

## **Public Involvement is Crucial in EIA to Make Development Sustainable**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of applying the EIA, environmental impact assessment is to integrate development and environmental sustainability. EIA being a planning tool tries to identify a plan for environmental protection and enhancement on a project by project basis. It provides a plan that will minimize the adverse impacts of the proposed project. In the last two decades the concept of Sustainable development has gained vast international recognition. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, (Brundtland Commission 1987) .Sustainable development is defined as the development that meets the present need without compromising the future generation's ability to fulfill their own wants. Public involvement is very essential in the process of EIA. The success rate of the EIA process increases by positive public involvement.

### **Background**

#### **Introduction**

In the beginning EIA was exclusively focused on the natural environment in the 70's. As time passed, in the 80's EIA was incorporate with social and economic impacts assessment. With every addition EIA became a more improved and affective planning tool.

#### **Literature Review**

EIA or the environmental impact assessment is a planning tool that identifies and provides necessary information to prevent and minimize the adverse impacts of the project. It then tries to mitigate the impact issues with the development project.

- Purpose of the EIA process is to provide proper information to the decision makers of the project about the environmental consequences .EIA intends to encourage environmentally sound and sustainable development through the identification of appropriate enhancement and mitigation measures.

#### **Aims and objectives**

EIA aims to inform the decision makers of the project about the potential environmental impacts and risks. The ultimate goal of the EIA is to guarantee sustainable development by ensuring that the resources are not being undermined and ecological function are not being interrupt.

The objectives of EIA include improvement of the environmental design of the project and protection of the resources that they are efficiently used. Long term EIA goals also include the safety of the human health and avoid irreversible changes to prevent serious damage to the environment.

## Discussion

### Outline of the EIA process

EIA identifies all the positive and negative impacts of the proposed project including natural and human environment. EIA identifies both the long term and short term impacts of the projects. It then provides a plan for the project which would in execution minimize all the negative impacts. EIA can provide alternative plan for the project to mitigate the adverse impacts. The plan may also result in utilization of positive impacts for enhancement measures that offset negative impacts to measure the level of the plan of implementation and the degree of the effectiveness of the environmental protection provisions. EIA provides a monitoring program.

### Public participation in EIA

According to Clark(1994), public participation in EIA has a critical role to play in helping to integrate economic, social and environmental objectives, *i.e. move towards more sustainable development by acting as a device to strengthen and increase public awareness of the delicate balance between economic and environmental trade-offs*. It also safeguards against bad or politically motivated decisions. Public participation is necessary for minimizing or avoiding public controversy, confrontation and delay, and can make a positive contribution to the EIA process. In simple words public involvement in the EIA process –

- Will contribute the local knowledge and values to the prediction, evaluation and mitigation of impacts.
- Will result improvement in quality and acceptability of EIA report.

### Local people involvement in a project

In the general case any projects may have significant impacts on the local population. Even if the projects aim is to improve the wellbeing of the population, a lack of understanding of the people and their society may result in development that has considerable negative consequences. More importantly, there may be disagreement between governmental interests and those of the local population. For example, the need to increase local rice production to satisfy increasing consumption in the urban area may differ from the needs as perceived by the local farmers. To allow for this, public participation in the planning process is essential. The EIA provides an ideal forum for checking that the affected public have been satisfactorily consulted and their views taken into account in project preparation.

The level of consultation varies depending on the type of the project. A new project involving resettlement or displacement requires the most extensive public participation. As stated before, the purpose of an EIA is to improve development projects with integrating sustainable development planning, to some extent this attempt can only be achieved by involving those people who are either directly or indirectly affected. The value of environmental services is not absolute and agreement is one way of establishing values.

Public consultation will reveal new information, improve understanding and enable better choices to be made. Without consultation, legitimate issues may not be heard, leading to conflict.

The community should not only be consulted they should be actively involved in environmental matters, their views must be taken account in the decision making process. The earlier the public are involved, the better

There are no clear rules about how to involve the public but it is important that the process remains innovative and flexible. In practice, the views of people affected by the plan are likely to be heard through some form of representation rather than directly. It is therefore important to understand how decisions are made locally, methods of communication including available government extension services. The range of groups outside the formal structure with relevant information is likely to include: technical and scientific societies; Water User Groups; NGOs; experts on local culture; and religious groups.

