

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS AND SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Policy Brief

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INTRODUCTION

Mountains are fragile ecosystems of global importance.

They cover about 22% of the earth's land area and an estimated 3 million km² of Africa's surface area. They are a home to 14% of the world's population and provide 70% of the world's freshwater for renewable energy, domestic use, agricultural and industrial use.

They host about 25% of terrestrial biodiversity and half of the world's biodiversity hence are hotspots for tourism and recreation currently attracting about 15-20% of global tourism.

They provide important ecosystem goods including raw materials for making crafts and firewood and because of the always fertile soils and favourable climates they are food baskets that can contribute tremendously to food security.

PROBLEM

Despite of those important attributes, mountains are high-risk environments characterised by landslides, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes –all of which threaten the lives of people in and around mountain regions. Harsh climatic and environmental conditions, remoteness and often their inaccessibility hampers economic development. As if that's not enough, mountain people frequently face political, social and economic marginalization and lack access to basic services like proper road networks, health and education services. These challenges coupled with the harsh living conditions often lead to outmigration of mountain communities to urban areas in some African mountainous areas. For young people, urban areas provide opportunities for employment, a source

of livelihood and getting connected to the world. People movement between cities and mountains affects those who remain behind such as the women, children and the elderly and with time, those who migrated take on other families where they went and stop sending remittances. By the fact that mountain communities live far from the centres of commerce and power, they have little influence on the policies and decisions that affect their lives and their voices often go unheard. Current global challenges such as climate change, economic developments and population growth are further exacerbating the hardships they face.

Also, in most African states, there is an evident lack of enabling institutional, policy and legal frameworks to guide mountain development, which is a major hurdle to achieving sustainable development. In cases where they do, policies and regulations including Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations are not implemented.



There is a need to provide infrastructural development and diversification of sources of livelihoods for mountain people. However the infrastructural development must be environmentally sound, a thing that can be achieved by conducting an EIA. Also, today, people are encouraged to take investments to mountains however such developments in mountains areas must go through an EIA.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT?

EIA is an environmental analysis prepared pursuant to a given country's National Environmental Policy Act, to determine whether a proposed project will or will not have detrimental impacts on the environment. The main goal of an EIA is to ensure that decisions on proposed projects and activities are environmentally sustainable.

WHY AN EIA?

EIA is conducted in order to: Identify the likely impacts of a project on the environment, predict the likely changes on the environment as a result of the proposed development and evaluate the impacts of the various alternatives to the proposed project. An EIA is also conducted with the purpose of identifying mitigation measures for the significant negative impacts of the proposed project on the environment, generating baseline data for monitoring and evaluating impacts including mitigation measures during the project cycle and highlighting environment issues with the aim of guiding policy makers, planners, stakeholders and government agencies to make environmentally and economically sustainable decisions.

PROJECTS IN MOUNTAIN AREAS THAT MUST GO THROUGH AN EIA PROCESS

Not all projects are detrimental to the environment hence may not go through an EIA however there are projects that must be subjected to EIA. Such projects are usually specified in specific schedules of the specific Environment Acts depending on the country.

Generally, such projects in mountain areas include:

- establishment or expansion of recreational townships in mountain areas, national parks and game reserves
- Construction of roads in scenic, wooded or mountainous areas.
- Construction of dams, rivers and water resources
- road developments in mountains as may increase the likelihood of soil erosion and is one of the most important human-induced triggers of landslides. Roads tend to modify existing patterns of surface and groundwater drainage and increases the potential for instability, while



high rates of surface erosion increase sediment production.

• Mining (including quarrying and open-cast extraction of precious metals, gem stones, metalliferous ores, coal, phosphates, limestone and dolomite, stone and slate, aggregates, sand and gravel, clay, exploitation for the production of petroleum in any form and extracting alluvial gold with use of mercury) can bring large benefits, but can also be devastating to fragile mountain ecosystems and local cultures, destroying the livelihood base of mountain communities. Massive quantities of waste, surface dumps and slag heaps are only the most visible consequences. Mining leads to atmospheric pollution and the loss of biodiversity and vegetative cover, which in turn destabilizes mountain slopes. Water contamination is especially serious because mountains supply most drinking- and irrigation water. In some mountain regions of Africa where mines are located, arsenic levels in water are 1 000 times the accepted standard.

One thing to note is that EIA is evolving hence there is need to integrate ecosystem services and climate change in the EIA process.



WHEN SHOULD AN EIA BE DONE?

EIA is part of the project development process and is usually done at the initial stages of the proposed project development. It is a decision making tool which should guide whether a project should be implemented, abandoned or modified prior to implementation.

WHO ADMINISTERS EIA?

The semi-autonomous government authority that handles Environment related issues for example National Environment Management Authority for the case of Uganda and the Rwanda Environmental Management Authority in Rwanda are mandated by law, to administer the EIA, at the cost of the project proponent who pays for the entire EIA process.

WHO QUALIFIES TO CARRY OUT AN EIA?

Individual Experts or Firm of Experts registered by your country's Environment Management Authority are the only ones to do all EIA/ EA studies. Contact your country's Environment Management Authority to access the register of the EIA experts.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE EIA PROCESS

The law requires that during any EIA process, the proponent shall in consultation with the Authority seek the views of persons who may be affected by the project or activity through posters, newspapers and radio; hold at least three public meetings with the affected parties and communities. The public participates by either submitting written or by making oral comments. Such comments are considered in reviewing the EIA Study Report.

STEPS INVOLVED IN THE EIA PROCESS

The key elements in the EIA process include:

- 1) Development and submission of a Project Report for projects or activities which are not likely to have significant environmental impacts or those for which no EIA study is required. However, if the Authority considers that an EIA study is required, then the ensuing EIA process is as follows:
 - a) Scoping and drawing-up of Terms of Reference (TOR) for the study for approval by the Authority.
 - c) Gathering of baseline information through investigation/ research and subsequent submission of EIA Study Report to the Authority.
 - d) Review of EIA Study Report by the Authority and relevant lead agencies.
- 2) Decision on EIA Study Report includes approval, approval with conditions or rejection.
- 3) Appeals
- 4) Implementation of project.
- 5) Monitoring the project
- 6) Auditing the project

Upon completion of the project, an Annual Environmental Audit (EA) Study Report is done on the project.



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