

A critical evaluation of the environmental impact assessment system in Bangladesh using a holistic approach

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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‘Knowledge is a subset of that which is both true and believed’ (Plato, 424 BC- 348 BC)

Dedication

To my beloved grandparents who were illiterate but dedicated their lives to educating my brothers and me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of publications.....	v
Table of contents.....	vi
Abbreviations and acronyms.....	xvi
Abstract.....	xx

Chapter-1: Introduction

1.1 The problem and the research gap.....	1
1.2 Rationale of the evaluation of EIA system in the context of Bangladesh.....	4
1.3 Research aim, objectives and research questions.....	5
1.4 Thesis structure and brief overview of chapters.....	7
1.5 Chapter summary.....	10

Chapter-2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Status of EIA systems in developing countries.....	11
2.3 Concepts of effective EIA systems.....	15
2.4 Development of a conceptual framework to evaluate EIA systems.....	17
2.4.1 Approaches of an effective EIA system.....	17
2.4.1.1 Institutional control approach	17
2.4.1.2 Decision making and quality of EISs approach.....	21

2.4.1.3 Contextual approach.....	25
2.4.1.4 Social system approach.....	27
2.4.2 A comparison of approaches of an effective EIA system.....	29
2.4.3 The proposed framework	30
2.5 Key areas and criteria for evaluation of the EIA system in Bangladesh.....	33
2.5.1 Institutional framework of the EIA system.....	33
2.5.2 The quality of EISs.....	34
2.5.3 Implementation of mitigation measures.....	36
2.5.4 Use of criteria to evaluate the EIA system in Bangladesh.....	37
2.6 Evolution of the EIA system in Bangladesh.....	38
2.7 Status of the EIA system in Bangladesh and the research gap.....	41
2.8 Chapter summary.....	44

Chapter-3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction.....	45
3.2 The research design	45
3.3 Evaluation criteria for the EIA system in Bangladesh	47
3.4 Methods of data collection.....	49
3.4.1 Face-to-face interview.....	49
3.4.2 Document (content) analysis.....	55
3.4.3 Review package for the assessment of the quality of EISs.....	57
3.4.4 Site visits and direct observations.....	65
3.5 Analysis of data.....	68
3.6 Quality control of research.....	72
3.6.1 Quality criteria for a qualitative research.....	72

3.6.2 Triangulation.....	74
3.7 Some operational difficulties faced by the researcher during fieldwork.....	76
3.8 Chapter summary.....	77

Chapter-4: Institutional framework for the EIA system in Bangladesh

4.1. Introduction.....	78
4.2. Legal and administrative arrangements for the EIA system.....	80
4.2.1 Legal arrangements.....	80
4.2.2 Administrative arrangements	89
4.3. EIA process and administrative procedure.....	97
4.4. Findings and discussions.....	103
4.4.1 Strengths of institutional arrangements of EIAs.....	105
4.4.2 Weaknesses of institutional arrangements of EIAs	114
4.5. Chapter summary.....	129

Chapter-5: Quality of EISs in Bangladesh

5.1 Introduction.....	130
5.2 Findings and discussions.....	131
5.2.1 Overall quality of EISs in Bangladesh.....	131
5.2.2 Quality of EISs by area.....	132
5.2.2.1 Area#1: Description of development and baseline conditions.....	133
5.2.2.2 Area#2: Identification and evaluation of key impacts.....	136
5.2.2.3 Area#3: Mitigation and monitoring	146
5.2.2.4 Area#4: Communication and presentation of an EIS.....	150

5.3 Factors influencing the quality of EISs in Bangladesh.....	154
5.4 Chapter summary	164

Chapter-6: Implementation of mitigating measures in Bangladesh

6.1 Introduction.....	165
6.2 Case study-I: Khulna-Jessore drainage rehabilitation project (KJDRP)	167
6.2.1 Project description	167
6.2.2 Environmental and social impacts of KJDRP and proposed mitigation measures.....	170
6.2.3 Findings.....	173
6.2.3.1 Status of implemented mitigation measures	173
6.2.3.2 Implementation of monitoring program.....	182
6.2.3.3 Community participation.....	183
6.3 Case study-II: Jamuna multipurpose bridge project (JMBP).....	186
6.3.1 Project description.....	186
6.3.2 Environmental and social impacts of JMBP.....	187
6.3.3 Proposed mitigation measures.....	189
6.3.4 Findings.....	191
6.3.4.1 Status of implemented mitigation measures.....	191
6.3.4.2 Implementation of monitoring program.....	204
6.3.4.3 Community participation	205
6.4 Case study-III: Meghnaghat Power Plant Project (MPPP).....	207
6.4.1 Project description.....	207
6.4.2 Environmental and social impacts of MPPP.....	209

