

Therefore, it can be foreseen that EIA will be effective and binding only for the small private sector projects. Governmental projects and the big private sector actors, who can influence the situation, might manage to find solutions that lead to their projects being authorized. It could be argued that having two opportunities for appeal is a device that can be used to ensure that rejected projects are authorized. Thus, if a proponent failed to win the case against GCEA, there would still be another opportunity of appeal against the licensing authority (which is not defined in the EPA).

In addition to the above, the current situation of the EIA Unit and GCEA in general is not comfortable. Space, staff and resources are lacking. Also, there is a lack of updated information. Recently, government departments were provided with access to the Internet. Nevertheless, it is presently unavailable to the private sector and general public, although they may be given access in the future.

### **CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE EIA IN SYRIA**

The conditions necessary for an effective Syrian EIA are identified in a set of six comprehensive but integrated proposals (Mahayri, 1998). First comes the need to enhance the existing legal base. The second is a key factor vital for all the other conditions, namely support in the form of high level political will. Third is the need to enforce relevant legislation. Fourth comes effective communication, coordination and cooperation. Fifth is the need for good information flow and management, which would be resolved by establishing a national GIS data centre. Then, to accommodate these conditions, the sixth proposal is for administrative reform. Other conditions, such as enhancing the relation between governmental, private sectors and the public are also important.

The implementation of these proposals is not supposed to be sequential. Rather, achieving these conditions should be sought simultaneously. This is especially true for administrative reform, which, for example, would be a basic requirement when implementing not only an enhanced legal base but also coordination in administrative processes. Some changes would be necessary to guarantee the efficacy of this reform. Awareness comes at the top of the list as it is severely lacking at present. Training and capacity building in all governmental sectors is needed. Lee (1988) discussed some training types, *inter alia*, 'on-the-job training'. Specialized 'on-the-job training' is necessary, as Syria lacks experienced, well qualified personnel.

Other parameters should be taken into consideration such as enhancing public participation; facilitating and encouraging the private sector to establish environmental consultancies; and establishing an effective Syrian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) sector.

## **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

The EIA Decree is supposed to be a base for implementing Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). However, the Decree does not satisfy the procedural and legal requirements of SEA. A cornerstone requirement is the need for a separate SEA Decree. Some conditions identified earlier for EIA, such as high-level political will and support, information management and co-ordination, would also serve the development of SEA in Syria.

## **EIA AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY OF NEAP**

The National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) for Syria was developed in June 1998. In NEAP, priority problems and priority actions were defined. On the other hand, 'enabling factors' to stop environmental degradation were discussed.

NEAP identified five strategic priority areas. The first, strengthening environmental management capacity within different governmental bodies, was considered a limiting factor for implementation of NEAP itself. Secondly came the need to review the policies encouraging the current misuse of land and water resources. The third priority was applying management systems, treatment facilities, environmental standards, emission limits, product standards and training that would protect human health against current pollution. The fourth strategic priority was the need for rural development and enforcement of urban planning norms in order to remedy the impacts of degraded urban environments caused by the increased urbanization. Lastly, the fifth priority dealt with protecting the degraded priceless Syrian cultural heritage, being one of the oldest human heritages (ERM 1998).

The overall goal of NEAP cannot be achieved without EIA. Effective EIA would minimize pressure factors and promote better planning and management of resources. It would ensure environmental factors were taken into consideration during the development and planning process. EIA would contribute in the internalization of environmental costs from an environmental economics viewpoint. The conditions identified for effective EIA in its crucial role of strengthening environmental management and capacity would be to improve the environmental planning and management institutions and complete the environmental legislation. At the same time, EIA would play a major role in coordination amongst different sectoral bodies and in raising awareness.

Notwithstanding, SEA is a key factor for the overall process. As a higher level of EIA, it would ensure that policies are environmentally friendly before dealing with the lower level of planning represented by projects. SEA plays the role of a framework for planning, which steers the general orientation of the development process leaving the details to be dealt with at the project level within EIA. An interactive integration of SEA and EIA

should be sought in order to accommodate the implementation of NEAP in Syria and to achieve better sustainable development.

