



Review and Update of the World Bank's Environmental and Social Safeguard Policies

Consultation Meeting with Government Representatives
Beijing, China, March 13, 2013

The consultation meeting was held on March 13, 2013. After a presentation by the World Bank Safeguards Review Team on the background, intended scope and process for the review, the floor was open for participants' input and comments.

What has worked well in the current safeguard policies?

- China has benefited from the safeguard policies introduced by the Bank and we appreciate the Bank's efforts to update the safeguards.
- Bank safeguards brought changes to the mindset of project implementation staff in China especially in terms of public consultation and participation. Without it, rural and forestry projects would have been difficult to implement.
- China has learned much from the Bank's safeguards in developing its own EIA law and procedures, e.g., public consultation and information disclosure. But EIA enforcement remains weak in China.
- Safeguards helped us improve targeting of the poor in poverty alleviation, and promoted socially and environmental friendly development.
- China has learned different things from the Bank at different development stages. Update of the safeguards is necessary to keep up with the evolving environment.

Issues and challenges encountered in the application of the safeguard policies.

- Interpretation of safeguard policies sometimes depends too much on individual task team leaders. The updated policies need to be clearer.
- There is a need to reconcile Bank safeguard policies with client country policies and regulations, e.g., compensation standards for land acquisition.
- Since the Bank and China have their own sets of social and environmental policies and procedures, each project has to go through two review processes in parallel, resulting in long preparation time and low efficiency.
- Indigenous Peoples: for countries that recognize ethnic minorities' autonomous rights such as China, minority people are actually the majority population in areas where they live and would

be the main beneficiaries of projects. Do we still need to have a separate ethnic minority development plan for Bank projects in these areas?

- There is the issue of cost versus benefit of Bank safeguard practices in China over decades. Some practices in China (e.g., time period of public disclosure) already meet the Bank criteria, thus duplication in these areas could be avoided to improve efficiency.

Aspects of the environmental and social safeguards policies that the Bank can improve to ensure that these policies continue to be an effective and efficient tool to achieve sustainable development and results on the ground

- The Bank should develop a generally applicable framework and principles, leaving the country to choose its own format of reporting.
- The Bank should balance the tradeoff between development and protection. Safeguards are not meant to impede or limit development but to mitigate its negative impacts, since every project has risks. Could the Bank have more policy and guidance on remediation than prevention?
- The objective of the safeguard reform is to streamline it, make it more operational and more specific with the ultimate goal of higher efficiency.
- Bank safeguards should coordinate better with client country policies, e.g., the focus of safeguards could vary for different countries. If a country like China already has EIA requirements, is there a need for the Bank to require another EIA?
- Bank safeguards need to be made easier to apply, more user friendly, and take into account client country policies and regulations, e.g., on dam safety and involuntary resettlement, the Bank safeguards need to pay more respect to the existing law and regulations in China.
- The Bank should only set principles. If a client country has comprehensive safeguard policies, country systems should be used and the Bank review should be combined with the client country's review process through, for example, participation of Bank experts in the domestic review process, to avoid conflicting decisions.
- The Bank safeguards should not be one-for-all, but tailored to each country.
- It is important to assess overall efficiency, especially of infrastructure projects.
- Take into consideration the multiple dimensions of safeguard policies which include: 1) principle of universal policy; 2) principle of diversified policy; and 3) combination of Bank policies with national policies.

How the Bank can better support borrowers in their efforts to strengthen their systems and institutions with respect to environmental and social safeguards practices to yield more sustainable results on the ground.

- The Bank safeguards should align with cultural heritage conservation plans in China by involving sector authority (i.e., State Cultural Heritage Bureau), not just directly working with local government. The Bank should pay more attention to preservation of ancient villages.
- The Bank should bring in more advanced concepts, ways of doing things and knowledge to help China transform its own system and sectorial structure, through more capacity building and staff training.

Examples of environmental and social assessment and risk management approaches (used by either public or private institutions) that the review should take into consideration.

- Private sector is playing a more important role. How to take it into account and any standards or requirements including good practice should be provided.

Recommendations with respect of any of the emerging areas described in the paper (i.e., disabilities; labour and occupational health and safety; human rights, land tenure and natural resources; free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples; gender; and climate change).

- Issues such as gender and disability are actually about public participation, is it necessary to separate them out in safeguards? It may cause overlap.
- Human rights may not be appropriate to be included as its definition is broad and varied, covering labor, occupational health and safety, and minority people.
- The Bank can have a more general safeguard policy to cover all emerging areas as well as existing ones to avoid overlap and duplication.
- Need to be cautious, especially in areas where international community has not reached consensus, e.g., human rights and climate change.
- It needs careful study especially on how to operationalize these emerging issues if included in Bank safeguards.
- Many new issues involve politics; better to introduce them after consensus is reached. Otherwise the Bank safeguards may risk becoming another arena for international negotiation, thus complicating the safeguard reform process. Do right thing at right time.
- In order to improve work efficiency, dialogue around the emerging areas should be conducted through other platforms.

Additional comments or suggestions

- Social insurance is expanding to rural areas in China in recent years. A major challenge is how to manage the state social insurance fund. It is hoped that the Bank can help.