Appendix A

Social Impact Assessment

Social Impact Assessment

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is sometimes called social assessment. In western countries, SIA tends to be defined as 'the process of assessing or estimating, in advance, the social consequences that are likely to follow from specific policy actions or project development, particularly in the context of appropriate national, state or provincial environmental policy legislation' (Burdge and Vanclay 1995, p.32)

Social impacts include all social and cultural consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to assess their needs, and generally cope as members of society. Cultural impacts involve changes to the norms, values, and beliefs of individuals who guide and rationalize their cognition of themselves and their society.

The major categories of social impacts identified in the literature include: population change, community and institutional structures, political and social resources, individual and family changes, and community resources. Similar collections of labels include lifestyles; attitudes, beliefs, and values; social organizations as used by Taylor et al. (1990); community resources, community social organizations, and indicator of individual and community well-being (Branch et al. 1984).

The basic model is comparative and based on a study of the course of events in communities where planned environmental change has occurred, and extrapolation from the analysis to predict what is likely to happen in another community where a similar developmental event or policy change is planned. Thus, three different tasks of SIA can be identified:

1) Assessment and prediction refers to the determination of the potential impacts of a specific action affecting a community before the commencement of any change.

2) Mitigation and monitoring. Mitigation involves both an initial statement about potential impacts and how they may be averted, and an ongoing role in the development process by all parties, including the affected community, the developer, and the agency, in order to minimize any impact that does occur. Monitoring extends beyond the role of mitigation, and checks that any occurring change has been anticipated, and that appropriate mitigation strategies can be developed to deal with the consequences of any unexpected impacts.

3) Audit and Analysis. Especially those for major projects need to contain an audit for methods and predictions. Furthermore, in order to advance the understanding of this area of study, analysis of the social impacts that have occurred as a result of past actions is necessary.

A first purpose of SIA is the anticipation of potential negative impacts of various development options to allow for an informed choice of the best option for society as a whole. A second purpose is to maximize benefits and minimize the drawbacks or the negative impacts by modification to plans (mitigation), partly through the use of local knowledge.

It is important that SIA be considered at all stages in project or planning development such as (Interorganizational Committee 1994):

1) Planning or policy development
2) Construction/implementation
3) Operation and maintenance
4) Decommissioning or abandonment

The Methodology of SIA

The methodological standards for SIA currently available, (possibly Interorganisational Committee (1994) come closest to this for developed countries.

- Identifies interested and affected people (IAPs or stakeholders)
- Facilitates and co-ordinates the participation of IAPs .
- Documents and analyses the local historical setting in which the project will occur
- Provide a rich picture of the local cultural context and an understanding of local community values
- Identifies and describes the activities which are likely to causes impacts (scoping)
- Predicts likely impacts, including cumulative impacts, and how the community might respond
- Assists in the selection and evaluation of program alternatives (including a no development option)
- Assists in site selection
- Recommends mitigation measures
- Provide suggestions relating to compensation
- Describes potential conflicts between stakeholders and advises on a conflict resolution process
- Develops strategies in the community for dealing with residual or non-mitigatable impacts
- Contributes to skill development and capacity building in the community
- Advises on appropriate institutional and co-ordination arrangements for all parties
- Assists in the devising and implementation of monitoring and management program
- Collects data for profiling to allow for the evaluation and audit of the impact assessment process and the project itself

The Steps in the Social Impact Assessment Model

The 10 steps presented here are adapted from the Guidelines and Principles (Interorganizational Committee 1994). They are considered to be logically sequential, but overlap in practice.

1) Public involvement: Plan to involve all potentially affected public.

2) Identification of alternatives: Describe the proposed action or policy change and reasonable alternatives. Minimum, details will be required about locations; land requirements; construction schedule; facility size and shapes; institutional resources.

3) Profile baseline condition: This will include the development of an understanding of the relationship between the social and biophysical environment; historical background of the area; political and social structures; culture, attitudes and social-psychological conditions; as well as basic population characteristics.

4) Scoping: Identify the full range of possible social impacts through a variety of means, including discussion or interviews with potentially affected individuals.

5) Projection of estimated effects: Projection of estimated effects: Evaluate all possible impacts to determine the probable impacts.

6) Prediction of responses to impacts: Determine the importance of the identified social impacts to the affected public.

7) Estimate indirect and cumulative impacts: Consider the flow-on ramifications of projects, including the second-, third- (and so on-) order impacts. Also consider how the impacts of one project may affect and be affected by other projects.

8) Changes in alternatives: Recommend new or changed alternatives and estimate or project their consequences.

9) Mitigation: Develop and implement a mitigation plan. Mitigation plans should firstly, seek to avoid impacts; secondly seek to minimize unavoidable impacts; and thirdly, utilize compensation mechanisms.

10) Monitoring: Develop and implement a monitoring program that is capable of identifying deviations from the proposed action and any important unanticipated impacts.

Problems Confronting Social Impact Assessment

1) Difficulties in applying the social sciences to SIA:
   - Units of analysis, theoretical models, and the language of various social science disciplines are sometimes contradictory or inconsistent, making interdisciplinary communication difficult
   - Social science traditions, especially sociology, tend to be critical and discursive, rather than predictive and explanatory.

2) Difficulties with the SIA process itself
   - Data are often poorly collected, therefore projections are based on inadequate information which is often isolated, and not systematically collected, thus, lack a validity check.
   - The methodologies for assessing social impacts are numerous and complex, and exist as a process as much as a discrete entity.
   - SIA are often done by consultants who do not know relevant social and economic theories, and who may not be trained in either SIA or social science methodology.
   - Agencies and corporations do not regularly check the credentials of consultants who undertake SIAs.
   - There is little evaluation or audit of SIA reports, and agencies and corporations receiving SIA statements seldom take the time to determine the validity and reliability of the contents of these reports.
   - Relevant literature on SIA is hard to find, and often not accessible. Many valuable resources are not published, but exist only as consultancy reports.
   - The regulatory frameworks under which EIA-SIA are undertaken (including NEPA and NEPA-like structures) impose this discrete event mentality.
   - Because of its project-based conceptualization, SIA cannot address cumulative impacts resulting from multiple projects.
   - Potential for the development and implementation of effective and ongoing mitigation strategies is limited by the failure to see SIA as a process.