

Environmental Impact Assessment

- EIA first legalised in Sri Lanka in 1980 in the Coast Conservation Act.
- Coastal Area - 300m landwards from the Mean High Water line and 2km seawards from the Mean Low Water line.
- ANY development within the coastal zone requires Coast Conservation Directors approval.
- Director has the discretion to call for EIA for any development project within the coastal zone.

EIA outside the Coastal Zone

- EIA formally brought into practice in areas **outside the Coastal Zone** in 1993, through legal provisions in the National Environmental Act.

A total of 31 prescribed projects have been gazetted as requiring EIA

- River basin development/irrigation
- Extraction of timber
- Clearing of land >50ha
- Mining and mineral extraction
- Transportation systems
- Ports and harbours
- Airports
- Power generation/transmission
- Resettlement >100 families
- Water supply
- Hotels >99 rooms
- Fisheries
- Disposal of waste
- Industrial estates
- Selected stand-alone industry

IEE/EIA

- Two “scales” of Impact Assessment of “prescribed projects”
- IEE (Initial Environmental Examination) for smaller-scale projects with less impacts on the environment
- EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) for large-scale projects with significant impacts on the environment

Projects in Environmentally Sensitive Areas

- In addition to the listed projects, projects to be sited in environmentally sensitive areas also require IEE/EIA, irrespective of their size or scale
- A list of ten “Environmentally Sensitive Areas” are also listed in the gazette notification

Public Participation in EIA

- Public participation is mandatory in EIA in Sri Lanka
- All EIA reports are kept open for 30 working days for public scrutiny and comment
- Public hearings are also held for projects with significant environmental/social impacts (not mandatory)

BIODIVERSITY IN SRI LANKA

- Sri Lanka is one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world

- The ecosystem diversity in Sri Lanka includes forest ecosystems, marine and maritime coastal ecosystems, natural grassland ecosystems and inland wetland ecosystems

- Several ecosystems in Sri Lanka are internationally recognized:
 - 1 World Heritage site
 - 2 Biosphere reserves
 - 3 Ramsar wetland sites
 - 41 Wetlands included in Asian wetland directory

BIODIVERSITY IN SRI LANKA

Percentage of endemic species in Sri Lanka

- ❑ 52% of Amphibians
- ❑ 41% of Freshwater Fish
- ❑ 100% Freshwater Crabs
- ❑ 76% Land Molluscs
- ❑ 28.3% of Flowering plants
- ❑ 17% of Fern species

Policies/Programmes on Biodiversity Conservation

- A Framework for Action on Conservation of Biological Diversity has been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers
- Forestry Sector Masterplan prepared in 1995, and is being implemented
- Coastal Resources Management Plan prepared and is being implemented, with special emphasis on biodiversity conservation
- A committee on Environment Policy Management for Biodiversity has been established
- National policy on wetlands has been finalised
- A National Wildlife Policy was formulated in 2000

International Conventions Related to Biodiversity

Sri Lanka has ratified the following International Conventions related to Biological Diversity

- Convention on Conservation of Biological Diversity in 1994
- CITES Convention in 1979
- Ramsar Convention in 1990

Integration of Biodiversity in EIA

- Almost all projects which undergo EIA routinely require an Ecological Assessment of the existing environment including habitat types and species
- The requirement for an Ecological Assessment is set out in the Terms of Reference(ToR) for the EIA
- ToRs of EIAs requires species type information. No specific mention of biodiversity, however

Projects implemented in Sri Lanka with a high impact on Biodiversity

- Agricultural projects
- Aquaculture projects
- Highway projects
- Large-scale hydropower projects
- Tourist hotel projects
- Mini hydro projects

Effective Integration of Biodiversity

- Mahaweli Project - massive irrigation and hydropower project implemented as far back as 1977
- Creation of several protected areas within the Mahaweli development zone to provide refuge to wildlife to compensate for habitats destroyed by the project
- Reforestation in riverine habitats, roadside planting, home garden development, organic farming and IPM
- Introduction of efficient stoves to minimise impact on natural forests

Effective Integration of Biodiversity, cont'd

Walawe left bank irrigation extension area

Large scale irrigation development project already approved after an EIA.
Following action taken in order to integrate biodiversity issues into the ongoing project:

A comprehensive predevelopment biodiversity assessment was done and areas of high biodiversity were identified and mapped using GIS

It was decided to preserve the areas identified as BIODIVERSITY REFUGES.
These areas were conserved during the construction stage

An arboretum has been established in the project area to conserve rare and important plant species of the area. This will also help to create awareness and educate local communities and visitors - a source of awareness creation and education

There are plans to carry out biodiversity assessments during and after the development project.

Examples of effective integration

- Upper Kotmale hydropower project(150mw project affecting 7 waterfalls - a complete biodiversity assessment is being carried out)
- Colombo-Matara highway - highway from the capital, Colombo, to the south of the country - the route proposed initially was changed in order to preserve an important wetland system close to Colombo and also other wetland systems along the route
- Mini hydro power projects - ecological assessments are routinely carried out as these projects are usually in very sensitive forests

Examples of poor Integration of EIA and Biodiversity

- There were many examples of poor integration in the early days of EIA
- A mere list of species included in the report
- Inadequate understanding of the concept of biodiversity led to this
- A large number of private sector projects still have inadequate biodiversity assessments

Examples of poor integration

Sinharajah resort hotel and golf course to be built in close proximity to a World Heritage Site

The project proponent was requested to carry out a comprehensive study of the terrestrial and aquatic ecological resources in the project area, and the impacts of the project on the existing habitats and required mitigatory measures in the EIA.

The project was rejected as the studies carried out was totally inadequate and the data reported in the EIA report was inaccurate

Strengths

- Availability of local expertise in biodiversity
- Biodiversity issues already incorporated in EIA
- Number of government agencies with expertise in Biodiversity (Forest Dept., Dept. of Wildlife Conservation, Central Environmental Authority, universities, research organizations)
- High level of public awareness on biodiversity issues
- Large number of NGOs who are interested and active in biodiversity issues.

WEAKNESSES

- Development oriented agencies pay less attention to biodiversity issues
- Biodiversity-related baseline information may not be readily available for EIA
- Project proponents have to carry out their own assessments at site which could be time consuming and expensive
- Post-approval monitoring of EIA projects is weak in some cases
- Most project proponents view EIA only as a regulatory requirement and not as a means of implementing an environmentally sustainable project