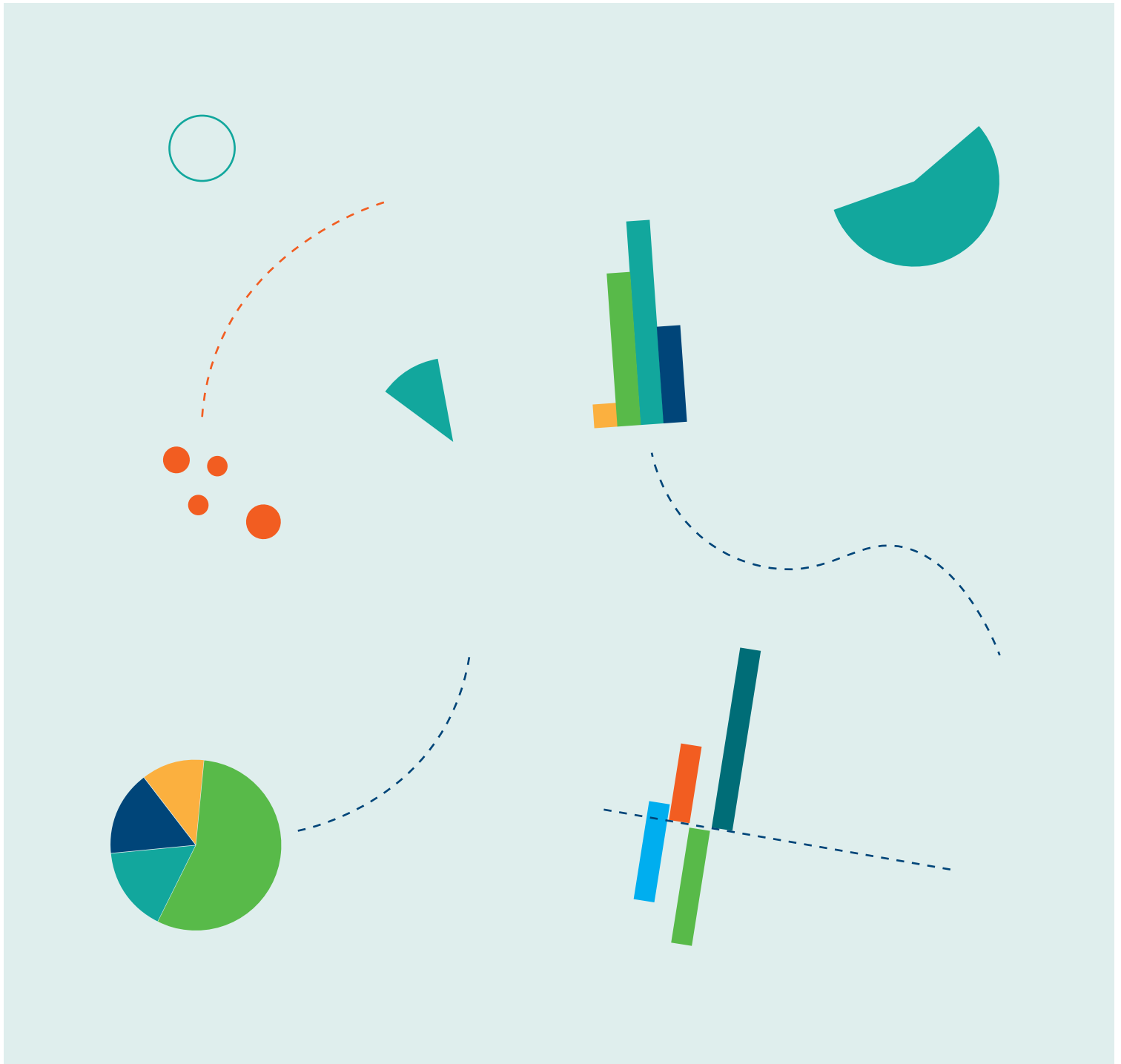


Effectiveness and relevance of recent environmental assessments for policy-making and public information in the Republic of Armenia

Working paper, October 2017



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European Environment Agency
Kongens Nytorv 6
1050 Copenhagen K
Denmark
Tel.: +45 33 36 71 00
Web: eea.europa.eu
Enquiries: eea.europa.eu/enquiries

Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Findings and key messages.....	6
	• Effectiveness.....	6
	• Quality.....	7
	• Efficiency.....	8
	• Policy impact.....	9
	• Awareness and outreach.....	10
3	Conclusions and considerations.....	11
	Annexes.....	13
	• Interviewed organisations.....	14
	• Summary of responses to the survey.....	15
	• Evaluation tool.....	18

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1 Introduction

This report synthesises the results of a survey among the users of environmental assessments in the Republic of Armenia (hereinafter Armenia). 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 environmental 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 Armenia. 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 Armenia.

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

[Armenia Ministerial Report](#), 2011, in Armenian. This 104-page document presents an overview of the system operations of the Ministry of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia for the period of 2007–2011. The report analyses the major achievements during the period from the Belgrade to the Astana Ministerial Conferences. It encompasses the current state of the environment, the development trends by sector and the country’s priorities for environmental protection. The report seeks to summarise the completed activities, to assess the achievements and to identify prospective opportunities. The document has few graphics.

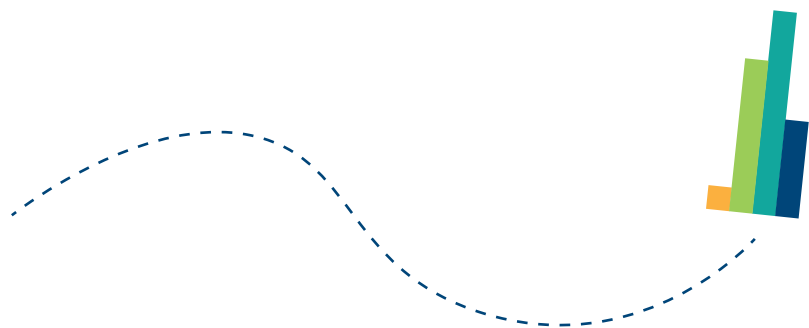
[Fifth National Report of the Republic of Armenia to the Convention on Biological Diversity](#), 2014, in Armenian. This 135-page document was prepared under the guidelines of the secretariat of the Convention. The report assesses the progress of implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use for 2011–2020, and enables Armenia to plan biodiversity conservation measures. It consists of three main parts, and includes information on the status and trends of biodiversity; threats to biodiversity and their implications for human well-being; implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan; and the outcomes of implementation of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in Armenia. The report includes some visual materials.

[Third National Communication of the Republic of Armenia to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), 2015, in Armenian. This 151-page National Communication was developed according to guidelines for Non-Annex I Parties to the Convention. It provides an assessment of the national GHG inventories and emission trends for 1990–2010, introduces climate mitigation scenarios and assesses future indicators until 2030 under new sectoral programmes facilitating reduction in emissions for all categories of emission sources. It also assesses vulnerability of ecosystems and climate-dependent sectors of the economy and identifies priority adaptation measures for mitigating the consequences of climate change impact and extreme hydrometeorological events. The document is well illustrated.

The Ministry of Nature Protection is responsible for coordination of the document preparation. The Ministry prepared the 2007–2011 Ministerial Report, and the UNDP Office in Armenia supported its translation and publication. The 2014 Fifth National report to CBD was prepared in close cooperation and with the support of the World Bank and GEF. The 2015 Third National Communication to the UNFCCC was prepared with financial support by UNDP.

The intended respondents included policy-makers from the environmental as well as non-environmental sectors of the government, selected representative of research, academia and business as well as the civil society (Annex 1).

In Armenia, 23 organisations were invited to the interviews and filled in the questionnaire. The interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings, electronic letter format, phone conversations and e-mail communications.



2 Findings and key messages

This chapter analyses the cumulative responses for all the reviewed assessments. Annex 2 presents more detailed data.

Effectiveness

→ **Key messages**

- Assessments are useful and needed
- There is potential for improvement in the quality of the assessments
- Assessments are not always efficiently used by decision makers

certain that the reports are serving their initial policy needs due to the limited use of reports by the policy-makers.

