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1 Introduction

This report synthesises the results of a survey of the users of environmental assessments in the Republic of Azerbaijan (hereinafter Azerbaijan). 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 East)”, 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 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 Azerbaijan. 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 Azerbaijan.

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

[National Report on Environmental Conditions for 2008–2012](#), 2013, in Azeri. This 96-page report includes the following topics: general information on the environmental policy of the country, the protection and management of water resources, atmospheric air, land resources, biodiversity conservation, waste management and forest resources. It also provides information on the hydrometeorological and geo-ecological situations and other related environmental information. The visual materials include tables, graphics, diagrams and maps.

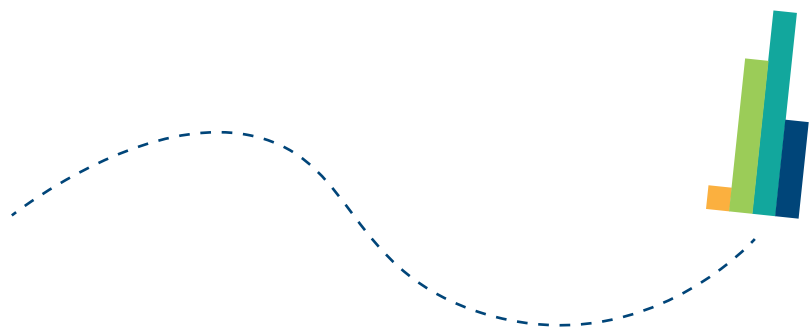
[Fifth National Report of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Convention on Biological Diversity](#), 2014, in English. The structure of this 64-page report is based on the guidelines for the Fifth National Report published by the Convention. It consists of three main parts, and includes information on the current situation on biodiversity; trends, threats and implications for human well-being; national biodiversity strategy and action plan; the 2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets; and the relevant 2015 targets of the Millennium Development Goals. Annexes to the report provide a list of international agreements, Presidential orders and decrees, laws, decisions, state programmes and plans. There are only a few visual materials.

[Third National Communication of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), 2015, in Azeri. This 90-page document was prepared according to the UNFCCC requirements. It includes chapters on national circumstances related to climate change, GHG inventory results, mitigation analysis, climate change scenarios, the assessment of vulnerability, and adaptation as well as other related issues. The report is well illustrated.

The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan is responsible for overall preparation of the environmental assessments. Every five years the Ministry prepares and disseminates a national report on environmental conditions. The latest was produced in 2013 and covers the period of 2008–2012. The Ministry prepared the Fifth National Report to the CBD with the financial and technical support of GEF and UNDP. Azerbaijan has recently – with the technical and financial support of GEF, UNDP and GIZ – initiated the process of reviewing, revising and updating its National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan (NBSAP). As part of this process, it will develop measurable targets and indicators that will enable the country to more effectively report on its contribution to meeting the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. As a Non-Annex I country, Azerbaijan developed and submitted its Third National Communication to UNFCCC in 2015.

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 Azerbaijan, the 23 organisations / potential respondents who received an invitation for an interview, as well as a request to complete the questionnaire included 17 governmental institutions / agencies, 3 non-governmental organisations, 1 academic institution and 2 private sector representatives. The interviews were conducted with representatives of all of the organisations listed in Annex 1, except for Eco Lex NGO as they were not available at the time. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, and lasted for 30-45 minutes. In three cases, when face-to-face interviews were not possible, the interviews were conducted by phone.



2 Findings and key messages

This section analyses the cumulative responses for all the reviewed assessments. More detailed data are presented in Annex 2.

