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SYNTHESIS OF THE WEBINAR

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS FOR INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT

FRIDAY 16 JUNE 2017, 16:00-18:00 CET (GMT +2)

ORGANIZED BY:
THE INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT SOCIETY

Background and Focus

Since The Integrated Assessment Society (TIAS) was established, considerably more experience has been built up in commissioning, delivering and using Integrated Assessment (IA) for environmental management and sustainable development. In particular, a larger variety of assessments have been produced. In addition to the prominent worldwide assessments, such as, the IPCC Assessment Reports, IPBES and GEO, IA has also been used at local level. Furthermore, policy analysis has increasingly become part of Integrated Assessment. Specifically in forward-looking assessments, alternative formats, such as megatrends, have been introduced, or have been re-invented, such as backcasting.

Taking advantage of the growing wealth of experiences that exists among TIAS members, TIAS proposes to review and sharpen our understanding of Integrated Assessment. What is it? What can we expect from it? In what terms can an IA study be proposed or commissioned nowadays? How can we advance our quest to make Integrated Assessments even more effective?

Drawing lessons from our accumulating experience will be especially useful in light of what we now see on the horizon: many simultaneous assessments related to the SDGs; rethinking the mediation between science and policy in times of fact-free policies as one of the more recent fashion trends; and the shrinking budgets for many of us.

This webinar is organized by Klaus Jacob (President of TIAS, Freie Universität Berlin) and Jan Bakkes (Vice President of TIAS, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency) and intends to kick off activities of a working group and future webinars. The focus of these activities will be discussed during the webinar. Our proposal is to develop a set of standards for IA (see e.g. [this](#) publication on program evaluation standards by Yarbrough et al.). With this in mind, this initial webinar will review key material, such as Bellagio STAMP and UNEP's recently renewed guidelines for Integrated Environment Assessment. Follow up activities will build upon this and will offer a forum to discuss possible standards for IA.

This document is meant to provide a synthesis of the presentations and the discussions. This synthesis report was prepared by Klaus Jacob, Jan Bakkes and Joanne Vinke-de Kruijf.

Link to the recording: <https://webconf.vc.dfn.de/p65wei7hu63/>

Synthesis of presentations and discussions

Opening and Introduction

Klaus Jacob, TIAS and Freie Universität Berlin

Integrated Assessments (IAs) are increasingly applied at the global scale as well at the regional, the national and the subnational level. Expectations are high in regards of their impacts on legitimization and improving decisions for a sustainable development. Research has been undertaken on IA and its impacts at Harvard. In the early 2000s, principles for sustainability assessment (Bellagio principles) have been developed. Since then, new assessments have been conducted, considering the findings of research on their impacts and the principles. It is timely to reflect on the quality and impacts of IA, to foster learning between the different processes and to distill some lessons. This could lead to updated principles or standards which would support planning and eventually the evaluation of IA. Developing such standards would be an opportunity to sharpen the profile of TIAS as an organization. The aim is to develop a rather short document that reflects the thinking on IA and options for their setup. Against this background the webinar was organized to initiate a working group on possible standards for IA. The first webinar is meant to take stock about relevant initiatives, possible future meeting could explore other relevant processes and standards from which IA standards could draw some lessons. Possibly, a workshop could be organized to facilitate the working group and opportunities for funding travel could be explored. Following the introduction, the speakers were introduced and the participants briefly introduced themselves.

Bellagio STAMP - Principles for sustainability assessment and measurement

Laszlo Pintér, TIAS and Central European University

BellagioSTAMP (an initiative of the IISD and OECD) has the aim to guide content, process, scope and ultimately improve the impact of processes of sustainability assessment. It is organized in eight principles, which were developed by a group of researcher and practitioners in IA from national, European and international organizations. The development was embedded in a policy discourse on measurement and indicators. The focus was on sustainability assessment, closely related to IA. Target groups include practitioners in the field and those entering the field (e.g. civil society, those focusing on governance etc.). The principles were published in a brochure and academic papers. Applications of BellagioSTAMP include a wide range of international, national and local assessments. The details on the eight principles are in the PPT file. The principles are normative on what it takes for an assessment to be regarded as 'integrated'. For example, in terms of thematic scope, time horizon and guiding vision, as well as participation and capacity to do another iteration in due time. At the same time, they are highly aggregated in order to reflect the common gene in a wide range of assessment practices. Later articles helped to illustrate the Bellagio principles with examples from various lines of work. Interestingly, the Bellagio principles were redone after a decade, in the light of much expended practice, by a largely new team. The principles benefitted much from this refresher and became more shorter and more crisp.

Overall, Laszlo endorsed the idea of developing standards and/or updating the principles. Preliminary ideas include to focus on mechanisms and criteria for adoption and verification. It should be explored if a standardization body could be part of the process. The target group needs to be clear. It could be explored in how far an update of Bellagio principles is needed.