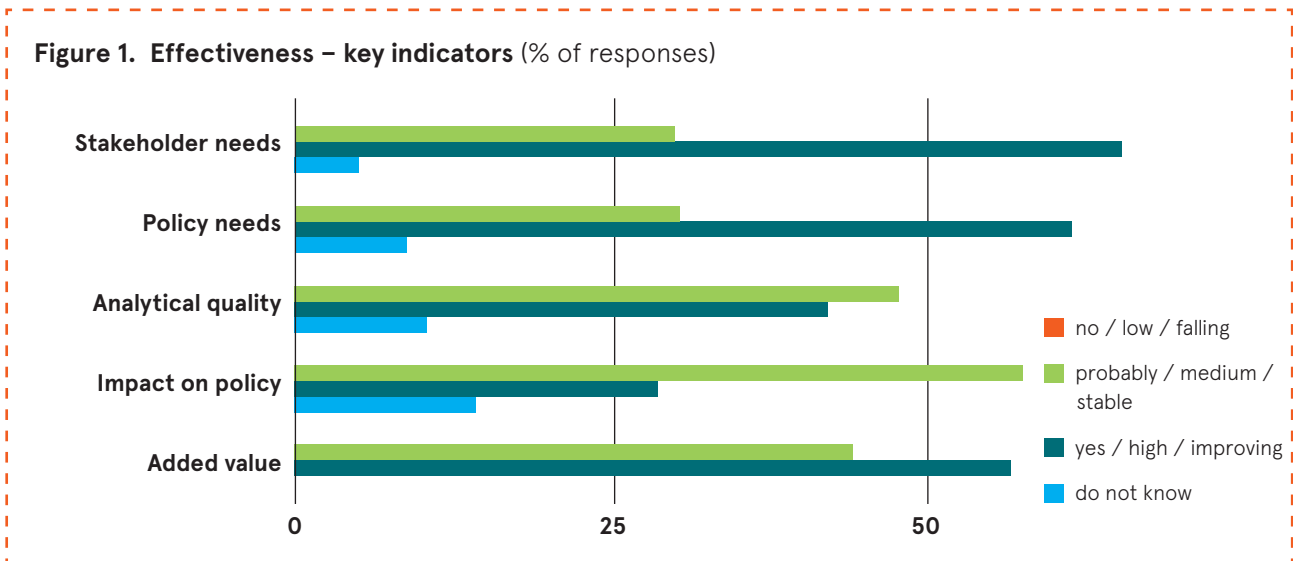
According to almost 90 per cent of the responses, the assessments are of medium to high **analytical quality**. On the other hand, representatives of civil society commented that the SoE lacks advanced analysis, contains very little useful information, and includes information that differs from water and air monitoring reports.

Almost all stakeholders identified the environmental assessments as useful and matching the **needs of stakeholders** (more than 90 per cent of the responses). Several stakeholders characterised the latest SoE as outdated and not always reflecting the current reality.

About 75 per cent of the responses stated that the environmental assessments probably have, or do have, an **impact on policy**. Some stakeholders were not able to answer this question (about 20 per cent of the responses).

Ninety per cent of the responses indicated that the assessments respond or probably respond adequately to **environmental policy needs**, but some stakeholders are not

Most of the respondents agreed that the assessments do provide an **added value** at the national level, as professionals use them for further analysis and actions in environmental management.



Quality

Key messages

- The overall quality and sufficiency of the assessments are medium
- SoE quality, timeliness and topical coverage needs improvement
- Reliability and independence are medium to high
- Thematic specialists are the main users

The **overall quality** of all three assessments was evaluated as medium. Respondents noted the lack of funding for the preparation of the documents and the availability and frequency of monitoring data as the main reasons for the shortcomings.

Almost 60 per cent of the responses rated **sufficiency** as medium, and 35 per cent as high. Respondents commented that the SoE lacks information on financial resources for implementation.

Seventy per cent of the responses indicated that the **timeliness** is high, with the timeliest reports being on biodiversity and climate. Several stakeholders mentioned the SoE report as the most outdated and in need of revision.

Medium **topical coverage** is observed within all the reports (90 per cent of the responses), with the highest topical coverage in assessments related to biodiversity, climate and air pollution.

