

## Environmental Impact Assessment of Transport Infrastructure Projects in Sri Lanka: Way Forward

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### Abstract

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is established for the purpose of managing impacts on environment due to development projects and to enhance the environmental quality where possible. However recent past incidents concerning several projects have raised the question, “Are we utilising EIA effectively?” Therefore this study was conducted to find the possible methods of improving the quality of EIA and enhancing its usage in decision making process. Several past EIA reports in Sri Lanka related to Civil Engineering projects specially transport infrastructure projects were studied for this purpose and compared with several recent EIA reports from other countries to identify possible improvements.

Identified problems can be categorised in to two, i.e. problems in the established EIA framework and methodologies adopted in the impact assessment. Main problems identified in the framework are the lack of broad frameworks of environmental and social protection, lack of accountability in EIA process, deficiency of public participation and the absence of proper post development monitoring system. These ambiguities are manipulated by developers as they see the EIA process only as a rubber stamp to start their projects. Necessary legislature should be developed to address these issues and they should also focus on giving a proper weight to the results of EIA in the decision process.

The problems identified in the assessment process are the lack of incorporating cumulative effects of development projects and sustainability concepts. Analysing impacts should focus more on concepts of environmental resources and limitations, rather than just focusing on the narrow impacts of the project. In this regard concept of compensation pools which is widely used in other countries could be used to address damages done in the development. Further in the impact assessment the product of magnitude of the impact and the duration of impact should be taken into account rather than just focusing on the magnitude. Further in addition to the project based EIA process, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) can be practiced to overcome the inherent weaknesses of the reactive nature of EIA and to direct development in the right direction before taking irreversible decisions.

**Keywords:** Environmental impact assessment, Effectiveness, Decision making