



A New Framework for Integrated Assessments

A recent research presents a “common assessment framework” for integrated assessments in order to strengthen the methodologies used by the practitioners and planners to assess the relative importance of different policy options.

Integrated assessments (IA) are used to evaluate and strengthen policy analyses in various national and international organisations. The main objective of such assessments is the integration of disciplines, of causes, and/or those of effects. An example is the National Emissions Ceilings Directive of the European Commission to assess multi-effects of multi-pollutants caused by air pollution in Europe.

A recent research, however, raises the question concerning the existing gaps between theory and practice in IA and also provides a “common assessment framework” in order to reinforce the IA methodologies used by the practitioners and planners to promote sustainable development.

It identifies the following potential causes for the problems associated with integrated sustainability assessments:

- simpler methods are used rather than more sophisticated tools developed by researchers and consultants;
- a limited link between economic, social, and environmental impact assessments;
- time, data, and resource constraints within which assessments have to be completed, and
- the complexity of the policy, planning, and decision-making environment.

To solve some of the conceptual issues, the proposed “common assessment framework” consists of three interlinked components, viz. the planning context within which the assessment is to take place, the process by which the assessment is to be undertaken, and the technical and consultative methods by which the impacts are to be assessed. Some of the important conclusions of the study are the following:

- A contextual analysis is recommended in order to ensure a relevant, focused, and feasible methodology.
- Screening and scoping must be performed to determine the extent and level of detail required.
- Instead of using a general method, the choice of methods and respective data requirement should be made on a case-by-case basis for each assessment.
- Consultation and participation (with major stakeholders including technical experts) should be of utmost importance to the assessment process.

These provisional recommendations need to be further tested not only to address the “gap” but also other deficiencies in existing IA practices. The research also proposes several “next steps” to improve the overall IA process. In conclusion, this study provides the means of transferring the latest methodological research to the practitioners and planners in order to strengthen their approach and to better assess the relative importance of different policy options.

Source: Norman Lee (2006) “Bridging the gap between theory and practice in integrated assessment”, Environmental Impact Assessment Review 26: 57-78.

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