

Environmental Impact Assessment in Ethiopia: A General Review of History, Transformation and Challenges Hindering Full Implementation

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Abstract

Ethiopia's past development has been highly criticized due to lack of integrating environmental concerns into the development agendas. It seems that only small efforts have been made up to date with the institutionalization of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) proclamation. Most development plannings have focused on short term economic feasibility and paid little attention to their environmental impacts. As a result, the country has experienced serious damages, not only to the environment, but also to the society. On the other hand, the country currently welcomes huge investment projects mainly targeted at intensification of agriculture and industrialization. These projects need attention to manage their environmental impacts. Regardless of the minimal effects of its implementation, Ethiopia has laid a foundation for this through the introduction of the Environmental Policy and EIA proclamation (Proc. No. 299/2002). This paper tries to look into the paths of EIA in Ethiopia. It reviews the history of the development system with a focus on problems of the past development. With an urgent need in the field of impact management in line with the current needs for development, the paper highlights the Ethiopian environmental policy, specifically targeting on the current implementation of EIA procedures. It also attempts to address the challenges the country has recently faced to fully implement EIA and suggests possible solutions to overcome, and hence move towards more sustainable development.

Keywords: Development; Environment; Environmental Impact Assessment; Ethiopia

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is highly vulnerable to grave environmental degradation mainly due to unwise use of natural resources and poorly planned development projects, prompted by rapid population growth. This is because the environment has not featured on the development agenda in the past, since project evaluation and decision-making mechanisms have focused only on short-term technical feasibility and economic benefits. Thus, neglected environmental and social, as well as long term economic dimensions, have resulted in a situation where the country experiences a seriously degraded natural environment that has consequences on negatively impacting the public health (Yonas, 2006). As a result, further development along this line has to be cut short, as efforts in reversing the damage to the environment at a later time is usually costly or even irreversible.

In order to ensure sustainable development, it is essential to integrate environmental concerns into development activities, programs, and policies. The Environmental Impact Assessment (hereafter referred as EIA) is one of the best environmental management tools, and facilitates the inclusion of principles of sustainable development aspirations early in a project.

However, until 1997 Ethiopia did not have a comprehensive environment policy as such (Mellese and Mesfin, 2008). Experience in the past has shown that different development schemes have caused massive environmental problems as traditional project preparation and decision-making mechanisms were based on short-term technical feasibility and economic benefits (TSION, 2008). As the concern for environmental degradation has increased in recent years, the Environmental Policy of Ethiopia (EPE henceforth) was issued in 1997 to provide guidance in the conservation and sustainable utilization of the country's natural resources in general. Among the specific objectives that the EPE seeks to achieve are ensuring conservation, development and sustainable use of essential ecological processes and life support systems, biological diversity and renewable natural resources and the empowerment and participation of the people in environmental management (Mellese and Mesfin, 2008). The EPE lays the foundation for EIA in the country. In section 4.9, the EPE stipulates the country's policies regarding EIA. It provides for the enactment of a law which requires that an appropriate EIA and environmental audits are undertaken on private and state development projects (Mellese and Mesfin, 2008).

This paper consists of four sections. The first section introduces the issues that this paper will discuss and briefly outlines the problems to be examined relating, specifically to past development endeavors. The next section highlights major functions in the emerging fields of EIA by setting a policy for proactive consideration of the environment in relation to socio-economic development of the country. Intertwined with the great environmental crisis of the past decades (before 1993) and the establishment of an EPE which was to lay a foundation for EIA, the third section explores the advancement of EIA and its history. The last section discusses the major factors influencing the implementation of EIA to maximum level and suggests scenarios towards

moving to more sustainable development in Ethiopia.

