

The Importance of Stakeholders Involvement in Environmental Impact Assessment

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Abstract Environmental issues and problems are being experienced in almost all countries of the world today, the extent or intensity of the issues and problems however differ from country to country, depending on the size and rate of growth of her population, the quality of and the technologies available to her people, the nature of the country's environmental units and their characteristics, and the level of her socio-economic development which recently have awakened global fears and responses or reactions. To address the problems created by human urge to subdue his environment call for collective effort by all concerned. The level of involvement may vary, but it is important that all affected by resource exploitation, projects, and any activity on the environment be given opportunity to think the way forward. The local people stand better position to notice changes in their environment than any other person no matter how highly placed the person might be. The neglect of stakeholders in EIA has led to waste of resources and man power. To avoid crisis, the stakeholder's views should be recognized and amenities provided for areas in and around the project sites.

Keywords Environmental impact assessment, Involvement, Stakeholders

1. Introduction

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has become one of the important criteria for the setting up of any project because of the increasing concern for a quality human environment. The growing industrial and urbanization processes, sophisticated technology and their impact on the environment, have over the years generated a deep concern for proper management of the environment in order to improve its quality, as it affects human well-being. Hoping that such action will lead to the protection of scenery, clean air and water, noise etc. in order to promote both in-door and out-door recreation.

The awareness in Nigeria to maintain a good environmental quality, led to the establishment of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) in 1988, charged with the responsibility for the protection and development of the Nigerian environment, including policy initiation in relation to environmental research and technology.

As part of the implementation of the National Environmental Policy, interim guidelines and standards for environmental control in Nigeria were fashioned out, one of which is the stakeholders involvement in environmental monitoring through participation in Environmental Impact

Assessment (EIA), for a proper management of such environment as well as the sustenance of any development project sited within an environment.

Hence, the assertion of Chief Executive of FEPA, Adewoye [1] presentation captioned "10 years of protecting the Environment our Experience", when he said "we believe in the preventive approach, we prefer that environmental devastations should not exist.... And that is why we do not joke with the issue of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which is a condition before a company which may impact the environment can be set up".

2. What is Environment?

The term environment has a variety of definitions, one of which is that of Umeh and Uchegbu [2], stating that "an environment is the component of earth, comprising land, water and air, all organic and inorganic matter and living organisms and the natural interactions within the system". While Azaiki [3] summaries it thus "the term environment simply means the existing area set of surroundings that affects an activity".

In the environment, nature interacts directly and indirectly with man and in this interaction; man is the controller and manipulated nature as he pleases. Thus, the understanding that the environment is subject to natural and man-made changes, but the focus in this paper is on the man induced changes which causes environmental effects that can be positive or negative, because a man induced change is often referred to as the "effect", while the harmful or beneficial

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consequences are called “Impacts”.

It is as a result of environmental effects and impacts, due to man’s activities that have raised the awareness for the need for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which is an attempt to evaluate the consequences of a proposed action in an environment.

As a result of observed consequences of activities taking place in the environment due to natural and man-made activities, [2], and Mann [4] defined Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as “an activity designed to identify and predict the impact on the biogeophysical environment and on man’s health and well-being of legislative proposals, policies, programmes, projects and operational procedures, and to interpret and communicate about the impacts”.

Highlighting more on the need for proper understanding and management of the environment, [3] observed that “with research studies pin-pointing the damage from current global warming and industry gas emissions to the damage to the environment, humans is beginning to see the connection between developmental processed and environmental protection. It is becoming obvious that as we push for industrialization, its cost needs to be weighed against preserving the environment or we will face the consequences of reduced living standards and life span”.

3. Environmental Monitoring

The essence of environmental monitoring is to ensure that before the actual impact of project on the environment can be determined, there is need to monitor selected variables such as air, water, soil, vegetation, etc. in a systematic observation and measurement manner in time and space which is the environmental impact study described by Godwill [5] as the effect a development activity would have on the environment which might be adverse or beneficial.

In designing impact monitoring programs, great care is needed to ensure that both technical and institutional factors are considered and formulated to ensure that monitoring meets its objectives, as it provides the necessary and essential input into environmental auditing, which is compiling the actual impacts based on the predications made.

In applying this method of study, it is possible to identify accurate and inaccurate predications, thereby increasing the knowledge of impacts, also gives information for future environmental impact assessment, and useful in designing mitigation measures and also monitoring strategies in order to improve the ability to predict from past mistakes.

