

Effectiveness and relevance of recent environmental assessments for policy-making and public information in Georgia

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1 Introduction

This report synthesises the results of a survey among the users of environmental assessments in Georgia. The direct objective of the study, which was funded by the EU within the project “Implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) principles and practices in the European neighbourhood regions (ENI SEIS II)”, was to better understand how users perceive the quality and usefulness of environmental assessments published in their countries. The end goal was to then identify how the countries’ capacities for regular environmental assessment and reporting could be further enhanced in order to better support their policy-making, public awareness and, in the end, environmental performance.

The study, designed and commissioned by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and carried out by Zoï Environment Network, was conducted through a series of interviews with the users of environmental assessments in each of the six countries. The interviews were based on a standardised questionnaire from the EEA to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of national assessments. The interviews and the initial analysis were carried out by Zoï and by the Regional Environment Centre for the South Caucasus in Tbilisi for Georgia. Attempts were also made to collect data about the dissemination and use of environmental assessments, both directly and through the available channels. The work was coordinated with and to the extent possible assisted by the national focal points for the ENI SEIS II project in Georgia.

The integrated and thematic environmental assessments used for review are described below.

[National Report on Environmental Conditions of 2010-2013](#), 2014, in Georgian. This 310-page document contains 21 chapters and 8 main topics as follows: the impact of socio-economic factors on the environment, protection of atmospheric air, water and land resources, live environment, waste and other environmental issues, as well as an impact of economic sectors on the environment and environmental management in Georgia. It evaluates complex conditions of the environmental and natural resources of Georgia for the period 2010-2013. It also includes data for 2014, which was available during the report’s preparation period. There are some visuals in the report such as graphics, diagrams and maps.

[Fifth National Report of Georgia to the Convention on Biological Diversity](#), 2014, in English. This 76-page document presents Georgia’s biodiversity action plan for 2014-2020. The NBSAP focuses on the values of biodiversity, emphasizing the necessity of safeguarding the natural capital that allows economic development and contributes to the population’s well-being. The NBSAP details Georgia’s existing challenges and lays the groundwork for raising the general public’s awareness of the importance and long-term benefits of biodiversity. It also sets out a strategy for integrating biodiversity into decision-making processes and into the development plans of all sectors with activities impacting biodiversity. Strategic goals and objectives were set out for each of the thematic areas except sustainable forestry and a total of 140 actions were outlined in the action plan to achieve the goals and objectives. The number of visuals is limited.

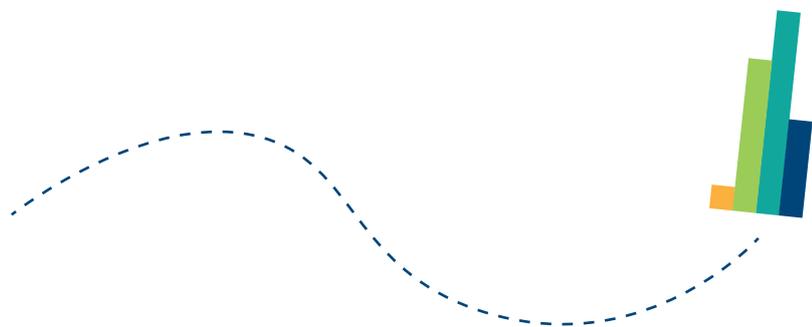
[Third National Communication of Georgia to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), 2015, in English. This 266-page document was prepared in 2012-2015 and includes the national inventory of GHGs. It widely considers climate change mitigation and adaptation issues and focuses on three regions of Georgia: Adjara, Upper-Svaneti and Kakheti. This approach facilitates identification of regional challenges that require particular attention. The National Communication also includes Georgia’s Climate Change Strategy by 2025 and describes conditions for the implementation of environmental projects and programmes that are important for Georgia, and at the same time are contributing to the worldwide efforts to combat climate change.

The National Report on Environmental Conditions of 2010-2013 was prepared with support of the GIZ and USAID in close cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection. The Fifth National Report to the CBD was prepared by the Ministry with technical assistance from the GIZ project, “Sustainable Management of Biodiversity-South Caucasus”. Georgia’s Third National Communication to the UNFCCC was prepared with the financial support of GEF and technical support of UNDP Georgia.