However, it is important to find out which groups are under-represented and which ones are responsible for access to natural resources, namely: grazing, water, fishing and forest products. There has been an enormous increase in the number of environmental NGOs and "Green" pressure groups throughout the world. Such organizations often bring environmental issues to the attention of the local press. However, this should not deter consultation with such organizations as the approach to EIA should be open and positive with the aim of making improvements. Relevant NGOs should be identified and their experience and technical capacity put to good use.

In some countries, open public meetings are the most common technique to enable public participation. Public participation/consultation and information dissemination activities need to be planned and budgeted. The social scientist team member should define how and when activities take place and also the strategy: extensive field work is expensive. It is important to note that public participation activities are often reported as a separate section of the final EIA.

### **Public Participation in EIA-**

Public participation is a fundamental component of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process. According to Wood (2002, 147), '*EIA is not EIA without consulting and participation*'. The European Commission (EC, 2003b) argues in the favor of public participation and suggests that public involvement increases accountability and transparency of the decision making. The Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1998) has emphasized the role and importance of public involvement in the environmental decision making. The key public participation requirements of the Aarhus Convention emphasis the need to: time participation programmers to achieve early participation; and provide the public with access to all documentation relevant to the decision-making process. The access to environmental information pillar of the Convention was addressed in European Directive 2003/4/EC (EC, 2003a) states that the public should be provided with wider and easier access to environmental information. The evaluation of public participation in EIA is essential if increased understanding is to be achieved.

The purpose of public involvement in the EIA process is to inform the stakeholder about the project in its likely effects. Another major purpose is to canvass their views, inputs and concern about the project.

**Key objectives** -the key objectives of the public participation in the EIA process are-

- To gather important local and traditional information for the decision making.
- To provide substantial alternatives and mitigation measures.
- To make certain that adverse impacts are not over looked and maximize advantages.
- To identify controversial issues to help avoid possible conflicts.

And most importantly, provide an opportunity for the public to influence the project design in a positive manner and thereby improve public opinion about the EIA process.

Typical Representative range of stakeholders in EIA-

The usual range of stakeholders in the EIA process includes

- The local people, individuals or group who will be affected by the project.
- The prominent and other project beneficiaries.
- government and NGOs

### **Scope of involvement**

There are a few levels of local involvement in the EIA process. In the EIA process local involvement can be engaged in *informing*, *consulting*, *participating* and in the *negotiating level* local participation in the *Involving level* means a flow of information to the public. In the

consulting level, it allows a two way of communication between the public and the advocate of the project. Interaction between the public and the proponent gives the chance to share and analyze agenda setting. Negotiating the public allows face to face discussion between the proponent and key stakeholders to build consensus and reach a mutually acceptable resolution of issues.

The range of stakeholders involved usually in the EIA process can be described into five main groups-

- Screening
- Scoping
- Impact analysis & mitigation.
- Review of EIA quality, and
- Implementation & follow UP.

Obstacle to successful Public involvement:

While the use of public participation has been vastly recognized as a valuable element of the EIA, the success of the public involvement in the EIA vastly depends on the public participation methods used and the way they have been implemented, as well as upon the personal beliefs of the stakeholders. The key barriers that are believed to prevented 'early' and 'effective' participation are given briefly –the main barriers are-

1. Poor public knowledge of planning, legal and waste licensing issues;
2. Poor provision of information;
3. Poor access to legal advice;
4. Mistrust of the waste disposal industry
5. Not in my back yard (NIMBY) syndrome;
6. Failure to influence the decision-making process;
7. Poor execution of participation methods; and
8. Regulatory constraints, etc.

Changes in EIA process due to public involvement:

EIA is now a standard procedure in any developmental projects. Many countries have achieved success in integrating development with sustainable environment by applying EIA. In the EIA process public involvement plays a vital role. Examples of some of the countries that have used EIA and their reflection on public involvement are given below.

➤ **Malaysia-**

In the year 1988, the EIA was announced as the mandatory legislative requirement for the protection of the natural resources and achieve a sustainable development. In Malaysia, public participation was required for an improvement in the project design. Unfortunately during the period of 1988 to 1999 only 15% of public involvement was conducted. The major limitation of the public involvement in Malaysia was

Public unawareness which was the weakness in the EIA .

