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UNEP - UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME Goals and Principles of Environmental Impact Assessment

Preliminary Note

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Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

EIA means an examination, analysis and assessment of planned activities with a view to ensuring environmentally sound and sustainable development.

The EIA goals and principles set out below are necessarily general in nature and may be further refined when fulfilling EIA tasks at the national, regional and international levels.

Goals

1. To establish that before decisions are taken by the competent authority or authorities to undertake or to authorize activities that are likely to significantly affect the environment, the environmental effects of those activities should be taken fully into account.
2. To promote the implementation of appropriate procedures in all countries consistent with national laws and decision-making processes, through which the foregoing goal may be realised.
3. To encourage the development of reciprocal procedures for information exchange, notification and consultation between States when proposed activities are likely to have significant transboundary effects on the environment of those States.

Principles

Principle 1

States (including their competent authorities) should not undertake or authorize activities without prior consideration, at an early stage, of their environmental effects. Where the extent, nature or location of a proposed activity is such that it is likely to significantly affect the environment, a comprehensive environmental impact assessment should be undertaken in accordance with the following principles.

Principle 2

The criteria and procedures for determining whether an activity is likely to significantly affect the environment and is therefore subject to an EIA, should be defined clearly by Legislation, regulation, or other means, so that subject activities can be quickly and surely identified, and EIA can be applied as the activity is being planned.²

Principle 3

In the EIA process the relevant significant environmental issues should be identified and studied. Where appropriate, all efforts should be made to identify these issues at an early stage in the process.

Principle 4

An EIA should include, at a minimum:

- (a) A description of the proposed activity;
- (b) A description of the potentially affected environment, including specific information necessary for identifying and assessing the environmental effects of the proposed activity;
- (c) A description of practical alternatives, as appropriate;
- (d) An assessment of the likely or potential environmental impacts of the proposed activity and alternatives, including the direct, indirect, cumulative, short-term and long-term effects;
- (e) An identification and description of measures available to mitigate adverse environmental impacts of the proposed activity and alternatives, and an assessment of those measures;
- (f) An indication of gaps in knowledge and uncertainties which may be encountered in compiling the required information;
- (g) An indication of whether the environment of any other State or areas beyond national jurisdiction is likely to be affected by the proposed activity or alternatives;
- (h) A brief, non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.

Principle 5

The environmental effects in an EIA should be assessed with a degree of detail commensurate with their likely environmental significance.

Principle 6

The information provided as part of EIA should be examined impartially prior to the decision.

Principle 7

Before a decision is made on an activity, government agencies, members of the public, experts in relevant disciplines and interested groups should be allowed appropriate opportunity to comment on the EIA.

Principle 8

A decision as to whether a proposed activity should be authorized or undertaken should not be taken until an appropriate period has elapsed to consider comments pursuant to principles 7 and 12.

Principle 9

The decision on any proposed activity subject to an EIA should be in writing, state the reasons therefor, and include the provisions, if any, to prevent, reduce or mitigate damage to the environment.

This decision should be made available to interested persons or groups.

Principle 10

Where it is justified, following a decision on an activity which has been subject to an EIA, the activity and its effects on the environment or the provisions (pursuant to Principle 9) of the decision on this activity should be subject to appropriate supervision.

Principle 11

States should endeavour to conclude bilateral, regional or multilateral arrangements, as appropriate, so as to provide, on the basis of reciprocity, notification, exchange of information, and agreed-upon consultation on the potential environmental effects of activities under their control or jurisdiction which are likely to significantly affect other States or areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Principle 12

When information provided as part of an EIA indicates that the environment within another State is likely to be significantly affected by a proposed activity, the State in which the activity is being planned should, to the extent possible:

- a) notify the potentially affected State of the proposed activity;
- b) transmit to the potentially affected State any relevant information from the EIA, the transmission of which is not prohibited by national laws or regulations; and
- c) when it is agreed between the States concerned, enter into timely consultations.

Principle 13

Appropriate measures should be established to ensure implementation of EIA procedures.

Official Note:

In this document an assessment of the impact of a planned activity on the environment is referred to as an environmental impact assessment (EIA).

Official note:

For instance, this principle may be implemented through a variety of mechanisms, including:

- (a) Lists of categories of activities that by their nature are, or are not, likely to have significant effects;
- (b) Lists of areas that are of special importance or sensitivity (such as national parks or wetland areas), so that any activity affecting such areas is likely to have significant effects;
- (c) Lists of categories of resources (such as water, tropical rain forests, etc.), or environmental problems (such as increased soil erosion, desertification, deforestation) which are of special concern, so that any diminution of such resources or exacerbation of such problems is likely to be significant";
- (d) An initial "environmental evaluation", a quick and informal assessment of the proposed activity to determine whether its effects are likely to be significant;
- (e) Criteria to guide determinations whether the effects of a proposed activity are likely to be significant.

If a listing system is used, it is recommended that States reserve the discretion to require the preparation of an EIA on an *ad hoc* basis, to ensure that they have the flexibility needed to respond to unanticipated cases.