

**BRIEF ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
PAKISTAN'S PERSPECTIVE**

By

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Environmental Impact Assessment is a planning tool and its main purpose is to give the environment its due place in the decision making process by clearly evaluating the environmental consequences of a proposed activity before action is taken. The EIA usually includes a description of the proposed development, data necessary to identify and assess the main impacts which it is likely to have on the environment; and a description of these impacts by reference to many factors such as people, flora, fauna, soil, water, air, landscape, cultural heritage, etc. Where significant adverse effects are identified, the EIA also include a description of the measures envisaged to avoid, reduce or remedy these effects.

For main development projects in Pakistan, the environmental assessment process provide proponents and decision makers, as well as members of the public, with an understanding of the potential environmental effects of proposed action, so as to avoid or minimize adverse effects wherever possible bearing in mind the costs and benefits of using the environmental resource in the particular project.

Pakistan Environmental Protection Act was enacted in 1997 to provide protection, conservation, rehabilitation and improvement of environment, for the prevention and control of population, and promotion of sustainable development. It is the basic legislative tool empowering the government to frame regulations for the protection of the environment. For new development projects, the Section 12 of the Act directs that an initial environmental examination, or where the project is likely to cause an adverse environmental effect, an environmental impact assessment be filed with the Agency for review and approval prior to project construction. The Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency issued Environmental Assessment Guideline package in 1997 which included

both general and sectoral guidelines. The EIA/IEE regulations were issued in the year 2000 regarding the environmental assessment procedures giving a firm legal status to IEE and EIA. The category of projects for which an IEE or EIA is mandatory has been issued in the Regulations.

Introducing EIA culture in a country like Pakistan was a difficult and challenging task particularly when the environmental institutions were weak and awareness level was low. It is quite encouraging that now the EIA process has started to begin in the country in an organized manner. Integration of environmental concerns in various government policies has been ensured. Any new project before it is approved has to pass through a process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which has become far more stringent. Public participation has been made mandatory for EIA review. The media has become quite conscious of the fact and any new project that is approved raises concerns either from the public sector or private sector. However there is still a need for improvement and overcoming the practical constraints. There are limited capacities and capabilities of many agencies responsible for protecting environment in relation to the evaluation of the Initial Environmental Examination or Environmental Impact Assessment reports for new development projects. There have been almost no training programs for the persons responsible for the evaluation of IEE/EIA reports.

Provincial Development Working parties (PDWP) and Central Development Working Party (CDWP) are the forums for approving public projects. Environmental assessment process is not presently fully integrated with the correct steps of the project cycle and hence the progressive findings of the IEE/EIA study are not considered while decision-making process is initiated by the CDWP. This fact is further aggravated due to inherent lacunas in the project digest format of PC-1 documents, which does not fully capacitate the provisions for conducting IEE/EIAs.