The standardised list of intended respondents for conducting the interviews included policy-makers from the

environmental as well as non-environmental sectors of the government, selected representatives of research, academia and business as well as civil society (Annex 1).

In Georgia, 25 organizations were invited for interviews and filled in the questionnaire. The format of interviews with ministries was face-to-face, and with others based on mail and phone calls.



2 Findings and key messages

This section analyses the cumulative responses for all the reviewed assessments. Annex 2 provides more detailed data.

Effectiveness

Key messages

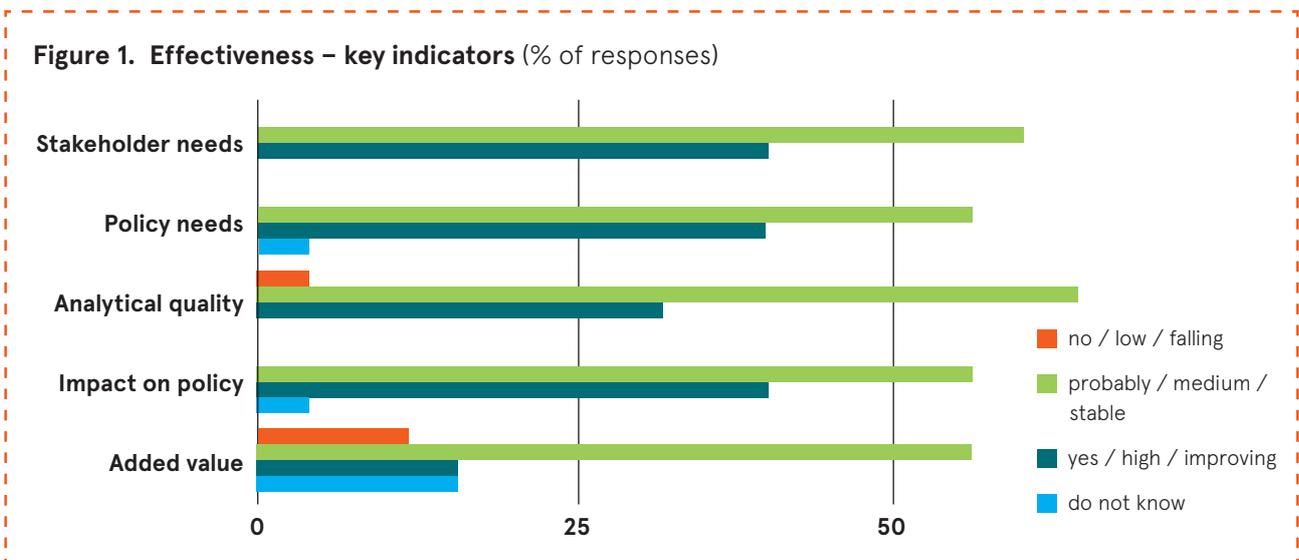
- Assessments meet stakeholders' and policy needs
- The analytical quality of the assessments is medium to high
- Assessments moderately provide added value

Most of the respondents indicated that the environmental assessments probably (about 60 per cent of the responses) or do have (40 per cent) an **impact on the environmental policy-making**. Some interviewees think that the aim of the reports is to influence environmental policy, and that the reports could do a better job at this. Some respondents mentioned that the impact on sustainable use of environmental resources is significant.

Almost all the stakeholders indicated that the environmental assessments probably meet or do meet the **needs of stakeholders** and **environmental policy**. Several respondents mentioned that the assessments could be improved to address more of the needs, and some stakeholders pointed out the limited use of the reports by decision makers.

About 60 per cent of the responses said that assessments probably provided **added value** with typically unique and straightforward information. All the reports are being used by professionals for further analysis and for environmental management. About 20 per cent of the respondents were not able to answer this question.

The **analytical quality** of the environmental assessments was rated as medium (63 per cent of the responses) to high (30 per cent of the responses).



