Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment of the oil and gas sector in Mauritania

Oil and gas in Mauritania
Mauritania, officially Islamic Republic of Mauritania, was included in the list of Africa’s oil producing nations in 2001 after the announcement that oil had been discovered in the offshore Chinguetti field. Mauritania has great oil and gas potential, but it also has to cope with fragile institutional structures and inadequate local expertise to competently manage its oil resources. The Government of Mauritania recognized the importance of improving the legal and regulatory framework and enhancing environmental governance in the oil and gas sector. Therefore, it decided that an SEA (strategic environmental assessment) was needed to ensure that oil and gas development proceeds in a sustainable manner. The SEA was (initially) supported by the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA), the World Bank and the Norwegian Oil for development programme.

Why SEA?
Mauritania has a very rich fauna, particularly when considering the bird species. Some mammalian species are reported to be critically endangered. The possible risk that oil and gas development poses to nature conservation areas, in particular Banc d’Arguin and the National park Diawling, was one of the reasons for the Government of Mauritania to start a Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA). The term SESA, in stead of SEA, is used to emphasize the importance of social issues.

The SESA objectives for Mauritania’s oil and gas were:
- To identify the social and environmental impacts which could be generated by increased onshore and offshore oil and gas development, and to evaluate the scope and probability of these impacts.
- To put forward recommendations to avoid, manage and/or attenuate these impacts.
- To facilitate the integration of these measures into a coherent policy and to ensure its application.
- To support the development of capacity building by providing a learning experience for Government officials in the management oil and gas sector impacts, in particular the Ministries of Environment and Petroleum, Energy and Mines.

The Process of the SEA
- At the request of the former President of Mauritania, and facilitated by the Netherlands Embassy in Dakar, Senegal, the NCEA visited Mauritania in 2006 to review the Environmental Impact Assessment/Social Impact Assessment report of the Chinguetti oil field and draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for an SEA of oil and gas development and coastal management. The latter had been published in September 2006.
- The Mauritanian government, with a new elected president in office since April 2007, together with the World Bank, established the final ToR for the SEA at the end of 2007.
- A Steering Committee for this SEA was appointed by an Inter-Ministerial Decree in July 2007 and an Expanded Steering Committee was established to support the Steering Committee activities and represent stakeholders during public consultation.
- In March 2008, two companies, D’Appolonia SpA of Italy and Integrated Environments (2006) Ltd. of Canada (D’Appolonia–IEL) were awarded a contract to undertake the SESA of the draft development policy for oil and gas exploration and production.
- A first meeting attended by the consultants SESA Team and stakeholders from the Steering Committee and extended Steering Committee was held in March 2008 to discuss the SESA scoping. Subsequent meetings and workshops took place in May and July 2008.
- In August 2008, the SESA was put on hold because of a change in government. In September 2009, the Mauritanian authorities decided to resume work on the

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a family of approaches that aim to integrate environmental considerations into policies, plans and programs and evaluate their inter–linkages with economic and social considerations.
SESA which lead to the drawing up of a reactivation plan in December 2009.

- In February 2010, a new contract to proceed on the SESA was drawn up and a meeting was held to discuss how the final SESA key findings and recommendations, Action Plan and Budget should look like.
- In April 2010 a team meeting was held to present the SESA Draft Report, the preliminary SESA key findings and recommendations.
- In April 2011, the comments and recommendations from the Mauritanian counterparts and workshop participants were compiled into the draft final report.

### SESA context in Mauritania
- Lack of overarching legal and regulatory framework for the extractive industry;
- Unclear roles and responsibilities defined for the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development;
- No environmental compliance system in place;
- Limited oil and gas reserves discovered – only offshore;
- Ocean fishery major income of GDP and local employment;
- Interactions with onshore established mining industry not assessed.

### NCEA involvement in this SEA
The NCEA had been requested to advice on ToR for the SEA of the offshore development of oil and gas exploitation and its interaction with fishery and coastal development. The ToR elaborates how the SEA should address two major themes. The first theme concerns the pace of management of Mauritanian resources, aimed at building up an adequate institutional structure, at the strategic allocation of additional revenues between investments and poverty alleviation and at optimal exploitation of the resources. The second theme addresses the ambition level for technical requirements given their interaction with the use of renewable resources (fishery, landscape, biodiversity, and culture).

### Services provided by the NCEA
The NCEA supports SEA practice in different countries. Depending on the needs in a specific country, the NCEA can contribute to:
- Introductory training;
- Institutional assessment;
- Coaching and training on-the-job of SEA teams;
- Introduction and design of SEA systems (see key sheet SEA introduction);
- Advising on ToR for and quality review of individual SEAs. (see key sheet Independent advice on SEA reports)

### More information
- Tailor-made support and advice on EIA/SEA (for oil & gas) contact helpdesk@eia.nl
- Or visit NCEA’s website at www.eia.nl for news, country profiles, resources and project database.

---

**The SEA Methodology**
The methodology employed in the SESA was derived from the SESA ToR, input from the SESA team and interaction with Mauritanian counterparts and from best SEA practice. It consisted of:

- Environmental and social baseline data collection and identification of key environmental and social impacts;
- Development of two potential scenarios for oil and gas development onshore and offshore considered;
- Review of the proposed new Hydrocarbon Code and review of the current context for oil and gas exploration and development in Mauritania.
- Preparation of key strategic recommendations; and
- Development of an Action Plan and related Budget.

**The SEA results so far**
The SESA aided in the development of a list of recommendations, along with an Action Plan to facilitate their implementation. Priorities were structured into immediate action (2011–2012), short term action (2012–2013) and medium to long-term action (2012–2015).