Effectiveness

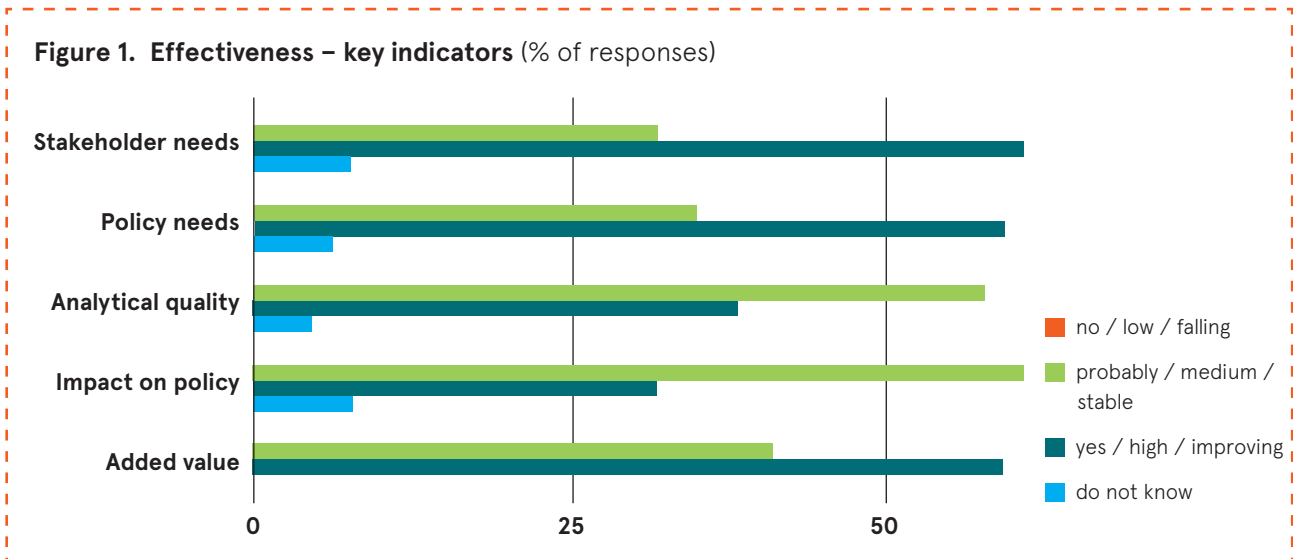
→ **Key messages**

- Assessments are useful and needed
- The analytical quality of the documents is medium
- Some stakeholders had limited knowledge of CBD and UNFCCC reports

The overall **analytical quality** of the assessments was rated as medium (about 60 per cent of the responses) to high (about 40 per cent of the responses). Most of the stakeholders (90 per cent of the responses) report that the assessments have medium to high **impact on policy**. The documents have **added value** at the national level.

Some respondents were not able to rate the indicators with respect to the reports to the CBD and UNFCCC.

About 90 per cent of the responses indicate that the environmental assessments meet or probably meet the **needs of stakeholders** and respond adequately to the **environmental policy needs**.



Quality

Key messages

- The SoE report is considered the most sufficient document
- The timeliness, topical coverage, independence and communication are sufficient
- The analytical quality is stable over time

The **overall quality** of the environmental assessments was rated as medium. The respondents pointed out the lack of scientifically based research. Most of the reports are prepared using country level statistics, though there is a need for local data and for increasing data quality. Some respondents commented that the latest 2013 national report on environmental conditions contains too much information on implemented activities, and less information on problems, needs and targets to be achieved in the coming years. It is not possible to observe trends or conduct analytical comparisons between current and previous reporting periods.

About 80 per cent of the responses rated the **sufficiency** of the assessments as medium and only 20 per cent as high. The 2013 national report on environmental conditions got the highest rating among the documents.

More than 80 per cent of the responses indicated that the **timeliness** of the assessments is high.

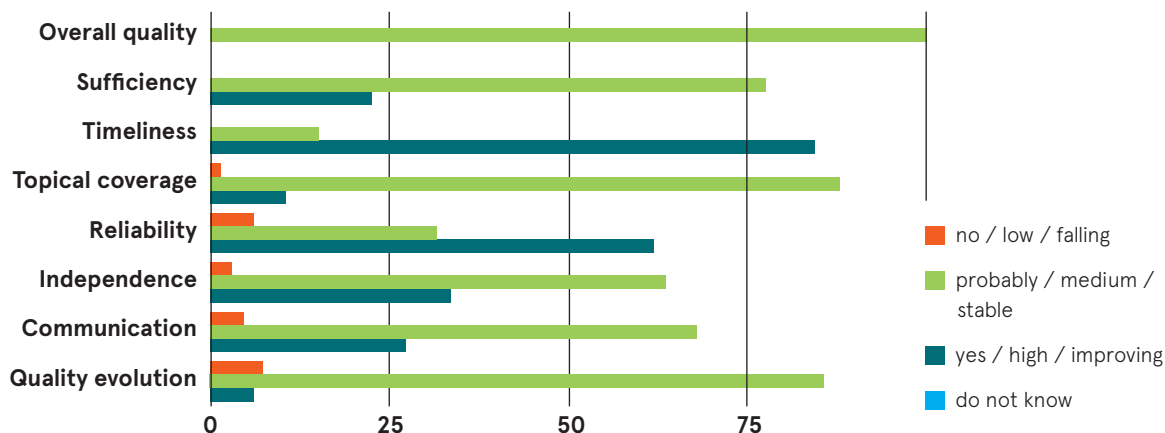
About 90 per cent of the responses indicated that **topical coverage** was medium. The reports cover several topics important for proper development of the country. Reports to CBD and UNFCCC were rated as comprehensive. Some respondents noted that the report to the UNFCCC provides limited information on adaptation, and that information on technological, financial and capacity needs is missing. Only one respondent mentioned low coverage of the report to UNFCCC.