If this procedure is strictly adhered, it will serve as preventive measure against environmental degradation. [3] Observed that “Nigeria’s environment is threatened by a number of factors, which include the operations of the petroleum industry, unplanned urban development and the misuse of renewable natural resources.”

This observation agrees with a report from the Department of Petroleum Resources, stating that over 95% of the volume

of oil spill on the Niger Delta region is not recovered. This means that marine lives, fishing waters, and, farming areas become polluted, which in turn adversely affects the economic resources of the people of the region.

In this regard therefore, environmental impact assessment as a management tool is designed to aid officials, managers and policy makers who take decisions about major development projects in predicting the environmental consequences of such project before their implementation, and planning measures are geared towards avoiding or mitigating adverse environmental impacts.

Hence, Annan [6] in his address to the Association of American Geographers stated that “as you know too well, the signs of severe environmental distress are all around us. Unsustainable practices are woven deeply into the fabric of modern life, land degradation threatens food security, forest destruction threatens public health, and fierce competition for fresh water may well become a source of conflict and wars in the future, placing environmental concerns as the natural security issues of the future.”

An indication of non-involvement of stakeholders in the investment and development of project communities is in a statement credited to [3] that “from the first discovered oil well in 1958 at Oloibiri to the present era of commercial crude oil, the Niger Delta has been fraught with problems that have led to systematic social exclusion. These conditions continue to remain true today as many communities lack infrastructure and livelihood services, despite various government interventions aimed at mitigating them.

An environmental impact assessment as a working tool of the stakeholder is that which therefore focuses on the problems, conflicts, natural resources constraints, and effluent discharges etc. that can affect the viability of a project. And the overall aim is to improve the suitability of the project within its proposed environment and lead to a more efficient use of resources than if remedial measures were to be introduced in an already impacted environment.

4. The need for Environmental Management System (EMS)

Environmental management system is an operational system that seeks to establish document and maintain a procedure for the day-to-day operations of projects, hence providing awareness training and internal communication within projects Environmental Management System (EMS) that establishes specific procedures for identifying Environment Impact and Corrective measures arising from activities of the system and services.

The procedures for achieving these set objectives are documented, using specific items that are contained in the work sheet of Environmental Impact Assessment Schedule such as;

A description of the proposed acts and alternatives;

A prediction of the nature and magnitude of

environmental effects, both positive and negative;

- i. An identification of human concerns;
- ii. A prediction of the magnitude of the impacts and effects of their impacts on the project and alternatives;
- iii. Recommendation for the acceptance and rejection of the project, or the adoption of alternative projects;
- iv. Recommendation for inspection procedures.

In order to ensure a step by step follow-up of project planning and implementation, involvement of stakeholders becomes very necessary, since project effect and impact will be felt mostly by them, so that their inputs and expectations will enhance a better environmental management that will be sustainable with time.

Hence, [6] suggestion to the Association of American Geographers that “environmental experts need to know if resources are under pressure from settlement patterns or other threats since without conservation economic growth cannot be sustained.” This suggestion is geared towards environmental sustainability and this is a major concern of every stakeholder in the environment”.

5. Stakeholders Involvement in Environmental Impact Assessment

There is a growing consensus that timely and broad-based stakeholder involvement is a vital ingredient for effective environmental assessment, as it is for project planning, appraisal and development in general. The World Bank has found that public participation in EIA tends to improve project design, environmental soundness and social acceptability [7]. Mwalyosi and Hughes [8] identified a similar experience in Tanzania. They found that EIAs that successfully involved a broad range of stakeholders tended to lead to more influential environmental assessment processes and, consequently, to development that delivered more environmental and social benefits.

Conversely, EIAs that failed to be inclusive tended to have less influence over planning and implementation, and consequently resulted in higher social and environmental costs.

Stakeholder's involvement brings in clarifications on points which were not hitherto grasped and expertise and local knowledge of members help in sustainable development.

Who are the EIA ‘stakeholders’? Howlett and Nagu [9] define stakeholders as ‘all those people and institutions who have an interest in the successful design, implementation and sustainability of the project. This includes those positively and negatively affected by the project.

Stakeholder participation involves processes whereby all those with a stake in the outcome of a project can actively participate in decisions on planning and management. They share information and knowledge, and may contribute to the project, so as to enhance the success of the project and hence ultimately their own interests’ The Republic of Ireland’s guidelines provide a list of over one hundred stakeholder

groups that should be considered as contributors to the environmental assessment process. These include government agencies, citizen’s groups, NGOs, recreational interest groups, expert groups, business affiliations and academic organizations [10].