6.4.3 Proposed mitigation measures	211
6.4.4 Findings.....	212
6.4.4.1 Status of implemented mitigation measures.....	212
6.4.4.2 Implementation of monitoring program.....	221
6.4.4.3 Community participation.....	222
6.5 EIA practice at post-EIS stage: overall environmental management performance of the three projects	223
6.6 Chapter summary.....	225

Chapter-7: General discussions

7.1 Introduction.....	226
7.2 Institutional arrangements for the EIA system in Bangladesh.....	226
7.3 The quality of EISs in Bangladesh	232
7.4 EIA practice at post-EIS stage: implementation of mitigation measures.....	236
7.5 Overall status of the EIA system in Bangladesh	243
7.6 A proposed feature of an effective EIA system in Bangladesh.....	244
7.7 Chapter summary.....	247

Chapter-8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction.....	248
8.2 The background, aim and objectives of research.....	248
8.3 Research findings related to three research questions.....	249
8.4 Policy implications (recommendations).....	252
8.5 Contribution of this research.....	256

8.6 Limitation of this research and future research directions.....	257
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List of boxes

Box 2.1 Control mechanisms for an effective EIA system.....	18
Box 3.1 Summary of criteria used to evaluate the EIA system in Bangladesh.....	48
Box 3.2 Interview protocol followed in this study	54
Box 3.3 Criteria for the review of EIS quality in the context of Bangladesh.....	60
Box 4.1 Key extracts of National Environmental Policy 1992.....	83
Box 4.2 Major features of Environmental Conservation Act (1995) and the Environmental Conservation Rules (1997) as the legal foundation of EIA.....	87
Box 4.3 International Conventions, Treaties and Protocols relevant to EIAs in Bangladesh.....	88
Box 4.4 Key strengths and weaknesses of institutional arrangements of EIA in Bangladesh.....	104

List of figures

Figure 1.1 Structure of thesis.....	7
Figure 2.1 Dimensions of an effective EIA system	16
Figure 2.2 A conceptual framework of an effective EIA system: an (integrated) holistic approach.....	31
Figure 3.1 Key areas investigated and methods applied to review the EIA system in Bangladesh.....	46
Figure 3.2 Tools used to record observation and interview data	55
Figure 3.3 Schematic view of assessment procedure from sub-category to overall assessment of quality.....	63

Figure 3.4 Projects investigated and their locations in Bangladesh.....	67
Figure 3.5 The process of analysis of interview data using Nvivo.8	70
Figure 3.6 Coding of text data using Nvivo.8.....	71
Figure 4.1 Legal arrangements of EIA system in Bangladesh.....	80
Figure 4.2 Principal actors involved in EIA system in Bangladesh.....	90
Figure 4.3 Organisational structures for EIA system in Bangladesh.....	91
Figure 4.4 Current structures of the DOE in Bangladesh	95
Figure 4.5 EIA process in Bangladesh.....	98
Figure 4.6 Screening and environmental clearance process by the DOE	100
Figure 4.7 EIS review process in Bangladesh.....	101
Figure 4.8 Integration of EIA process in project planning and implementation.....	113
Figure 4.9 Trend of applications submitted at DOE (1996-2006).....	123
Figure 5.1 Overall quality of EISs in Bangladesh.....	132
Figure 5.2 Quality of the EISs by area	133
Figure 5.3 Factors influencing the quality of EISs in Bangladesh	155
Figure 6.1 Location of KJDRP and area under the project	168
Figure 6.2 Benefits of implementation of TRM option.....	174
Figure 6.3 Regulators without fish-friendly structure	175
Figure 6.4 Reduction of fish stock in rivers in the project area	177
Figure 6.5 Piled-up dredged soil disrupts agriculture in the project area	178
Figure 6.6 Location of Jamuna multipurpose bridge	186
Figure 6.7 The fate of upper Dhaleswari River in dry season.....	192
Figure 6.8 Excavated ponds are dried-up and abandoned.....	193
Figure 6.9 Gharial (<i>Gavialis Gangeticus</i>): one of the threatened species	