More than 60 per cent of users report that the **reliability** of the assessments and data provided is high, though 30 per cent said that it is medium with room for improvement.

Independence of the preparation process and **communication** of the environmental assessments were rated as medium to high by almost all users.

More than 90 per cent rated the assessments' **quality** as stable or slightly improving **over time**. Some respondents observe improving quality partly due to the introduction of modern methods and to the country's increasing number of local experts with reliable skills in environmental science.

Figure 2. Quality of assessments (% of responses)



Efficiency

→ **Key messages**

- Assessments provide relevant information
- The use of methods and tools is medium
- There is medium potential for optimisation

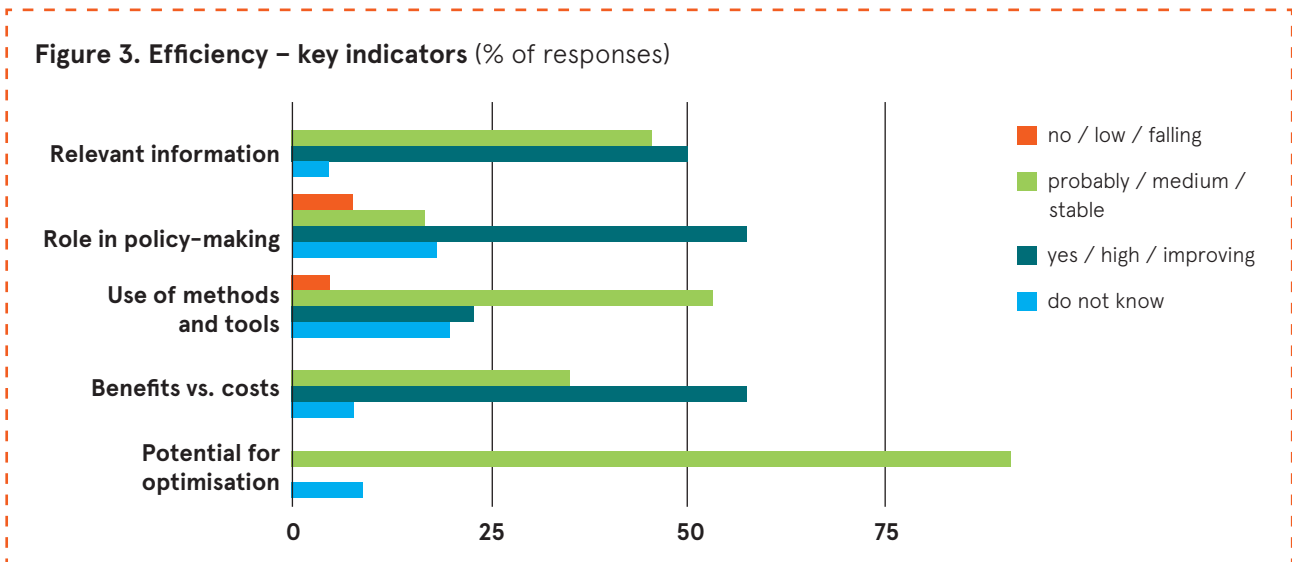
Almost all interviewees mentioned that the reports deliver or probably deliver **relevant information**. One respondent did not know.

About 60 per cent of the respondents think that the reports play a role in environmental **policy-making** in the country. All the reports guide the development of new strategic policy documents and legislation. The report to the UNFCCC, for example, identified agricultural sector adaptation priorities that helped in the design of the Strategic Roadmap for agricultural development. About 20 per cent of the respondents were not able to answer this question.

