**CLASS NOTE**

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**Topic - Social Impact Assessment – I (13.3)**

The legal basis of SIA (and thereby increasing standing and public awareness) first emerged in 1969/1970 when the US National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) introduced a requirement to ensure that major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment were incorporated into a balanced and publicly available assessment of the likely impact of such actions (Burdge and Vanclay 1995). The inquiry into the proposed Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline from Yukon Territory to Alberta (1974-1978) was the first major EIA case which was overturned for social reasons, due to a failure to consider the impacts on a local tribe. Since then, SIA has been progressively introduced to many countries around the world.

**Definition**

Social Impact Assessment includes the processes of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment.

The important features of this definition are that:

1. The goal of impact assessment is to bring about a more ecologically, socio-culturally and economically sustainable and equitable environment. Impact assessment, therefore, promotes community development and empowerment, builds capacity, and develops social capital (social networks and trust).
2. The focus of concern of SIA is a proactive stance to development and better development outcomes, not just the identification or amelioration of negative or unintended outcomes. Assisting communities and other stakeholders to identify development goals, and ensuring that positive outcomes are maximised, can be more important than minimising harm from negative impacts.
3. The methodology of SIA can be applied to a wide range of planned interventions, and can be undertaken on behalf of a wide range of actors, and not just within a regulatory framework.
4. SIA contributes to the process of adaptive management of policies, programs, plans and projects, and therefore needs to inform the design and operation of the planned intervention.
5. SIA builds on local knowledge and utilises participatory processes to analyse the concerns of interested and affected parties. It involves stakeholders in the assessment of social impacts, the analysis of alternatives, and monitoring of the planned intervention.
6. The good practice of SIA accepts that social, economic and biophysical impacts are inherently and inextricably interconnected. Change in any of these domains will lead to changes in the other domains. SIA must, therefore, develop an understanding of the impact pathways that are created when change in one domain triggers impacts across other domains, as well as the iterative or flow-on consequences within each domain. In other words, there must be consideration of the second and higher order impacts and of cumulative impacts.
7. In order for the discipline of SIA to learn and grow, there must be analysis of the impacts that occurred as a result of past activities. SIA must be reflexive and evaluative of its theoretical bases and of its practice.
8. While SIA is typically applied to planned interventions, the techniques of SIA can also be used to consider the social impacts that derive from other types of events, such as disasters, demographic change and epidemics.

SIA is best understood as an umbrella or overarching framework that embodies the evaluation of all impacts on humans and on all the ways in which people and communities interact with their socio-cultural, economic and biophysical surroundings. SIA thus has strong links with a wide range of specialist sub-fields involved in the assessment of areas such as: aesthetic impacts (landscape analysis); archaeological and cultural heritage impacts (both tangible and non-tangible); community impacts; cultural impacts; demographic impacts; development impacts; economic and fiscal impacts; gender impacts; health and mental health impacts; impacts on indigenous rights; infrastructural impacts, institutional impacts; leisure and tourism impacts; political impacts (human rights, governance, democratisation etc); poverty; psychological impacts; resource issues (access and ownership of resources); impacts on social and human capital; and other impacts on societies. As such, comprehensive SIA cannot normally be undertaken by a single person, but requires a team approach.

**International Context**

The objective of SIA is to ensure that development maximises its benefits and minimises its costs, especially those costs borne by people (including those in other places and in the future). Costs and benefits may not be measurable or quantifiable and are often not adequately taken into account by decision-makers, regulatory authorities and developers. By identifying impacts in advance: (1) better decisions can be made about which interventions should proceed and how they should proceed; and (2) mitigation measures can be implemented to minimise the harm and maximise the benefits from a specific planned intervention or related activity.

An important feature of SIA is the professional value system held by its practitioners. In addition to a commitment to sustainability and to scientific integrity, such a value system includes an ethic that advocates openness and accountability, fairness and equity, and defends human rights. The role of SIA goes far beyond the ex-ante (in advance) prediction of adverse impacts and the determination of who wins and who loses. SIA also encompasses: empowerment of local people; enhancement of the position of women, minority groups and other disadvantaged or marginalised members of society; development of capacity building; alleviation of all forms of dependency; increase in equity; and a focus on poverty reduction.

SIA complements the economic and technical models that characterise the thinking of many development professionals and agencies. SIA can be undertaken in different contexts and for different purposes. This creates difficulties in defining or evaluating it. The nature of an SIA done on behalf of a multinational corporation as part of that company’s internal procedures may be very different to an SIA undertaken by a consultant in compliance with regulatory or funding agency requirements, or an SIA undertaken by a development agency interested in ensuring best value for their country’s development assistance. These, in turn, may be very different to an SIA undertaken by staff or students at a local university on behalf of the local community, or an SIA undertaken by the local community itself. Each of these applications of SIA is worthwhile, and none should pretend to be the definitive statement. Evaluation of an SIA needs to consider its intended purpose.

Some conceptualisations of SIA are related to protecting individual property rights, with clear statements of adverse impacts required to ensure that individual rights are not transgressed. Where these rights are violated, SIA could be seen as contributing to mitigation and compensation mechanisms. In these situations, SIA tends to concentrate on the negative impacts. In other contexts, however, particularly in developing countries, there should be less emphasis on the negative impacts on small groups of individuals or on individual property rights. Rather, there should be greater concern with maximising social utility and development potential, while ensuring that such development is generally acceptable to the community, equitable and sustainable.

SIA should also focus on reconstruction of livelihoods. The improvement of social wellbeing of the wider community should be explicitly recognised as an objective of planned interventions, and as such should be an indicator considered by any form of assessment. However, awareness of the differential distribution of impacts among different groups in society, and particularly the impact burden experienced by vulnerable groups in the community should always be of prime concern.

**Impact/features**

SIA is much more than the prediction step within an environmental assessment framework. Social impacts are much broader than the limited issues often considered in EIAs (such as demographic changes, job issues, financial security, and impacts on family life). A limited view of SIA creates demarcation problems about what are the social impacts to be identified by SIA, versus what is considered by related fields such as health impact assessment, cultural impact assessment, heritage impact assessment, aesthetic impact assessment, or gender impact assessment. The SIA community of practitioners considers that all issues that affect people, directly or indirectly, are pertinent to social impact assessment.

A convenient way of conceptualising 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 a 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 systems – the extent to which people are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the level of democratisation 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 the 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 disease or infirmity;
* 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 the future of their children.

**Ref.** <http://www.iaia.org/wiki-details.php?ID=23> (Acc.on 23.5.18)

**To be continued….**