



Research article

An evaluation of the environmental impact assessment practice in Uganda: challenges and opportunities for achieving sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a broad process that emerged from the National Environment Policy Act, 1970 in the U.S. Its primary objective is to generate information on the likely impacts of a project on all aspects of the environment and used in agency decision making and in the long run protect the environment and achieve sustainable development. EIA practice in Uganda was formally established through the National Environment Act, 1995 and now in practice for over 25 years. However, there is increasing level of water pollution especially Lake Victoria, rivers, streams, aquifers and soils. This research reviewed the institutional, legal and regulatory framework for EIA, related literature and EIA documents especially EIA reports and conducted key EIA stakeholders survey using questionnaires to identify capacity and practice issues. The results revealed that, there was gap between law and practice arising from inadequate and ineffective public participation, weak follow-up, low key stakeholder's capacity, political interference, lack of SEA practice and not embracing EIA in a trans-boundary context. However, there is fairly good and comprehensive institutional, legislative and regulatory framework for EIA, good local governance structures, adequate staffing, robust national planning framework, active non-state actors and regional groupings. In order to maximize the potential of EIA as a means for achieving the SDGs, we recommended measures to address the challenges facing the EIA practice as well as utilize the existing opportunities within the context in which EIA is applied.

1. Introduction

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is a broad process that emerged from the National Environmental Policy Act 1970 (NEPA) in the U.S. It is the process of assessing proposed action for their likely effects for all the aspects of the environment before decisions are taken to commit to these actions and developing appropriate responses to the issues identified in the assessment (Morgan, 2012). NEPA require federal agencies to produce environmental impact assessment statements (EISs) for projects under their authority to explain to the public that all the impacts of the proposed undertaking on all aspects of the environment are identified and addressed before implementing the project.

The basic principle of EIA is that, it should be participative (Jigme Choki, 2015) and public participation has been considered as an essential integral component of EIA since its inception through the NEPA process. According to (Enserink et al., 2006) different levels of public participation may be relevant to the different phases of an EIA process from initial

community analysis and notice of the proposed intervention to approval decision making, to monitoring and follow-up. However, to maximize the potential of EIA as a tool for achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs), public participation during the EIA process ought to be emphasized at the policy level (strategic environmental assessment), the initial EIA phases especially scoping, but also important during the study, review, monitoring and post - environmental audit conducted in line with the SDGs.

The original objective of EIA is to generate relevant data and therefore information which must be used in the decision making processes of environmental agencies and such should be well documented. According to the UN (2019) global issue, big data through different sources and new analytical approaches, if applied well can enable more agile, efficient and evidence – based decision making and can better measure progress on the SDGs in a way that is both inclusive and fair. Big data gives unprecedented power to understand, analyze, forecast or predict and ultimately change the world to be a better place to live. Big data made into open

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