Different types of stakeholders can contribute to the EIA process in different ways and, in most cases; inputs from a broad variety of stakeholders will complement the EIA process.

Stakeholder interests exist at different levels. For example, at the local project level, they might include land or water access rights, pollution or market opportunities.

At regional or country levels, stakeholder involvement might focus more on issues concern renewable versus nonrenewable resource use (e.g. hydropower versus coal-fired power generation) or demand-side management (by setting energy prices to levels that discourage inefficient energy use; or by adopting more resource-efficient technology).

At the international level, stakeholder interests may be more concerned with global climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, etc.

Stakeholder involvements in this work encompass the full spectrum of interaction between stakeholders (governmental, non-governmental, business/private sector, service providers, the public etc.) and the decision-making process. The term encompasses both consultation and participation.

Participation is used in this work to define ‘a process by which stakeholders influence decisions which affect them’ and is distinguished from consultation’ by the degree to which stakeholders are allowed to influence, share or control the decision-making process (Hughes [11]).

Consultation implies a process with little share or control over the process for consultees. Adnan et al. [12] formulated an extremely useful typology of participation that has since been widely cited and adapted by others [13]

The range of stakeholders involved in an EIA typically includes:

- the people “individuals, groups and communities” who are affected by the proposal;
- the proponent and other project beneficiaries;
- government agencies;
- NGOs and interest groups; and
- Others, such as donors, the private sector, academics etc.

Local people

Individuals or groups in the affected community will want to know what is proposed; what the likely impacts are; and how their concerns will be understood and taken into account. They will want assurances that their views will be carefully listened to and considered on their merits. They will want proponents to address their concerns. They will also have knowledge of the local environment and community that can be tapped and incorporated into baseline data.

Proponents

Understandably, proponents will wish to shape the

proposal to give it the best chance of success. Often, this involves trying to create public understanding and acceptance of the proposal through the provision of basic information. More creatively, project design can be improved through using public inputs on alternatives and mitigation and understanding local knowledge and values.

Government agencies

The government agencies involved in the EIA process will want to have their policy and regulatory responsibilities addressed in impact analysis and mitigation consideration. For the competent authority, an effective public involvement programme can mean the proposal may be less likely to become controversial in the later stages of the process. For the responsible EIA agency, the concern will be whether or not the public involvement process conforms to requirements and procedures.

NGOs/Interest groups

Comments from NGOs can provide a useful policy perspective on a proposal; for example, the relationship of the proposal to sustainability objectives and strategy. Their views may also be helpful when there are difficulties with involving local people. However, this surrogate approach should be considered as exceptional; it cannot substitute for or replace views which should be solicited directly.

Other interested groups

Other interested groups include those who are experts in particular fields and can make a significant contribution to the EIA study. The advice and knowledge of government agencies and the industry sector most directly concerned with the proposal should always be sought. However, in

many cases, substantive information about the environmental setting and effects will come from outside sources.

The different benefits provided for key groups by effective public participation are described in the table below. However, these benefits may not be always realized or acknowledged by participants. Each of the above groups may perceive the benefits gained from public involvement in the EIA process through the lens of their own experience and interests. [14]

Environmental Impact Assessment is a study that predicts the impact of a project on the biographical components of the environment as well as human and his well-being. Hence, the need for the involvement of concerned citizens of the environment to determine what project will be most suiting, or the need to sort for their views before the location of any developmental project, making them partners in such projects, so as to enhance environmental sustainability and maintenance of international standard while pursuing human satisfaction using available natural resources that is obtained from that defined environment.

Such stakeholder's involvement would have prevented the observation made by Edwin-Nwosu and Elenwo [16] that "the crude oil producing states/communities have continued to increase with uncountable woes of environmental impoverishment. This has continued to create set backs on human lives/resources."

It is as a result of this view that advocates are insisting on community participation in resource control and environmental monitoring and protection, which emphasizes on the importance of stakeholders involvement in environmental impact assessment.

