



commission for environmental impact assessment

SICA/CCAD  
Mr. M. Castro Salazar  
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Urb. Santa Elena, Antiguo Cuscatlán  
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your reference

your letter of  
31 October 2002

our reference  
052-ab

subject  
Advisory Guidelines on transboundary  
and regional impacts of the SIEPAC  
project, Central America

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Utrecht,  
24 February 2003

Dear Mr. Castro,

By letter dated 31 October 2002, you invited the Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment (the Commission) to advise on Terms of Reference for Environmental Impact studies for projects within the so called Plan Puebla Panamá. One of these projects is the SIEPAC project, Sistema de Interconexión Eléctrica de los Países de América Central. You invited the Commission to address specifically the regional and transboundary impacts of SIEPAC. It is my pleasure to submit herewith the advice prepared by a working group of the Commission. I would like to draw your attention to the following points:

During its stay in Central America the Commission noticed that the Central American countries are increasingly confronted with (mega)-projects and plans at a strategic level. Questions arise like for example:

- at national level: how do mega- projects at national level relate to international projects. Nicaragua mentioned the example of the so-called 'Canal seco'-project, consisting of three projects that form a connection between the atlantic and pacific coast and the SIEPAC project. It was felt that an analysis was needed on how the SIEPAC and the Canal Seco projects relate to each other, can they be integrated, do they have cumulative impacts, do they contradict each others objectives, how do they fit into other major plans and programmes at national level?
- at regional level: as SIEPAC is one of the initiatives of the Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP), the PPP was subject of much discussion. There was much confusion about issues like how SIEPAC relates to the objectives of PPP (promote integration, overcome poverty and increase quality of life), which initiatives form part of PPP and why, what does PPP mean for each country, why is 'sustainable development' one of the 10 initiatives instead of integrated in each of the single initiatives? What could be induced impacts of PPP? Would it not be more effective to do one SEA for the PPP instead of 10 EIA's for each single initiative?

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As some Central American countries now have (a form of) Strategic Environmental Assessment in their EIA legislation (El Salvador, Guatemala, Panamá) and/or regulations and others are planning to have SEA requirements within the coming months (Costa Rica) or years (Nicaragua, Honduras) the Commission endorses the suggestions raised by CCAD and the individual EIA directors to execute a joint SEA for the PPP to start with. Also the Free Trade Agreement with the US and Canada was mentioned to be a suitable case for an SEA study. A request for assistance in this SEA process could be directed to the Netherlands Commission for EIA.

In relation to the SIEPAC project, the Commission wants to emphasise that the most important potential (positive and negative) impacts are related to the selection of the route alignment and to related induced transboundary and regional impacts. The direct impacts of construction and operation are less relevant. The Commission recommends therefore to focus time and effort in the upcoming EIA studies on the issues addressed by the Commission in its supplementary guidelines to the IDB ToR.

The Commission is of the opinion that the SIEPAC project forms an excellent opportunity for co-operation between the national environmental authorities of the 6 Central American countries and harmonisation of environmental criteria. If the environmental authorities succeed in well managing this joint EIA process, this will contribute positively to the strengthening of their position and reputation. To stimulate this potentially positive spin-off, the Commission suggests to actively involve the environmental authorities in organising and managing the public participation process. This would also have budget implications (in terms of reservation of amounts and handing over of responsibilities).

If requested, the Commission is willing to assist in reviewing the SIEPAC EIA studies (limited to checking whether the issues raised in the supplementary guidelines have been addressed) when these are finalised.

The Commission appreciates to be informed about the use that is made of this advice.

K.J. Beek

Chairman Working Group

Transboundary and Regional Impacts of SIEPAC,  
Central America

cc.

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