Quality

Key messages

- Quality, topical coverage, timeliness, reliability and communication are sufficient
- The quality of assessments is progressively improving

The **overall quality** of environmental assessments was rated as high by 60 per cent of the responses and as medium by 40 per cent. At the same time the respondents commented on the need for the involvement of local experts in the preparation of the assessments, and that local-scale environmental issues are not fully reflected. One respondent commented on improving the quality of the monitoring and statistical data used for the analysis.

In terms of **sufficiency**, assessments were evaluated as medium to high by all respondents. Respondents mentioned that most of the data provided in the reports are general.

Almost all respondents highlighted the **timeliness** of the assessments. **Topical coverage** was rated as medium to high for all the assessments.

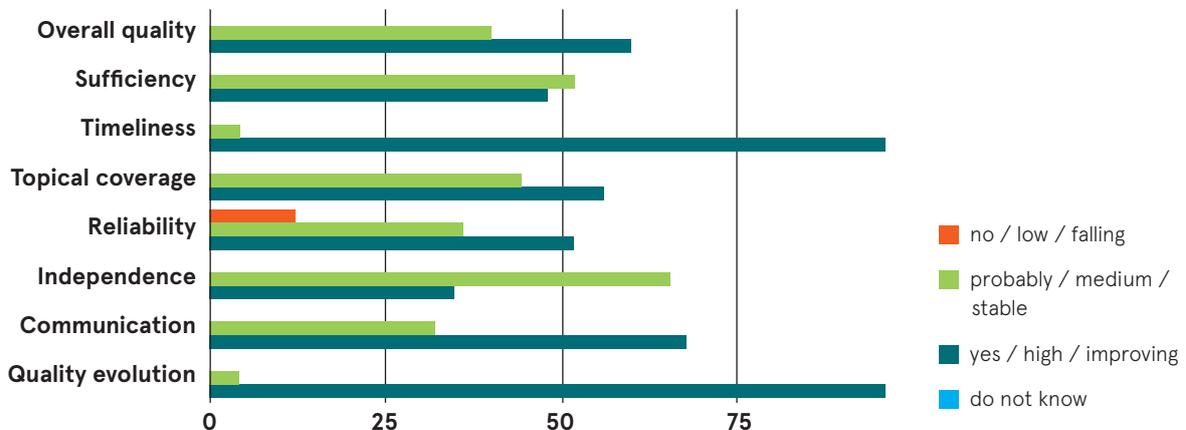
About 90 per cent of the responses indicated that the **reliability** of all three assessments is medium to high, while more than 10 per cent of the responses ranked the reliability as low, mainly due to the absence of sources and methodology of data collection / processing in the assessment.

All respondents rated the **independence** of data and analysis as medium to high. The data in the reports are usually processed by different independent experts, an approach that increases the independence of the documents.

Communication of the assessments was evaluated as medium (by 30 per cent of the responses) to high (almost 70 per cent). Respondents mentioned that according to the existing information, the findings of the reports are well communicated to the legal and key authorities.

The respondents believe that the **quality** of the reports is improving **over time**, partly because modern methods are introduced in the research, and the number of local experts with reliable skills in environmental sciences is increasing in the country.

Figure 2. Quality of assessments (% of responses)



Efficiency

Key messages

- The assessments provide relevant information
- The assessments used analytical methods and tools effectively
- Some stakeholders are not aware of the assessments' role in policy-making or whether the benefits of the reports justify the costs

The study reveals that the **analytical methods and tools** used in the environmental assessments are probably appropriate and sufficient. More than 10 per cent of respondents declared they could not answer this question.