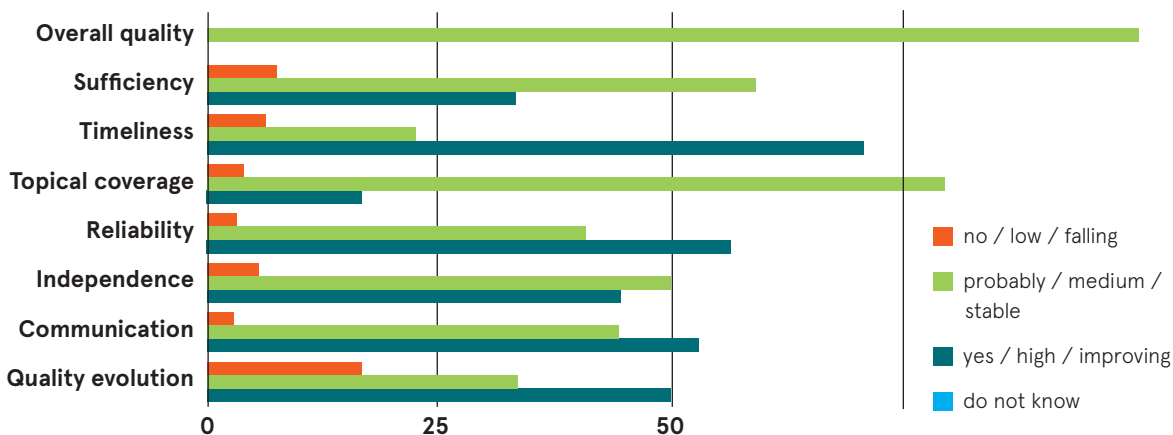
Overall, about 55 per cent of responses rated the **reliability** as high, and 40 per cent as medium. The most reliable data are presented in biodiversity and climate assessments, while the reliability of SoE was evaluated as low.

More than 90 per cent of the responses ranked the **independence of data and analysis** among all reports as medium to high. Biodiversity and climate assessments were recognised as the most independent.

The **communication** of the environmental assessments was evaluated as medium to high. The well-communicated reports included the biodiversity and climate assessments. Some stakeholders also commented on the limited use of the assessments by wider stakeholder audiences, and indicated a need for better communication and outreach. Thematic specialists are the main users.

More than 80 per cent of the responses indicated that the **quality of the assessments** has improved or probably improved over time, while about 20 per cent of the responses pointed out that the quality is not improving.

Figure 2. Quality of assessments (% of responses)



Efficiency

→ **Key messages**

- The assessments provide relevant information, but do not always have an impact on environmental policy
- Some stakeholders are not aware of the methods and tools used, or of how the benefits of the reports compare to the costs
- There is a potential for optimisation

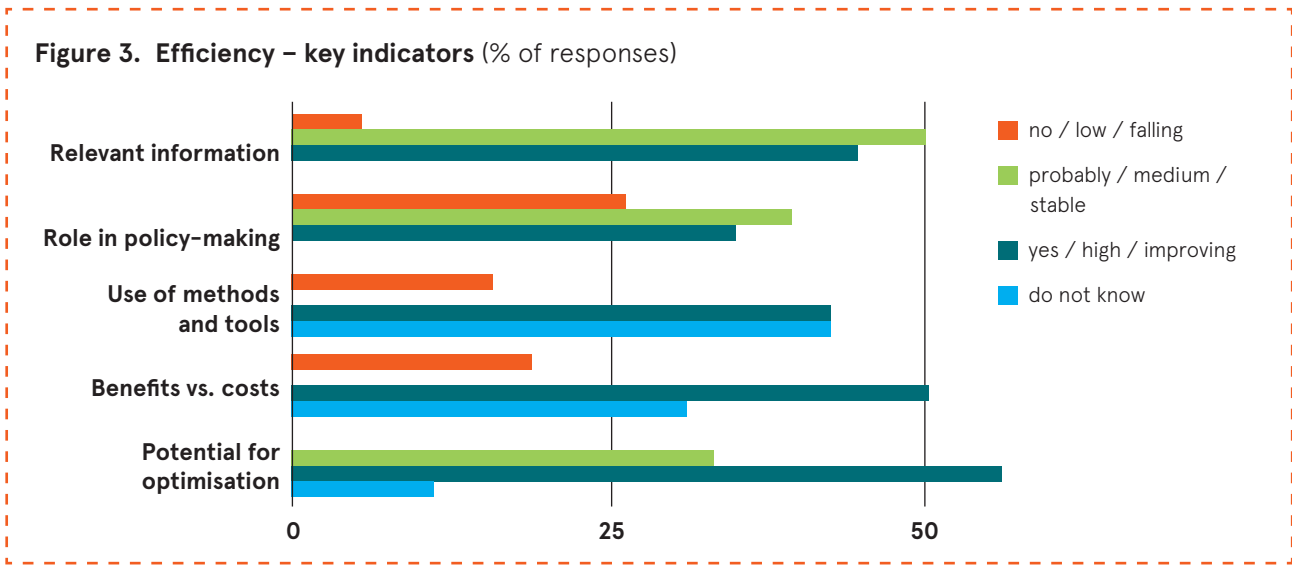
Ninety per cent of the responses say that the environmental assessments provide or probably provide **relevant information**.

