

Environmental Impact Assessment: Case Studies in West Bengal, India

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The recent spate of development in diverse areas is leading to ever growing deterioration in environmental conditions and human health. Ever changing lifestyles, breakneck pace of urbanization, rapid industrialization and infrastructure development have caused widespread environmental pollution and degradation which manifest themselves as pollution in air, water and land leading to biodiversity losses and potential health hazards. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was formally introduced in India in 1994. It had its foundation on institutional framework that has a robust legislative, administrative and procedural setup. EIA ensures potential problems are envisaged and addressed at an early stage in project planning and design. Thus it is a tool used to provide a rational approach to sustainable development. Globally, EIA has been successfully implemented to warrant that proposed actions are economically feasible, socially justifiable and environmentally sustainable. EIA provides an indication to the policy makers regarding the likelihood of possible consequences of their proposed actions. It acts as a precursor to detailed analysis of environmental impacts. Based on this assessment, regulatory measures can be effectively adopted and specific roles of concerned agencies clearly defined for an efficient and holistic environmental management program. Both central and state level authorities are stakeholders in sharing the responsibility of its development and management. The overall objective of EIA is to design developmental projects and activities taking into perspective environmental issues and their potential impact. It is more significant in case of developing countries like India where the threat to human lives and property is very real keeping in mind the burgeoning population. The first EIA in India was undertaken in the early 80's on the Silent River Valley hydroelectric project which was however considered to be a big threat to biodiversity and forest ecosystem of the Silent Valley which led to its subsequent abandonment and declaring Silent Valley as a national park. This particular case study provided a primary insight about the implication of EIA and since then EIA was extended to other spheres. In West Bengal, India, EIA has lent itself to case studies for Farakka Thermal Power Plant, Sundarbans Tiger Project etc.