaluación de impacto son capaces de establecer los necesarios vínculos entre un objetivo declarado de la Conferencia Río+20 - llegar a un acuerdo sobre la transición para una economía verde - y los procesos decisorios subyacentes. Aunque la Cumbre Río+20 tenga encontrado dificultades en reconocer su potencial, la evaluación de impactos debería ser fortalecida en soporte de decisiones gubernamentales y privadas.

Palabras clave: Evaluación de impacto. Evaluación ambiental estratégica. Conferencia Río+20. Toma de decisiones ambientales.
