

Impact Assessment for Industrial Development —Whose Business Is It?

The private sector has participated in impact assessment (IA) since its inception. In market economies, project proponents, financiers, designers, constructors, operators and their consultants have now been actively engaged in IA processes for more than 30 years.

Globally, as national economies de-regulate and continue their shift towards market models, the role of the private sector in shaping the world we live in has increased in many ways. Ongoing privatization of the economy has important ramifications on human society and the environment, and is having a profound effect on the field of impact assessment.

Impact assessment has matured greatly, and now operates well beyond its original local, project-oriented focus. Impact assessments are undertaken not only at local scales, but also at regional, national, international and even global scales. Impact assessment is also being used more strategically, and is now being applied to policies, programs and plans; to complex regional development scenarios; and to whole economic sectors.

Aboriginal or indigenous people, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), locally affected people and a variety of other stakeholders are playing increasingly important roles in impact assessment.

Finally, there are expectations that impact assessment will contribute significantly to worldwide efforts to secure a sustainable future for the human race. Contributing in a meaningful way to sustainability is perhaps the greatest challenge faced by the impact assessment community, and likely will be a major criterion upon which the historical relevance of impact assessment is judged by future generations.

As impact assessment has matured and has broadened its range of parameters and inputs, its practicality and relevance has also been challenged. As a result, it is important to investigate how impact assessment tools can be most effectively used to achieve sustainable development.

The private sector with its long-standing involvement in IA at many levels has much to contribute to the future practice of impact assessment. Its overarching goal of efficient and effective use of limited resources can inform IA processes. Its management expertise can support the execution of impact assessment work in a timely and cost-effective manner. It provides numerous examples of forward-looking and progressive enterprises that are already looking beyond the boundaries of traditional impact assessment. These enterprises are taking bold and innovative steps to internalize sustainability principles in their corporate cultures, and to adjust their systems and procedures accordingly.

The 24th Annual Conference of IAIA is dedicated to the theme: Impact Assessment for Industrial Development – Whose Business Is It? The conference will provide an important international venue for private sector firms, as well as state-owned corporations, to highlight their achievements in impact assessment and in managing for sustainability. The conference will also provide a forum for all members of the impact assessment community — be they from the private sector; the public sector; Aboriginal or indigenous communities; non-governmental organizations; or the educational, research and health sectors — to share experiences and insights, and to discuss their respective roles in achieving a sustainable future.

We look forward to the new perspectives to be brought, the breadth of expertise to be made available, and the practical experience and successes to be shared in Vancouver next April.

The Program Committee welcomes your ideas, suggestions, and concrete proposals for this engaging and important Conference.

We look forward to hearing from you – and to your participation.

Photo courtesy of Environment Canada

