

That said, each model added value in different ways. Environmental and social impact assessments and political risk assessments have all developed strong methodologies over the years, and international standards have been developed to guide these assessment methodologies. And while the strengths for these types of assessments lay in their methodology, the strength of a human rights impact assessment lay in it being firmly rooted in international legal obligations that would underscore the importance of such issues as participation and disclosure of information. An impact assessment based in human rights would carry with it great weight and moral authority. The promotion of human rights, for example, constitute an element of Canada's foreign policy and respect for human rights enjoys broad public support and acceptance. Human rights also covers a broad array of issues, and would likely expand the scope of a EIAs and SIAs, providing a much more comprehensive and holistic approach to assessment. Furthermore, human rights are currently not being addressed with sufficient vigour either within EIAs, SIAs, or political risk assessments.

Therefore, it was less a question of whether to have a separate HRIA or integrate it into a SIA, than of using human rights and a rights-based approach as the framework for developing a SIA. That said, the process for conducting SIAs would also need to be reviewed because, for example, they are being funded by companies and therefore not independent. Another participant also observed that if sustainable development was the end goal, then there were a number of necessary preconditions for this new approach to work. Among other things, this approach would need to have a long term perspective; there would need to be clear and comprehensive human rights indicators; there would need to be ongoing monitoring of a broad array of issues; and the IFI would need to be clear about what it would require from the company.

In order for such an assessment to work, there would also need to be both national and international support for the initiative. One participant suggested that since Canada does not appear to have a strong tradition of using SIAs, it may be advantageous to propose the development of a HRIA. EDC might, for example, use some of its profit every year towards financing HRIAs and monitoring them.

Some suggested that it was not EDC's responsibility to fund such studies, but rather the proponent's. Others suggested that this would not create any level of independence and that a separate mechanism would be needed to fund HRIAs and hire truly independent consultants. But where would the money come from?

Another participant argued that in terms of international support, it would be difficult to push things on the international stage as the World Bank, for example, currently excludes human rights issues from its central mandate.

This discussion then ended by exploring the utility of developing a new and improved model when there are so many outstanding issues that have yet to be resolved. For example, one participant observed how decision-makers will sometimes ignore the recommendations of consultants. Monitoring is often the responsibility of proponents, yet there is a perverse incentive on the part of proponents to distort outcomes and render them favourable in order to secure the next trench of money. Similarly, one participant questioned whether a company, an ECA or a host government would ever say 'No' to a project when there is money to be made. Another questioned the value of developing an improved assessment process when commercial confidentiality and current disclosure practices at ECAs keep so much of the information related to these commercial transactions secret. EDC argued that it had moved forward on disclosure although there was some discussion about the extent to which it had done this.

Finally, several participants expressed the need not to try to find the perfect solution, but rather find a credible, develop a workable methodology and carry out a pilot project.

Some questions which were raised during the discussion, but that still needed further clarification included the following:

- What does a stand alone SIA do that a Environmental and Social Impact Assessment doesn't?
- What do we want to use the HRIA for - for example, for conflict, privatization, public support for private investment, or trade policies?