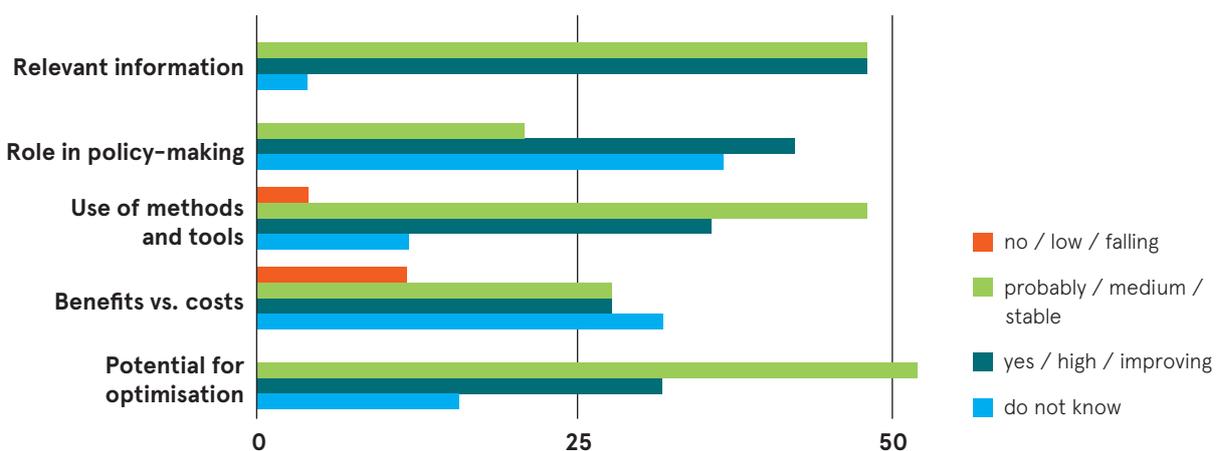
About 30 per cent of the respondents indicated that they did not know whether the **benefits** of the reports justified the **costs**. About 15 per cent said the benefits did not outweigh the costs, and about 55 per cent said they did or probably did.

Almost all responses indicate that the assessments probably or do deliver **relevant information**, although some interviewees were not sure.

Eighty per cent of the responses pointed out that all assessments probably have or do have the **potential for optimization**, while almost 20 per cent of the respondents was not able to answer.

More than 40 per cent of the responses said that assessments play a **role in policy-making**, and another 20 per cent of responses said they probably play a role, while almost the same number of respondents was not able to answer this question. Some stakeholders have mentioned that there are several new policies and draft laws based on the information provided in the assessments.

Figure 3. Efficiency – key indicators (% of responses)



Policy impact

Key messages

- Assessments help identify policy interventions, and help determine their scale and scope
- Assessments significantly help in choosing and developing policies
- Assessments are needed in the evaluation of environmental performance

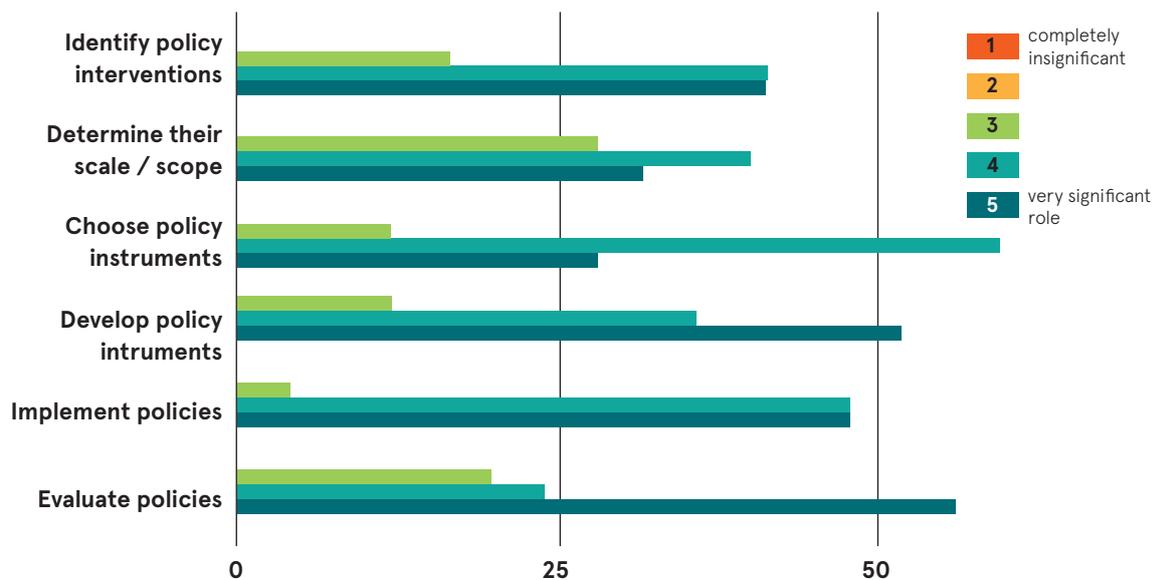
Sixty per cent of the responses indicated that assessments significantly help in **choosing policy instruments** (legal, awareness raising etc.), 35 per cent very significantly and 15 per cent moderately. More than 50 per cent of the responses underlined that assessments very significantly help in **developing of policy instruments**.

