

## **Annex 4: Namibia's Environmental Assessment (EA) Process**

### **1. Pre-feasibility study and screening**

- Before an EIA is done, the developer usually does his/her "homework" through conducting a study to see whether the project is viable from a financial point of view. In the case of tourism, the study will determine whether there is a good enough tourism product in the area, whether s/he will be able to compete in the market and realize a profit and return on investment. At this early stage, it is important to see whether the project is in line with the vision in the tourism Master plan or Conservancy Management Plan. S/he will then complete the environmental questionnaire so that a decision can be taken on whether an EIA is needed or not. This stage is generally known as screening. The questionnaire should be completed by the developer early in the planning process.
- This decision to do an EIA or not must be taken carefully, and the size of the project may not be the best criteria. For example, the construction of a small campsite will probably not require an EIA, but if it is to be placed near an important spring, at a village or close to game migration paths, then an EIA should be done.
- The screening process should, ideally involve consultation between all affected stakeholders so that the final decision is collective rather than unilateral.
- If the initial analysis is positive and the impacts seem likely to be minimal, the authorities will probably issue an Environmental Clearance and set conditions for the implementation of the project without an EIA being done. Alternatively, a full EIA might be triggered.

### **2. Scoping**

- The next step is scoping, which proceeds after a decision has been taken that an EIA is required.
- Scoping is the process of identifying from a broad range of potential problems, a number of priority issues to be addressed by an EIA. Scoping is extremely important, because an EIA study can easily become disoriented in trying to find out a little about everything instead of as much as possible about the most important impacts likely to result from the proposed development.
- Most EIAs are conducted under time pressure, since the developers inevitably want to proceed as soon as possible with their projects. It is thus vital to focus the study from the start. There are many ways to conduct a scoping exercise, but recent experience suggests that one of the best ways is to consult stakeholders, especially people living in the project area. Locals are more likely than anyone else to correctly identify potential impacts and their perspective is essential in assessing the significance of these impacts.
- A successful scoping exercise results in
  - a prioritized list of potential impacts,
  - an inventory of stakeholders,
  - sources of information and a clearer idea of what to study, why and how.
- Many practitioners summarize this information in a matrix, where a list of project related activities, the receiving environment and a preliminary assessment of impact severity and significance, are presented in tabular format for ease of reference.

### **3. The EA study**

- The actual EIA study only commences once screening and scoping have been completed.
- The study is usually carried out by a "team of experts" who are competent in all the relevant fields. These typically include sociology, ecology and other natural sciences. More recently, anthropologists, landscape architects, lawyers, health experts and economists have played a more prominent role as EIA has become a more integrated process.

- The EIA team should ideally work in tandem with other components of the planning process, such as design and economic modelling, so that the disciplines can influence each other in an iterative fashion.
- A best-case scenario is achieved when an EIA and the other studies jointly explore alternatives and collectively design a “least cost” project. Least cost in this case includes maximum economic returns and minimal environmental impacts and opportunity costs.
- The complexity, length and detail of each EIA depend on the subject being studied and the interrelationships between the issues.
- Usually, the EIA study results in the compilation of a report which is delivered to the proponent (referred to as an EIA report or Environmental Impact Statement). Many jurisdictions specify a minimum standard for the form and content of the report, which should at least provide an executive summary of the findings and key recommendations, the process that was followed, the stakeholders consulted, the main issues and findings, and detailed recommendations for impact mitigation.
- Modern EIA systems also require consultants to advise on how project benefits can be enhanced, thereby addressing the concern that EIA is a fault-finding exercise.

### ***Specific tasks to be undertaken in conducting the EIA study***

#### **Task1: Description of the proposed project and its sub-components**

- Describe the relevant parts of each phase of the project (i.e. those that are likely to cause significant environmental impacts).
- The EIA should also analyze the alternatives to the project, and explain why the proposed project is superior to the alternatives, including the no-project alternative.

#### **Task 2: Description of the environment**

Provide a brief but concise description and analysis of the following components of the affected environment.

*Institutional environment:* Characteristics of the relevant sectors in local government (including capacity to offer support), NACSO and the CBNRM support network.

*Natural environment:* an overview (not a comprehensive biodiversity inventory) of the current status of the natural capital within the focus area (especially water and wildlife), planned development activities versus current use to see if there will be considerably more requirements for land and natural resources in the future; conflicts between wildlife and humans, suitability of the areas for other forms of land use, etc. A statement on the current “state of the environment” will be useful, especially as a benchmark for future monitoring. Any particularly sensitive areas or areas of important biodiversity should be highlighted.

*Socio-cultural environment in the focus area:* population and demographics; community structure; employment; public health (including sexually transmitted diseases); aspirations and attitudes (regarding the project), decision making and management structures within the focus area, administrative systems, and relations with neighbours. Highlight the known (or expected) occurrence of sites of cultural importance in the focus area.

*Economic environment:* general overview of the current land use and livelihood profile in the focus area, the investments to date (through other projects and by the communities themselves) and the returns on these. The assessment should consider the plans of other sectors in the area (e.g. mining and agriculture) and note plans for infrastructure development (e.g. roads).

