**Conceptualising context in the art & science of Effective EIA in Nigeria: The Interplay between Formal and Informal Aspects in the EIA System in Nigeria**

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**Introduction**

Principles of environmental assessment have been in use in Nigeria since 1969, first with respect to oil and gas exploration and subsequently (in 1992), for development planning in other sectors. Existing research suggests that EIA has performed poorly and a gap exists in literature in relation to how local context influence effectiveness of the Nigerian EIA system. Context is an important factor to consider in EIA, and an understanding of what it means is important to the promotion of a better performing and effective EIA system. This study investigates the meaning and implication of context in EIA, and how contextual peculiarities in formal and informal aspects of the Nigerian system exerts influence on EIA effectiveness. A key argument in this research is that the context of EIA practice holds peculiarities that influence the effectiveness of EIA. Therefore, knowing these peculiarities (addressed as "local context" in this study), which also stem from the interactions between State and Federal systems and how they exert influence on EIA effectiveness, presents an understanding for improving EIA effectiveness. Several scholars agree that context of EIA implementation is a key consideration for evaluating EIA effectiveness (Fischer, 2005; Fischer and Gazzola, 2006; Runhaar and Driessen, 2007; Arts et al., 2012; Van Doren et al., 2013; and Khosravi et al., 2019). However, discussions on context in literature to date, does not provide enough coverage and depth for understanding the role of informal cultural practices and the interplay with formal ones, especially at sub-national level in a developing country like Nigeria.

**What Defines context in EIA?**

Context, defined as "the situation in which something happens and that helps you to understand it" (Oxford dictionary, 2021), is a key underpinning consideration for evaluating EIA effectiveness. In a bid to understand the meaning and implication of context in EIA, a multi-disciplinary search of literature in closely related fields of study to EIA was conducted. These fields are; environmental management, spatial planning: place making, place identify and attachment-sense of a place, politics and power relations sustainable development and international development, and international environmental standards. Environmental problems are a social construct, Liberatore (1995), Taylor (2000), and Ehresman, and Stevis, (2018) argues that there are forces within a context, that are related to institutional, political,

and economic factors that shape the framing around environmental problem to make them an issue within one context and a non-issue in another. It should be expected that interaction will produced varied outcomes in terms of perception and behaviour, from place to place, based on respective cultural and historic events and antecedents (Denzin, 2016), and this underscores the notions of context and the possibilities of different type of influence on policies and interventions (like EIA). Planning is a cultural construct (Gazzola and Onyango, 2018) which derives its value for making judgement from the cultural context of time and place (Stephenson, 2008 in Roe, 2016), these values changes over time and space/context (Roe, 2016), suggesting that people change their use of space and perception of planning. Land use patterns align with socio-cultural influences (Savati et al., 2018), place making patterns and place attachments also define how people respond to development efforts in their environment (Kaplan, 2017; Devine-Wright, 2013). Kelsall et al. (2016) discussed four power relations typologies and argued that they form the reason why some societies succeed in implementing development agendas and why others fail. Power is relevant to how EIA actors participant and how their input into the EIA process impact on the outcomes of the EIA, Arts et al., (2017), argues that the power position of actors is a relevant consideration for evaluating EIA effectiveness. Furthermore, the political system of a country, plays a role in determining the institutional arrangement for the governance approach of EIA, for example, it is a centralised system in Nigeria and a devolved system in the UK. The global political backing to the issues of sustainable development has given rise to the internationalisations of practices and tools that promote sustainable development, EIA being one of them. Also, the growth of international funding organisations' interest in sustainable development has also added some support and pressure on member state to align with respective goals, standards, and agenda for promoting sustainable development. The interaction and convergence of standards has the capacity to create fluidity between entities (Garcia, 2018) and could become a veritable means for recalibration of country-based environmental standards for improved EIA and other environmental interventions. Bitondo (2000) argue that the use of EIA in Cameroon is due to external pressure on the country, and that development assistance stood in the way of understanding country-based EIA practice in Cameroon (Bitondo et al., 2014). From the different but intricacy liked issues identified as contributors to the local context of a place, this definition is arrived at. Which defines context as the interaction of formal and informal social-cultural, institutional, political, environmental, and economic circumstance in an entity which EIA is implemented in (or takes place in) and the information used to describe the interaction as an advisory for planning decision making.

**Formal EIA Process in Nigeria**


**Informal Systems in the Community**


**Conceptualizing Context for Effective EIA in Nigeria**


**Conclusion**


**References**