Around 60 per cent of the responses clarified that the assessments very significantly help **evaluate** the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies, and all of the responses indicated that assessments significantly or very significantly help **implement environmental policies**.

All responses show that the assessments help moderately to very significantly deliver information to **identify policy interventions**.

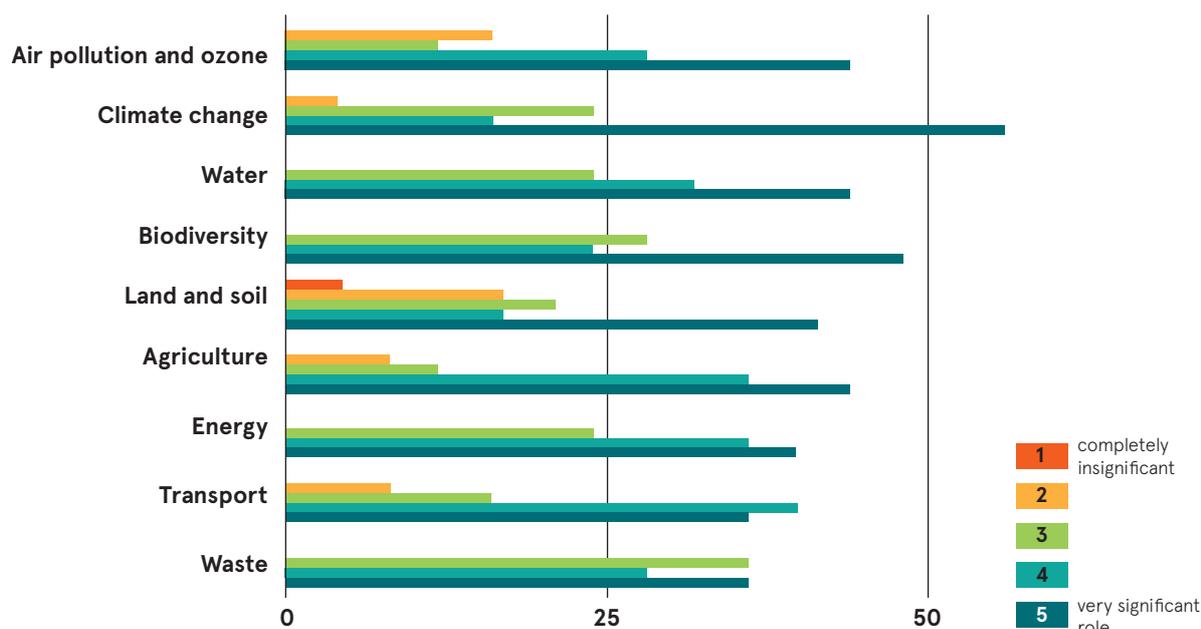
Forty per cent of the stakeholders who are involved day-by-day in the field reported that assessments significantly **determine the scale and scope** of policy interventions, while 35 per cent said very significantly and 25 per cent said moderately.

Figure 4. Policy relevance and impact (% of responses)



Overall there is very high demand for these kinds of thematic reports. The respondents believe that these and similar environmental assessments **are particularly needed** in order to help improve the country's environmental performance with respect to all areas in the questionnaire to a high or very high extent.

