Session 3. (1:00)
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Concepts, Process, & Skills: Part I

Objectives

Establish that familiarity with the EIA process and concepts is important because USAID's environmental procedures are a specific implementation of the general EIA process,

Achieve a common, basic understanding of the EIA process and key EIA concepts.

Understand how the EIA process achieves Environmentally Sound Design and Management.

Become familiar with the principles and processes that constitute the core EIA skills of baseline characterization, identifying issues and impacts of concern, and mitigation design.

Establish that because effective mitigation design must be highly responsive to site conditions, effective mitigation design requires baseline characterization and issues identification skills.

Format

Presentation and worked examples; Q&A

Summary

This session proceeds in 4 parts:

1. **Introduction and basic EIA terminology and concepts**
2. **Baseline Characterization & Determining Impacts of Concern**
3. **Mitigation**
4. **Linking EIA to ESDM**.

Part 1: Introduction and basic EIA terminology and concepts. The session will:

- Define Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as a formal process for identifying the:

  likely effects of activities/projects on the environment, and on human health and welfare; and

  means and measures to monitor & mitigate these impacts.

- Establish that EIA-based environmental "safeguard" processes are now standard requirements of nearly all donors and governments, including the US Government/USAID.

- Define key EIA terms and concepts such as *baseline* and *impact*, and summarize the basic elements of the EIA process.

- Identify the following EIA core skills

  1. characterizing the **baseline situation**;
  2. identifying (and evaluating) the potential adverse **impacts** of planned development activities (issues of concern); and
  3. developing mitigation and (4) monitoring measures to address these impacts.

  This session addresses core skills 1-3; the fourth (monitoring) is addressed in a subsequent session.

Part 2: Baseline Characterization & Determining Impacts of Concern. At first thought, characterizing the baseline situation and identifying issues of concern might seem relevant only to the pre-implementation EIA process—not to implementing the conditions that result from that review.

However, conditions specified in USAID IEEs and EAs are often very general. They require IPs to identify issues of concern particular to a site & respond with appropriate, specific mitigation measures. Thus effective mitigation requires a familiarity with all core EIA skills.

The first part of this session explains the basic, logical process behind baseline characterization and identifying issues of concern. We will illustrate the process with a worked example.

An example from a real and typical small-scale construction project will illustrate why the core EIA skills of baseline characterization and identifying issues of concern are directly relevant to effective mitigation.

Depending on the size, complexity and context of the activity, sophisticated environmental models and other tools *can* be required to evaluate impacts in the context of a full EIA study. But for most small-scale activities and preliminary assessments (IEEs), the simple, logical process described here, supported by good judgment and the information contained in the *Sector Environmental Guidelines* (or similar resources), is sufficient.

Part 3: Mitigation. The purpose of the EIA process is not simply to assess potential environmental impacts, but to change project design and implementation so that these impacts are *mitigated*—that is, avoided, reduced or offset.

As such, mitigation is a critical part of ESDM and the EIA process. Monitoring (addressed in a subsequent session) is its essential complement, required to verify whether the mitigation measures are sufficient, effective—and actually implemented.

This part of the session:

- Defines mitigation.
- Provides examples of basic mitigation approaches.
- Explains the principles behind good mitigation design and practice.

Part 4: Linking EIA to ESDM. This final part of the session will show that the EIA process provides a systematic framework to achieve ESDM. More specifically, it operationalizes the following principles for achieving ESDM:

- Be prevention-oriented
- Apply general development best practices to *environmental* aspects of the activity, including:
    - Technical soundness with respect to local environmental conditions
    - Design for the social and policy context
    - Build stakeholder commitment and capacity
    - Practice Adaptive Management
    - Design for Climate Change
- Be systematic

Key resources

The sector chapters of USAID's *Sector Environmental Guidelines* are a key resource for (1) identification of potential adverse environmental impacts and (2) design of mitigation and monitoring measures. http://www.usaidgems.org/sectorGuidelines.htm.

"IV.1: Topic Briefing—Introduction to EIA" in the *Environmental Guidelines for Small Scale Activities*. (USAID/AFR/SD; available at www.encapafrica.org/egssaa.htm) is a general resource for core EIA concepts.