The Problem: Past Development Activities in Ethiopia

Literature and experience witness that poorly planned development endeavors and unwise use of natural resources have threatened and deepened Ethiopia's past economic, environmental and social status. Although the cause for Ethiopia's environmental degradation is, in general, diverse and interlinked; chronic poverty, population growth, coupled with the lack of relevant scientific knowledge, inconsistency on an institutional level, non-existence of complementarities between institutions, and lack of environmental and investment policy and proclamations, are among the major drivers of environmental degradation of the country. Most development practices have never been anticipated for the elimination or mitigation of potential environmental problems, and hence only targeted towards short term technical feasibility and economic benefits. These actions were not able to maintain the environment because developments had no vision for the long term and future generations. There was no awareness regarding the quality of the environment. Like in many parts of the world, in Ethiopia, the environment has not featured on the development agenda in the past. Therefore, in the past the environment was not considered in the development as most projects were undertaken without any prefeasibility studies of the project. There was no monitoring and protection and these no-actions lead to destruction of both local communities and the environment in general. Later on in recognition of this, and then urgency of the matter, the country took major action and prepared an EIA system, including Procedural Guidelines, which is used for all types of development projects in any sector. However, the country still has problems with the full implementation of this proclamation, despite launching a major investment program for the implementation of large scale development schemes and industrialization. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to review the path that the country has travelled through in terms of addressing integration of environmental issues into the development agenda through the introduction and implementation of EIA and it also highlights major challenges hindering the country from full implementation of the existing EIA policies.

Emerging Trends in Impact Assessment: A Review of Literature

The environmental crisis, as a result of human action, has become a major global issue affecting every part of the globe (both developed and developing), causing countless sufferings to millions of people worldwide. This is especially severe in developing countries as they frequently suffer from insufficient considerations of impacts, alternatives and public participation. In the worst scenario, before EIA was promoted as a tool and policy instrument for integrating the environment and development issues at all levels, nothing was done to mitigate impacts surrounding any past developmental activities (Li, 2008).

Hence, acknowledging the fact that this is particularly troubling, EIA has increasingly been the center of stages for achieving sustainable development since its origination in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States of America and has adopted extensively in the rest of the world (Li, 2008). It is believed that the major factors such as a tradition of rational planning, growing environmental concern, concern for public involvement in the process of development, increasing demand and wider repercussions of major developments schemes, and the failure of project appraisal and review procedures to account for evident ecological and community impacts were major convergent factors which led to the introduction of EIA during these early periods (Sadler, 1996). More particularly, multilateral environmental agreements, such as the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992), and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD, 2002), set the stage, laid a solid foundation and reiterated commitment at the highest level, to integrate environmental and developmental issues to achieve sustainable development. The institutionalization of Environmental Assessment (EA) as an instrument for integrating these issues at all levels for achieving sustainable development is an integral part of agreements and commitments at these global conferences (Li, 2008; ECA, 2005).

Principle 13 and 14, for instance, of the Stockholm convention of 1972 marked a breakthrough supporting the need for rational and integrated planning, while the education component of the Action Plan on the human environment identifies the capacity building as important; incorporating environmental considerations into development planning. In addition, it specifies how to identify and analyze the economic and social cost-benefit relationships of alternative approaches. Similarly, the institutionalization of EIA endorsed by Principle 17 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development was recognized at national level as a decision-making instrument for proposed activities that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Evaluating environmental impact of all developmental projects and the integration of environment and development at policy, planning and management levels for better decision making were conducted mainly through capacity building, national reviews of economic, environmental policies, strategies and policies and improving mechanisms to facilitate the active participation of all concerned bodies. These are some important elements underscored in Agenda 21 of the UN 1992 resolution (Li, 2008; Ogola, 2007; ECA, 2005). Since the Rio Declaration, EIA is seen as one of the most important policy innovations of the 20th century, though its

institutionalizations as well as internationalization of environmental activities were the major striking features (Sadler, 1996). However, the extent to which this environmental assessment was adopted late in many countries, culminating only twenty years on in Rio Principle 17 of the Rio Declaration (Sadler, 1996). Currently EIA has travelled more than a 40 year journey causing a more mature and dynamic form of EIA. Thus, it seems reasonable to say that EIA is a universally recognized instrument for environmental management, as more than 190 member nations of the United Nations either have national legislation or ratified formal use of EIA.

Despite the internationalization and institutionalization of the EIA in development activities, the upgrading of the EIA process and practices, so as to tackle the root cause of environmental degradation, are still challenging due to poverty, underdevelopment and lack of basic infrastructure. This is mainly experienced in developing countries. There are major reasons suggesting why EIA implementation in developing countries often falls considerably short as compared to another handful of countries. Primarily, this is due to financial, structural and resource constraints on introducing and instituting EIA arrangements, and this is a reality among poorer countries. Limited public involvement in the political decision making process, weak implementation and enforcement of laws and regulations, low awareness of the importance of environmental management among government sectors and the public, and poor coordination at national level and between national and local levels are also major driving factors holding back effective implementation of the EIA in developing countries (Abaza *et al.*, 2004).

