

Chapter 22

The Development of the Environmental Impact Assessment Process in Botswana

Eagilwe M. Segosebe
University of Botswana, Botswana

ABSTRACT

The desire to protect the natural environment and the resources it hosts is at the core of every country's ambition to achieve long-term sustainable development. Yet, the history of development shows that environmental protection always came about as an after the fact activity. Nations around the world, including the industrial countries, most of the time reacted to adverse impacts of the environment rather than acting proactively to prevent undesirable outcomes of development. The 1970s decade is seen as a watermark in the development of legislation aimed at protecting the environment particularly in the developed world. This development and requirement to have projects subjected to environmental impact assessments spread to developing countries like Botswana in the 1980s. Botswana embraced the ideal to protect the environment to achieve sustainable development. Toward this end, the government of Botswana carried out Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on major projects voluntarily, even before the passing of the maiden EIA Act of 2005 and its supplement of 2011 and accompanying guidelines in 2012. After this and particularly in the 1990s, Botswana rigorously pursued its position on the international terrain where the country signed and ratified some international conventions and protocols. This chapter concludes by suggesting that the next area of focus for Botswana is on monitoring the outcomes of projects for which EIAs have been conducted.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by suggesting that environmental destruction is often inadvertent and that only in rare cases do people's activity seem to harm environmental resources deliberately as in the case of hunting. Then a global picture of the state of the environment is reviewed followed by a brief explanation of what Environmental Impact Assessment entails. Following on this a narration of how Africa was introduced

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to the new concept of environmental management is addressed. Then a brief on how the development of environmental impact assessment came about in Botswana is narrated, as well as the extent to which environmental concerns were considered in National Development Plans after independence. It is demonstrated that government concerns about environmental impact dates back to the period prior to the attainment of independence as shown by some of the Legislation that dates back as early as 1961. Notwithstanding the existence of legislation related to environmental impact, evidence on the ground showed growing concern by government about the ever-increasing pressure on natural resources due to increase in human population. Adverse environmental consequences drove government to motivate for the formulation and adoption of the National Conservation Strategy of 1992, as well as the enactment of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act of 2005 and a revised Act of 2011 with associated regulations to ensure an effective application of the Environmental Impact Assessment procedure. What is of interest as suggested later is that government implemented EIA on some projects even before the EIA Act was enacted and adopted e.g. the Metsimotlhabe Water Transfer Scheme.

Perception on Environmental Problems

In order to appreciate the problems of the environment in Botswana, it is perhaps wise to begin by exploring fundamental human experiences and how people of the world perceive environmental issues. Thus knowledge of global experiences would better enable us to comprehend what is happening around us. As people we often take things occurring around us for granted and little do we realize that there is a purpose for everything that exists in the natural environment. We neither seem to always have foresight about the consequences of our activities nor comprehend the workings of nature. One must hasten to pronounce that the majority of ordinary people have no intention to destroy nature and its resources. Instead, their routine activities are aimed to eke out a living from natural resources. This is the case with livestock rearing, crop production, hunting, fishing, timber harvesting and so on. The purpose of these activities is not to destroy pasture or soil structure; deplete wildlife, fish, or timber, but to make a living out of them. But the reality is that with human population increase and multiple demands by individual users on the same resources, the natural capacity of natural resources (both fixed and renewable) are diminished. Even renewable resources are often overwhelmed, especially when the thresholds of their productivity is exceeded by increased exploitation. This applies to such resources as wildlife, fish, forests and water. Of course these would happen to varying extents depending on the nature of the resource in question. It is also worthy of note to point out that humanity is also concerned about imminent depletion of non-renewable resources such as minerals in the absence of readily available substitutes.

Because we do not always pay attention to what happens in our surroundings subsequent to our activities or otherwise, undesirable impacts often develop in our environment without being noticed, if humanity is not just showing indifference to such developments. In many cases impacts on the environment are often noticed after the fact or after we have implemented policies or projects. For example, it was only in the early 1970s, after damage on the environment had occurred that humanity began to show real concern about the state of the environment e.g. the introduction of National Environmental Policy Act in the United States America and Environmental legislation in Europe. It was only during the early 1970s that we saw the enactment of environmental laws by the forerunners of conservation in the developed world. Only then did these countries require Environmental Impact Assessments to be undertaken for major development projects. It is noteworthy to mention here that prior to these requirements environmental care has always been an after the fact initiative even in the industrial world. Pollution

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