About 75 per cent of the responses indicated that the environmental assessments probably play or do play a role in **environmental policy-making** in the country, as strategy and action plans are based on the assessments. About 25 per cent of the responses assessed the role in policy-making as low.

Concerning the **analytical methods and tools** used in the assessments, 40 per cent of the responses indicated that they are well used and sufficient (biodiversity and climate reports), while the same percentage of respondents were not able to answer this question. About 20 per cent of the responses indicated that the use of modern methods and tools is not sufficient.

At least half of the respondents stated that the relationship between the **costs** and the **benefits** of the reports is reasonable, while 30 per cent of the respondents did not know. Climate and biodiversity assessments are considered to be worthy of investment.

Respondents rated the **potential for optimisation** as high (about 60 per cent of the responses) or probably high (35 per cent of the responses). In the opinion of civil society organisations, SoE report has room for improvements in quality.



Policy impact

Key messages

- Assessments play little role in identifying policy interventions
- Assessments moderately help in policy evaluation

Sixty per cent of the responses indicated that the information delivered through the assessments plays a completely insignificant role in identifying **policy interventions**. Most of the criticism goes to the timing of the assessments and the missed opportunities to react in certain situations.

A majority of the stakeholders consider the reports to be efficient in helping to determine **the scale and scope** of policy interventions.

More than 30 per cent of the responses indicated that the assessments are significant or very significant in helping to **choose policy instruments**. Forty per cent of the

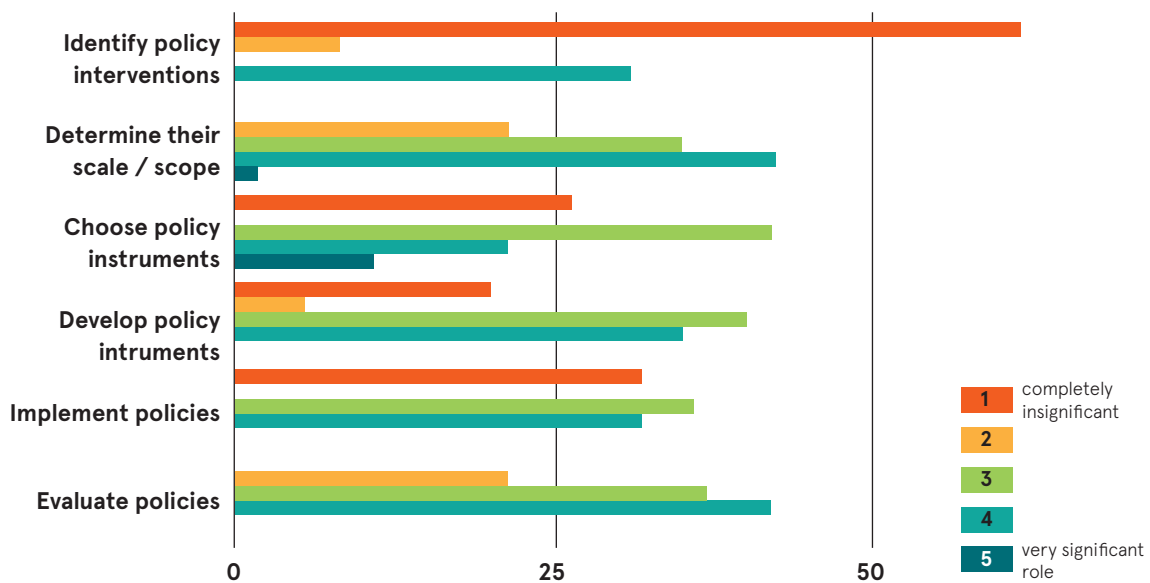
responses indicated that the help is moderate, while about 30 per cent stated that the assessments play a completely insignificant role in choosing policy instruments. Biodiversity and climate assessments are considered the most efficient in supporting policy choices.

