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Evaluation of the Environmental Impacts Assessment (EIA) System in Lao PDR

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ABSTRACT

This study explores and seeks to explain the EIA procedures practice gap in Lao PDR. It reviews the literature and studies EIA legislation, administrative procedures, guidelines, and relevant documents by using a model proposed by Leu *et al.* (1996) and applying criteria proposed by Wood (1995) to evaluate the performance of EIA systems. Key EIA legislation in Lao PDR has many strengths, but also major weaknesses: Inadequate planning procedures, no secondary regulations, few trained and skilled personnel, inadequate public consultation, lack of environmental data, weak follow-up and monitoring, and no enforcement machinery. Additionally, the EIA approval procedure is very bureaucratic and easily derailed by political and economic pressures. In addition, coordination among EIA proponents, consultants, concerned ministries, local authorities, planners, and decision-makers is generally weak. This delays decision-making and hinders implementation of environmental regulations. Thus, procedures and evaluation are not always performed well. EIAs are more a project justification tool than a project planning tool for sustainable development. We conclude with recommendations to strengthen the system, such as improving capacity building, implementing an EIA consultants' accreditation system, ensuring effective public participation and access to EIA reports, applying systematic EIAs, reviewing criteria, and promoting environmental awareness.

KEYWORDS

Environmental Impact Assessment; Lao PDR; Strength and Weakness; Procedures and Practices

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