Social Impact Assessment for Wetlands

Frank Vanclay

Contents

Abstract

Social impact assessment (SIA) comprises the processes of analyzing, monitoring, and managing the social consequences of planned interventions, such as projects, plans, programs, or policies. SIA arose alongside environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the early 1970s to focus on the social (rather than biophysical environmental) impacts. Social impacts are changes that occur as a result of the planned intervention to how people live, work, play, and interact with one another, their culture, community and political systems, their environment, health and well-being, personal and property rights, and their fears and aspirations. SIA consists of an analysis of the communities likely to be affected by the planned intervention (stakeholder analysis), and collection of baseline data to enable measurement of change over time. Alternative options for the intervention and for mitigating potential impacts are identified. A monitoring plan to monitor change over time is developed and an adaptive management process to address unanticipated changes is implemented. An agreement making process between the communities and the developer should be facilitated, including an Impacts and Benefits Agreement (IBA) and a Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP). Finally, processes should be put in place to enable proponents, government authorities, and civil

F. Vanclay (✉)
Department of Cultural Geography, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands
e-mail: frank.vanclay@rug.nl

society stakeholders to implement arrangements implied in the SIMP and IBA and to incorporate management action plans into their own organizations. A grievance mechanism should be established to ensure that people with complaints against the proponent have a mechanism by which their concerns can be heard and resolved.

Keywords

Social impact assessment · Social licence to operate · Social performance · Free, prior and informed consent · Human rights

Introduction

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) comprises the processes of analyzing, monitoring, and managing the social consequences of planned interventions (Vanclay 2003; Esteves et al. 2012). Planned interventions can be projects, plans, programs, or policies. SIA arose alongside Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in the early 1970s to be a form of impact assessment focusing on the social (rather than biophysical environmental) impacts (Vanclay 2014). However, whereas EIA is required by law in most countries, relatively few countries specifically require SIA although some include the assessment of social impacts within EIA. In the commercial world, social impacts are often assessed within an integrated environmental, social, and health impact assessment (ESHIA).

Defining and Describing Social Impact Assessment

The International Principles for Social Impact Assessment (Vanclay 2003) state that: "Social Impact Assessment includes the processes of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment." Although SIA has a common origin with EIA, over time many differences have emerged. In particular, SIA has demonstrated its business case to the commercial world and is often undertaken for project development in many contexts whether required by law or not, especially in the extractive industries (Esteves and Vanclay 2009; Franks and Vanclay 2013). SIA is also advocated by many industry organizations, the International Finance Corporation, and other development banks, and by those project financing institutions that subscribe to the Equator Principles, the global financial industry benchmark for determining, assessing, and managing environmental and social risk in projects. SIA will be a necessity if proponents are to meet the requirements of the principle of free, prior, and informed consent when dealing with Indigenous peoples (Hanna and Vanclay 2013). SIA is also likely to be useful for companies to comply with the due diligence expectations of the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (United Nations 2011; Kemp and Vanclay 2013).

SIA therefore should not be understood merely as the task of predicting social impacts in a regulatory impact assessment process. Instead, the focus nowadays in SIA

is on managing the social issues. There is a strong concern with enhancing positive outcomes and not just with mitigating negative consequences (João et al. 2011). As the International Principles (Vanclay 2003) argues, this contemporary understanding of SIA implies that the goal of impact assessment is to bring about a more ecologically, socioculturally, and economically sustainable and equitable outcome. Therefore, SIA promotes community development and empowerment, builds capacity, and develops social capital (social networks and trust). SIA takes a proactive stance to development and better development outcomes, not just the identification or amelioration of the negative or unintended outcomes. Assisting communities and other stakeholders to identify their development goals, and ensuring that positive outcomes are maximized, can be more important than minimizing harm from negative impacts.

SIA can be applied to a wide range of planned interventions and can be undertaken on behalf of a wide range of actors, and not just within a regulatory framework. SIA contributes to the adaptive management of policies, programs, plans, and projects, and informs the design and operation of the planned intervention. SIA builds on local knowledge and utilizes participatory processes to analyze the concerns of interested and affected parties. It involves stakeholders in the assessment of social impacts, in the analysis of alternatives, in the monitoring of the planned intervention, and in the planning of enhancement measures.

Good practice in SIA accepts that social, economic, and biophysical impacts are inherently and inextricably interconnected. Change in any of these domains will lead to changes in the other domains. SIA must, therefore, develop an understanding of the impact pathways that are created when a change in one domain triggers impacts across other domains, as well as the iterative or flow-on consequences within each domain. In other words, there must be consideration of the second and higher order impacts and of cumulative impacts.

In order for the discipline of SIA to learn and grow, there must be analysis of the impacts that occurred as a result of past activities. Thus, ex-post SIA is important, as well as the typical ex-ante assessments. SIA must also be reflexively critical of its theoretical bases and practice. While SIA is typically applied to planned interventions, the techniques of SIA can also be used to consider the social impacts that derive from other types of events, such as natural disasters and epidemics, as well as demographic and other changes in a community.

What Are Social Impacts?

Social impacts are all the impacts on humans, including on all the ways people and communities interact with their sociocultural, economic, and biophysical surroundings. SIA thus includes a wide range of specialist subfields addressing topics such as: aesthetic impacts, archaeological and cultural heritage impacts (both tangible and nontangible), community impacts, cultural impacts, demographic impacts, development impacts, economic and fiscal impacts, gender impacts, health and mental health impacts, impacts on Indigenous rights, infrastructural impacts, institutional impacts, leisure and tourism impacts, political impacts (human rights, governance,

democratization, etc.), poverty, psychological impacts, resource issues (access and ownership of resources), impacts on social and human capital, and other impacts on societies. As such, comprehensive SIA requires a team approach.