Likewise, different scholars (Ogola, 2007; Abaza *et al.*, 2004) believe that EIA was still not readily understood and fully accepted in developing countries due to different myths such as perceiving as anti development the fact that EIA dictates land development, it was believed to cause negative impacts and should be discontinued. It was simply considered as a bureaucratic stumbling block hindering development. Secondly, EIA was conceived as complex, it does not produce useful results, is expensive, delays projects and is just an add-on and occurs too late to do any good. Thirdly, it was also perceived as a sinister means by which developed nations intend to prevent developing countries from overcoming poverty. All these are misconceptions about the importance and contribution of EIA, and also contrasting with existing facts. Currently, the choice of new projects is primarily based on the sustainability of the project and hence the triple bottom-line approach (economic, environmental and social) to project viability is considered (Modak and Biswas, 1999).

OVERVIEW OF EIA IN ETHIOPIA

It is clearly understandable that EIA is a tool that seeks to ensure sustainable development through the evaluation of impacts arising from major activities, including policy, plans, programs and/or projects having likely significant environmental impacts. In a number of developing countries in general and Ethiopia in particular, balancing poverty and socioeconomic needs with environmental concerns creates very pressing problems. To meet this challenge and to realize the spirit of the aforementioned multilateral and also bilateral environmental agreements, a number of countries have formulated strategic environmental sustainability policies.

Similarly, given the fact that natural resources are the foundation of Ethiopia's economy, the country has made a significant attempt to develop a policy which protects its ecosystems. One of the main achievements is the approval of "the first comprehensive statements of Environmental Policy for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia by the Council of Ministers in April 1997" (UNEP, 2002), which was intended to promote sustainable social and economic development of the country through conservation and sustainable utilization of natural, manmade and cultural resources and the environment of the country. The progress of EIA in Ethiopia together with its current status and related challenges are discussed below.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OF ETHIOPIA: A BASIS FOR EIA SYSTEMS BACKGROUND

As the supreme law of the land, the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has served as a stepping stone for the formulation of the EPE. The Constitution gives only an insight into the environmental protection essence. However, it does not deal with issues of detail. The EPE which was issued in April 1997, two years after the constitution, has more detail which has relevance to the safeguarding of natural resource base and the environment. This policy was written based on the policy, strategy findings and recommendations contained in Volume II of the Conservation Strategy for Ethiopia with the overall objective "to improve and enhance the health and quality of life of all Ethiopians and to promote sustainable social and economic development through the sound management and use of natural, man-made and cultural resources and the environment as a whole, so as to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need". It is clear that this objective is a derivation from Principle 11 of the Stockholm Convention which literally states the same "the environmental policies of all states should enhance and not adversely affect the present or future development potential of developing countries, nor should they hamper the attainment of better living conditions for all."

This policy articulates the integration of environment and development at policy, planning and management levels for the improvement of decision making. Hence, it was the EPE, which marked a breakthrough in the history of EIA providing an essential guidance for the Federal Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) activities in general and for the preparation of EIA procedural guidelines in particular as well as for other policies.

The EPE specifies the policy objectives, key guiding principles, sectoral and cross-sectoral policy frameworks and implementation strategies to be followed, so that the overall objectives can be realized (Abebe, 2010). These policy objectives and guiding principles have contributed towards the betterment of the EIA system formulation through its implementation.

The following are some of the extracts derived from the policy objectives and an attempt to link them with different multilateral environmental agreements to which Ethiopia has ratified. These extracts from the EPE (Objectives and guiding principles) include:

