

A Study on the Perception of Contractors on the Implementation of Social Impact Assessment

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Abstract

The aim of the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is to guarantee that the construction project will be safe and conform to accepted practice. But to ensure that the objectives of this SIA are achieved, contractors must be informed of how important this SIA is to the work they do to build the project. Therefore, three objectives—the contractor's perspective, SIA implementation factors, and strategies to improve the perception of SIA among contractors—were developed to determine the contractor's level of understanding of SIA. The majority of contractors believe that SIA should be adopted because it will benefit the construction industry, according to the first goal. Next, regarding the factors of SIA implementation, the contractor stated that, in addition to improving the sustainability of the project, the implementation of SIA can help the community in fostering a better relationship between the contractor and the community. The majority of respondents to the third objective—increasing contractors' perception of SIA—said that the government should include SIA in the construction code and offer more incentives to businesses that need it. This will help in educating construction partners about the value of SIA in construction projects. As a suggestion, training and incentives are crucial in promoting contractor involvement in SIA. This is to ensure that the contractor is more open to the interests of SIA while giving them an advantage as well.

1. Introduction

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) was a necessary step before starting a project, helping to understand how it affects the community and surroundings. It assesses both positive and negative impacts to ensure safety and minimize risks during and after the project. In the case of an offshore oil platform, initial construction negatively impacted the local community. Ongoing assessments were conducted to address concerns and ensure long-term benefits. In the Netherlands, where flooding was a significant issue, an integrated assessment considered ecological, economic, and social factors to develop effective flood control policies. This ensures the chosen policies are suitable based on cost and various criteria (Roy, 2004).

1.1 Problem Statement

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) evaluates how a project or policy affects people and communities, considering both positive and negative impacts. Measuring social impact can be challenging due to different perspectives and biases. Subjectivity in SIA, influenced by stakeholders' values, can lead to inconsistent evaluations and conflicts.

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To address this, transparency, stakeholder involvement, and considering multiple perspectives are crucial.

Contractors in SIA may lack expertise in understanding social dynamics and local communities, leading to incomplete assessments. Collaboration with specialists was vital for accurate consideration of social, cultural, and economic factors.

Starting SIA early helps identify potential issues, allowing for measures to minimize harm and maximize positive outcomes. SIA was essential for sustainable development, identifying potential negative impacts and allowing for proactive measures to improve project outcomes. Encouraging meaningful stakeholder participation ensures diverse perspectives are considered, promoting social justice.

SIA requirements in construction projects vary globally, being mandatory, voluntary, or recommended. In Malaysia, while SIA was not mandatory, some projects voluntarily undertake it for environmental and social responsibility, guided by sector guidelines within the broader Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows.

- i. What are the perceptions of contractors about the implementation of social impact assessment?
- ii. What are the factors of the implementation of social impact assessment?
- iii. What strategies can be taken to improve the perception of SIA among contractors?

1.3 Research objectives

The research objectives are as follows.

- i. To identify the perception of contractors about the implementation of social impact assessment.
- ii. To identify the factors of the implementation of social impact assessment.
- iii. To recommend strategies to improve the perception of SIA among contractors.

1.4 Research Scope

This study was conducted in Johor. Johor was chosen because the state is known for its diverse environmental resources, marine ecosystems and biodiversity. According to Adrian (2016), environmental pollution in Johor will affect the tourism industry in the state. This is because pollution problems such as open burning will affect the health of local residents and reduce their quality of life. This matter will indirectly affect social relations between local communities. Therefore, before the project is carried out, SIA needs to be carried out to ensure there is no risk to the local community and the environmental stability of the area.

In addition, Johor has a diverse society with a unique social context. Involving communities such as indigenous groups and stakeholders in the decision-making process allows their perspectives and concerns to be considered. In addition, this community involvement also allows them to make decisions and contribute ideas to implement projects positively (IAIA, 2018 & Hemmati & Adrien, 2008).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Social Impact Assessment (SIA)

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) was vital for considering human aspects in evaluating the environmental ecosystem's balance, ensuring the well-being of human life. Some confusion existed between SIA and socio-economic impact assessment, hindering the achievement of safe projects (Rossi, Drius & Brianezi, 2017).

