<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landscape Matters?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Naushad Tahsildar and John Flannery from Environmental Resources Management, provide a Practitioner’s view on the issues surrounding Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for major projects in developing countries.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction**

The role of environmental impact assessment (EIAs) and environmental and social impact assessment (ESIAs) has always been crucial to the development process in most parts of the world since their inception in the 70s. These assessments are formally required for certain types of projects across developed and emerging economies and implemented through a number of country specific regulations requiring identification of significant impacts.

Project financing agencies and banks like IFC/EBRD also have their own environmental and social standards to meet – these standards are also useful to apply in countries where EIA or ESIA regulations or guidelines do not exist or are in development. These international guidelines e.g. IFC Performance Standards have driven international best practice.

**Role of LVIA in EIAs/ESIAs**

As included in the UK Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is a separate and closely linked process that operates within the overall framework of EIA. LVIA specifically aims to ensure that all possible effects of change and development, both on the landscape itself and on views and visual amenity, are taken into account in decision-making.

Within the UK and in some other developed countries, LVIA is a core part of the EIA process and is formally required to comply with various EIA Regulations.

Numerous guidelines have been produced to improve the quality of LVIA across the UK and the third edition of the GLVIA is in the process of being published.

**Absence of LVIA within EIA/ESIA of Major Projects in Developing Countries**

Whilst LVIA is common practice in the UK as part of the EIA process, the topic is often noticeable by its absence in EIAs/ESIAs of major projects undertaken in developing countries.

The key reason for its omission is often the absence of a regulatory framework within the relevant country as well as the absence of ‘landscape and visual’ as a specific stand-alone topic in international best practice guidelines/regulatory requirements. Within the recently revised IFC Performance Standard and EHS Guidelines there is no explicit reference to LVIA. On a positive note the importance of landscape to a certain extent has been recognised in the newly revised IFC Performance Standards i.e. under Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources and Cultural Heritage.

**Missing out on Benefits**

In not explicitly carrying out LVIA in EIAs/ESIAs, there is the potential that important aspects of the landscape and visual amenity will be overlooked, with the risk that impacts/mitigation are not taken into account in decision making and consenting. The GLVIA states that:

‘As a process even where LVIA are not formally required they have benefitted the EIA process as a whole and also assisted in other forms of land use change or development that fall outside the requirements of the directives and regulations. Informal use of such procedures can be a very useful way of thinking about the different forms of development or other projects that may possibly bring about environmental change’.
This is true and we have experienced several benefits in the past by carrying out LVIA on a range of international projects where they might not, under ‘normal circumstances otherwise have been undertaken. In a recent study in Egypt, the stakeholders and regulatory authorities were pleased to see an LVIA had been undertaken and this has set a benchmark for newer studies. The guidance used in this case was based on UK guidance with a pragmatic approach.

In the absence of international LVIA guidelines, the opportunity to carry out LVIA in international EIAs/ESIAs is being missed and often not carried out even on the most significant, large scale projects. In many cases landscape and visual issues are considered on an ad-hoc basis. In addition, the scope, methodology and quality of these assessments can also vary from project to project in the absence of international guidelines/framework.

As a global practice, ERM is always looking to address international issues such as this, as well as those within our international air quality, biodiversity and noise/vibration practices. In many cases we are seeing a much greater need for collaboration with our social team to help understand how different cultures react to changes in visual amenity and landscape. We are very interested in the views and thoughts of other IEMA members with similar experiences and concerns.

This article was written as a contribution to the EIA Quality Mark’s commitment to improving EIA practice.

John Flannery is a Principal Consultant and Head of the UK and Ireland Landscape Team and Naushad Tahsildar is a Senior Consultant at ERM specializing in LVIA.