

Chapter FOUR

Conducting the Impact Assessment

The study of disease is really the study of man and his environment.

— Unknown

4.1 Introduction

Establishment of each and every industrial unit is unique in itself and the impact of each individual unit tends to differ significantly from others. Impact does not end with any single effect rather it gets metamorphosed with multiplier and accelerator effects resulting in damages, final victim being humans. The impact could be on residences, livelihood, water table, health and environment. Unless the impact is closely assessed, taking appropriate steps to minimise the impact won't be possible.

There is always confusion between BLS and impact assessment. The former records the scenario of the displaced and neighbourhood communities as observed either just before or at the time of establishment of the industrial unit, whereas the latter measures the impact once the industrial unit is established and when it undertakes its regular activities, like extraction of natural resources, production of outputs and spread of its employees into the neighbourhood. However, not many companies notice the difference between these two. Based on those findings of BLS, many companies proceed with the implementation of CSR initiatives. Hence, it is essential to understand the framework, tools and techniques and methods of conduct of impact assessment at the time of establishment of the unit, which also can be used to assess the impact caused after the unit starts its intended activities.

4.2 Periodicity of the Impact Assessment

All impacts of industrial activities won't be felt instantaneously. The effects would lead to impacting at different time frames based on the activities undertaken by the units. Even different activities of the same unit also impact at different points of time with different intensities. Based on severity and time frame of gestation in resulting as damage, the impacts can be delineated as immediate, medium-term, long-term, sudden and hidden.

- Immediate impact takes place when the industrial unit occupies the lands needed for its establishment resulting in displacement, loss of housing, loss of livelihood and loss of farm, grazing and wastelands.
- Medium-term impact takes place when the unit starts extracting the raw material and undertakes the production process, which results in the depletion of natural resources to meet the unit's needs. Health problems may crop up due to the release of gases, fumes, vapours, dust and smoke and crop loss due to pollution of soil and water bodies.
- Long-term impacts could be felt when the unit realises its full potential of activities in raw material extraction, production and marketing.
- Sudden and instantaneous impacts may take place when the dangers brewing over the years due to negligence of the companies or for other reasons explode and results in situations like the great gas tragedy of Union Carbide industries of Bhopal and nuclear explosions in Chernobyl and Fukushima causing damage with their potential.

Nobody knows the hidden impacts until several generations. Had our forefathers been aware of pollution, health hazards, global warming, ozone layer depletion, melting of snow in north and south poles and other ice glaciers and possible rise in the sea water levels submerging of low-lying areas, they would not have ventured to start the industrial activity in the current form. The impacts remained hidden till recently for the common man. In fact, the real dangers of impact of an industrial unit are generally hidden, and not known to common man, until impact leads to a life-threatening situation.

However, certain impacts do not fit into either of the above four categories. For example, medium-term impacts would be felt after five years in the case of certain industrial units and in other cases, five years may be too small period as they take five years for construction itself, let alone reaching its full potential of industrial activity. Cases of major accidents do happen in the process of establishing the unit itself and might result as sudden impacts even before the unit starts its production.

Hence, impact assessment needs to be conducted at periodic intervals. But the impact might not be uniform at different points of time. There is every chance that the aims and objectives differ based on the situation on hand; at one time it may be on housing, livelihood and income levels; next time it may be on soil, water table and agriculture; other time it may be on environment and health issues. Hence, it

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