More than 70 per cent of the respondents believed that the use of **analytical methods and tools** in the environmental assessments is probably appropriate and sufficient. About 20 per cent of the respondents were not able to answer this question.

About 85 per cent of the respondents answered that the **benefits** of the assessments justified the **costs**. The environmental assessment development process is usually financed by GEF through UNDP projects with in-kind contributions from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan.

Ninety per cent of the responses agree that there is probably **potential for optimisation** of the assessments with regard to modern and efficient operational work flow.



Policy impact

Key messages

- Assessments help in identifying policy interventions and in choosing policy instruments
- Assessments moderately help in developing policy instruments and in implementing policies

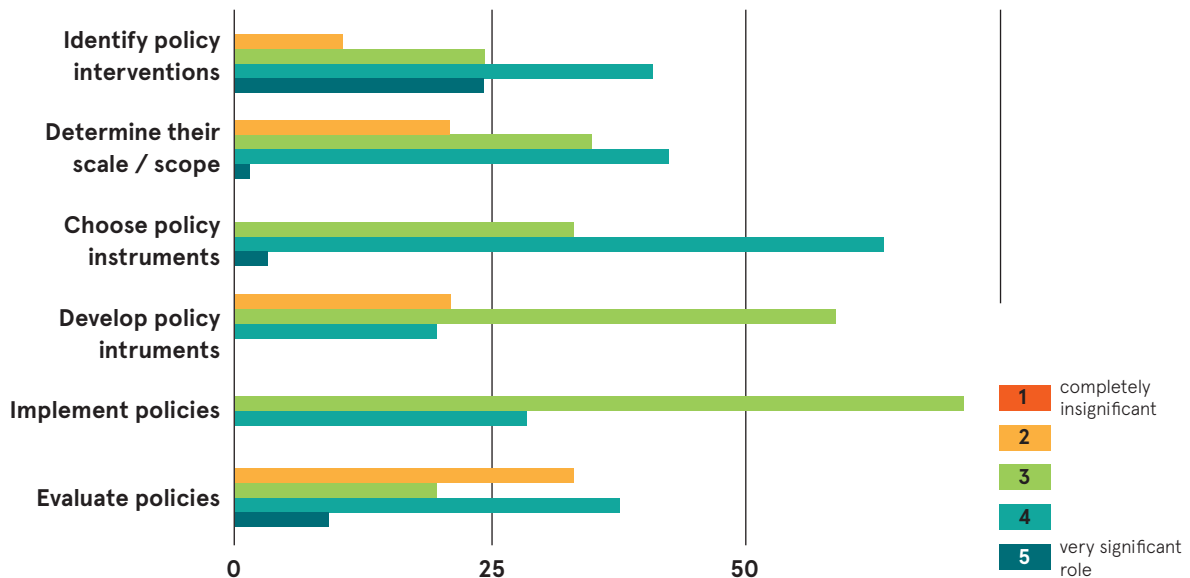
More than 40 per cent of the responses indicated that the environmental assessments play a moderate role in identifying necessary **policy interventions**, and about 25 per cent rank the role as very significant.

The documents moderately to significantly help determine **the scale and scope** of policy interventions according to 75 per cent of the responses.

More than 95 per cent of the respondents determined that the assessments significantly help **choose policy instruments** (legal, awareness raising etc.); moderately to significantly help **develop policy instruments** (including setting their targets and indicators) and moderately (70 per cent) to significantly (30 per cent) help **implement policies**.

