



Incorporating Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation in EIA: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract: National governments and development agencies have invested considerable effort in recent years to develop methodologies and tools to screen their projects for the risks posed by climate change. However, these tools have largely been developed by the climate change community, and their application within actual project settings remains quite limited. An alternate and complementary approach would be to examine the feasibility of incorporating consideration of climate change impacts, and adaptation within existing modalities for project design, approval, and implementation. This analysis shows that there is ample scope for employing EIA procedures as a vehicle for enhancing the resilience of projects to the impacts of climate change. A number of entry points have been identified to incorporate climate change impact and adaptation considerations, from the strategic phase that precedes the initiation of the EIA to the scoping, detailed assessment and implementation stages.

A key bottleneck here is the availability of detailed information on the historical climate, as well as fairly specific scenarios of future climate for the project location. In many jurisdictions such information is currently not available. There is also the risk of unnecessary or even counterproductive investments in altering project design if the uncertainties associated with climate change projections are not adequately considered. While innovative approaches are currently being tested in various jurisdictions to incorporate climate change impacts and adaptation within EIA, it is important that they retain a certain degree of flexibility to accommodate better and more detailed climate change information as it becomes available. There is also a concomitant need to make substantial and long-term investments in the provision of climate change information, as well as establishing good communication mechanisms between the scientific community and practitioners.

Summary: National governments and development agencies have invested considerable effort to develop methodologies and tools to screen their projects for the risks posed by climate change. An alternate and complementary approach would be to examine the feasibility of incorporating consideration of climate change impacts and adaptation within existing modalities for project design, approval, and implementation.