

SECTION I

SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT: MEANING, DEFINITION AND SCOPE

Planners and decision makers increasingly recognize the need for better appreciation of social consequences of policies, plans, programmes and projects (PPPPs). SIA is likely to contribute substantially toward understanding such impacts. This is all the more important in view of the fact that such impact assessment has become a mandatory requirement.

SIA alerts the planners and programme executors of the likely benefits and costs of a proposed project, which may be social, cultural, and/or economic and such others. The knowledge of these likely impacts in advance can help decision-makers in deciding whether the project should proceed as it is, or proceed with some changes, or dropped altogether. The most important outcome of a SIA is to develop mitigation plans to overcome the potential negative impacts on individuals and communities, and the society at large.

SIA could assist advocacy groups as well. A SIA report, done comprehensively, showing the likely consequences of the project on affected people and suggesting alternative approaches, adds credibility to their campaigns.

Historical Overview

The beginnings of SIA, under the broad canvas of the EIA could be traced to developments as recent as those during the 1970s. By this time, “development agencies began to use impact assessments – which were about predicting, before the start of a project, its likely environmental, social, and economic consequences – in order to approve, adjust, or reject it” (Roche 1999: 18).

From the early 1980s, several new methods of enquiry emerged, including Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Chambers 1997). These sought to make people and communities active participants, rather than mere objects of assessment.

By the early 1990s, social science professionals were also able to develop an acceptable set of SIA guidelines and principles (Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment: 1994 and 2003, and International Association for Impact Assessment: 2003). Around this time, SIA became an accepted practice among development agencies as a way to assess the impacts of development projects before they commence. Now SIA is a part of the formal planning processes in most development projects.

SIA have been carried out for a variety of projects, including projects in such diverse sectors as dams, sanitation and health, mining, urban transport systems, pastoral development programmes, and livelihood support projects.

In recent years, much has been written on applications and methodology of SIA. The subject is widely taught, often in conjunction with other professional and academic courses, and training programmes. Numerous consulting firms have come up to offer SIA expertise in project preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

In the earlier decades, as already indicated, SIA used to be carried out as part of EIA. Increasingly, SIA is now carried out as an exercise independently of EIA, because these are two different kinds of assessments (Reference: R & R policy 2007).

Current Scenario

SIA has now become an important part of the project preparation process, especially for the preparation of Resettlement Action Plans (RAPs). In this process, SIA is carried out as socio-economic survey that identifies social, cultural and economic impacts on people and communities facing project-induced displacement. In addition, data thus generated is used in designing mitigation measures as well as in monitoring mitigation implementation.

Resettlement policies have lately made SIA a major part of the resettlement planning process. In 2006, a provision was included for conducting SIA in the Orissa R&R Policy 2006. The National R&R Policy 2007 has made a provision for conducting SIA whenever a new project or expansion of an existing project is undertaken. But this provision is limited to only those cases which involve displacement of 400 or more families, *en masse* in plain areas, or 200 or more families *en masse* in tribal or hilly areas, DDP blocks or areas mentioned in the Schedule V or Schedule VI of the Constitution. However, this stipulation of 400 families in the plains and 200 families in the hilly tribal areas does not appear to be very satisfactory keeping in view the distribution of population and settlements pattern, particularly in the rural and tribal areas. Therefore, this provision will need careful review.

The issue is no longer whether SIA should be carried out or not, but how it should be carried out so that the local people benefit from the project. Extra care should be taken to ensure that the disadvantaged sections are able to cross the threshold of vulnerability. This applies more to women headed households, SC and ST populations and those below poverty lines.

What are Social Impacts?

Social Impacts are the changes that occur in communities or to individuals as a result of an externally-induced change. Interorganizational Committee on Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment (IOCGPSIA, 2003: 231) defines social impacts as “the 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 meet their needs, and generally cope as members of society. The term also includes cultural impacts involving changes to the norms, values, and beliefs that guide and rationalize their cognition of themselves and their society.”

Such changes may affect employment, income, production, way of life, cultural practices, community participation, political systems, environment, health and well-being, individual rights as well as property rights, fears and aspirations as well as change in ethnic composition. These impacts can be positive or negative or both.

Examples of projects with significant social impacts include: dams and reservoirs (disruption due to relocation), mining, power and industrial plants (involuntary displacement, influx of work force, pressure on infrastructure), roads and linear projects (dislocation of activity networks), and landfill and hazardous waste disposal sites (seen as health risks).