in Bangladesh.....	196
Figure 6.10 A partial representation of the loss of wildlife during the construction of the project.....	198
Figure 6.11 Land acquired for project is left open and unutilised.....	199
Figure 6.12 Resettlement areas for local community displaced by project	200
Figure 6.13 Meghnaghat power plant (back view).....	207
Figure 6.14 Location of Meghnaghat power plant site.....	208
Figure 6.15 The disruption of water-flow by the project.....	213
Figure 6.16 Constructed earth embankments and planted trees	214
Figure 6.17 Installed stacks of 60 meters in height to minimise air pollution.....	215
Figure 6.18 Acquired but unused land in the project area	218
Figure 6.19 The status of implemented mitigation measures of the three projects.....	224
Figure 7.1 The relationship between baseline data, impact prediction and mitigation measures.....	234
Figure 7.2 Environmental management performances of the three projects at post-EIS stage of EIA process	237
Figure 7.3 Interaction of four key parties in the implementation and management of mitigation measures.....	243
Figure 7.4 A proposed effective EIA system in Bangladesh.....	246

List of tables

Table 2.1 Status of EIA systems and practice in developing countries.....	12
Table 3.1 Types of public documents analysed in this study.....	56
Table 3.2 Methods used by authors to assess EISs' quality.....	58

Table 3.3 Number of EISs by sector.....	62
Table 3.4 Alphabetic symbols and the definition of grades.....	64
Table 3.5 Quality control of research using quality criteria.....	73-74
Table 4.1 Current manpower of Department of Environment	122
Table 5.1 Causes of uncertainties during impact prediction, assessment and mitigation.....	146
Table 6.1 Major social and environmental impacts of KJDRP.....	171
Table 6.2 Recommended mitigation measures for KJDRP.....	172
Table 6.3 Status of mitigation measures implemented for KJDRP.....	181
Table 6.4 Major social and environmental impacts of JMBP.....	188-189
Table 6.5 Recommended mitigation measures for JMBP	190
Table 6.6 Status of mitigation measures implemented for JMBP	203
Table 6.7 Major environmental and social impacts of MPPP	210
Table 6.8 Recommended mitigation measures for MPPP.....	211-212
Table 6.9 Status of mitigation measures implemented for MPPP.....	220
References.....	259
Appendices	
Appendix A: Checklist/criteria.....	290
Appendix B: Interview schedule.....	295
Appendix C: Statement of information.....	297
Appendix D: Consent form.....	300
Appendix E: List of interviewees (face-to-face interview).....	301
Appendix F: List of EISs of projects reviewed	302

Appendix G: A sample of collation sheet	304
Appendix H: Summary results of the quality of 30 EISs.....	305
Appendix I: List of participants/ key informants interviewed for three projects.....	306
Appendix J: Information sheet for mitigation measures.....	307

