

28th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment
THE ART AND SCIENCE OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT
IAIA08 Session Chair's Report

Session number and name: CS2.5 Institutional Capacity Building: How to Deal Effectively With People in the Community on Contentious Projects

Day: Wednesday **Date:** 7th May 2008 **Time:** 2-3:30pm
Persons attending session: Approx 35

Name(s) of Session Chair(s)

Sally Pickard
Paul McLeod

Contributors:

Harry Spaling; Lain Dare; Sabrina Genter

(a) Three current issues in application of assessment processes discussed in this session

- The concept of "engaging communities" in public participation components of impact assessments presumes exclusion from the process, rather than communities being central to the impact assessment process.
- Use of impact assessments in post-disaster reconstruction. How manage a community-driven process, in the absence of traditional data and information sources.
- Use of "Limits of Acceptable Change" as the basis for community consultation regarding environmental management of project impacts.

(b) One or more emerging trends

- The value of establishing long-term relationships with community, to facilitate engagement and consultation and engender trust.
- Community-centre impact assessment and identification of mitigation strategies. Use of tools that come out of the community development discipline area, to generate 'community based environmental assessments', particularly in post-disaster reconstruction.
- The value of using a structured methodology, such as 'limits of acceptable change' as a technique to engage stakeholders and identify socially acceptable limits of change, community values and potential mitigation strategies, in public engagement processes and to diffuse emotive situations in contentious projects.

(c) Comments on the Art and Science of Impact Assessment (i.e. the relative importance and interplay between science and values/politics/subjectivity in impact assessment)

It was noted that stakeholder engagement is definitely an art, with a project by project approach required for community and stakeholder engagement. There are techniques which may constitute the 'science' of stakeholder engagement. However defining the appropriate program of engagement for a particular situation is most definitely an artform. It is not an art that either companies or consultants get right all the time. However, it was noted that increasingly companies are seeking to understand and engage with stakeholders and impacted communities more effectively.