SIA was applicable in various projects, including large infrastructure projects like dams and highways. In such projects, SIA helped assess potential impacts on local communities and cultural heritage, identifying and addressing social risks for sustainable outcomes (Vanclay, 2017).

Urban development projects, like regeneration or zoning changes, could also have profound social effects. SIA aided in understanding impacts on housing, community cohesion, service access, and social inequality, supporting decision-making in urban planning (Holland and Davies, 2010).

Projects related to mining, oil, gas extraction, or forestry often impacted local communities and indigenous peoples. SIA was crucial in understanding these impacts on livelihoods, cultural heritage, human rights, and community well-being, integrating social considerations into project planning (World Bank, 2010).

Various stakeholders, including project proponents and independent consultants, were responsible for SIA in a project. Project proponents engaged with stakeholders, collected data, and incorporated social considerations into project design. Independent consultants, specialized in environmental and social assessments, conducted SIAs, using their expertise to analyze impacts and provide

recommendations for mitigation (Hanna and Vanclay, 2013; Vanclay, 2017).

2.2 Issues of SIA

There are several issues involved in social impact assessment (SIA). Here are some issues that may come up:

(a) The challenge of the evaluation process.

According to Vanclay's (2002) article, the concept of social impact in the context of impact assessment highlights the issue of power asymmetry and the difficulty of ensuring meaningful participation of marginalized groups in the SIA process. These groups include indigenous communities, minority populations or individuals who are economically or developmentally disadvantaged. Because they are from marginalized groups, their voices and concerns are often not heard and lead to social injustice and inequitable outcomes. Because of this, the problem of power imbalance needs to be addressed and empower marginalized communities in the decision-making process to ensure that their perspectives are taken into account and to promote social justice.

2.3 Related Ways in SIA

Here are some ways that can be used in Social Impact Assessment (SIA) in the context of construction:

(a) Determine the purpose of the assessment

The first step is to determine the purpose of the SIA social impact assessment. Is the purpose to measure the effectiveness of construction, increase the participation of construction participants, or evaluate the overall social impact? Setting clear objectives will help in planning the assessment accurately (PLAN Malaysia, 2018).

2.4 Contractor's Perception

(a) Improvement of construction quality

SIA's social impact assessment can be used to improve and develop more effective construction strategies. This could include improvements to the system, training for builders, or more inclusive policy changes. Thus, the social impact assessment of SIA can help improve the overall quality of construction (IAIA, 2015).

(b) Complexity and limitations of the method

SIA social impact assessment involves complexity in choosing the right method to measure social impact and gather relevant data. However, each method has its own limitations and challenges, such as the subjectivity of interpretation or difficulties in measuring complex and multifaceted social impacts (Jodie & John, 2009).

2.5 Factors of the Implementation of SIA

Some factors that can affect the implementation of SIA include:

(a) Purposes and Scope

The purpose of social impact assessment and its scope are also important factors. Evaluation can be focused on certain aspects such as participant participation, socioeconomic impact, or the physical environment. Clarification of the clear purpose and scope will help in the planning and implementation of an accurate SIA (Aisyah, 2014).

2.6 Strategy to Implement SIA

To ensure the implementation of social impact assessments is always carried out consistently and effectively, here are some strategies that can be taken.

(a) Organizational Commitment

It is important for organizations or educational institutions involved in construction to have a strong commitment to social impact assessment. This can be reflected in the organizational policy that mandates the implementation of SIA in an orderly and integrated manner in every program or activity carried out (Basel & Issam, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In research design, there are 3 types of research methods, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. In this study, researcher would like to use qualitative method.

3.2 Qualitative

Qualitative research methods are research approaches that focus on in-depth understanding of the study through the collection, analysis and interpretation of non-numerical data. In qualitative research methods, researchers use a variety of data collection techniques, including interviews, participant observation, direct observation, document review, and audio or video recording (Rashidah, 2015). This approach allows the researcher to collect rich and in-depth data about the participants' perspectives and experiences.

