Environmental Impact Assessment: Good Quality Report Preparation

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Universal definition of a good quality Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report is not found in literature though guidelines are available on the preparation as well as review of EIA reports. About 500 professionals were interacted and 70 EIA reports for different sectors prepared by consultants during 2009-2016 in India were reviewed. Major factors, considered responsible for far from satisfactory quality of EIA reports, attributed to consultants and designated authorities, are brought out. It is observed that mandatory accreditation requirement for the consultants preparing EIA reports has limitations. A comprehensive site-specific TOR and consideration of all the project-related and allied/associated activities involved in different life cycle phases of a project are essential pre-requisites for a good quality EIA report. For improving quality of EIA reports, recommendations including salient contents of an EIA report, internal mechanism for quality assurance, role of statutory as well as project financing agencies and practice of peer review are made.

Key words : *Environmental Impact Assessment, EIA report, good quality, good quality EIA report, salient features, accreditation, developing countries, India*

Introduction

There appear no standard requirements for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report to be qualified as a good quality report. Lee & Colley [1992][7] and Lee et al. [1999][8] developed a package for the review of environmental assessments in UK. The review criteria for Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) quality includes multiple criteria arranged in a four level hierarchical structure consisting of an overall report grade, 4 review areas (description of the development, the local environment and the baseline conditions; identification and evaluation of key impacts; alternatives and mitigation of impacts; and communication of results), 13 categories and 39 sub-categories. Christopher Wood et al. [1996][26] considered some factors, often acting in combination, which are important in determining quality of EIA reports, viz., legislation, nature of consultants, experience of participants, scoping, length of EIA reports, and nature of projects. Comparative evaluation of EIA systems was carried out by Christopher Wood [1999][27]. The literature available on evaluation of EIA systems is reviewed by Kimmo Jalava et al. [2010][5]. Kabir & Momtaz [2012][6] and Momtaz & Kabir [2013][14] evaluated EIA practices in developing countries. Investigations on quality of EIA reports were carried out by Sandham [2008][21], Talime [2011][23] and Zakari [2015][30] using Lee and Colley review package. It was revealed that major factors influencing poor quality of EIA were provision of inadequate information regarding the project, inaccessibility/ lack of baseline data, insufficient competency of EIA practitioners, non-awareness on the importance of environmental issues, non-use of quantitative impact assessment methods, inadequate consideration of alternatives, absence of sound basis of proposed mitigation measures, poor public participation, lack of monitoring after decision making, insufficient time for conducting EIAs, low or lack of resources, and corruption. Nadeem & Hameed [2006][15] described determinants of a good quality EIA process as commitment to EIA, availability of EIA guidelines and legislations, resources allocated to EIA, nature and experience of various participants in EIA process, interaction between parties involved in EIAs, type and size of project. The EIS review guidance [EC, 2001][2] for the European Union on the preparation of better quality EIS and more effective review for making the best possible information available for decision making.

Evaluation of EIA practices in India using SWOT analysis was carried out by Paliwal [2006][16], when earlier legislation [MOEF, 1994][11] was applicable. Poor quality EIA reports and non-accountability of EIA professionals was considered weakness of Indian EIA process [Sanjay Mathur, 2016][10]. Panigrahi et al [2012][17] carried out appraisal of EIA system in India and reviewed quality of EIA reports.

The objective of this paper is to focus on inclusion of specific contents while preparing an EIA report to make it a

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