The benefits of effective participation for different groups

The proponent	The decision-maker	Affected communities
<i>Source: Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment [15]</i>		
Raises the proponent's awareness of the potential impacts of a proposal on the environment and the affected community	Achieves more informed and accountable decision making	Provides an opportunity to raise concerns and influence the decision-making process
Legitimizes proposals and ensures greater acceptance and support	Provides increased assurance that all issues of legitimate concern have been addressed	Provides an opportunity to gain a better understanding and knowledge about the environmental impacts and risks that may arise
Improves public trust and confidence	Demonstrates fairness and transparency, avoiding accusations of decisions being made 'behind closed doors'	Increases awareness of how decision-making processes work, who makes decisions and on what basis
Assists by obtaining local information/data	Promotes good relations with the proponent and third parties	Empowers people, providing the knowledge that they can influence decision making and creating a greater sense of social responsibility
Avoids potentially costly delays later in the process by resolving conflict early	Avoids potentially costly delays later in the process by resolving conflict early	Ensures all relevant issues and concerns are dealt with prior to the decision

The views of the advocates have been captured in a statement by Ajaegbu [17] that “the United Nations Organization (UNO) also declared and celebrates the 5 day of June every year as World Environment Day. This is meant to draw the attention of governments, non-governmental organizations, development decision makers, and all other people in various countries of the world to the state of the environment and various environmental issues and problems threatening mankind today.”

It is believed that stakeholders’ involvement in environmental monitoring is a crucial process that is capable of producing verifiable evidence of the degradation and losses suffered by communities in relation to industrial or developmental processes. Whereby community environmental monitoring brigade are established, it becomes a strategy to ensure that stakeholders exercise reasonable control over their environment. [18]

The Songhai farm project in Bormu in Tai local government area of Rivers State in Nigeria is a case where the involvement of stakeholders in EIA has proved successful in Nigeria. From the onset of the project the state government consulted the local government for land identification and acquisition. Stakeholders were invited from among the Non-governmental organisation, Government agencies and ministries concerned, local government representatives, professionals, representatives of the local people and other interest groups.

Settlements were made to indigenes and the project carried out. To this day the project had not recorded any problem or crisis that is common with projects around south-south region of Nigeria. This project was established since 2012.

Other projects where stakeholders were not involved in the EIA are associated with crisis and unrest. The Umuechem, Odi and Ogoni sagas in south-south region of Nigeria were some of the projects where stakeholders were neglected, with the argument that the local people are not educated or experts in the field. Those involved are not interested in the environment and the people; they only care for what they stand to benefit from their involvement. This neglect is always met with stiff resistance from the local people. Their action is termed militancy or cultism by those in power.

Oil spillage, environmental degradation, pollution, without adequate basic amenities and infrastructure are the known legacy of exclusion of real stakeholders in EIA.

6. Conclusions

Environmental management is the process of putting together those items of nature environment where man exists, so that man’s penetration and exploitation of available resources do not have adverse effect on the environment.

As a result of man’s desire to sustain his environment, there is that need for its total assessment, which is a process that involves the carrying out of an appraisal and evaluation

of the total effects of a particular development schedule on the environment. And this must be well organized, orderly, all embracing and scientific in nature in considering the potential impacts on the physical, biological, chemical, cultural and socio-economic aspects of the environment, as it is intended to preserve the environment for the future generations. There is need for strong legislation and continuous sensitization of the people on the importance of Environmental Impact Assessment. For sustainable development to thrive stakeholders should be involved. Stakeholders should not be intimidated in anyway as a result of their opinion on EIA deliberation. Finally, essential amenities must be provided for communities or areas where it is discern that a project will have negative effect on the environment before the project execution.

7. Recommendations

The Government and Firms should be able to identify and understand that the stakeholders are individuals, communities, interest groups that a project execution will affect positively or negatively. That these group had varying background, beliefs and customs, therefore, both the elites and illiterates members of the group should be fully represented.

- (1) Information should be given to participating stakeholders on time (about a month) to enable them participate effectively.
- (2) Venue of stakeholders meeting should be on location that local people can easily access, not in an intimidating hotel that will frighten the people.
- (3) Training of professionals and civil society groups in collaboration with institutions and non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) so as to inculcate the basic knowledge of all on EIA of businesses and companies in the environment from members of the stakeholders communities.

This action is important because the stakeholders would have been part of the decision making organ of the project that is to be sited within their environment, also part of monitoring team, and as well as checkmating project activities in relation to international standard since project impacts will be most felt by them.

This action will also minimize the misunderstandings witnessed most often between communities and co-operate organizations operating within such environments that is commonly tagged “youth restiveness”.

- (4) Any member of the group of stakeholders that knowingly compromise standard should be sanctioned.
- (5) Amenities and infrastructures should be provided to local committees where projects that are prone to adverse effect are located. For instance, communities that use a River as source of drinkable water should not wait until when the water had been polluted

before drinkable water will be provided.

- (6) Force and intimidation should not be used on stakeholders that have contrary opinion about a project.
- (7) The language must not be ambiguous. In fact local dialect should be accepted in stakeholder meeting. The choice of stakeholders must not be restricted to highly educated individuals and politicians.

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