

## General Principles

Impact assessment, simply defined, is the process of identifying the future consequences of a current or proposed action.

### THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The underlying reason for environmental impact assessments is the desire to identify, evaluate and predict the physical, chemical, biological, social and economic effects of industrial and development activities on the existing environment. The statutory and regulatory basis for environmental impact assessments began in 1969 with passage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in the United States. In succeeding decades, the concept has become incorporated into laws and practice in more than 200 countries. All such assessments follow the same general principles, with minor differences that can easily be accommodated by process adjustments.

The International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA) has published “Principles of Environmental Impact Assessment Best Practice” that sums up all the important considerations. These principles are defined below.

### 2.1 Definition of EIA

Environmental impact assessment is the process of identifying, predicting, evaluating, and mitigating the biophysical, social, and other rele-

vant effects of development proposals prior to major decisions being taken and commitments made.

## 2.2 Objectives of EIA

Regardless of geographic location, type of project being evaluated, and statutory authority, an environmental impact assessment has four general objectives—

- To ensure that environmental considerations are explicitly addressed and incorporated into the development decision-making process.
- To anticipate and avoid, minimize or offset the adverse significant biophysical, social and other relevant effects of development proposals.
- To protect the productivity and capacity of natural systems and the ecological processes which maintain their functions.
- To promote development that is sustainable and optimizes resource use and management opportunities.

## 2.3 EIA Principles

Two levels of EIA principles have been defined by the IAIA:

1. Basic principles apply to all stages of EIA; they also apply to strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of policies, plans and programs. The list of basic principles should be applied as a single package, recognizing that those included are interdependent and, in some cases, conflicting (e.g., rigor and efficiency). A balanced approach is critical when applying the principles to ensure that environmental impact assessment achieve their purpose and are carried out to internationally accepted standards. Environmental impact assessments thus produce both complete analyses and the means of reconciling apparently conflicting principles.
2. Operating principles describe how the basic principles should be applied to the main steps and specific activities of the environmental impact assessment process e.g., screening; scoping; identification of impacts; assessment of alternatives. It is also envisaged