Figure 5. Future demand for assessments (% of responses)



Awareness and outreach

Key messages

- Assessments are available online for the broader public
- Internet research resulted in a limited number of entries per title

All three reports are posted on the website of the Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC), and are easily accessible by the general public, but the EIEC does not trace or record information about the number of web visitors and downloads. The Centre is not aware of the number of individuals informed about the latest environmental assessments produced.

Georgia's Fifth National Report to the CBD is on the website of the Convention.

The 2015 Third National Communication of Georgia to the UNFCCC is on the website of UNDP.

In Georgia, there are 387 registered NGOs of which 41 are environmental NGOs and are likely aware of the assessments.

A Google search for the report titles returns one (SoE), three (CBD) and three (UNFCCC) entries per title.

Overall it seems that awareness of the assessments in Georgia is relatively sufficient, though some stakeholders pointed out the need to increase awareness.

3 Conclusions and considerations

Overall the interviewees confirmed the need to produce environmental assessments, but they also pointed out the need to improve assessment quality, including topics covered and up-to-date data presentation.

Considerations

- The content of analytical chapters within the assessments should be improved
- Up-to-date information and data for analyses should be provided and improved
- Good quality local-scale information should be introduced and improved

To improve the institutional coordination for the preparation of the environmental assessment, and to ensure that a wider circle of scientists, stakeholders and local experts is involved, the Ministry should create an analytical centre or administrative unit under the Ministry to perform analysis and assessments.

Consideration

- The Ministry should establish an analytical centre

To ensure the increased use of the environmental assessments in policy decisions, Georgia may want to consider developing a system of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) of national plans and programmes, and consider the results during the preparation of the next environmental assessments.

Consideration

- An SEA system should be established and used in synergy with the assessments

The majority of respondents noted that the biggest gap in the assessments is the absence of country-level targets

and indicators (SoE), or in contrast, the designated national targets are too ambitious to be achieved within allocated timeframes and funds (CBD). The prioritised list of implementation activities should be in line with the country's realities and capacities (UNFCCC).

Considerations

- The country-level targets and indicators should be better presented in the state-of-environment assessment
- Realistic national targets, and the ways to achieve them, should be included
- Country-specific indicators within the report to CBD should introduced and validated

The Third National Communication to the UNFCCC was rated as a very comprehensive and useful document. Although the interviewees pointed out that some important parts could be strengthened: assessment of vulnerability and adaptation of the national economy to climate change, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and sink expansion activities in sectoral programs.

Considerations

- Vulnerability and adaptation chapters of the report should be connected with sectoral programmes and improved
- Greenhouse gas emissions reduction policy, forecasts and evaluation measures should be developed and used

Since the conservation of unique and rich biodiversity is among the priorities in Georgia, the report to CBD should be the main document for assessing the distribution, changes and trends, and for describing clearly the national policy on biological conservation. Georgia needs to establish a national biosafety system, and the country will benefit from becoming a party to the CBD Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable

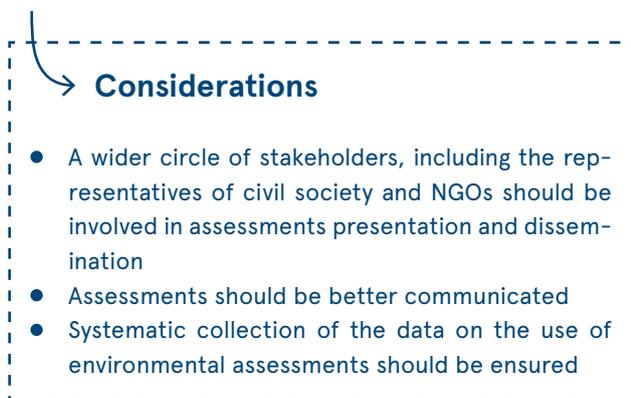
Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization and to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA).