- Sustaining essential ecological processes and life support systems, biodiversity, and renewable resources (comparable to principle 2 & 3 of Stockholm Conference);
- Extending benefits of the exploitation of non-renewable resources into the future (comparable to principle 5 of Stockholm Conference);
- Incorporating the full economic, social, and environmental costs and benefits of natural resource development in top planning, implementation and accounting process (comparable to principle 4, 13 & 15 of Stockholm Conference);
- Improving the environment of human settlements in a sustainable manner; (comparable to principle 15 of Stockholm Conference);
- Preventing pollution in a cost-effective manner which does not outweigh the benefits accrued;
- Ensuring the empowerment and participation of the people of Ethiopia and their organizations in environmental management and (comparable to principle 22 of Rio Conference);
- Raising public awareness and understanding of the linkages between environment and development, (comparable to principle 19 of Stockholm Conference and principle 10 of Rio Conferences);
- Sustainability being dependent on peace and security (comparable to principle 25 of Rio Conference);
- The use of renewable resources not exceeding their rate of natural replacement; (comparable to principle 2 of Stockholm Conference);
- Minimizing the use of non-renewable resources (comparable to principle 5 of Stockholm Conference);
- Minimizing degrading and polluting impacts and adopting a precautionary principle in decision-making (comparable to principle 15 of Rio Conference);
- Integrating the implementation of cross-sectoral and sectoral policies and strategies across all levels of government (FDRE, 1997).

CURRENT STATUS OF EIA IN ETHIOPIA

As indicated in the introductory part of this paper, the formulation of environmental policy in Ethiopia has led to the enactment of the EIA proclamation in 2002. Fortunately, Ethiopia's earliest commitment to use EIA came into being when it ratified the Convention on Biodiversity in 1994 where Article 14(1)(2) of the convention specifically requires every contracting party to use EIA to protect and conserve biodiversity (Dejene, 2013). But the 1995 FDRE constitution came up with provisions urgently requiring the use of EIA by addressing the concept of sustainable development and environmental rights in articles 43, 44 and 92 of the Constitution and each of these specific articles stipulate the following:

Article 43: The Right to Developments,

Peoples right to:

- improved living standards and to sustainable development;
- participate in national development and, in particular, to be consulted with respect to policies and projects affecting their community, and
- the enhancement of their capacities for development and to meet their basic needs.

Article 44: Environmental Rights,

All persons are entitled to:

- live in a clean and healthy environment;
- Compensation, including relocation with adequate state assistance.

Article 92: Environmental objectives,

It is declared that:

- government shall ensure that all Ethiopians live in a clean and healthy environment;
- programs and project design shall not damage or destroy the environment;
- people have the right to full consultation and expression of views, and
- government and citizens have the duty to protect the environment.

Ethiopia took another big step by adopting the Environmental Policy in 1997 which recognizes the need to use EIA for the attainment of its goals. However, it was the 2002 EIA proclamation (Proc. No. 299/2002) from which the country adopted its strictest environmental laws, solely dealing with the importance of environment together with the urgency of EIA application. This proclamation has made environmental assessment a mandatory legal prerequisite for the implementation of major development projects, programs and plans. It is a proactive tool and a backbone for harmonizing and integrating environmental, economic, cultural, and social considerations into a decision making process, in a manner that promotes sustainable development. In addition, this proclamation ensures that EIA is carried out and evaluated according to the Federal Environmental Protection Authority (FEPA), which is currently being created under the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, and regional environmental agencies. According to the EIA Proclamation No. 299/2002, the EPA is given a strong mandate by stating “no person shall commence implementation of any project that requires environmental impact assessment without authorization from the Authority or from the relevant regional environmental agency” (FDRE, 2002a). The EPA was established in 1995 by virtue of Proclamation No. 9/1995 as a response to the Rio Declaration, 1992.

Potentially, the environmental assessment requires the principle of ‘common but differentiated roles’, and the EIA proclamation 299/2002 clearly spells out the roles and tasks of different stakeholders. Accordingly, defining the roles and responsibilities of each party would enable to harmonization of various interests and foster cooperation in a manner that averts duplication of efforts and promotes efficiency.

The Proponent is defined as any person that initiates a project, policy or program in the public sector an organ of government, in the private sector as an investor. A proponent is required to proactively integrate environmental concerns into the social and economic development of the project, program, policy, plan or strategic initiative, as per the requirements of relevant environmental laws and directives. These ensure that positive effects are optimized and strive to promote conservation based on the development and work of the objectives of continuous improvement, and cover all expenses associated with implementing EIA. Furthermore, the proponent is expected to initiate the EIA process and create the necessary ground for undertaking EIA and appoint an eligible independent consulting firm who shall seek to undertake EIA.

