



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

Consultation Meeting with Civil Society Organizations Tbilisi, March 20, 2013

The consultation meeting was held on March 20, 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.

- Gender issues should be included in the safeguard policies.
- There is a need to make environmental and social legislation more compatible with international rules in order to reflect the patterns of project planning and development in the national system. There is also a need to discuss environmental issues and make strategic decisions during the technical-economic justification phase of projects (for example selection of locations for major infrastructural projects).
- Control and monitoring of planned activities is important as the quality of environmental impact documents is usually much better than their implementation. Both the Bank and the country should work on improving the monitoring process.
- Georgian legislation regarding resettlement is problematic and the Bank's OP 4.12 provides more complete regulation of this issue; for example, there is no concept of traditional property in Georgian legislation. While many infrastructure projects are being planned in Georgia in which the Bank may be involved, local legislation must be made more compatible with Bank policy.
- One aspect of OP 4.12, which concerns the necessity to avoid resettlement as much as possible, seems for some reason to be ignored in many countries.
- It is very important to have public discussions in order to guarantee involvement of all stakeholders; project documents should be sent to stakeholders ahead of time; their suggestions and recommendations regarding the project should be taken into account and the revised documentation showing how those suggestions have been incorporated should be provided to stakeholders before their publication so that stakeholders can respond appropriately. Informing the population beforehand is very important.
- A strategic evaluation of environmental impact of programs, carried out before making corresponding decisions, is needed. It would be good if the Bank could encourage inclusion of a strategic evaluation mechanism for environmental impacts in the national legislation.
- Adequate media coverage of projects in general as well as their environmental and social impacts needs to be ensured. Currently many issues are covered incorrectly and incompletely.

- It was suggested that civil society participate in monitoring implementation of the updated safeguard policies when they are completed.
- Laws and action plans are created but there are no institutional mechanisms and budget for their implementation. This should be discussed with the government.
- With regard to the structure of the policies, Environmental Assessment, Natural Habitats, and Forests are all interconnected, whereas Involuntary Resettlement sometimes results from the requirements of the abovementioned policies. Elaboration of more integrated policies should be considered.
- As for Physical Cultural Resources, why are only physical resources taken into account; non-material resources are no less important.
- When there is a discrepancy between Bank and national requirements, the stricter requirement should apply.
- Regarding the term “borrower,” it is important to note that this usually implies the country’s government, whereas the borrower is the country as a whole and the government is only its representative. Sometimes the views of the government and the population don’t coincide.
- It should be possible to include monitoring in the technical assistance component of projects and the monitoring should be undertaken by the Bank. However, third party monitoring could create certain difficulties, for example, when monitoring functions are assumed by journalists or local community representatives, etc.
- The importance of strategic evaluation of environmental impacts was underlined, because environment often becomes a victim of economic development in countries with developing or transitional economies, which is unacceptable. A certain balance must be preserved.
- The awareness of the population should be raised. There are many people whose property rights are violated when the state implements projects and they don’t know what they can do about it.
- The quality of framework documents for involuntary resettlement should be improved. OP 4.10 (Indigenous Peoples) is not well tailored to the situation in Georgia as far as the definition of the term is concerned. Criteria for considering various groups as “Indigenous Peoples” must be tailored to the reality of the country. Vulnerability criteria must be more precise.
- Georgian environmental legislation has significantly worsened recently, especially as far as environmental impact is concerned. This issue needs to be raised with the government. Nongovernmental organizations must also be involved in the process of improving the law. There are problems associated with experts and expert examination: experts often do not understand the technical task and procedural requirements. Improving experts’ capacity is necessary.
- Labor safety issues should be included in the safeguard policy documents.
- It would be desirable to include a mechanism in the policy documents for protecting cultural heritage outside a country’s political borders. Representatives of NGOs should also be involved in that process. The situation in occupied territories is also noteworthy, because local cultural heritage should be protected there as well.
- The impact of current projects on the environment of other countries should be considered as well. For example, a power station is being built in Turkey, which will have an impact on Georgia’s coastline.