

Session 7.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Process in Malawi

Technical presentation and dialogue

Summary

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process is the basis for USAID Environmental Procedures and provides an internationally accepted methodology for identifying and understanding the potential impact(s) of a given activity or set of activities. The EIA process is also widely used to underpin national-level environmental policies and regulation, including the establishment of specific impact assessment criteria. While the principles of EIA are relatively portable, the particular implementation of EIA protocols by individual governments does vary. That is to say each national environmental authority may have its own unique 'take' on the EIA process. The result—to be expected—is a degree of difference in EIA requirements among the host countries in which USAID operates.

USAID Environmental Procedures stipulate that host country EIA regulations are met along with Reg. 216 and related Agency requirements. This can present Mission staff and partners with a confusing array of environmental management criteria. Although typically rooted in the same EIA process, these otherwise distinct protocols can quickly complicate the impact assessment process, particularly when it comes to necessary review and approval cycles. To the extent possible, USAID advocates—and actively supports—the fulfillment of USAID and host country environmental compliance requirements in concert. This means, for example, that the analysis and determinations included in a USAID project IEE might also be used to meet any host country requirements for preliminary assessment of a proposed activity. Similarly, when implementing an environmentally complex or high-risk project that requires an EA or PEA, it would be important to address host country regulation in the EA/PEA Scope of Work (SOW). In this manner a single detailed (and costly!) assessment is undertaken to meet to both USAID and host country requirements.

Within USAID, the Mission Environmental Officer (MEO) regularly serves as the primary reference for interpreting and, as necessary, incorporating national-level environmental policies and regulation in project design. The perceived transparency and practicality of host country EIA regulations can also vary significantly; some are easy to grasp and apply while others may seem vague and unenforceable. It is regardless vital that USAID and its partners be cognizant of host country environmental regulations and understand their relevance in a given scenario.

This session will provide an understanding of the EIA process in Malawi, including key differences and similarities with USAID Environmental Procedures. Following the technical presentation participants will have the opportunity to discuss specific aspects of complying with both USAID and Malawian environmental regulations.

Objective

Understand the nature and extent of national EIA regulations in Malawi and how they reflect or complement USAID Environmental Procedures. Discuss ways in which the project environmental review process can be maximized to meet multiple standards simultaneously. Identify particular challenges to navigating the EIA process in Malawi.

