

COHAB 2
Second International Conference on Health and Biodiversity
Galway, Ireland, 25th to 28th February 2008

Satellite Workshop:

Best Practice in Impact Assessment
Systemic approaches to biodiversity in SEA and HIA

Friday, 29th February 2008

The COHAB Initiative Secretariat in collaboration with the International Association for Impact Assessment and the Secretariat to the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, will convene a special discussion forum on the theme “**Best Practice in Impact Assessment – Systemic approaches to biodiversity in SEA and HIA**”, in Galway City, Ireland, on Friday 29th February 2008.

The aims of this workshop are:

- To explore systemic approaches to strategic assessment that recognise the links between human health, sustainable development and ecosystem integrity,
- To share experiences of dealing with biodiversity and public health issues in impact assessment projects from around the world,
- To build capacity for biodiversity-inclusive SEA and HIA,
- To explore the opportunities which these approaches represent for promoting appropriate development and for supporting human well-being and biodiversity conservation.

The Workshop is supported by United Nations agencies and member States of the European Union. Participation is open to planning officials, health professionals, environmental professionals, decision makers, heritage officers, representatives of businesses and industry bodies, and other stakeholders.

Background

All human development activities – physical, social and economic – are dependent upon a healthy natural environment. Biodiversity and ecosystems provide a range of essential goods and services, which cannot be obtained elsewhere or otherwise provided by technology. These include supplies of freshwater, food, medicines and fuel resources, regulation of climate and diseases, soil formation, flood mitigation, and so on. In short, “healthy ecosystems = healthy business, healthy people.” Consequently, all environmental degradation ultimately impacts on human health and economic sustainability.

It is now clear that the disruption of the earth’s ecosystems threatens the health and well-being of the world’s people, and the viability of local, regional and national economies. The Stern Review on the Economic Impacts of Climate Change and recent reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change outlined many of these challenges in stark detail. The U.N. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment have also recently reported that two thirds of the world’s ecosystem services are being degraded, and that the ability of many ecosystems to sustain the flow of essential services required by economies and communities is being compromised.

It is widely recognised that the solution to these problems lies in effective planning of human development activities and rigorous assessments of the potential impacts that may arise from the implementation of related policies, plans, programmes, and projects.

Effective planning for the future must recognise the relationship between human communities and the environment, and must consider the various ways in which ecosystems support human development and well-being. This is an essential component of sustainable development. But exactly how can people involved in decision-making and planning processes identify which ecosystems are of importance in each individual case? How do we determine which drivers of ecosystem change need to be considered? For example, how do we identify the threats to human health or economic growth that might arise from impacts on biodiversity, and how might those impacts come about? What level and what type of protection are required? And how do we account for the complicating influence of climate change?

Answering these questions requires a holistic, multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach. In this era of global environmental change, co-operation across borders and cultural divides is also essential. The use of impact assessment tools, including Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Health Impact Assessment (HIA) provides a means for achieving this in a collaborative manner that accounts for the needs and positions of all stakeholders. They also represent important opportunities for enhancing human well-being and facilitating human development through the sustainable use and conservation of biological diversity and natural resources.

The Workshop

The workshop will form part of a week of international discussion forums on biodiversity and human well-being, taking place in Galway, Ireland, and centred around the Second International Conference on Health and Biodiversity (COHAB 2). This satellite workshop on “Best Practice in Impact Assessment” will aim to contribute to the development of capacities for biodiversity-inclusive impact assessments, taking into account the specific circumstances in which they should be applied. This will include consideration of infrastructure development, urban renewal, land use planning, overseas development and cohesion funding, nature conservation plans and public health programmes.

Presentations by leading experts in SEA, HIA, climate change and ecosystem assessments will be combined with open discussions and working group exercises. Working groups will aim to develop awareness and understanding of the issues, to develop capacity for addressing the risks and opportunities associated with development planning, and to share experiences of dealing with these issues around the world. Participants will collaborate to explore ecosystem approaches to impact assessment in a number of scenarios based on actual development issues from every continent.

Workshop Outputs

A report on the outputs from the discussions will be published in April 2008. The report will be presented for consideration at the ninth meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP9) in Bonn, Germany, in May 2008, and to other meetings on public health and multi-lateral environmental agreements. A series of papers will be prepared for publication towards the end of 2008, and the outputs of working group exercises will also be submitted for publication in the journal of the International EcoHealth Association.

Tentative timetable:

08.30 – 09.00	Registration
09.00 – 09.10	Welcome
09.10 – 09.35	<i>Presentation</i>
09.35 – 10.00	<i>Presentation</i>
10.00 – 10.25	<i>Presentation</i>
10.25 – 10.50	Discussion
10.50 – 11.10	<i>Refreshments</i>
11.10 – 11.35	<i>Presentation</i>
11.35 – 12.00	<i>Presentation</i>
12.00 – 12.40	Working Groups
12.40 – 13.40	<i>Lunch</i>
13.40 – 14.05	Feedback from Working Groups
14.05 – 14.30	<i>Presentation</i>
14.30 – 14.55	<i>Presentation</i>
14.55 – 15.15	Discussion
15.15 – 15.20	CLOSE