Qualitative research provides space for researchers to explore unexpected dimensions and deepen understanding of complex studies. Qualitative research methods are very useful in understanding complexity, context, and human perspective in various fields such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and cultural studies. This approach allows the researcher to dig deep meaning and contextual understanding of the research being studied.

3.3 Research Flow

For this research, the researcher will use qualitative methods as a research methodology. The location that has been chosen to conduct this study is Johor. Johor was chosen as the research area because the state is currently booming in construction projects.

In order to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher will interview contractors who are currently involved in the construction project. With this method, the researcher can obtain a clearer answer thus helping the researcher complete this study.

Before the researcher interviews the contractor, the researcher needs to prepare the questions that will be asked during the interview. The purpose of preparing the questions is so that the researcher remains focused on the original purpose and the questions that will be presented will lead to the questions and objectives. The results of the interview will be transferred into a report or table based on the answers given by the contractor.

3.4 Instrument Study

The researcher used the interview method as a research instrument. This is because the researcher thinks the interview method makes it easier for the researcher to get more useful findings in this study. The interview method also allows the researcher to ask various questions that may be relevant during the interview session. In fact, respondents can also provide a variety of useful information during the interview session. According to Zanaton Hj. Iksan (2016), this opinion is acknowledged in a journal published by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

However, if respondents do not have time to be interviewed, then quantitative methods such as questionnaires will be used. This is because the questionnaire method saves more time and cost since the questionnaire can be distributed online. Respondents also do not need to spend time on the road to get to the interview location. According to Laura McKinney (2023), this opinion is acknowledged in the article Surveillance Packages.

3.5 Population

In the study area, Johor, the population in the area is increasing as time progresses. As the area is in a developing phase, with many new infrastructure and buildings being and will be built, the population in the area will also increase. This can be attributed to increased job opportunities. When a lot of new construction is carried out, there are of course many contractors who manage the area.

3.5.1 Respondents

In qualitative research, the main purpose is not to produce statistical generalizations, but to gain an in-depth picture of the experiences and perspectives of the individuals or groups involved. For this reason, the number of respondents required in qualitative research varies depending on the research design, the purpose of the research, the complexity of the phenomenon being studied, as well as the saturation of the data to be achieved.

In qualitative research, the method of interview approach or in-depth observation can provide the quality of information and the richness of the data is more important than the large number of respondents. Overall, the achievement of data saturation can be a criterion for determining a sufficient number of respondents.

3.6 Data Analysis

For data analysis, the researcher will use the content analysis method to collect the data obtained from the interviews. Content analysis is the process of identifying, analyzing and evaluating the content in a document, text, image or other media to gain a better understanding of the content, structure and characteristics of the content.

Content analysis can be done qualitatively. Qualitative analysis involves reading and human interpretation of content to identify emerging themes, sentiments, meanings or trends. While quantitative analysis involves the use of statistical tools or techniques to measure the frequency, distribution, or certain patterns in content, such as keyword analysis or social network analysis. Overall, content analysis can provide a deeper understanding thus enabling better and more effective decision making.

4. Data Analysis and Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

In order to make sure the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) meets the study's goals, the researcher will provide a data analysis of the contractor's perspective in chapter 4. As previously mentioned, this study employs a qualitative methodology that consists of interviewing a subset of contractors as respondents. Data collection is essential to the study's strength and to ensuring that it is accurate and transparent, helping to achieve its goals of determining contractors' perceptions of the social impact assessment's implementation, identifying the factors that influence that implementation, and suggesting strategies to enhance contractors' perceptions of SIA.

Four interviewees from various Johor, Malaysian companies participated in this technique. With the respondent's permission, both in-person and online interviews were done. The purpose of this study was to determine the contractor's degree of expertise regarding Social Impact Assessment (SIA) in the building sector.

4.2 Respondents Background

Table 1 below shows the respondents background involved in this study.