Types of Impacts

Not all projects cause similar impacts. For example, impacts that are commonly experienced in urban projects are different from those in hydropower, thermal power, mining and iron and steel projects. The common hydropower project impacts include the following:

- Submergence of vast areas, usually in hilly, sparsely populated regions, inhabited by agriculture-dependent rural and tribal communities
- Forced displacement (often resulting in impoverishment)
- Boomtowns (uncontrolled influx of construction workers, with negative social impacts, crime, HIV, etc.)
- Downstream adverse changes in agro-production systems

On the other hand, there is no submergence in urban projects. People are affected by loss of residential/commercial structures and jobs, not by loss of agricultural lands.

The following is an illustrative list of possible impacts:

- Loss of all land, commercial premises and housing structures
- Loss of all commercial premises or land, but not house
- Loss of house, no loss of land or commercial premise
- Loss of house, land or commercial premise left unviable
- Loss of house, land still viable
- Loss of house to the owner or occupant/tenant
- Loss of house, without adequate entitlement to lands or with customary rights to lands
- No loss of house, land or commercial premise left viable
- No loss of house, land or commercial premise unviable
- Loss of access to income generating activities (employment, etc.)

- Land and/or house cut off or inaccessible due to the project (for example, creation of islands in reservoirs)
- Loss of livelihood to indirectly affected (without land or house entitlements)

What is Social Impact Assessment?

SIA seeks to assess, in advance, the social repercussions that are likely to follow from projects undertaken to promote development, such as dams, mines, industries, highways, ports, airports, urban development and power projects. It is a tool that can help decision-makers to foresee the likely negative impacts of their actions so that steps necessary to prevent or at least to contain them could be taken in time. As an aid to the decision making process, SIA provides information on social and cultural factors that need to be taken into account in any decision that directly or indirectly affects the lives of project area people.

According to Interorganizational Committee on Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment (IOCPGSIA 2003), a conventional way of conceptualizing social impacts is as changes to one or more of the following:

- “people’s way of life – that is, how they live, work, play and interact with one another on day to day basis;
- their culture – that is, their shared beliefs, customs, values and language or dialect;
- their community – its cohesion, stability, character, services and facilities;
- their political system – the extent to which people are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the level of democratization that is taking place, and the resources provided for this purpose;
- their environment – the quality of the air and water people use; the availability and quality of food they eat; the level of hazard or risk, dust and noise they are exposed to; the adequacy of sanitation, their physical safety, and their access to and control over resources;
- their health and wellbeing – health is a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmities;
- their personal and property rights – particularly whether people are economically affected, or experience personal disadvantage which may include a violation of their civil liberties;
- their fears and aspirations – their perceptions about their safety, their fears about the future of their community, and their aspirations for their future and future of their children;”

Activities Comprising Social Impact Assessment

SIA comprises the following activities:

- “participates in the environmental design of the planned intervention;

- identifies interested and affected people;
- facilitates and coordinates the participation of stakeholders;
- documents and analyses the local historical setting of the planned intervention so as to be able to interpret responses, and to assess cumulative impacts;
- collects base line data (social profiling) to allow evaluation and audit of the impact assessment process and the planned intervention itself;
- give a rich picture of the local cultural context, and develop an understanding of local community values, particularly how they relate to the planned intervention;
- identifies and describes the activities which are likely to cause impacts (scoping);
- predicts (or analyses) likely impacts and how different stakeholders are likely to respond;
- assists evaluating and selecting alternatives (including a no development options);
- assist in site selection;
- recommends mitigation measures;
- assists in the valuation process and provides suggestions about compensation (non-financial as well as financial);
- describes potential conflicts between stakeholders and advises on resolution processes;
- develops coping strategies for dealing with residual or non-mitigatable impacts;
- contributes to skill development and capacity building in the community;
- advises on appropriate institutional and coordination arrangements for all parties;
- assists in devising and implementing monitoring and management programmes”.

Advantages of conducting Social Impact Assessment

The main advantages of doing a systematic SIA include the following:

- Identifying Affected Groups: SIA helps in identifying people and groups who are affected by the project;
- Free and Fair information sharing : SIA should ensure exchange of free and fair information.;
- Avoiding Adverse Impacts: SIA provides the basis for preparing mitigation measures to avoid, reduce or manage adverse impacts;
- Enhancing Positive Impacts: SIA preparation also helps identify measures to maximize/share project benefits;
- Reducing Costs: Addressing social impacts at an early stage helps to avoid costly errors in future

- Getting Approval Faster: A well prepared SIA demonstrates that social impacts are taken seriously and helps in getting project clearance faster

Social impact assessment is predicated on the notion that decision makers should understand the consequences of their decisions before they act and that the people affected will not only be apprised of the effects, but have the opportunity to participate in designing their future (IOCPGSIA 2003:248).