## CONCLUSIONS

Syria is in a phase of transition, which involves major economic activities and change. At the same time, the environmental resources in Syria are being continuously degraded. EIA, including SEA, is a tool that would promote the sustainability of the current economic progress by ensuring consideration of environmental factors at an early stage in planning and decision making. However, the current situation with respect to EIA in Syria has many shortcomings. These are mainly a lack of: binding environmental legislation; enforced procedural framework; communication, coordination and cooperation; awareness; experience; resources; and information. This is leading to inefficient EIA. Indeed, there are even specific shortcomings in the draft legislation. The lack of authority given to personnel responsible of EIA has originated from many causes, mainly the absence of binding law, and is considered a key element contributing to the current unsatisfactory situation with respect to EIA.

There is a need to enhance the current legal base and to bring it into effect. High level political will and support is considered to be the ultimate element that would resolve the existent hindrances. This element will ensure that the legislation is brought into force; establish a more efficient communication, coordination and cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the EIA process; speed the information flow; and promote the conditions required to accommodate all the other proposals, namely, administrative reform. Some improvements such as: national coordination and cooperation; promotion of the private sector; enhancing information management; the national GIS information centre; awareness and training programmes, would not only provide for an efficient future EIA, but for the general development of the country.

The cornerstone of sustainable development in Syria in the future is likely to be NEAP. However, the goals and priorities of NEAP will not be achieved without an effective and integrative implementation of EIA and SEA in Syria.

## LIST OF RELEVANT PUBLISHED PAPERS AND OTHER SOURCE MATERIAL

Ahmad B., 1996, *Environmental Impact Assessment in Syria and other Arabic States; A Comparative Review*, Master's dissertation, University of Manchester.

Ahmad Y. J. and Sammy G. K., 1987, *Guidelines to Environmental Impact Assessments in Developing Countries*, United Nations Environmental Programme, Regional Seas Reports and Studies No. 85. UNEP, Nairobi.

Arabicnews, 19/11/1997, *Syria authorizes 1,494 projects at a cost of 7.3 billion dollars*, <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/971119/1997111902.html>, accessed on 5/7/1998.

Arabicnews, 3/12/1997, *Syrian economy booms*, <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/971203/1997120333.html>, accessed on 5/7/1998.

Arabicnews.com, 12/12/1997, *Newly introduced economic reforms in Syria*, [www.arabicnews.com/ansub/daily/day/971212/1997121216.html](http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/daily/day/971212/1997121216.html), accessed on 12/12/1997.

Arabicnews.com, 16/7/1998a, *Syria, Holland sign environment accord*, [www.arabicnews.com/ansub/daily/day/980716/1998071604.html](http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/daily/day/980716/1998071604.html), accessed on 16/7/1998

Arabicnews, 16/7/1998b, *Syria modernize its economy to comply with European partnership agreement*, <http://www.arabicnews.com/anasub/Daily/Day/980716/1998071607.html>, accessed on 16/7/1998.

Biswas A. K., and Geping Q., (Eds) 1987, *Environmental Impact Assessment for Developing Countries*, Tycooly International, London.

Biswas A. K., and Agrawala S. B. C. (Eds) 1992, *Environmental Impact Assessment for Developing Countries*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann.

Carew-Reid J., Prescott-Allen R., Bass S., and Clayton B D., 1994, *Strategies for National Sustainable Development; A Handbook for their Planning and Implementation*. The World Conservation Union IUCN, International Institute for Environment and Development IIED, Earthscan Publications Ltd., London.

CCG, 1998, *Country Commercial Guide; Syrian Arab Republic; Fiscal Year 1998*. The Commercial Service of the U.S. Department of Commerce, <http://www.ita.doc.gov/uscs/ccg98/ccgosyri.html>, accessed on 24/8/1998.

Clayton B. D., Roe D., and Hughes R., 1995, *A Dictionary of Impact Assessment Guidelines*, International Institute for Environment and Development IIED, The World Conservation Union IUCN, London.

Colley R., 1998, *Environmental Resources Management (ERM), Participant in preparing the National Environmental Action Plan of Syria*, Personal Communication.

DHV Consultants B.V and Alfa Group, 1995a, *Establishment of an Environmental impact Assessment Unit, General EIA Guidelines including Draft EIA Decree and its Section by Section explanation*. METAP, World Bank, European Investment Bank and Ministry of State for the Environment, Syrian Arab Republic. Unpublished.

DHV Consultants B.V and Alfa Group, 1995b, *Establishment of an Environmental impact Assessment Unit, Procedures and Organization*. METAP, World Bank, European

Investment Bank and Ministry of State for the Environment, Syrian Arab Republic. Unpublished.

