

Tool for Initial Environmental Assessment of Road Rehabilitation Projects

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The environmental assessment process involves the prediction of changes over time in various environmental aspects as a result of a proposed project. The prediction of the nature, extent, and magnitude of environmental changes likely to result from a proposed project is aided by various tools and techniques, the choice of which depends upon the impacts of concern, data availability or lack thereof, and the appropriate specificity of quantitative models. However, the choice of the appropriate method for conducting an environmental assessment can only be guided by certain criteria, but no single method will meet all the necessary criteria.

The environmental assessment for development projects are mandatory requirement in Sri Lanka since 1993. The detailed assessments are required only for the projects fall under the category of prescribed projects of the National Environmental Act. The Road rehabilitation projects do not fall in to the above category unless it falls within sensitive areas or resettlements of more than hundred families are involved. However, for funding purposes foreign agencies have made this mandatory even though they exempted from the Environmental Assessment according to the NEA act. Therefore a quick alternative method for environmental assessment is essential for this purpose.

For these reasons, the present study was conducted to develop a checklist for initial environmental assessment of road rehabilitation projects which only consumes a week or so to carry out the environmental assessment. The checklist was generated from the information collected from literature survey, questionnaire surveys and field observation of six actual road rehabilitation projects from planning, construction and operational phases. It identifies activities, corresponding environmental impacts, suitable mitigation and the monitoring requirement for each component of road rehabilitation projects. Notwithstanding the lesser time it takes, it will certainly help Sri Lanka to absorb more foreign donors and aids with effective assessments and also to attract prospective donors. The checklist is user friendly as

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activities and impacts are predetermined and linked to each other and it could be used in any road rehabilitation projects by the subject experts in order to be effective and accurate.

Also the study discovered that to avoid opposition from the general public for the proposed development, the compensation should be paid at the planning stage and a strong monitoring system should be implemented during construction and operational phases. A search for new cost effective mitigation measures is recommended and the checklist has to be upgraded accordingly.

Key Words: Initial Environmental Assessment, Road Rehabilitation Projects, Mitigation Measures, Environmental Monitoring, Checklist for Initial Environmental Assessment