



IAIA
International Association
for Impact Assessment

“IA can help reduce vulnerability to a changing climate and thus increase the resilience of natural and human systems.”



AUTHOR

Sabine McCallum

With significant input from Phil Byer, Peter Croal, Wes Fisher, Arend Kolhoff, and other members of the Climate Change Section.

FASTIPS

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Climate Smart Decisions

Climate change affects various human and natural systems and poses a serious challenge to economic development and ecosystem sustainability. Potential beneficial and adverse effects due to climatic change should therefore be explicitly considered in decision-making about proposed policies, plans, programs, and projects. Addressing risks and opportunities is essential for taking decisions that will remain robust under future conditions, when many climate change impacts are expected to become more significant.

Impact Assessment (IA) can ensure that the design of policies, plans, programs, and projects properly addresses both the mitigation of climate change (the effects of the proposal on greenhouse gas emissions), and adaptation to climate change (effects of climate change on the proposal). Taking into account climate change in decision-making through IA can help reduce vulnerability to a changing climate and thus increase the resilience of natural and human systems. IA can further play a significant role in achieving national, regional or sectoral climate change objectives.

This note focuses on key things to know and to do when considering climate change in IA.

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

1. Climate change must be considered with, and not separate from, environmental, social, and economic issues affecting human and natural systems. A balanced approach that addresses both climate and non-climate risks is required.
2. IA should be used to assess climate change impacts over a time horizon of many decades (up to 100 years) to support decision-making that will reduce potential climate change risks, identify opportunities, and increase the coping capacity of natural and human systems in the long term. Careful planning and shorter-term decision-making are particularly important for small island nations and low-lying countries, which are among the most vulnerable to climate change and already exhibit noticeable adverse effects.
3. Uncertainties about future climate change and associated risks, including the difficulties in addressing them, should not be used as an excuse for inaction. The threat of climate change requires flexible approaches to cover a range of possible futures. IA can highlight suitable approaches and help in selecting among alternative mitigation and adaptation strategies and measures.
4. IA can foster a continuous review of the effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and legitimacy of decisions taken in response to anticipated climatic changes by establishing suitable mechanisms for monitoring and re-evaluations of risks.
5. Constant efforts are needed to document and analyze cases that have used IA to address climate change. This is to both improve IA processes and the understanding of them by decision-makers and other stakeholders.

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO

1. Address both climate change mitigation and adaptation as complementary issues when assessing proposed policies, plans, programs, and projects.
2. Use the latest, most reliable scientific information about climate change and its effects and build on practical experience so that decision-making is well supported and informed.
3. Address uncertainties about future climates by evaluating how well a proposal performs across a wide range of assumptions inevitably inherent in climate projections. Thus, recognize the value of identifying both no/low regrets and options with multiple benefits under varying conditions—while also applying adaptive management approaches.
4. Fully engage stakeholders, and include the knowledge held by local and Indigenous peoples who could be affected by climate change; they can help establish baseline conditions, conduct trend analyses, and identify and evaluate mitigation and adaptation measures.
5. Seek assistance from experienced communication specialists and journalists to help inform decision-makers of the relevance and implications of climate change to the proposals being assessed.

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Contact Maria Partidário (mpartidario@gmail.com), FasTips Series Editor.

FURTHER READING

IA practitioners should also read and follow the advice provided in the following IAIA Best Practice document:

“IAIA Climate Change in Impact Assessment International Best Practice Principles.” IAIA Special Publication #8 (SP8), April 2012, found at http://www.iaia.org/publicdocuments/special-publications/SP8%20Climate%20Change_web.pdf.

In addition, other groups continue to develop a growing body of information on climate change and IA, including guidelines and web-based tools, to help understand, predict and address future climate change in impact assessments. Selected literature and links to Internet web sites are available through the IAIA web site, www.iaia.org. Colleagues are encouraged to contribute information to this site by contacting IAIA.