Environmental Protection Act EPA for Syria, 1992, Syrian Arab Republic. Unpublished.

ERM, 1998, *National Environmental Action Plan for the Arab Republic of Syria*, World Bank, UNDP, Environmental Resources Management ERM, London.

European Commission, 1994, *Environmental Impact assessment Review Checklist*, EC Directorate General-Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection, Brussels.

European Commission, 1996a, *Environmental impact Assessment Guidance on Screening*, Directorate General Environment Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection, European Commission, Brussels.

European Commission, 1996b, *Environmental impact Assessment Guidance on Scoping*, Directorate General Environment Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection, European Commission, Brussels.

European Commission, 1997a, *Council Directive 97/11/EC of 3 March 1997 amending Directive 85/337/EEC, The assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment*. OFFICIAL JOURNAL NO. L 073, 14/03/1997 P. 0005. Also can be found in the following web page

<http://www.unimaas.nl/~egmilieu/Legislation/eianew.htm>, accessed on 26/7/1998.

European Commission, 1997b, *Environmental Impact Assessment DGIB Guidance Note and Annexes((support Material)*, External Relations, Directorate General I B European Commission, Brussels.

General Commission for Environmental Affairs GCEA, *Strategy, work programme and annual report of GCEA 1994-1995*. High Council for Environmental affairs, GCEA Action Plan, Syrian Arab Republic, Unpublished.

Hughes R., 1998, member of the Environmental Planning Group of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in London, Personal Communication.

Lee N., 1988, *Training Requirements for Environmental Impact Assessment*, in Wathern P., (Ed), 1988, *Environmental Impact Assessment; Theory and Practice*, Unwin Hyman Ltd, London.

Lohani B., 1992, *Environmental Assessment and Review during the project cycle: the Asian Development Bank's approach*, in Biswas A., and Agrawala S., (Eds), 1992, *Environmental Impact Assessment for Developing Countries*, Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd, Oxford.

Radtke K., 1998, Third Secretary in the European Union Delegation of the European Commission in the Syrian Arab Republic, Personal Communication.

Sadler B., 1994, *Proposed Framework for the international Study of the Effectiveness of Environmental Assessment*, Federal Environmental Review Office FEARO, Canada; and the International Association of impact Assessment, in Roe D., Clayton B. D., and Hughes R., 1995, *A dictionary of Impact Assessment Guidelines*, IIED, London.

Sadler B., and Verheem R., 1996, *Strategic Environmental Assessment Status, Challenges and Future Directions*, International Study of Effectiveness of Environmental Assessment, The EIA Commission of the Netherlands, Published by the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the environment of the Netherlands.

Smith G., 1993 print, *Impact Assessment and Sustainable Resources Management*, Longman, England.

The World Factbook page on Syria, 1998a, *Syria; Economy*,  
<http://cliffie.nosc.mil/~NAWFB/factbook/sy-e.html>, accessed on 26/6/1998.

The World Factbook page on Syria, 1998b, *Syria; People*,  
<http://cliffie.nosc.mil/~NAWFB/factbook/sy-p.html>, accessed on 26/6/1998.

The World Factbook page on Syria, 1998c, *Syria; Geography*,  
[http://mirrors.org/world\\_facts/factbook/sy-l.html](http://mirrors.org/world_facts/factbook/sy-l.html), accessed on 26/6/1998.

Therivel R., Wilson E., Thompson S., Heaney D., and Pritchard D., 1992, *Strategic Environmental Assessment*, Earthscan Publications Ltd, London.

Therivel R., and Partidario M R., 1996, *The Practice of Strategic Environmental Assessment*, Earthscan Publications Ltd, London.

UNEP, 1988, *Environmental Impact Assessment: Basic procedures for Developing Countries*, United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, Nairobi.

Waddams A., 1998, An Interview with Arabicnews, in Arabicnews, 12/6/1998, *Euro-mission chief: Syria has self-sustaining economy, needs modernization*,  
<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980612/1998061203.html>, accessed on 25/6/1998.

Wathern P., (Ed), 1988, *Environmental Impact Assessment; Theory and Practice*, Unwin Hyman Ltd, London.

---

***The author:***

Imad Mahayri  
Hi-Tech House  
PO Box 25982  
Damascus  
SYRIA

---

**Key words**

strategic  
environmental  
assessment  
institutional  
support