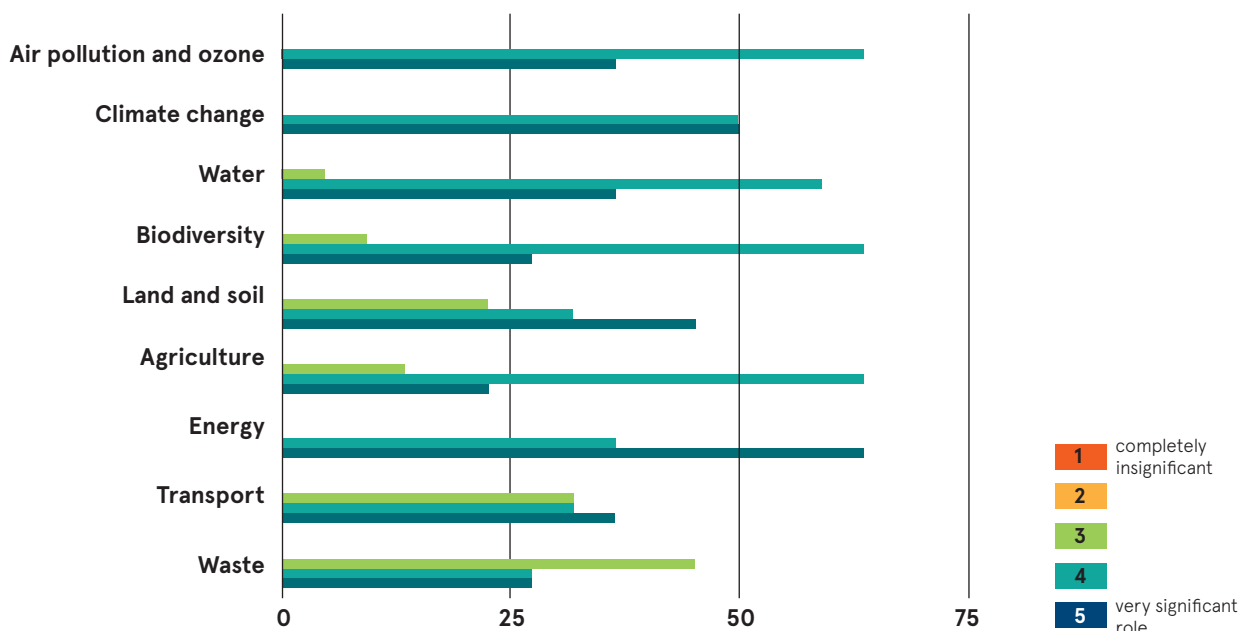
The documents moderately to significantly help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of **environmental policies**.

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



Overall, the demand for environmental assessments intended to help improve the country's environmental performance across all thematic areas is high or very high. More than 60 per cent of the responses indicate that energy-related assessments are needed to a very high extent. Transport and waste received medium scores.

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



Awareness and outreach

Key messages

- Assessments are available online: SoE and UNFCCC reports on the Ministry website and the CBD report on the Convention website
- Wider communication and presentation of the assessments is necessary

All reports are placed on the appropriate web portals and are available to the public. The National Report on Environmental Conditions for 2008-2012 is on the website of the Ministry and is available in the national language. The Fifth National Report to the CBD is on the website of the

Convention on Biological Diversity and available in English. The Third National Communication to the UNFCCC is placed on the website of UNFCCC in English and is available in Azeri at the official website of the Ministry.

Among 102 environmental NGOs registered in Azerbaijan, 21 are active and likely aware of the assessments.

A Google search for the report titles returns four (CBD), six (UNFCCC) and four (SoE) entries per title.

Even though the assessments are available, there is a room for increasing the general public's access of the reports to through various public awareness activities and through the wider communication and presentation of the reports.

3 Conclusions and considerations

The overall effectiveness of the environmental assessments is high, but some reports do not provide proper analysis of gaps or problems, and the information is quite general. There is also a lack of concrete targets for the next reporting period and the recommendations are too general.

Considerations

- The content of analytical chapters should be improved
- Information on existing gaps, needs and problems should be provided
- Targets and recommendations, as well as the methods to achieve them, should be clearly stated

The overall quality of the reports is evaluated as high, but there is a need for improvement of the National Communication report to the UNFCCC with the application of new tools and guidelines. The current report used the IPCC 1996 revised inventory methodology, and subsequent reports should use IPCC 2006. One other issue related to the National Communication is a gap in topical coverage.

Considerations

- New tools and guidelines for the inventory and adaptation parts of National Communication report to the UNFCCC should be applied
- All topics relevant to Azerbaijan should be covered in a new phase of reporting under the UNFCCC

In order to improve the quality of the reports, there is a need to involve a wider circle of national and local experts, as well as to conduct proper capacity-building for them.

Considerations

- The involvement of experts needed for the preparation of the assessments, including local experts, should be ensured
- Specific training sessions on assessment preparation should be conducted

These and similar assessment reports are particularly needed to improve the country performance in regard to all covered topics.

Consideration

- National environmental assessments should include more detailed sectoral information

It is important that all environment related reports are available on nationally managed websites, ideally on the MoE website, and the data on the usage of the assessments needs to be better monitored.

