

1. What is Environmental Impact Assessment?

In 1981, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) revised the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). By its revision, Environmental impact assessment (EIA) became a mandate to development assistance project. This was the first attempt to introduce EIA systems in the field of development assistance. This book introduces EIA system of multilateral development banks such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which play prominent roles in the implementation of EIA in developing countries.

Objectives The objective of environmental impact assessment is to offer information to decision makers concerning matters that may be brought about as a result of decisions relating to a new project, program, plan or policy. Environmental impact assessment must realize decision-making based on the inputted information including potentially important factors and it must be beneficial for both the proponent and the citizens. Furthermore, environmental impact assessment is a technique that presents in a systematic manner a technical assessment of impacts on the environment that the project is likely to cause and explains the significance of predicted impacts and as a result, it indicates the scope for modification or mitigation. Finally it makes the concerned ministries/agencies assess the potential results of the project before a decision is given. Project developers and administrative agencies who have a responsibility for environmental consideration can use environmental impact assessment technique to improve the quality of both the project plan and decision-making by identifying possible effects in the early stages. The specific objections of the environmental impact assessment system are as follows:

- i) To disclose significant environmental effects of proposed projects to decision-makers and the public.
- ii) To identify ways to avoid or reduce environmental damage.
- iii) To prevent adverse environmental impacts by requiring implementation of feasible alternatives or mitigation measures.
- iv) To disclose reason of approvals for the projects with significant environmental impacts to the public.
- v) To foster interagency co-ordination.
- vi) To enhance public participation.

Significance of
EIA

Environmental impact assessment is not a procedure for preventing actions with significant environmental impacts from being implemented. Rather the intention is that project actions are authorised in the full knowledge of their environmental impacts. There are some cases that EIA takes place in a political context. It is inevitable that economic, social or political factors will outweigh environmental factors in many instances. This is why the mitigation measures are so central to EIA. Decisions on proposals in which the adverse environmental effects have been mitigated are much easier to make and justify than those in which mitigation has not been achieved. The significance of EIA is:

- 1) EIA is more than technical reports, it is a means to a larger intention – the protection and improvement of the environmental quality of life.
- 2) EIA is a procedure to identify and evaluate the effects of activities (mainly human) on the environment - natural and social. It is not a single specific analytical method or technique, but uses many approaches as appropriate to the problem.
- 3) EIA is not a science but uses many sciences in an integrated inter-disciplinary manner, evaluating phenomenon and relationships as they occur in the real world.
- 4) EIA should not be treated as an appendage, or add-on, to a project, but be regarded as an integral part of project planning. Its costs should be calculated as an adequate part of planning and not regarded as something extra.
- 5) EIA does not give decisions but its findings should be considered in policy- and decision-making and should be reflected in final choices. Thus it should be part of the decision-making process.

The findings of EIA should be focused on the significant and essential issues. It is also required to provide a sufficient explanation on why they are important, and study its validity in order to facilitate a basis for policy decisions.