A Consulting firm is an institution that can provide the required qualified professional working group that has demonstrated the ability to undertake the EIA, and meets the requirements specified under the relevant laws. The firm that will be appointed to work on behalf of a proponent is expected to have expertise in EIA and management in accordance with the nature of the proposed activity and legal requirements, make available an interdisciplinary team, having solid technical skills and legal know-how, as well as local knowledge, and manage the participation of interested and affected parties in an acceptable manner. The consulting firm is expected to have the facility to produce readable reports that are thorough and informative, declare and ensure at all times that they have no vested interest in the proposed activity and observe all ethical values of the calling.

The licensing agency is either the EPA or the Regional Environmental Body that are mandated by a Proclamation provided for the establishment of Environmental Protection organs 295/2002 and EIA proclamation 299/2002 and other relevant laws to oversee and facilitate the implementation or administration of EIA. The agency has responsibility to make sure that the necessary system containing procedural and technical guidelines is prepared and implemented; that the public, especially affected communities, are given meaningful opportunity in the EIA process; that views, concerns and positions are taken into account during assessment, reviewing, auditing and at all stages of decision making. The agency has given accredited strong responsibility in playing a very decisive role in the EIA system. Hence, it is sound enough to say the EIA Proclamation could be described as one of the most important environmental laws the county has ever enacted.

In order to ensure effective implementation of the EIA, a set of general procedures applicable to all developmental projects, has been prepared although the proposed projects do not show detailed aspects of technical issues. This is specific to individual projects; according to which have details which have been covered in technical guidelines for different sectors.

Since Ethiopia is a country with a transitional economy, there has been increasing trends of Foreign Direct Investment which is bringing a huge investment in industry and the infrastructure sector. These are consequently causing an adverse environmental impact, which further brings an urgent need for EIA to minimize the risks and ensure long term development. Hence, there are some experiences indicating that EIA is being applied on the ground by private project owners as well as government agencies in Ethiopia. Such experiences are increasing, so are applications made by project owners. Similarly, according to Mellese and Mesfin (2008) there is growing concern over EIA in different sectors, such as the establishment of environmental monitoring units, enhancement of regional capacities by the federal government agencies, the developments of code of conduct of the Ethiopian Floriculture Association and other current activities. They are all showing green light in a development of the EIA process in Ethiopia.

Moreover, consultation with local people and their representatives by a few development project processes, decentralization of environmental units to district/lower level, restructuring the EPA at ministry level,

improvement in terms of coordination between the environment and other sectors, formation of local governments and proposed procedures and guidelines emphasizing new directions to address specific local needs and opportunities, are encouraging for the realization of the full implementation of EIA in the country. More importantly, the recent transformation of the Environmental Protection Authority to the Ministry of Environment and Forest can be seen as a positive government move, but still demands more power. Because there was no specific organ which is directly responsible for the environment in Ethiopia, its efforts have not been given the necessary attention at all levels. Therefore, as environmental matters are now established at ministry level more power is given to these matters in accordance with other ministries accountable to the House of People's Representatives. Meanwhile, the amendment of the designation and clarification of the power and duties of each section structured under the Ministry equally deserves praise for its achievements.

Despite efforts showing a sign of positive beginnings, the real practical aspect of EIA in Ethiopia has until now remained weak, due to different bottle necks in achieving full benefits of EIA. Therefore, the following section highlights some major gaps and challenges hindering the full implementation of EIA in the country.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES

