

Environmental Impact Assessment Act 2020

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What is EIA?

- Environmental Impact Assessment under the Environment Protection Act 1986 is a process of evaluating the environmental impacts of a proposed project or development by taking into related socio economic, cultural and human health impacts into account.
- EIA is a tool to anticipate the likely environmental impacts that may arise out of the proposed developmental activities and suggest mitigation measures and strategies.
- The projects covered under this Act are mining of coal or other minerals, infrastructure development, thermal, nuclear and hydropower projects, real estate and other industrial projects.

Stages in Environmental Impact Assessment Act

- Screening
- Scoping
- Alternatives
- Preliminary Assessment
- Mitigation
- Environmental impact statement
- Monitoring

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- Reviewing

Importance of Environmental Impact Assessment in India

- It is to provide information on the environmental consequences for decision making
- Promote environmentally sound and sustainable development through the identification of mitigation measures and appropriate alternatives.
- It is used to identify, predict and evaluate the economic, environmental and social impact of Development Activities
- It is widely accepted as a tool to ensure sustained development with minimum environmental degradation.

Drawbacks in EIA

- Weak linkages between environmental impact assessment report recommendations on mitigation and monitoring and project implementation and operation.
- Lack of consistency in selection of developments requiring specific environmental impact assessment studies.
- Poor integration of biophysical environmental impacts with social, economic and health effects also adds to the Problems in Environmental Impact Assessment.

Origin in India

- India notified the first EIA Norms in 1994
- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) notified new EIA legislation in September 2006
- A new Draft was introduced in 2020 but it is widely criticised for the problematic changes in its guidelines
 - i) EIA Draft 2020 Allows Post- Facto Clearance which means any project without environment clearances could carry out their operation.
 - ii) In a new Draft there has a list of Projects exempted from Assessment includes any project the Government categorises as strategic. Once the project is strategic then no information should be mentioned in the Public Domain
 - iii) All inland waterways and National Highway Projects have also been Excluded from the public consultation.
 - iv) According to the New Draft the Violations cannot be reported by Citizens it is only reported by Government Representative.
 - v) The new EIA Draft cuts down current 30 days of Public Consultation into 20 days. This rule weakens the Principle of Public participation.
 - vi) The Public Review Window was set to expire on 10 June but the environment ministry had set the new deadline to August 10 because of a delay in publishing the draft in the Gazette due to pandemic.

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Recent Incidents of Gas leak in LG Polymer plant in Vizag where the company was operating without clearances , Fire at Oil India Limited Assam are some of the examples which points out the importance of EIA.

EIA should look at the impact of the project and should be done before any project commences.

Conclusion:

As we know the common fact that environment is for everyone, it is not only for environmentalists. Citizens involvement is must in terms of more expertise in reading EIA themselves. We all should get involved and need more ecological literacy. The major impacts will also be brought under acceptable limits by implementing the required hazard prevention & control measures as suggested in the EIA report. Thus, it has been concluded that there would not be any major impacts on environment due to the proposed project.

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