Similar opinions were evident regarding the role of the assessments in helping to **develop policy instruments**: 35 per cent said significant, 40 per cent said moderate, and 20 per cent said insignificant.

Environmental assessments (except for SoE report) were considered helpful for **implementation of policies** by 35 per cent of the responses. More than 35 per cent stated that the role of the assessments in the implementation of policies is completely insignificant.

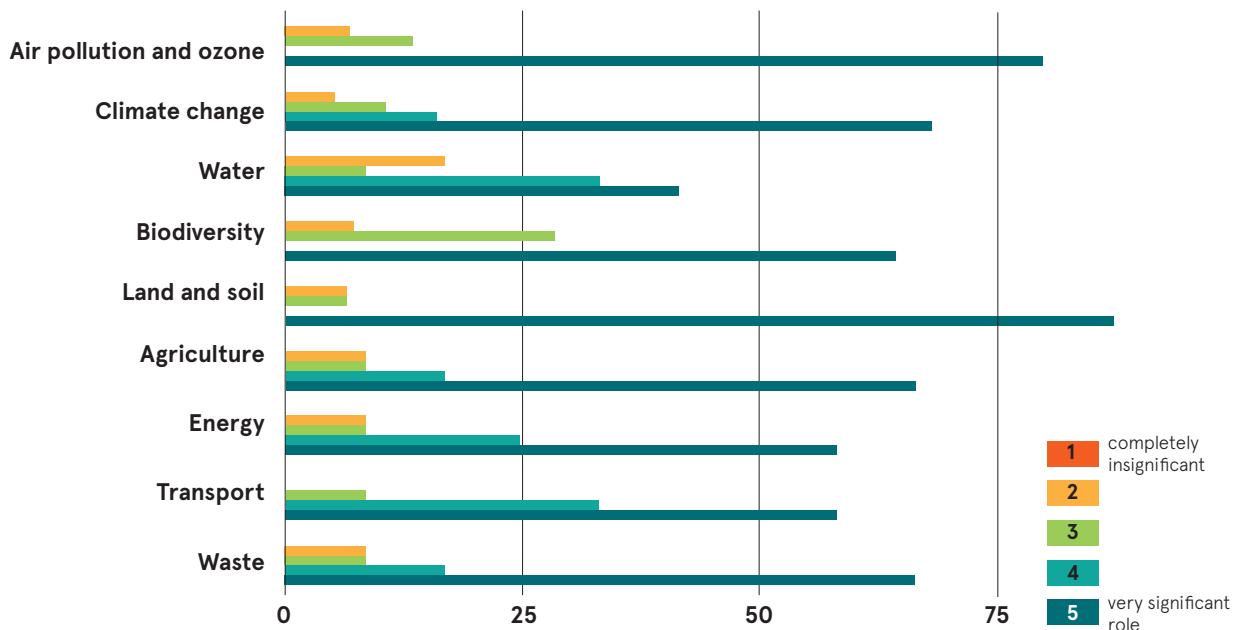
More than 90 per cent of the responses considered the reports helpful or moderately helpful for evaluating the **effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies**.

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



Overall, the responses regarding the **future demand for assessments** demonstrate the need to produce environmental assessment reports across the range of topics in order to help improve the country’s environmental performance. Most topics ranked from high to very high, but water got lower marks.

