

IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN INDIAN ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Which is the covering around us? We call it the atmosphere. We are living in the presence of this environment; it is the cornerstone of our life on which our whole life rests. Thus we can say that our development is dependent on the environment and our development depends on the nutrition of the environment. Thus we can say that both are directly related to each other in a complex way.

The development of one is not possible without the other, so mankind has assessed many skills, learning's and innovations to nurture and adapt nature according to its needs. Humankind is expected to give an environment to the future generation which they too can enjoy as we had. This is our commitment to our next generation. This approach has prompted us to revisit the study and assess the environmental impact at the project level and strategic level. In this article, we will discuss Environmental Impact Assessment in detail.

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What is Environmental Impact Assessment in India?

An environmental impact assessment has been defined by Cantor Monsieur (1999) as the classification and assessment of environmental impacts that a planned project could potentially have on various aspects of the environment. These impacts can be direct or indirect and include both environmental and social impacts.

In India, the importance of environmental impact assessment for human welfare was recognized in the early nineteenth century. However, it was only by the mid-eighties that the Environmental Impact Assessment Technique was introduced as a necessary step for consent of various developmental activities under the Environment Protection Act 1986. Informs about the benefits and also warns about the future environmental hazards.

Environmental Impact Assessment Objectives in India

The objective of environmental impact assessment in India is to predict the environmental impacts at the initial stage of project and project creation. Finding ways and tools for favorable and unfavorable impacts, shaping projects to suit the local environment, and providing predictions and alternatives to decision-makers.

Environmental Impact Assessment in India scientifically examines both beneficial and harmful consequences, systematically examines them and ensures that these impacts are taken into account during project implementation. It helps to identify the potential environmental consequences of the proposed project, suggests strategies to reduce adverse activities and predicts whether there will be significant adverse environmental impacts after the strategy is applied.

By considering the environmental impacts of the project and their strategies in the project planning cycle, environmental assessment has many benefits, such as protection of the environment, optimum utilization of resources and saving of time and labor of the project. It also helps reduce conflicts and assists in promoting, providing information to decision makers and laying the groundwork for environmentally sound projects. The benefits of conducting Environmental Impact Assessments in India have been seen at all stages of a project, from maintenance and planning, to policy formulation, assembly, decommissioning and site closure.

Environmental Impact Assessment Process in India

The EIA process includes the steps mentioned below. However, the EIA process is cyclic with interactions between different phases.

- **Screening** - The project is tested for investment parameters, location and development methods and if the project requires statutory clearance.
- **Scope** - Potential importance of the project, affected area, mitigation prospects and maintenance requirement.
- **Collection of baseline data** - Outline data is the environmental aspect of the study area.

Impact forecasting; Adaptive and adverse, variable, irreversible and temporary and permanent impacts need to be reported further reflecting the advanced understanding of the project by the appraisal agency.

- **Mitigation Measures and EIA Reporter** - EIA information should include measures needed to prevent, reduce or mitigate impacts or the level of government support for potential environmental damage.
- **Public hearings** - Upon completion of the EIA notification, public and environmental groups living near the project can be informed and consulted.
- **Decision maker** - consults the project in-charge with experts to take final orders, keeping in view the environmental management plan.

Monitoring and Implementation of Environment Management Plan: Oversees various phases of project implementation.

- **Evaluation of alternatives, mitigation measures Environmental importance assessment Reporter** - For all projects, potential alternatives should be considered, and environmental characteristics should be measured and assessed. Alternatives should include both project location and process technologies. Once the options are examined, a mitigation plan should be prepared for the options chosen and

supplemented with an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) to guide the proponent towards environmental improvement.

- **Risk Assessors** - Inventory analysis and risk probabilities and indices are also part of EIA processes. The entire process of EIA is governed by eight guiding principles which are as follows-
- **Participation** - useful and timely access to the assigned task, for all interested persons.
- **Transparency** – All measurement and evaluation decisions and their basis should be public and easy to use.
- **Certainty**- methodology and timing of evaluation must be agreed upon by all participants in advance.
- **Accountability**- Decision makers from all parties are responsible for their actions and decisions under the evaluation mechanism.
- **Credibility** – Evaluation work and others should be executed with professionalism and fairness.
- **Cost-effectiveness** – The evaluation process and its results will ensure environmental protection with minimum time, labor and cost to the society.
- **Flexibility** – The appraisal process should be able to be completed efficiently from any proposition and decision making situation.
- **Applicability** – The information and outputs provided by the evaluation process should be readily usable in decision making and planning.

Limitations of Environmental Impact Assessment in India

- **Doubtful results submitted by EIAs** - In many cases, there have been cases in which information transmitted by EIA contains false facts, misleading data, false theories, outdated information and biases. This is due to lack of integrity of agencies, corrupt and dishonest employees, incomplete knowledge of projects and much more.
- **Incomplete reports** - For correct conclusion, full report is required by all project officers and sometimes surveys related to water leakage, landslides and land erosion are completely ignored. These incomplete surveys and details lead to inadequate planning of the EIA.
- **Unanswered Public Issues** - During public hearing work, villagers ask a question to the government and construction officials. Sometimes these officers try to shy away from the important question raised by the local people and do not include such a question in the information. The officials in India are so corrupt that they directly condemn the rules.
- **Lack of awareness** - Most of the time, people are not aware of the day, date and time of the meeting which is held for EIA planning. There are many reasons for their ignorance like
 1. No personal notice is sent
 2. Notices are advertised only on some newspapers
 3. Unavailability of people due to day's work etc.
- **Contingent attitude of officers and employees** - As the cost of operation of the project has increased, the concerned authorities and corporate group will always try to start the project first and then move to EIA. Such practices are in clear contravention of the rules and if the state government itself indulges in such action, then where can you expect justice.
- **Inexperienced executives** - the developer's favored friend to investigate unskilled and sometimes uneducated people in order to save money. The wrong information prepared by them is completely useless. Imagine doing further development based on that report.

Conclusion

- Public awareness and environmental education programs among the local people are the basic need of the hour and the government should do it from the beginning.
- It is necessary to provide excellent government aid and manpower while doing the evaluation.

- For better results, the current technology of high importance educational technology such as Blockchain should be adopted.
- Equal assistance of both men and women in decision making would also be beneficial.
- The EIA appears only as a documentary work and has little practical utility. To change this, we have to change the way of working of every officer and employee including the government, so that everyone works seriously.
- An independent national environmental regulator should be set up and empowered with all necessary powers.
- A high capacity institute like NSSO should also be set up, and the sole objective of the institution would be to collect only the most proven and valid data related to the environment.

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