There has been an increasing discussion over socio-economic aspects of projects financed in the EU and internationally. In the past couple of years a few articles published on the IEMA website have elaborated on social-economic issues that should be considered throughout the project lifecycle - monitoring of social impacts (Social Monitoring) is an integral part of this discussion. This article aims to provide a brief overview of some important considerations for planning and implementing social monitoring, particularly in the context of international development finance.

For the purposes of this article Social Monitoring is defined as monitoring, auditing and final evaluation of impacts upon people and their livelihoods, and the measures developed to mitigate these impacts during project implementation.

Social impact assessment in internationally financed EIA/ESIA projects is often surrounded by confusion on the scope of the social impact assessment to be undertaken. There is a real need for a clear scope to be set around social impact assessment at the very start of a project to ensure fundamental principles of social monitoring, and the benefits it can deliver to a project, are captured within a project’s activities from the beginning.

Based on professional project experience, the key aspects and issues to consider and be aware of when planning and undertaking Social Monitoring include the following.

1. **Scoping and planning of Social Monitoring**

The need and scope for social monitoring arises from socio-economic impacts that have been identified, and mitigation measures that have been developed, at the projects’ impact assessment stage. A well-defined scope and good quality social impact assessment (as part of EIA or ESIA), can therefore determine how well Social Monitoring for a particular project is planned.

Project management and mitigation plans should clearly formulate and integrate social monitoring tools from the outset, such as key performance indicators, resource needs, budget and responsibilities. Monitoring and final evaluation of social impacts are heavily dependent on the quality of the baseline information collected at the impact assessment stage. The scope of interim or final evaluations/audits are often affected availability and quality of baseline information.

As a rule of thumb, Social Monitoring should seek to cover land acquisition and resettlement (physical and economic displacement); labour and working conditions for direct employees and contractor personnel; labour and human rights compliance at a supply chain level; stakeholder engagement which covers consultations; grievance mechanisms and disclosure of information; public health, safety, security and access; gender equality; and assistance to vulnerable groups. Similar to environmental parameters, the scope of social issues requiring monitoring may vary significantly from project to project. As an example, a large-scale resettlement or retrenchment will require a large amount of resources, coordination and stakeholder engagement to successfully mitigate impacts, therefore, affecting the scope and implementation of Social Monitoring.

2. **National legal framework vs. best practice social monitoring**

Often the legal frameworks of a country support compliance assurance only for a limited number of social issues (such as labour and working conditions of direct employees and health and safety compliance), and are overseen by different institutions. As a rule of thumb, monitoring of social impacts identified in an EIA/ESIA, but not covered by a country’s legal compliance system, is challenging as their implementation requirements are likely to be not so well understood, implemented and documented.
3. Qualitative component

Social Monitoring and evaluations may rely considerably more on qualitative baseline parameters than quantitative, as a result of collection through Environmental Monitoring visits. This makes the assessment more subjective to a specialist's interpretation and judgement. Qualitative data typically covers public perception of a project and level of satisfaction and feedback. It is typically collected through stakeholder and grievance logs, socio-economic surveys, Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews.

4. Monitoring of land acquisition and resettlement

Complex social impacts such as: land acquisition; resettlement; and livelihood restoration programmes can require more stringent Social Monitoring. They typically require specific performance indicators, standalone stakeholder engagement, and a grievance mechanism. Therefore, separate monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems are often developed for this type of Social Monitoring as best practice.

5. Responsibilities, capacity, training and budgeting

A number of issues arise around Social Monitoring responsibilities, roles and capacity. Monitoring of various social impacts is often not integrated within the legal compliance system of a country, and hence not well understood. Project proponents and contractors don’t have experience undertaking social monitoring and there is a need for specific training to manage Social Monitoring. Generally, within the profession, there is a lack of qualified staff able to undertake the monitoring.

As a result, there is often confusion among stakeholders about responsibilities, type of resources, training needs, and budget requirements to implement a Social Monitoring and Management Plan successfully.

6. Extended and holistic stakeholder engagement

Effective social monitoring significantly benefits from the involvement of local communities and grassroots organisations. The main obstacle to such engagement is the need to organize local community groups and deal with conflicting local interests and community dynamics. However, if project proponents invest time in understanding these factors and organizing individuals, the effectiveness of mitigation and monitoring is likely to be a net positive action for both.

By understanding the requirements of, and implementing, Social Monitoring as part of the ESIA/EIA process, intrinsic to the mitigation proposed, a project can deliver a beneficial outcome for the social outcomes of a project.


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