

## Social Impact Assessment (SIA)

### 1. What is the SIA?

SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (SIA), also known as Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), is the assessment of the wider environmental, social and economic impacts of alternative proposals at the beginning of a project.

SIA is best understood as a general or overarching framework that encompasses the assessment of all impacts on human beings and all the ways in which people and communities interact with their socio-cultural, economic and biophysical environment.

### 2. Who developed the SIA?

The legislated basis for SIA first emerged in 1969/1970, when the US National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) established a requirement to ensure that key federal actions significantly impacting on the quality of the human environment be incorporated into a well-balanced, public assessment of the potential impacts of such actions (Burdge and Vanclay 1995).

### 3. What types of initiatives is the SIA useful for?

SIA can be carried out in different contexts and for different purposes. This creates difficulties in defining or assessing it. A SIA conducted on behalf of a multinational as part of that company's internal procedures may be very different from one conducted by a consultancy, a funding agency, by university students, or one carried out by the local community itself. Each of these applications of SIA is worthwhile, and none should claim to be definitive. The evaluation of an SIA must take into account its purpose.

A comprehensive SIA cannot normally be carried out by a single person, but requires a team approach.

### 4. What are the main objectives of SIA?

SIA aims to ensure that development maximises its benefits and minimises its costs. If impacts are identified in advance: (1) better decisions can be made about what interventions should be made and how they should be made; and (2) mitigation measures can be applied to minimise the harms and maximise the benefits of a specific planned intervention or related activity.

### 5. How does it work?

#### SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES OF SIA PRACTICE

The SIA must address 5 key matters: community and stakeholder engagement; workforce management; housing and accommodation; local business and industry procurement, and health and community well-being.

In conducting the SIA, the project owner should involve the community and stakeholders in all aspects of the project in order to: understand who may be affected and how; understand the affected communities; identify and assess potential social impacts; develop management measures to mitigate adverse impacts and enhance benefits, and support monitoring and reporting.

## 6. What skills and knowledge are useful for using the SIA?

Skills and knowledge areas identified for organisations and individuals can be classified based on players, users and doers. Below, examples in each category:

- **Skill and Knowledge for Players:** Communication skills, innovative skills to reach out to people, leadership skills, and influential skills are critical.
- **Skill and Knowledge for Users:** Includes leadership skills, influential skills, analytical skills, decision-making skills and information processing skills. Also, a wide range of knowledge expertise in order to relate the SEA process and information to local and regional planning needs. Both technical and behavioural skills can be identified as crucial for this group type.
- **Skill and Knowledge for Doers:** Project management skills, strong communication skills, analytical skills, quantitative and qualitative skills may top the list. Special mention needs to be made to information management and dissemination skills.
- **Classification based on scale/context**  
Example of generic skills include communicative; project management; leadership; teamworking; stakeholder management; conflict resolution; and time management to name a few. A sound understanding of environmental issues, cause and effect relationship will also be useful.
- **Context specific skills and knowledge areas:**  
Visual and analytical skills are crucial. These may include further sub-categories such as map reading skills or perhaps cartographic skills. Also, methods such as brainstorming sessions, external feedback and interdepartmental meetings should help organisations to adopt interpersonal skills and conceptual understanding
- **Case specific skills and knowledge:**

This will depend on the particular plan, programme or policy (PPP).

- **SEA methodology and learning:** The basic ability or learning preference of individuals within the SEA process will also have an important bearing on the effectiveness with which they perform their task within the SEA process.

## 7. USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

<https://www.iaia.org/wiki-details.php?ID=23>

<https://www.iisd.org/learning/eia/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SIA.pdf>

<https://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/coordinator-general/strong-and-sustainable-resource-communities/social-impact-assessment>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232703107 Exploring relevant skills and knowledge areas for strategic environmental assessment](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232703107_Exploring_relevant_skills_and_knowledge_areas_for_strategic_environmental_assessment)