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



Awareness and outreach

Key messages

- All assessments are available online in English and Armenian, but not always on nationally managed websites
- The Third National Communication to the UNFCCC could be an example for other reports
- NGOs could be more actively involved

All three documents are available online for wider public use (on websites of the Ministry and/or UNDP), though neither the Ministry, nor the UNDP were able to provide the information about visitors to their websites, or how many times the documents were downloaded.

Stakeholders identified the Third National Communication to the UNFCCC as a well-communicated report on different types of events in Armenia. This report could serve as an example for other similar environmental assessments to follow.

3 Conclusions and considerations

Overall, the environmental assessments meet the stakeholders' needs and support environmental policy, but improvements in the quality of the assessments can be considered especially for the SoE reports. Information and data need to be refreshed and updated, the assessments should be complemented with analysis and documents should include relevant material and case studies. The development of the reports should include large-scale consultations with academic institutions, relevant government agencies, civil society and experts. Information should be verified with relevant organisations having specific expertise in the field.

→ **Considerations**

- The quality of data and information should be improved
- Analysis in the assessments should be improved

The quality of assessments is dependent on the availability of monitoring data and expertise in particular areas. In the area of waste management, for example, reports and assessments are not regularly conducted and data is not regularly collected and analysed. As a result, the data on the impact of waste, contamination of natural resources and the environment, and negative impacts on human health are scarce. A consistent approach across issues is necessary for the creation of accessible and free environmental information.

→ **Consideration**

- The timeliness, frequency and comprehensiveness of data collection for the preparation of the assessments should be ensured

The quality of environmental assessments most frequently depends on funding for the preparation and financing for the expertise and analysis, data collection and research in particular areas. This means that the proper financial resources for environmental reporting should be allocated from the public funding, and should this be done in close coordination with donor institutions and agencies interested in development and environmental performance.

→ **Consideration**

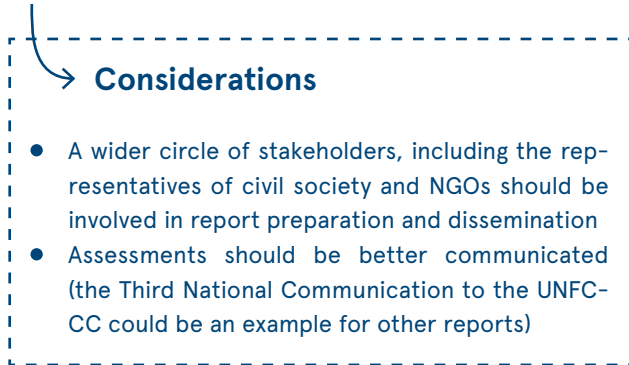
- Sufficient financial support for the preparation of the assessments should be stabilised and ensured from both public, also donor sides

The medium rating of the impact of environmental assessments on the policy leads to a consideration of increasing the use of the assessments among decision-makers and to improve their impact on policy development, in particular, in developing policy instruments, tools and reforms, and in introducing and monitoring the progress towards national priority targets and indicators. The environmental assessments should correspond more closely to the principles of national legislation and international commitments.

→ **Consideration**

- The role of the environmental assessments (especially SoE reports) in policy development and decision-making should be strengthened

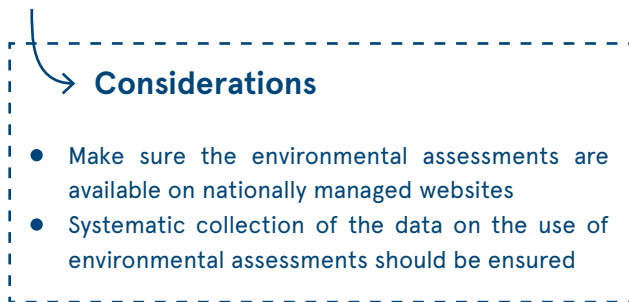
Civil society organisations identified the issue of participation and collaboration in the preparation and dissemination of national environmental assessments among the public, civil society and academia (through academic networks).



