



International Principles for Social Impact Assessment

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is analysing, monitoring and managing the social consequences of development.

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.

This document was prepared for IAIA by Frank Vanclay, to whom feedback should be provided.

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The core values of SIA

The SIA community of practice believes that:

1. There are fundamental human rights that are shared equally across cultures, and by males and females alike.
2. There is a right to have those fundamental human rights protected by the rule of law, with justice applied equally and fairly to all, and available to all.
3. People have a right to live and work in an environment which is conducive to good health and to a good quality of life and which enables the development of human and social potential.
4. Social dimensions of the environment – specifically but not exclusively peace, the quality of social relationships, freedom from fear, and belongingness – are important aspects of people's health and quality of life.
5. People have a right to be involved in the decision making about the planned interventions that will affect their lives.
6. Local knowledge and experience are valuable and can be used to enhance planned interventions.

Fundamental principles for development

The SIA community of practice considers that:

1. Respect for human rights should underpin all actions.
2. Promoting equity and democratisation should be the major driver of development planning, and impacts on the worst-off members of society should be a major consideration in all assessment.
3. The existence of diversity between cultures, within cultures, and the diversity of stakeholder interests need to be recognised and valued.
4. Decision making should be just, fair and transparent, and decision makers should be accountable for their decisions.
5. Development projects should be broadly acceptable to the members of those communities likely to benefit from, or be affected by, the planned intervention.
6. The opinions and views of experts should not be the sole consideration in decisions about planned interventions.
7. The primary focus of all development should be positive outcomes, such as capacity building, empowerment, and the realization of human and social potential.
8. The term, 'the environment', should be defined broadly to include social and human dimensions, and in such inclusion, care must be taken to ensure that adequate attention is given to the realm of the social.

Principles specific to SIA practice

1. Equity considerations should be a fundamental element of impact assessment and of development planning.
2. Many of the social impacts of planned interventions can be predicted.
3. Planned interventions can be modified to reduce their negative social impacts and enhance their positive impacts.
4. SIA should be an integral part of the development process, involved in all stages from inception to follow-up audit.
5. There should be a focus on socially sustainable development, with SIA contributing to the determination of best development alternative(s) – SIA (and EIA) have more to offer than just being an arbiter between economic benefit and social cost.
6. In all planned interventions and their assessments, avenues should be developed to build the social and human capital of local communities and to strengthen democratic processes.
7. In all planned interventions, but especially where there are unavoidable impacts, ways to turn impacted peoples into beneficiaries should be investigated.
8. The SIA must give due consideration to the alternatives of any planned intervention, but especially in cases when there are likely to be unavoidable impacts.
9. Full consideration should be given to the potential mitigation measures of social and environmental impacts, even where impacted communities may approve the planned intervention and where they may be regarded as beneficiaries.
10. Local knowledge and experience and acknowledgment of different local cultural values should be incorporated in any assessment.
11. There should be no use of violence, harassment, intimidation or undue force in connection with the assessment or implementation of a planned intervention.
12. Developmental processes that infringe the human rights of any section of society should not be accepted.

Developing Guidelines

Because guidelines are specific recommendations for action, they need to be developed in the context in which they are to be applied and they need to be addressed to a specific audience. Therefore, they need to be developed in conjunction with the relevant parties. They need to become accepted as the guidelines of that group rather than being imposed. There are many different groups who are potentially interested in guidelines for SIA. They include:

- **SIA practitioners** – require guidelines to improve their practice;
- **Regulatory agencies** – require guidelines in order to specify or audit the scope of SIA activities they commission as well as the quality of SIA reports they receive;
- **Policy and program developers** – require guidelines to ensure that policy and program development considers social impacts;
- **Affected peoples and NGOs** – require guidelines to be able to participate effectively in SIA processes. Local action groups (resident action groups) and NGOs often act like a regulatory agency in checking the appropriateness of SIA processes.
- **Developers (proponents) and Financiers** – require guidelines to be committed to good practice in environmental and social impact assessment, to adequately resource such practice, to liaise effectively with practitioners and interested and affected parties, and with regulatory agencies.
- **Development agencies** (multilateral and bilateral aid organisations) – require guidelines to ensure that the most benefit is obtained from their aid projects, that SIA components are adequately resourced, and that the aid projects themselves do not have unintended environmental or social consequences.

In addition, various sectors of the community may have special interests, and it may be appropriate for guidelines to be developed to address those special interests, such as Indigenous Peoples. IAIA seeks to liaise with the groups listed above in all countries to develop SIA Guidelines applicable to their practice.

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