- A. **Lack of implementing laws:** As indicated by different authors (Ruffeis *et al.*, 2010; Dejene, 2009; Tsion, 2008), although the EIA Proclamation was made years ago there is no enforcement mechanisms in place in order to specifically determine the liability of proponents to undertake EIA before licensed with an investment permit, as the proclamation strictly prohibits the commencement of any projects requiring EIA before appropriate assessment is made (Proclamation 299/2002, Art. 5). In this regard, the power entrusted to EPA in ensuring and evaluating full implementation is not fully applied, as this decision is made by the Investment Agency and not by EPA (Ruffeis *et al.*, 2010). However, in most cases Ethiopia's Investment Proclamation does not make EIA a requirement to make the decision whether to permit the investment, and practically most projects are granted approval without the say so of the environmental agency. Ruffeis *et al.* (2010) state that the major reasons behind the miscommunication between the authority and the investment agency is due to the absence of legal means to enforce the law, as the EIA law is very dated and has not been adapted since the time of introduction of the proclamation. On the other hand, the country is updating the investment policy on occasion to facilitate economic development and hence the current investment proclamation does not include a requirement for EIA. This further prevails over the EIA proclamation. As a result, most development initiatives are not passing through the EIA process, although the EPA document guidelines identified key sectors that should be subject to EIA in 2002. These sectors include agriculture, industry, transport, mining, dams and reservoirs, tannery, textile, hydro-power generation, irrigation projects and resettlement projects. The potential environmental impacts of these key sectors are specified generally and fairly comprehensively, but miss information on how to go about evaluation processes and the validation of the assessed impacts. In this regard, Yonas (2006) states that the following should be in place to overcome the above limitations; setting indicators for threshold values for specific development projects that require detailed EIA; clearly setting criteria for defining adverse significant impacts of a project; and developing appropriate standards in order to review reports pertaining EIA study. Nevertheless, widening the scope of the available incentives is helpful for enforcement of EIA laws and encourages compliance with EIA requirements (Tsfaye, 2006).
- B. **Lack of Awareness:** The EIA in Ethiopia is very little known among different stakeholders, and this makes its implementation difficult. It is even believed that those who are in a position to implement the law at different levels, especially at Zonal and District levels do not have sufficient knowledge about EIA and related laws. While they are key actors in EIA, it is difficult to implement it in such a situation. The reason is diverse as narrated by different authors (Dejene, 2009; Tsion, 2008; Tsfaye, 2006; Mellesie and Mesfin, 2008). One of the main reasons for such a low level of EIA knowledge is that there was limited public participation during the law making process. Mellesie and Mesfin (2008) also indicated that local communities, who are the major stakeholders were never been consulted during the law making process that finally resulted in Proclamation No. 299/2002. In addition, the absence of a functional mechanism for ensuring public participation and environmental impact studies are not made available to the public in a formal and well organized way. Hence, lack of understanding of EIA has led stakeholders to consider EIA as a bottleneck for development. Moreover, the lack of knowledge about EIA has led many stakeholders with responsibility to implement EIA to have misconceptions about the importance of and the contribution of EIA.

As mentioned earlier, there are different myths where EIA is considered as "anti-development and anti-investment, as very expensive and hence difficult to cover costs surrounding EIA. For instance some people think that EIA is just an add-on and occurs too late to do good, it is time-taking and hence delays

projects, too complex processes to undertake, it does not produce useful results and we are too poor to afford EIA demanding rapid economic growth. They generally perceive that EIA is designed to make development processes more difficult, preventing the quick economic growth of the country (Mellesie and Mesfin, 2008). It is clear that without full understanding of the nature of EIA together with its processes, one cannot understand the benefits of EIA in achieving sustainable development. Hence, there needs to be a way of addressing appropriate mechanisms so as to ensure the required adequate awareness about the importance of EIA. This further ensures commitment among stakeholders in supporting and contributing towards the successful implementation of a given project rather than resisting projects, addressing economic, social and environmental issues fairly and adequately and overall make development sustainable.

- C. **Lack of capacity:** The issue of capacity is very important in determining the full implementation of EIA process. Training and education in EIA contribute to capacity building. However, there is a lack of facilitating environmental training and education, very limited budgets to go through the EIA, especially in Federal and Regional environmental agencies, and not a sufficient number of experts in the government (Mellesie and Mesfin, 2008; Tsion, 2008; Tesfaye, 2006). In this regard, Mellesie and Mesfin (2008) state the consultants and EPA do not have full capacity to undertake EIA due to lack of multidisciplinary expertise and budget constraints. On the other hand, lack of infrastructure such as sufficient laboratories to conduct quality EIA processes, internet services, library facilities and others could be reasons affecting the implementation of EIA. Thus, one can realize that the capacity problem is best seen from the perspective of consultants and of the EPA itself. More specifically, this problems can be explained as follows:
- D. **The consultant:** Even though the consultant is expected to have a qualified professional working group able to undertake effective EIA on behalf of the proponent, most of the consultancies working with EIA in Ethiopia do not have an interdisciplinary team, solid technical skills and legal know-how. In addition, as there is no code of conduct or criteria governing how such a multidisciplinary task should be handled, consultants risk being highly influenced by their clients. On the other hand, lack of statement of baseline information, lack of quality reports and honesty are also common problems in most consultancies.
- E. **The EPA:** As indicated on the EIA Proclamation in most of the cases (Proclamation 299/2002, Art. 5) EPA is given the authority to regulate the activities carried out by the proponent and also by the government. But, in reality EPA does not have capacity and legal means to enforce the law (Mekonnen, 2015; Ruffeis *et al.*, 2010). As a result, most government offices are run hierarchically at a higher level than EPA. Of course, most investors are not required to conduct EIA. Lack of infrastructure, limited financial capacity and lack of qualified experts are other major capacity problem of the EPA. Therefore, enhancing the capacity of both consultants and EPA at all level is important to improve the capacity building of the EIA system of the country.
- F. **Lack of Incentives:** It is assumed that the use of economic incentives is important to identify and understand different activities and forces that comprise the economic causes of environmental loss. In this case Article 16 of the EIA Proclamation strongly recommends that environmental agencies, within the capacity available to it, to provide financial and technical support for any environmental rehabilitation or pollution prevention or cleanup project to cover additional costs. However, according to Mellesie and Mesfin (2008) and Tesfaye (2006), there are problems surrounding this provision. Firstly, the proclamation does not clearly indicate what such support would cover, and hence, creates doubt as to whether the incentive is referring to the performance in EIA or not. Secondly, the absence of guidelines for implementing the incentive provision is causing confusion as it is not known how to implement the incentives. Therefore, clearly stated arrangements for incentives in relation to experts involved in EIA implementation would be beneficial.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: TOWARDS A MORE VIBRANT EIA SYSTEM IN ETHIOPIA