In 2004, it was concluded t by Staerdahl that public involvement is the central element for the EIA study and thus the success of EIA depend upon it.

In Malaysia the public involvement in the EIA is only limited to inform the public, nit the actually involve them in the decision making.

### ➤ **Indonesia**

The EIA was formally introduced in Indonesia in the year 1986 when government regulation no 29 enacted. Even though EIA was introduced for long time in Indonesia, the importance of the public participation was acknowledged not that long. After developing EIA for 14 years, Indonesia recognized the significance of public participation in the EIA process.

EIA was already being implemented in Indonesia from 1982, however it was formally introduced in 1986. After concluding the lack of public participation as a weakness in the EIA process, and the EIA system in Indonesia was open to include participation.

### ➤ **United Kingdom-**

The evaluation framework derived from the Aarhus convention principles can help us to analyze UK public participation in EIA. The Aarhus Convention was signed by the UK and the European Commission in 1998 (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2001). According to the Aarhus convention framework the evaluation is based on Communication, Fairness, Timing, Accessibility, Information provision, Influence on

Decision making, competence, and interaction. Based on Cullingworth and Nadin (2002) demonstration we can say that public participation has never been a very strong component of the UK development control system. However it is evident that minor modifications to public participation procedures could help the UK EIA system to meet the requirements of the Aarhus Convention, which is early and effective participation in the EIA. By allowing more time for public participation by modifying the UK EIA legislation to extend the consultation period from three to six weeks, will strengthen its importance within the EIA process, would be particularly beneficial.

### ➤ **Italy-**

As portrayed earlier that the goal of public participation in the EIA process is -Understand the perception of the proposed project, Resolve conflict and reach consensus etc. In the case of Italy the regulations include- Law N. 349 8 July 1986: establishment of the Italian Ministry of the Environment (MoE), DPCM 10 August 1988 N. 377: contain Regulations for the declaration Of environmental compatibility and which requires an EIA for

Projects listed in Annex I of Directive 85/337/EEC with the addition Of dams and certain other installations from Annex II, DPCM 27 December 1988: technical regulations for the preparation of the environmental impact study (EIS) and for the formulation of the judgment of environmental compatibility, DPR 12 April 1996 “Atto di indirizzo e coordinamento” (Act of instruction and coordination) etc. They first note the goals, which seem to be the objectives of the provisions and procedures and their contribution to bringing about effective public Involvement. A wide public is involved by placing information in the newspaper. EIA has not had a smooth integration in Italy. In the EIA procedure in Italy is the minimum expected and required by the Directive; the public are informed, consulted, and their opinions are taken into consideration. As Italy doesn't have any framework law, it facing low effectiveness in both involving the public and EIA as a whole. The framework must include the public in the scoping stage of the EIA process.

### ***Public involvement is a vital part in the EIA process, to ensure a sustainable development***

According to Morgan (1998), the role of public participation is critical in the EIA process. It is an essential part in the decision making of any development project. So the success of the EIA process is linked with public participation. Given that the decision making process should take account the community interests and EIA is a process that concludes various development projects.

The importance of public participation in the EIA process is also argued by Glasson et al (1999), that the public can ensure the quality if EIA. moreover public participation can promote comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the EIA process.

Thomas (1998) also suggests that better decision making will result from participation process in the EIA, because it enable dissemination of information and identification of various values.

EIA is an essential process to ensure that the proposed project will be a sustainable development. EIA alone can prevent the exploitation and degradation of the environmental resources. It not only points out the favorable alternatives but tries to mitigate the adverse issues with the possible sustainable actions. Public involvement is a critical element in the EIA process. Public involvement not only provides new steam of information but it also earns public confidence about the whole EIA process.

From the given example of Malaysia and Indonesia, we can see that both of the countries have faced an amount of failure in the EIA process because of lack of public participation .After a certain time both countries included active public involvement in the EIA process.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

To ensure sustainable development EIA process has no other alternative. Public participation is a critical element of the EIA process. The EIA process becomes easier to implement after public involvement is included. There is a positive relation between public participation and sustainable development.

From prior argument and example of the countries like UK, Indonesia, Italy and Malaysia, we can agree on the fact that Public involvement in the EIA process is a vital element of the process. It can assist the EIA process to ensure sustainable development.

So we can conclude that, active public involvement in the EIA process can lead to a successful EIA process, thus sustainable development.

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