

Mainstreaming Climate Change Adaptation in Environmental Impact Assessment in Sri Lanka

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Application of Climate Change Issues and Adaptation Measures in EIA in Sri Lanka

- EIA was made a legal requirement for prescribed development projects in Sri Lanka since 1993 with the publication of EIA regulations.
- The scope of the EIAs in Sri Lanka is often limited to identification of impacts of the project on surrounding environment based on the present environmental condition and mitigation of such impacts.
- The effects of climate change or climate change -induced impacts are rarely addressed in EIAs.
- The project developers who grapple with day to day challenges of doing business rarely have the time to take the long term view of slowly emerging threats of climate change.

Application of Climate Change Issues and Adaptation Measures in SEA in Sri Lanka

- In 2006, the decision was taken by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Sri Lankan Government to direct all Government Agencies to undergo SEA for all policies, plans and programmes.
- SEA regulations have not yet been published under the National Environmental Act (NEA) and thus SEA is not a legal requirement yet.
- However, the Central Environmental Authority as the regulatory and enforcement agency of the NEA has carried out or in the process of carrying out several SEAs for regional land use / development plans.
- Climate change issues and adaptation measures are being considered to a certain extent in carrying out SEAs for regional plans although SEA guidelines do not specifically include any climate change considerations.

SEA for Northern Province Development Plan

Climate related direct impacts experienced in the Northern Province:

- Increase in the frequency and intensity of disasters such as droughts and floods
- Variability and unpredictability of rainfall patterns
- Increasing temperature
- Sea level rise, storm surges and continued coastal erosion

SEA for Northern Province

Development Plan

Climate related indirect impacts experienced in the Northern Province :

- Changes in terrestrial ,coastal and marine eco-systems due to change in rainfall regime, increasing temperature and sea level rise
- Land degradation due to extreme weather conditions
- Greater pressure on fresh water sources due to droughts and salinity intrusion
- Increases in vector densities such as mosquitoes

SEA for Northern Province

Development Plan

Key sectors where climate vulnerabilities are expected to be critical in the Province:

- Water
- Agriculture and Fisheries
- Urban development, Human settlement & Economic infrastructure
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem services
- Health

SEA for Northern Province

Development Plan

Following Adaptation measures have been identified to cope with climate change threats;

- Develop hazard maps
 - Flood prone areas have been identified and mapped
- Adopt an integrated water resources and watershed management system
 - Water resources and catchment areas which are threatened have been identified
- Construct new reservoirs to mitigate flood hazard and to meet water demand
 - Studies are being done to identify suitable locations for reservoir construction
- Restore /conserve forest
 - Priority forest areas which need to be protected have been identified

SEA for Northern Province

Development Plan

Adaptation Measures Contd....

- Manage Protected Areas and other wildlife refuges.
 - Areas which need to be protected to maintain a continuous PA network have been identified
- Adopt an integrated coastal resources management system
 - Coastal zones vulnerable for sea erosion and set back areas where constructions are restricted have been identified.
- Protect marshes and flood retention areas
 - Marshes which need to be protected in terms of hydrological value and ecological value have been identified
- Control and manage salt water intrusion into fresh water resources
 - Requirement of salinity barrages have been identified.

Key Challenges in Mainstreaming Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation in Sri Lanka

- Technical capacity to effectively deal with climate change is lacking across key sector agencies . There is no focal point or unit responsible for ensuring climate resilience criteria are considered in national level planning initiatives.
- Adequate guidelines and safeguards on climate change considerations are lacking. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) guidelines, for example, do not specifically include any climate change considerations.
- While climate change related initiatives and research are being carried out on an ad-hoc basis by various stakeholders, there is little co-ordination among them. Access to information and lessons from these initiatives is limited.

Key Challenges in Mainstreaming Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation in Sri Lanka

- Availability of financing for climate adaptation is limited, and a key factor for the fatigue and frustration expressed by many stakeholders participating in climate change initiatives.
- The education system, media and other information “multipliers” are not effectively engaged in disseminating information on climate change. The target groups that need to be mobilized to support climate change adaptation in Sri Lanka are many ranging from international agencies to local communities.