This paper examines the trajectories that EIA has passed through over the past two decades and covers a wide range of issues surrounding its full implementation in Ethiopia. Before 1997, Ethiopia did not have a comprehensive environmental policy as such. In other words, the developmental system in Ethiopia had, for a well over a decade; hibernated in its traditional form where the environment did not feature on the development agenda. The occurrence of project evaluation and decision-making mechanisms were focused on short-term technical feasibility and economic benefits, which resulted in a serious degraded natural environment. In addition, despite the minor efforts made to achieve EIA through internalization and institutionalization of the tool in development activity, the developments in the field of Environmental Assessment was in a rudimentary stage to be able to achieve integrated, comprehensive, and effective administrative and policy responses that aimed at effective implementation of EIA.

The 1997 Environmental Policy of Ethiopia was the moment where the concerns for environmental degradation started growing towards an intended goal of improving and enhancing the health and quality of life of all Ethiopians and ensure sustainable development through sound management and use of natural resources. However, there was criticism that the conceptual framework of the environmental policy of Ethiopia was too general, not systematically formulated and missed strategies for rigorous implementation, monitoring, or evaluation. In this sense it was the formulation of the EIA Proclamation (Proc. No. 299/2002), begun by the Environmental Protection Authority, including Procedural Guidelines as a prerequisite for the approval of new development activities and projects in any sector, having a very specific vision and mission statements that was of great significance. Later, this mission statement has led to the enforcement of the "Environmental Pollution Control Proclamation (Proc. no. 300/2002)", which is promulgated with a view to eliminate or, when not possible, to mitigate pollution as an undesirable consequence of social and economic development activities (FDRE, 2002b). This proclamation is one of the basic legal documents, which need to be observed as corresponding to effective EA administration.

Nevertheless, over previous decades, EIA in Ethiopia was voluntary and not legally binding whereby it was only applicable to large projects and certain environmental impacts of development activities and lacks how to mitigate negative impacts early in the project planning cycle. Hence, despite the internationalization and institutionalization of EIA in development activity, the upgrading of EIA process and practices in Ethiopia to tackle the root cause of environmental degradation are still challenging due to the lack of practical implementation and application of the EIA process leaving a huge gap between theory and practice.

In fact, as narrated by Sadler (1996) the influence that the EIA process has upon decision making is a 'litmus test' of EIA effectiveness only. In other words, there must be a way to turn to EIA proximate, rather than substantive, enforce its full implementation, and aim to find measurable criteria of effectiveness. In addition, setting limits could be set for proposed developments according to the resilience or regenerative ability of the environments affected. Moreover, in order to strengthen the current EIA system in Ethiopia and ensure its effective implementation, the enforcement mechanisms have to be established either through market based forces or safeguarded by incentives (Ruffeis *et al.*, 2010); put in place a good monitoring system; develop effective mechanisms for accountability; ensure capacity building and awareness creation.

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