Considerations

- The report to the CBD, as an important political tool, should be improved
- Georgia's international commitment to biodiversity conservation should be strengthened

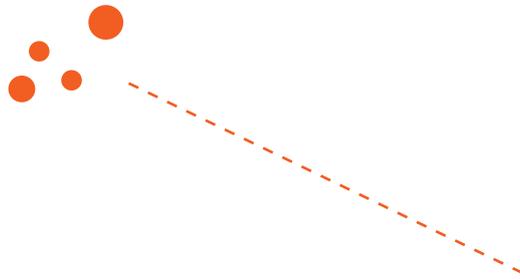
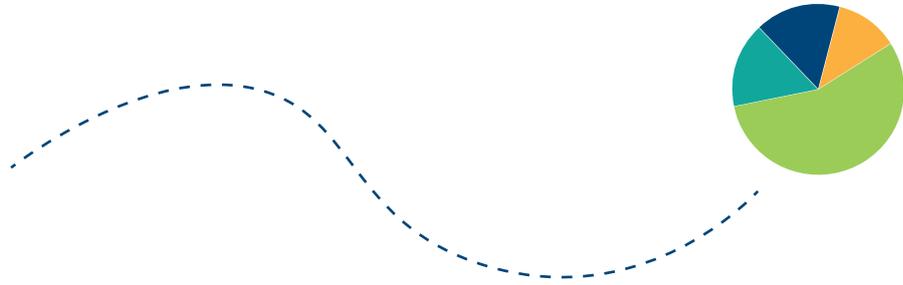
Wider communication and presentation of the assessments is necessary and it is important that the data on usage of the assessments is better monitored.



Considerations

- A wider circle of stakeholders, including the representatives of civil society and NGOs should be involved in assessments presentation and dissemination
- Assessments should be better communicated
- Systematic collection of the data on the use of environmental assessments should be ensured

ANNEXES



Annex 1 Interviewed organisations

Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee, Parliament of Georgia
Agrarian Committee, Parliament of Georgia
Government of Georgia
Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection
Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development
Ministry of Finance
Ministry of Agriculture
Ministry of Agriculture
Ministry of Energy
Ministry of Education and Science
Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure
Ministry of Internal Affairs
Tbilisi City Hall
Ilia State University
Tbilisi State University, Institute of Geography
Academy of Science
The Regional Environmental Centre for the South Caucasus
The Legal Entity of Public Law "Environmental Information and Education Centre", Aarhus Centre Georgia
Greens Movement Georgia/ Friends of Earth
CENN NGO
Georgian Woodworkers and Furniture Manufacturers Association

Annex 2 Summary of responses to the survey

I. Effectiveness

1 Key indicators of effectiveness

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No
1.1 Did the EA match the needs and requirements of the stakeholder?	30	45	0	0
1.2 Did the EA respond adequately to environmental policy needs?	30	12	3	0
1.3 Is the EA's analysis of consistently high quality?	24	48	0	3
1.4 Do the EA findings have an impact on environmental policy-making or likely to have such impact in the future?	30	42	3	0
1.5 Did the EA provide added value at the national level?	12	42	12	9

2 Overall quality of the Environmental Assessment reports

	Low	Medium	High
2.1 How would you evaluate the overall quality of Environmental Assessment reports	0	30	45

3 Overall, how would you rate the quality of the information provided in the Environmental Assessment reports by the following criteria?

	Low	Medium	High
3.1 Sufficiency	0	39	36
3.2 Timeliness	0	3	72
3.3 Topical coverage	0	33	42
3.4 Reliability	9	27	39
3.5 Independence	0	51	27
3.6 Well-communicated	0	24	51

4 Development of the Environmental Assessment reports quality

	Falling	Stable	Improving
4.1 How would you evaluate the development of quality of the Environmental Assessment reports in recent years?	0	3	72

II. Efficiency

1 Key indicators of efficiency

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No
1.1 Did the EA deliver relevant information?	36	36	3	0
1.2 Did the EA play a role in environmental policy-making in the country?	24	12	21	0
1.3 Is the use of analytical methods and tools in the EA appropriate and sufficient?	27	36	9	3
1.4 Did the EA represent value for money comparing the costs and benefits?	21	21	24	9
1.5 Is there any potential for optimisation of the EA with regard to a modern and efficiently operational work flow?	24	39	12	0

