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How Well is the EU's Impact Assessment Procedure Performing: Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development Outside Europe

The achievement of sustainable development is a cross-cutting policy issue necessitating policy coordination. This is especially true when the impacts of policies both inside *and* outside the European Union's (EU) borders have to be considered. Achieving policy coordination represents a persistent problem for all political systems but especially the EU due to its high degree of institutional complexity and fragmentation. In pursuit of greater policy coordination, all new policies being developed by the European Commission since 2003 have undergone a two tiered Impact Assessment (IA) process. This is intended to facilitate the flow of information among interested parties or networks so that likely trade-offs in achieving competing policy objectives can be identified. These networks are anticipated to act as a 'bottom-up' tool for coordination with little central steering from the Commission. This is in keeping with the EU's desire to operate a more networked style of governance. An evaluation of 24 of the extended impact assessments shows that the IA process is not adequately considering the impacts of EU policies beyond its borders, particularly in developing countries. It is evident that self-steering networks of interested parties are, in general, not forming as the IAs are being conducted largely within the same strong sectors that has led to the EU's current coordination problems. Without the basis of information flow, higher more complex levels of coordination cannot be achieved. In light of the Commission's intention that the first year of the IA system should be a 'learning-by-doing' year, a number of recommendations to improve the process are made.