A convenient way of conceptualizing social impacts is as changes that occur as a result of the planned intervention to one or more of the following (Vanclay 2002, pp.185–186):

- People's way of life – that is, how they live, work, play, and interact with one another on a day-to-day basis
- Their culture – that is, their shared beliefs, customs, values, and language or dialect
- Their community – its cohesion, stability, character, services, and facilities
- Their political systems – the extent to which people are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the level of democratization that is taking place, and the resources provided for this purpose
- Their environment – the quality of the air and water people use; the availability and quality of the food they eat; the level of hazard or risk, dust, and noise they are exposed to; the adequacy of sanitation, their physical safety, and their access to and control over resources
- Their health and well-being – where health is understood in a manner similar to the World Health Organisation definition: "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"
- Their personal and property rights – particularly whether people are economically affected, or experience personal disadvantage, which may include a violation of their civil liberties
- Their fears and aspirations – their perceptions about their safety, their fears about the future of their community, and their aspirations for their future and the future of their children.

Vanclay (2002), using a framework developed by Slootweg et al. (2001), develops this understanding of social impacts into a thorough analysis of the social change processes and the personal and collective experience of perceptual and corporeal impacts created by the activities that comprise a planned intervention. What is particularly important to appreciate is that people react to the impacts they experience, and their changed behavior can then lead to more social and biophysical changes and impacts. Thus, the second and higher order (indirect) impacts can often be more consequential than the first order impacts (Vanclay 2012).

Activities Comprising Social Impact Assessment

Good practice SIA includes the following activities (Vanclay and Esteves 2011; Esteves et al. 2012; Vanclay 2012). First, a thorough understanding is needed of the communities likely to be affected by the planned intervention (i.e. profiling), including a thorough stakeholder analysis to understand the differing needs and interests of

the various sections of those communities. Participatory processes and deliberative spaces should be facilitated to enable community discussions about desired futures, the acceptability of likely impacts and proposed benefits, and community input into the SIA process, so that there can be a negotiated agreement with a developer based on free, prior, and informed consent. All this should lead to the identification of community needs and aspirations.

The key social issues associated with the planned intervention (the significant negative impacts as well as the opportunities for creating benefits) should be scoped. Baseline data to provide a benchmark to measure change over time is collected, and the social changes that may result from the policy, program, plan, or project are predicted. The significance of the predicted changes is established, and the likely response of various affected groups and communities is determined. Other options are examined, especially in terms of social issues, and ways of mitigating potential impacts and maximizing positive opportunities are identified.

In addition, a monitoring plan to monitor change over time is developed and an adaptive management process to address unanticipated changes is implemented. An agreement making process between the communities and the developer should be facilitated, ensuring that the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is observed and that human rights are respected, leading to the drafting of an Impacts and Benefits Agreement (IBA). The proponent should be assisted in the drafting of a Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP) that operationalizes all benefits, mitigation measures, monitors arrangements and governance arrangements that were agreed to in the IBA, as well as plans for dealing with any ongoing unanticipated issues as they arise.

Finally, processes should be put in place to enable proponents, government authorities, and civil society stakeholders to implement arrangements implied in the SIMP and IBA and to develop their own respective management action plans and embed them in their own organizations, establish respective roles and responsibilities throughout the implementation of those action plans, and maintain an ongoing role in monitoring. Care should be taken that the proponent has fully considered all impacts on human rights by either ensuring that human rights impacts are considered in the SIA, or that a separate human rights impact assessment is conducted. A grievance mechanism should be established, consistent with Principle 30 in the United Nations Guiding Principles (United Nations 2011) to ensure that affected people with complaints against the proponent have a mechanism by which their concerns can heard and resolved.

References

Esteves AM, Franks D, Vanclay F. Social impact assessment: the state of the art. Impact Asses Project Apprais. 2012;30(1):35–44.

Esteves AM, Vanclay F. Social development needs analysis as a tool for SIA to guide corporate-community investment: applications in the minerals industry. Environ Impact Assess Rev. 2009;29(2):137–45.

Franks D, Vanclay F. Social impact management plans: innovation in corporate and public policy. Environ Impact Assess Rev. 2013;43:40–8.

Hanna P, Vanclay F. Human rights, Indigenous peoples and the concept of free, prior and informed consent. Impact Asses Project Apprais. 2013;31(2):146–57.

João E, Vanclay F, den Broeder L. Emphasising enhancement in all forms of impact assessment: introduction to a special issue. Impact Asses Project Apprais. 2011;29(3):170–80.

Kemp D, Vanclay F. Human rights and impact assessment: clarifying the connections in practice. Impact Asses Project Apprais. 2013;31(2):86–96.

Slootweg R, Vanclay F, van Schooten M. Function evaluation as a framework for the integration of social and environmental impact assessment. Impact Asses Project Apprais. 2001;19(1):19–28.

United Nations. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework. United Nations Human Rights Council 2011. UN Doc. HR/PUB/11/04.

Vanclay F. Conceptualising social impacts. Environ Impact Assesst Rev. 2002;22(3):183–211.

Vanclay F. International principles for social impact assessment. Impact Asses Project Apprais. 2003;21(1):5–11.

Vanclay F. The potential application of social impact assessment in integrated coastal zone management. Ocean Coast Manag. 2012;68:149–56.

Vanclay F, editor. Developments in social impact assessment. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar; 2014.

Vanclay F, Esteves AM. Current issues and trends in social impact assessment. In: Vanclay F, Esteves AM, editors. New directions in social impact assessment: conceptual and methodological advances. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar; 2011. p. 3–19.