

Session 4.

Core EIA Skills I: Baseline Characterization, Identifying Issues of Concern & Mitigation

(0:45)

Objectives

Become familiar with the principles and processes that constitute the core EIA skills of baseline characterization, identifying issues and impacts of concern, and mitigation design.

Establish that because effective mitigation design must be highly responsive to site conditions, effective mitigation design requires baseline characterization and issues identification skills.

Format

Presentation and worked examples.

Summary

The EIA process requires the following core skills:

1. characterizing the **baseline situation**;
2. identifying (and evaluating) the potential adverse **impacts** of planned development activities (issues of concern); and
3. developing mitigation and (4) monitoring measures to address these impacts.

(“Baseline situation,” “impacts” and “mitigation and monitoring” were defined in Session 3.)

This session addresses core skills 1-3; the fourth (monitoring) is addressed in a subsequent session.

At first thought, characterizing the baseline situation and identifying issues of concern might seem relevant only to the pre-implementation EIA process—not to implementing the conditions that result from that review.

However, conditions specified in USAID IEEs and EAs are often very general. They require IPs to identify issues of concern particular to a site & respond with appropriate, specific mitigation measures. Thus effective mitigation requires a familiarity with all core EIA skills.

Part 1: Baseline Characterization & Determining Impacts of Concern

The first part of this session explains the basic, logical process behind baseline characterization and identifying issues of concern. We will illustrate the process with a worked example.

An example from a real and typical small-scale construction project will illustrate why the core EIA skills of baseline characterization and identifying issues of concern are directly relevant to effective mitigation.

Depending on the size, complexity and context of the activity, sophisticated environmental models and other tools *can* be required to evaluate impacts in the context of a full EIA study. But for most small-scale activities and preliminary assessments (IEEs), the simple, logical process described here, supported by good judgment and the information contained in the *Sector Environmental Guidelines* (or similar resources), is sufficient.

Part 2: Mitigation.

The purpose of the EIA process is not simply to assess potential environmental impacts, but to change project design and implementation so that these impacts are *mitigated*—that is, avoided, reduced or offset.

As such, mitigation is a critical part of ESDM and the EIA process. Monitoring (addressed in a subsequent session) is its essential complement, required to verify whether the mitigation measures are sufficient, effective—and actually implemented.

The second part of this session:

- Defines mitigation.
- Provides examples of basic mitigation approaches.
- Explains the principles behind good mitigation design and practice.

Key resources

The sector chapters of USAID’s *Sector Environmental Guidelines* are a key resource for (1) identification of potential adverse environmental impacts and (2) design of mitigation and monitoring measures.

<http://www.usaidgems.org/sectorGuidelines.htm>

“IV.1: Topic Briefing—Introduction to EIA” in the *Environmental Guidelines for Small Scale Activities*. (USAID/AFR/SD; available at www.encapafrika.org/egssaa.htm) is a general resource for core EIA skills.