Considerations

- A wider circle of stakeholders, including the representatives of civil society and NGOs should be involved in report preparation and dissemination
- Assessments should be better communicated (the Third National Communication to the UNFCCC could be an example for other reports)

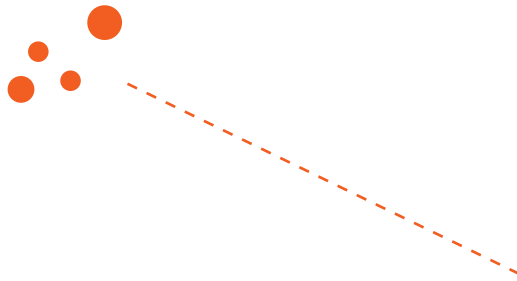
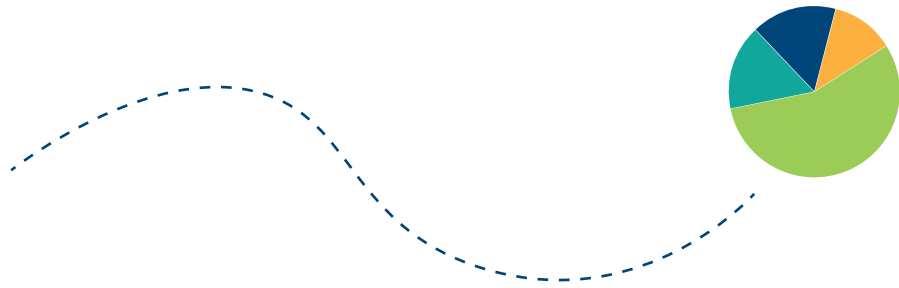
It is important that all environment related reports are available on nationally managed websites, ideally on the MNP website, as well as the data on usage of the assessments is better monitored.



Considerations

- Make sure the environmental assessments are available on nationally managed websites
- Systematic collection of the data on the use of environmental assessments should be ensured

ANNEXES



Annex 1 Interviewed organisations

National Assembly
Ministry of Agriculture
Ministry of Nature Protection
Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development
Yerevan Municipality Council
National Academy of Sciences
Institute of Hydro-ecology and Ichthyology of Scientific Centre of Zoology and Hydro-ecology
Institute of Botany
Climate Change Information Centre
Yerevan State University
Armenian State Pedagogical University
Regional Environmental Centre for Caucasus
Aarhus Centre
Green Club UNIDO
Green Lane NGO
Foundation to Save Energy
Environmental Survival NGO
Republican Union of Employers of Armenia

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?	13	6	1	0
1.2 Did the EA respond adequately to environmental policy needs?	14	7	2	0
1.3 Is the EA's analysis of consistently high quality?	8	9	2	0
1.4 Do the EA findings have an impact on environmental policy-making or likely to have such impact in the future?	6	12	3	0
1.5 Did the EA provide added value at the national level?	9	7	0	0

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	45	0

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	2	16	9
3.2 Timeliness	2	7	22
3.3 Topical coverage	1	19	4
3.4 Reliability	1	13	18
3.5 Independence	2	18	16
3.6 Well-communicated	1	15	18

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?	2	4	6

II. Efficiency

1 Key indicators of efficiency

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No
1.1 Did the EA deliver relevant information?	8	9	0	1
1.2 Did the EA play a role in environmental policy-making in the country?	8	9	0	6
1.3 Is the use of analytical methods and tools in the EA appropriate and sufficient?	8	0	8	3
1.4 Did the EA represent value for money comparing the costs and benefits?	8	0	5	3
1.5 Is there any potential for optimisation of the EA with regard to a modern and efficiently operational work flow?	10	6	2	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?	8	1	0	4	0
2.2. help determine the scale and scope of policy interventions?	0	14	23	28	1
2.3 help choose policy instruments (legal, awareness raising etc.)?	5	0	8	4	2
2.4 help develop policy instruments (including setting their targets and indicators)?	4	1	8	7	0
2.5 help implement policies?	8	0	9	8	0
2.6 help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies?	0	4	7	8	0

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	1	2	0	12
3.2. Climate change	0	1	2	3	13
3.3 Water	0	2	1	4	5
3.4 Biodiversity	0	1	4	0	14
3.5 Land and soil	0	1	1	2	8
3.6 Agriculture	0	1	1	3	7
3.7 Energy	0	0	1	3	7
3.8 Transport	0	0	1	4	7
3.9 Waste	0	1	1	2	8

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					