2 Did the EA reports deliver information to...

	Completely insignificant role (1)	2	3	4	Very significant role (5)
2.1 help identify necessary policy interventions?	0	0	12	30	30
2.2. help determine the scale and scope of policy interventions?	0	0	21	30	24
2.3 help choose policy instruments (legal, awareness raising etc.)?	0	0	9	45	21
2.4 help develop policy instruments (including setting their targets and indicators)?	0	0	9	27	39
2.5 help implement policies?	0	0	3	36	36
2.6 help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies?	0	0	15	18	42

3 These and similar Environmental Assessment reports are particularly needed in order to help improve the country's environmental performance with respect to

	Completely insignificant role (1)	2	3	4	Very significant role (5)
3.1. Air pollution and ozone depletion	0	12	9	21	33
3.2. Climate change	0	3	18	12	42
3.3 Water	0	0	18	24	33
3.4 Biodiversity	0	0	21	18	36
3.5 Land and soil	3	12	15	12	30
3.6 Agriculture	0	6	9	27	33
3.7 Energy	0	0	18	27	30
3.8 Transport	0	6	12	30	27
3.9 Waste	0	0	27	21	27

Annex 3 Evaluation tool (the questionnaire)

EEA Evaluation tool:

Scope and key questions of the evaluation of recent national Environmental Assessments (EA)

NOTE: the tables below are to be filled for all the publications selected for review. Please put publication symbols in cells corresponding to the respondent's opinion about these publications. Example:

	Low	Medium	High	Comment
2.1 How would you evaluate the overall quality of Environmental Assessment reports	B	S	W, A	

S: SoE report; W: Thematic reports on water; A: Thematic reports on air / climate; B: Thematic reports on biodiversity

Effectiveness and efficiency – the two dimensions of the evaluation:

✓ I. Effectiveness

1 Key indicators of effectiveness

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No	Comment
1.1 Did the EA match the needs and requirements of the stakeholder?					
1.2 Did the EA respond adequately to environmental policy needs?					
1.3 Is the EA's analysis of consistently high quality?					
1.4 Do the EA findings have an impact on environmental policy-making or likely to have such impact in the future?					
1.5 Did the EA provide added value at the national level?					

2 Overall quality of the Environmental Assessment reports

	Low	Medium	High	Comment
2.1 How would you evaluate the overall quality of Environmental Assessment reports				

3 Overall, how would you rate the quality of the information provided in the Environmental Assessment reports by the following criteria?

	Low	Medium	High	Comment
3.1 Sufficiency				
3.2 Timeliness				
3.3 Topical coverage				
3.4 Reliability				
3.5 Independence				
3.6 Well-communicated				

4 Development of the Environmental Assessment reports quality

	Falling	Stable	Improving
4.1 How would you evaluate the development of quality of the Environmental Assessment reports in recent years?			

✓ II. Efficiency

1 Key indicators of efficiency

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No	Comment
1.1 Did the EA deliver relevant information?					
1.2 Did the EA play a role in environmental policy-making in the country?					
1.3 Is the use of analytical methods and tools in the EA appropriate and sufficient?					
1.4 Did the EA represent value for money comparing the costs and benefits?					
1.5 Is there any potential for optimisation of the EA with regard to a modern and efficiently operational work flow?					

2 Did the EA reports deliver information to...

	Completely insignificant role (1)	2	3	4	Very significant role (5)
2.1 help identify necessary policy interventions?					
2.2. help determine the scale and scope of policy interventions?					
2.3 help choose policy instruments (legal, awareness raising etc.)?					
2.4 help develop policy instruments (including setting their targets and indicators)?					
2.5 help implement policies?					
2.6 help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies?					

3 These and similar Environmental Assessment reports are particularly needed in order to help improve the country's environmental performance with respect to

	Completely insignificant role (1)	2	3	4	Very significant role (5)
3.1. Air pollution and ozone depletion					
3.2. Climate change					
3.3 Water					
3.4 Biodiversity					
3.5 Land and soil					
3.6 Agriculture					
3.7 Energy					
3.8 Transport					
3.9 Waste					

