

SESSION 4

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

SESSION SUMMARY.

The objectives of this session are to introduce participants to key concepts of the environmental impact assessment (EIA), define the EIA process used by Reg. 216, and walk through the process as a group to assist participants in gaining a holistic understanding of what is involved. Together, the group will develop the fundamental skills of performing an EIA and understand how these skills contribute to environmental compliance at USAID.

It is essential for participants to understand the process for understanding activities and their impacts to determine the correct path for the assessment. The determination of activity risk and the potential for adverse impacts will provide the indicators for next steps. To understand risk potential, participants must be familiar with the fundamental concepts of impact assessment: impacts, baseline situation, and activities. These three concepts are woven throughout the process and inform all decision-making during the assessment.

Once the assessor has an understanding of these concepts, the assessor can move on to determining risk and whether a preliminary assessment is necessary. Conducting a preliminary assessment (an Initial Environmental Examination [IEE]) requires the investigation of impacts of concern and mitigation methods. If through a preliminary assessment, the activity is determined possible to have significant adverse impacts, then a full study is conducted. Participants can think of a preliminary assessment as a truncated full EA study, as they contain many similar elements. However, the full study differs in that it requires much more research and participation.

The environmental impact assessment process is one that focuses on prevention, minimizing adverse effects on the environment, and applying best practices to development practices by systematically applying the same principles to all environmental compliance measures. Furthermore, by building familiarity with the USAID environmental impact assessment process, you are gaining an understanding of a much wider scope of environmental protection measures around the world, considering the environmental impact assessment extends far beyond the U.S. government alone.