Abbreviation and acronyms

ADB-Asian Development Bank

BCAS-Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies

BCL-Bangladesh Construction Limited

BELA- Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association

BRAC-Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

BUET-Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology

BWDB-Bangladesh Water Development Board

CBD-Conventions on Biological Diversity

CEGIS-Centre for Environment and Geographic Information System

CI-Cumulative Impact

CCG- Combined Cycle Gas

CCGT-Combined Cycle Gas Turbine

CITES-Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

CBD-Convention on Biological Diversity

CFSD-Centre for Sustainable Development

DOF-Department of Forest

DOF-Department of Fishery

DOE-Department of Environment

DC-Deputy Commissioner

ECR-Environmental Conservation Rules

ECA-Environmental Conservation Act

ECA-Environmentally Critical Area

ECC-Environmental Clearance Certificate

EIA-Environmental Impact Assessment

EIS-Environmental Impact Statement

EMP-Environmental Management Plan

EMAP-Environmental Management Action Plan

EOI-Expression of Interest

EPA-Environmentally Protected Area

EPWAPDA-East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority

ESIA-Environmental and Social Impact Assessment

ETP-Effluent Treatment Plant

ESMP-Environmental and Social Management Plan

EU-Environmental Unit

FB- Fixed Budget

FCCC-Framework Convention on Climate Change

FGD-Focus Group Discussion

GOB-Government of Bangladesh

ICBD-International Convention of Biological Diversity

IUB-Independent University of Bangladesh

IESC-Important Environmental and Social Component

IEC-Important Environmental Component

IEE-Initial Environmental Examination

IWM-Institute of Water Modelling

ISCs-Important Social Components

IUCN-International Union of Conservation on Nature

JMBA-Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority

JMBP- Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Project

KJDRP-Khulna Jessore Drainage Rehabilitation Project

KWH-Kilo Watt Hour

MPL-Meghnaghat Power Limited

MPSA-Meghnaghat Power Site Area

MPP-Meghnaghat Power Plant

MOEF-Ministry of Environment and Forest

MW-Mega Watt

NBAPB-National Biodiversity Action Plan for Bangladesh

NEP-National Environmental Policy

NCS-National Conservation Strategy

NEC-National Environmental Council

NGOs-Non Governmental Organisations

NO_x-Nitrogen Oxides

NTS-Non Technical Summary

PAPs-Project Affected Persons

PC-Planning Commission

PRA-Participatory Rural Appraisal

QCBS-Quality and Cost Based Selection

RCC-Resource Control Centre

RAP-Resettlement Action Plan

RRAP-Revised Resettlement Action Plan

SCF-Standard Cubic Feet

SO_x-Sulphur Di Oxides

SUB-State University of Bangladesh
SWMC-Surface Water Modelling Centre
TBM-Tidal Basin Management
TOR-Terms of Reference
TRM-Tidal River Management
UP-Union Parishad
UK-United Kingdom
USA-United States of America
USAID-United States Agency for International Development
VGD- Vulnerable Group Development
WARPO-Water Resource Planning Organisation
WB-World Bank
WC-Water Committee
WMC-Water Management Committee

Abstract

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is an environmental management tool used widely in more than 100 countries and, by multilateral and bilateral agencies. Like many other jurisdictions, the EIA has been practiced in Bangladesh as an environmental management tool for projects with the aim of protecting the environment from impacts. While in developed countries a good number of studies are available, the evaluation of EIA systems in developing countries is a neglected area. The evaluation of an EIA system helps to understand how an EIA system is working, the strengths and weaknesses of the system and areas for further improvement.

In Bangladesh, the EIA system has been formally in place since 1995 but no comprehensive study has been conducted to understand how the system is working including its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, a comprehensive investigation is warranted to identify any shortcomings, leading to suggestions for improvement of the EIA system in Bangladesh.

The study of an EIA system should focus not only on the practice of the EIA, but also on the necessary legal and administrative arrangements that support its practice and subsequent outcomes. With this in mind, this research used an integrated-holistic framework to understand the effectiveness of the EIA system in Bangladesh. This framework facilitated a comprehensive investigation of the EIA system covering institutional arrangements, the practice of EIA (i.e. the quality of EISs), and subsequent outcomes (i.e. the implementation of mitigation measures and monitoring).

The first area of investigation is the institutional arrangements of the EIA in Bangladesh. The study shows that, in Bangladesh, there is legislation for EIA practice and designated agencies to administer EIA implementation. These make a good foundation for EIA practice. However, there is a lack of comprehensive EIA legislation that clearly outlines the requirements of key stages of EIA process. The current legislation does not clearly define the key stages of EIA process (i.e. scoping, community involvement, mitigation and monitoring) and other procedural requirements, such as the contents and review of Environmental Impact Statements (EISs). A comprehensive provision of EIA requirements detailed in legislation is necessary in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the administrative capacity of the DOE is weak due to the shortage of trained staff, inadequate budget and lack of stable leadership. These weaknesses keep the DOE's efforts to implement EIA at a minimum.

The second area of investigation is the quality of EISs that is the product of an EIA process. This area examines to what extent the tasks of the EIA process (stages of EIA and other procedural requirements) are addressed in practice. Reviewing thirty (30) EISs, this study shows that the quality of EISs in Bangladesh is generally satisfactory. However, a significant proportion (34%) of EISs is still poor. The deficiencies in the contents of EISs include inadequate baseline data, poor impact prediction and evaluation of the significance of impacts, analysis of alternatives, and the poor presentation of information in a Non-Technical Summary (NTS). A number of factors influencing the quality of EISs have also been identified.

The implementation of mitigation measures, the third area of investigation, shows that they are poorly implemented in Bangladesh. Three projects from different sectors were investigated and the findings show that none of the projects' mitigation measures were fully implemented. Community participation and monitoring programs were inadequate during the implementation of environmental mitigation measures of projects. A number of factors behind the partial implementation of environmental mitigation measures, inadequate community participation and monitoring were identified.

Finally, after the identification of the current strengths and weaknesses of the EIA system, this study concludes that, while the EIA system in Bangladesh is heading in the right direction, more improvements are required to make the system effective. Interventions by the government of Bangladesh are needed to improve the institutional capacity, the quality of EIA reports, and the implementation of mitigation measures. Importantly, the proper implementation of mitigation measures is deemed to be essential to harness the benefits of an EIA as an environmental management tool.