

# **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)**

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## **Introduction**

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is an important management tool for ensuring optimal use of natural resources for sustainable development. A beginning in this direction was made in our country with the impact assessment of river valley projects in 1978-79 and the scope has subsequently been enhanced to cover other developmental sectors such as industries, thermal power projects, mining schemes etc. To facilitate collection of environmental data and preparation of management plans, guidelines have been evolved and circulated to the concerned Central and State Government Departments. EIA has now been made mandatory under the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986 for 29 categories of developmental activities involving investments of Rs. 50 crores and above.

## **Environmental Appraisal Committees**

With a view to ensure multi-disciplinary input required for environmental appraisal of development projects, Expert Committees have been constituted for the following sectors:

1. Mining Projects
2. Industrial Projects
3. Thermal Power Projects
4. River Valley, Multipurpose, Irrigation and H.E. Projects
5. Infrastructure Development and Miscellaneous Projects
6. Nuclear Power Projects

## **Environmental Appraisal Procedure**

Once an application has been submitted by a project authority alongwith all the requisite documents specified in the EIA Notification, it is scrutinised by the technical staff of the Ministry prior to placing it before the Environmental Appraisal Committees. The Appraisal Committees evaluate the impact of the project based on the data furnished by the project authorities and if necessary, site visits or on-the-spot assessment of various environmental aspects are also undertaken. Based on such examination, the Committees make recommendations for approval or rejection of the project, which are then processed in the Ministry for approval or rejection.

In case of site specific projects such as Mining, River Valley, Ports and Harbours etc., a two stage clearance procedure has been adopted whereby the project authorities have to obtain site clearance before applying for environmental clearance of their projects. This is to ensure avoiding areas which are ecologically fragile and environmentally sensitive. In case of projects where complete information has been submitted by the project proponents, a decision is taken within 90 days.

### **Monitoring**

After considering all the facets of a project, environmental clearance is accorded subject to implementation of the stipulated environmental safeguards. Monitoring of cleared projects is undertaken by the six regional offices of the Ministry functioning at Shillong, Bhubaneshwar, Chandigarh, Bangalore, Lucknow and Bhopal. The primary objective of such a procedure is to ensure adequacy of the suggested safeguards and also to undertake mid-course corrections required, if any. The procedure adopted for monitoring is as follows:

1. Project authorities are required to report every six months on the progress of implementation of the conditions/safeguards stipulated, while according clearance to the project.
2. Field visits of officers and expert teams from the Ministry and/ or its Regional Offices are undertaken to collect and analyse performance data of development projects, so that difficulties encountered are discussed with the proponents with a view to finding solutions.
3. In case of substantial deviations and poor or no response, the matter is taken up with the concerned State Government.

4. Changes in scope of project are identified to check whether review of earlier decision is called for or not.

### **Coastal Area Management**

Coastal States/UTs are required to prepare Coastal Zone Management Plans (CZMPs) as per the provisions of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification 1991, identifying and categorising the coastal areas for different activities and submit it to the Ministry for approval.

The Ministry has constituted a Task Force for examination of these plans submitted by Maharashtra and Gujarat States have been discussed in the meetings of the Task Force and these need to be modified. The Government of Orissa has submitted a partial plan covering only a part of their coastal area. In respect of West Bengal, a preliminary concept document of the CZMP has been submitted. Revised CZMP/clarifications have been received from the State of Goa and UTs of Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. During the year, the Task Force had seven meetings and two site visits for consideration of the plans. Once the plans of the different States/UTs are finalised, the development activities in the coastal belt would be more forcefully regulated to ensure non-violation of CRZ Notification.

### **Island Development Authority (IDA)**

The 9th meeting of IDA was held on 22.1.96 under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister to decide on various policies and programmes aimed at integrated development of the islands, keeping in view the relevant aspects of environmental protection, and also to review the progress of implementation and impact of the programmes of development.

### **Studies on Carrying Capacity**

Natural resources are finite and are dwindling at a fast pace. Optimization of natural resources for achieving the objective of sustainable development is therefore, self evident, this can be done only when environmental considerations are internalized in the development process. It has often been observed that one or more natural resource(s) becomes a limiting

resource in a given region thereby restricting the scope of development portfolios. The Ministry of Environment & Forests has been sponsoring Carrying Capacity Studies for different regions. The studies involve:

1. Inventorisation of the natural resources available;
2. Preparation of the existing environmental settings;
3. Perspective plans and their impact on natural resources through creation of "Business As Usual Scenario";
4. Identification of "Hot Spots" requiring immediate remedial action to overcome air, water or land pollution;
5. Formulation of alternative development scenarios including a Preferred Scenarios. A comparison between "Business As Usual" and the "Preferred Scenario" would indicate the future course of action to be adopted for development of the region after the package has been discussed with the local people as well as the planners.

A few problem areas such as the Doon Valley - an ecologically sensitive area, the National Capital Region (NCR) which is suffering from air and water pollution as well as congestion, Damodar River Basin which is very rich in natural resources and yet has extensive environmental degradation and Tapi estuary which represents the problems in the coastal region both for water and land development, have been selected for carrying out such studies. A multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional approach has been adopted for conducting these studies. Draft reports are ready for Doon Valley and the NCR and are being discussed with the NGOs and the local people for finalising the same. Work relating to Damodar Basin and Tapi Estuary is continuing with respect to secondary data collection and analysis so as to identify the requirements of primary data collection and modification in the development scenarios.