UN Environment Integrated Environmental Assessment Guidelines

Pierre Boileau, Head of the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) Unit, UNEP

Pierre Boileau presented draft Integrated Environment Assessment Guidelines of the UN Environment (formerly UNEP). In particular, their purpose was explained, namely to position the range of assessments produced by UN Environment (UNEP) in a framework of consistent guidelines. The expectations are to develop transparent procedures for IEA. That range extends from the global environment outlook (GEO) series to so-called rapid response assessments. UNEP found a considerable variability across practices for IEA in member states and other assessments, e.g. IPCC. The development of the guidelines involved the review by a large number of experts. In addition, bodies of the GEO process (stakeholder advisory body and scientific advisory panel) were involved. It builds on previous documents, including earlier definitions of concepts. It also builds on the concepts of salience, credibility and legitimacy.

The guidelines put forward a decision tree focusing on which combination of issues and constraints require which type of assessment. This is anchored in a theory of change, outlined in the guidelines and asking the

authors to be explicit about this. There should be a clear problem statement at the beginning and an evaluation of the effectiveness of policies, goals and governance approaches to solve these problems. Ultimately, an IEA should develop a path to achieve the desired environmental state. This is not necessarily based on outlooks or scenarios as it is the case in other assessments – the focus is on how to achieve change. The consideration of scope and scale is an important aspect. The guidelines build on the DPSIR framework and recognize them as a circular process. A key perspective is to explore the effectiveness of policies. This is currently explored within the context of GEO6. Another key feature is the early planning of an impact strategy, including dissemination activities. The present guidelines build on the 2007 IEA training manual for the Global Environment Outlook, by UNEP and IISD but does not intend to replicate this. Interestingly, the 2007 manual was originally intended to assist the compilation of GEO main reports but found its widest application in the making of regional GEO reports and associated capacity building. It is hoped that the present draft guidelines will be ‘road tested’ by the authors of the global edition of GEO-6. The guidelines should be understood as a living document that includes different guidelines and procedural guidance according to the needs of users.

The discussion focused firstly on the concept of the theory of change. A different understanding of theory of change refers to the target audience of an IEA. It makes a difference if it is targeted at policy makers or other audiences e.g. academics, civil society, general public. An assessment that aims to have an impact would need to be written in different formats. This could be considered in a theory of change as part of the guidelines. Secondly, the pathways of change were discussed: They could look differently in a problem oriented IEA as compared to a solution oriented assessment. Thirdly, dissemination activities of GEO6 were highlighted. Finally, the forthcoming evaluation of GEO6 were discussed. The evaluation will follow a standardized method, criteria are developed by the programme managers.

Designing effective Global Environmental Assessments?

Pauline Rioussel, Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW) and Martin Kowarsch, TIAS and Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change

Soon-to be published findings of the FOGTEAM project were presented by Martin Kowarsch and Pauline Rioussel. This extensive project focuses on effectiveness of global environment-related assessments (GEAs), in particular the assessments from 2005 onwards. In total 140 GEAs were identified. The landscape and thereby the shape of GEAs is changing. Environmental problems have changed, more wicked problems are on the agenda, issues of equity and social justice are discussed, emerging economies play an more important role. As a result the number of objectives for each assessment increases. GEAs appear as promising tool at the science-policy interface. There is an increasing demand for solution-oriented GEAs. This implies more stakeholder involvement and diverse views. Research on GEAs applies rather narrow evaluation criteria and focuses on the politics. There is a rather small body of peer reviewed research since 2005. The FOGTEAM project analyzed solution-oriented IAs and took IPCC WG III AR5 and GEO 5 as case studies. An extensive survey was undertaken (100+ interviews, workshops, analysis of documents and literature). A strategic perspective on IAs suggests an assessment cycle, which includes a policy problem, GEAs impact on discourses, scope and objectives, methods, processes and procedures and resources for GEA. Impact would entail not only instrumental learning, but, above all, change of discourses which ultimately would lead to policy change. This causal chain allows a more subtle evaluation as compared to focus on learning only. Within the project, coordinative discourses were distinguished from communicative discourse and scientific discourses. Solution oriented GEAs would explore different pathways/policy alternatives and thereby facilitating deliberative learning processes. Thereby, the project positions global environment assessments as an element in deliberative processes about policy alternatives in view of societal goals. Future research may focus on analyzing how changing governance landscape impact on IA practices. For example IPCC is so far not strong in retrospective policy analysis, but this is a growing expectation. An important mechanism for increasing the impact of GEAs could be ongoing evaluations.

In the discussion, it the need of transparency about assumptions behind the assessments were highlighted as a key aspect for the quality of GEAs. Such assumptions would not only needed in numericals, but also qualitative in narratives. Thereby assumptions and implications would be understandable for a wider audience. The demand for transparency will increase in the future.

Conclusions and way forward

Jan Bakkes, TIAS and the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL)

In a brief discussion on next steps, one plea was widely supported, namely that any development of IA standards (be it principles, guidelines, product/process criteria, or even an ISO-type standard) should work alongside concrete evaluation of specific assessments. There is a larger number of people that, in response to

the invitation for this webinar, expressed interest on next steps in developing standards. A follow up meeting of the working group will be planned based on the outcomes of the meeting. A starting point for developing standards could be the INGSA network. Another option would be another decadal update of the BellagioSTAMP, perhaps in tandem with developing of methods for ongoing evaluation. Given the different options, it was suggested to survey the community on their needs. It will be explored if funding for a physical meeting can be raised.