Considerations

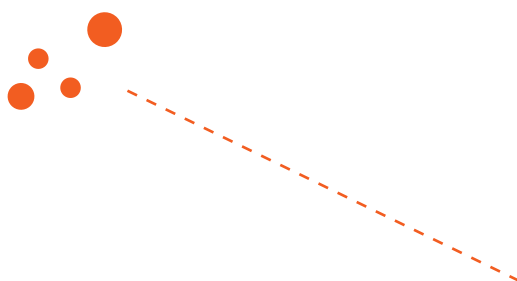
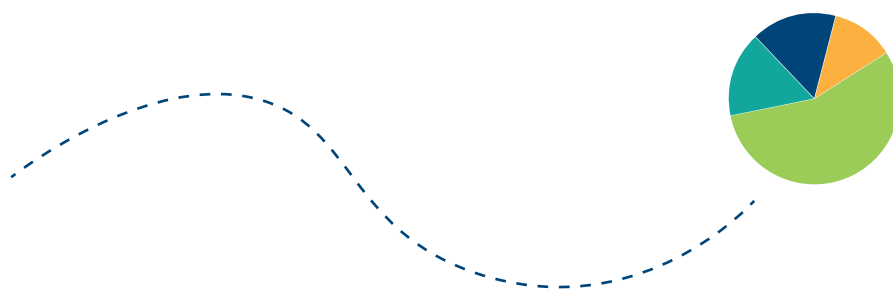
- Make sure the environmental assessments are available on nationally managed websites
- Systematic collection of the data on the use of environmental assessments should be ensured

Wider communication and presentation of the assessments is necessary.

Considerations

- A wider circle of stakeholders, including the representatives of civil society and NGOs should be involved in assessments presentation and dissemination
- Assessments should be better communicated

ANNEXES



Annex 1 Interviewed organisations

Center of Economic Reforms and Communication under Presidential Office
Parliament (Committee on Natural Resources, Energy and Environment)
Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources
Ministry of Economy
Ministry of Agriculture
Ministry of Energy
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Transport, Communication and High Technologies
Ministry of Emergency Situations
State Statistical Committee
National Academy of Sciences
Water and Melioration Farms OSC
Azersu OSC
State Agency on Renewable and Alternative Energy Sources
State Oil and Gas Company (SOCAR)
Azerenergy OSC
TamizShahar OSC
The Regional Environmental Centre for the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan Branch office
Local Governance Assistance NGO
REC Azerbaijan LLC
OIKOS Consulting LLC

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?	40	21	5	0
1.2 Did the EA respond adequately to environmental policy needs?	29	23	4	0
1.3 Is the EA's analysis of consistently high quality?	25	38	3	0
1.4 Do the EA findings have an impact on environmental policy-making or likely to have such impact in the future?	21	40	5	0
1.5 Did the EA provide added value at the national level?	0	27	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	22	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	0	51	15
3.2 Timeliness	0	10	57
3.3 Topical coverage	1	59	7
3.4 Reliability	4	21	41
3.5 Independence	2	42	22
3.6 Well-communicated	3	45	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?	5	57	4

II. Efficiency

1 Key indicators of efficiency

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No
1.1 Did the EA deliver relevant information?	33	30	3	0
1.2 Did the EA play a role in environmental policy-making in the country?	11	28	12	5
1.3 Is the use of analytical methods and tools in the EA appropriate and sufficient?	15	35	13	3
1.4 Did the EA represent value for money comparing the costs and benefits?	38	23	5	0
1.5 Is there any potential for optimisation of the EA with regard to a modern and efficiently operational work flow?	0	60	6	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?	0	7	16	27	16
2.2. help determine the scale and scope of policy interventions?	0	14	23	30	1
2.3 help choose policy instruments (legal, awareness raising etc.)?	0	0	22	42	2
2.4 help develop policy instruments (including setting their targets and indicators)?	0	14	39	13	0
2.5 help implement policies?	0	0	47	19	0
2.6 help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies?	0	22	13	25	6

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	0	0	14	8
3.2. Climate change	0	0	0	11	11
3.3 Water	0	0	1	13	8
3.4 Biodiversity	0	0	2	14	6
3.5 Land and soil	0	0	5	7	10
3.6 Agriculture	0	0	3	14	5
3.7 Energy	0	0	6	8	14
3.8 Transport	0	0	7	7	8
3.9 Waste	0	0	10	6	6

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					