#### **Task 3: Legislative and regulatory considerations**

- Briefly describe and analyse the pertinent national, regional and local authority policies and legislation regarding land use and natural resource management (and planning).
- This needs to be linked to the anticipated activities of the project and CBNRM in general.

- It is not necessary to provide a summary of all the relevant laws and policies – rather analyse their relevance to the project and assess the extent to which the project will need to comply with these and what licensing permits will be needed.

#### **Task 4: Determination of the potential impacts of the proposed project**

- In this analysis, distinguish between significant positive and negative impacts, direct and indirect impacts, and immediate and long-term impacts.
- Identify impacts which are unavoidable or irreversible.
- Characterize the extent and quality of available data, explaining significant information deficiencies and any uncertainties associated with predictions of impact.
- It is strongly urged that the EIA focus on the 5 most important issues so that time, money and paper are not wasted on insignificant issues.
- Once the consultant has a list of key issues, s/he should meet with the client and the appropriate communities and authorities to agree on the priorities.
- An important issue for the EIA to consider is who will use the data that is generated concerning potential social and cultural impacts.
- When considering the potential impacts of a development on the physical environment, the issue of whether an impact is negative or positive is fairly straightforward. If a development removes the last remaining habitat of an endemic species, then it can be predicted that the species will become extinct. It is a valid conclusion that the loss of this species will have a negative impact on biodiversity.
- When considering social and cultural issues, the determination of what is a negative or positive impact is more difficult. If those carrying out an EIA do not belong to the culture of the people affected, they are not in a position to determine whether a specific impact is positive or negative.
- Given such potential differences in perception of culture and cultural change, the issue of who interprets the nature of potential impacts becomes crucial. The EIA process needs to ensure that the residents of an area where a development takes place are the people who decide whether potential impacts will be of a positive nature or a negative nature. In order for this to happen, a process of consultation and discussion with residents needs to be undertaken by the assessment team once potential impacts have been identified. The potential impacts need to be presented to residents for discussion. Residents can then decide whether the impacts are desirable or undesirable.
- It will be necessary for the assessment team to note varying attitudes between different social groupings and the residents should be encouraged to find consensus if differences emerge. If consensus cannot be found, this should be noted in the report and the different attitudes recorded. Only once residents have stated their views on the nature of specific impacts, will it be possible to decide which impacts should be completely avoided from a social and cultural perspective and which require mitigating action. The process of identifying mitigating actions should also be carried out through the strong participation of local residents. It should be recognized that what might be acceptable to residents of one area, might not be acceptable to their immediate neighbours.
- Generally many of the potential social impacts that might be considered negative might be acceptable to residents, if there has been a process of consultation with residents in the development of the plans for the lodge. Also many of the potential negative impacts could be avoided, if there has been a process of joint planning. For example, resentment about the import of outside labour for construction or operation of the lodge can be pre-empted if there are agreements in place that the lodge will hire local labour except where skills are not available locally. Further the agreement could stipulate that where skills are not available locally, residents will be trained to develop these skills.

- In assessing the impacts of the project, the EIA should consider whether alternative designs or ways of implementing the project could reduce negative impacts whilst enhancing the benefits. This analysis should result in a series of practical and feasible mitigation measures, which can later be used to develop an Environmental Management Plan (EMP). The development of the EMP might be included in the project specific TOR as work to be done by the consultant, but in some cases the EMP might be a separate consultancy.

#### **Task 5: EIA Report**

- The EIA report should be concise (no more than 50 pages – excluding appendices) and shall focus on the significant environmental, social and economic issues.
- The main text should highlight the findings, conclusions and recommended mitigation actions.
- The report should be easy to read and easily understood by a layperson, but at the same time it should contain data (where available) and it must be scientifically sound.
- The text should be complimented by graphs, tables, illustrations and maps that help the reader to better understand the message that is being conveyed.

#### **Task 6: Review and decision making**

- In Namibia, the authority for reviewing an EIA report is the Directorate of Environmental Affairs (DEA) in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET).
- However, it would be good practice if the conservancy (or other community structure) and the local MET office reviews the EIA first, before it is sent to Windhoek.
- After the review, the authorities (be they local, regional or national) either authorize or deny the proposed activity.
- Authorization is usually conditional on compliance with a set of conditions, which are generally based on the recommendations of the EIA and the review.
- These conditions should be incorporated into an Environmental Management Plan (EMP). The EMP should consist of a strategy for reducing negative impacts, enhancing benefits and monitoring progress. It must thus include a monitoring programme and indicators by which to measure both changes within the environment and progress towards achieving objectives.

#### **Task 7: Monitoring and auditing**

- It is important that we learn from experience gained during implementation; there is thus a need to include a feedback mechanism in the EIA system.
- This is usually achieved through regular monitoring and audits.
- As noted earlier, the monitoring system is sometimes published as a separate EMP or Environmental Management System (EMS).
- Ideally, the lessons learnt through implementation should provide the basis for reviewing the conditions of approval, and the authorities and proponent should constantly be updating these crucial documents.