Table 1 Respondents background

Respondents	R1	R2	R3	R4
Position	Contract Manager	Contractor	Contractor	Contract Manager
Company	A	B	C	D
Grade	G7	G7	G7	G7
Experience in Construction Sector	23 years	15 years	10 years	25 years
Experience in using SIA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

4.3 Summary of the Perception of Contractors about the Implementation of SIA

Contractors often lack understanding of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) due to limited experience with corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Norajila, 2010). The majority of respondents emphasize the importance of SIAs in identifying and mitigating potential impacts on communities, fostering community involvement, and

promoting sustainable development (Wahab, 2021). SIAs are essential for recognizing a project's social impact, balancing social demands with economic factors, and promoting sustainable development (Lunkapis, 2020). This involves a systematic process of detecting, forecasting, assessing, and mitigating social consequences through stakeholder involvement (Langapis, 2020).

The timeframe for SIA implementation varies depending on project scope and typically occurs during the planning phase, lasting from a few months to a year (Abd Rahman, 2023). Project location, goals, and impacts play vital roles in early issue detection, community engagement, and achieving environmental and social objectives (Wijaya, 2021). Challenges in SIA include accurate data collection, predicting long-term impacts, and balancing stakeholder interests, which can affect project execution and community satisfaction (Said, 2002). SIA fosters positive relationships between stakeholders and communities, strengthens ties, and utilizes local expertise, enhancing project execution and long-term sustainability (Norja, 2023).

It enables early identification and management of implications, improves community relations, and balances developer and community interests, reducing conflicts (Lunkapis, 2020). Successful projects enhance a contractor's reputation as a socially conscious business, while SIA misjudgments can harm it, underscoring the importance of addressing social and environmental concerns for a contractor's reputation (Squarespace, 2021).

4.4 Summary of the Factors of the Implementation of SIA

Respondents in the second aim highlighted that Social Impact Assessment (SIA) benefits communities by fostering better relationships, reducing conflict, and enhancing project sustainability and decision-making (Lunkapis, 2020). The timeframe and cost of SIA vary based on project size and complexity but typically last from a few months to a year, ensuring thorough application to prevent or mitigate social impacts (Vanclay, 2015).

Despite challenges like additional time and expense, efficient SIA implementation can prevent long-term issues, emphasizing its importance in understanding and addressing developmental goals (Petkova, 2009). Contractors stressed the need for thorough research, community interaction, and openness to establish credibility and garner community support (Mejia, 2013). Involving the community through project displays, consultations, and feedback mechanisms aids in understanding project effects and addressing concerns (Gulakov, 2019).

Challenges may arise in balancing project requirements with community expectations, requiring careful consideration of social and economic goals (Esteves, 2011). Transparency and communication with stakeholders are crucial for project planning and execution (Iron, 2013). Feedback from the community through post-implementation reviews and monitoring helps in detecting and managing potential issues, reducing conflict (Esteves, 2012). Expert reports from social and environmental specialists provide credible insights and recommendations (Branch, 2019). Lastly, dissemination of findings and suggestions through various channels promotes accountability and transparency, fulfilling ethical communication responsibilities (Iron, 2013).

4.5 Summary of Recommends the Strategies to Improve the Perception of SIA among Contractors

In response to the first question, participants proposed government integration of SIA into regulations and charging businesses for it to incentivize contractor adoption, alongside awareness campaigns and training initiatives (Esteves, 2017). However, contractors typically aren't actively involved in SIA implementation, which could hinder comprehensive decision-making, as they often prioritize technical concerns (Vanclay, 2015).

Yet, considering social, economic, and environmental implications of projects can benefit contractors by enhancing their reputation and market competitiveness (Hong, 2020; Esteves, 2017). This recognition of social impact management also fosters improved community ties and long-term profitability, positioning contractors favorably in the market (Esteves, 2017). Effective community interaction, both online and in person, is crucial for addressing local concerns and fostering trust, ultimately expediting project approval (Esteves, 2017). However, challenges such as perceived costs and the need for additional training may arise, though these can be viewed as opportunities for skill enhancement (Vanclay, 2015). Potential incentives for contractors could include favorable treatment during procurement processes or tax benefits, motivating sustainable practices (Vanclay, 2015).

Simplifying the SIA process through specialist assistance and clear guidelines can also enhance its effectiveness for contractors (Ding, 2008). Additionally, promoting early contractor involvement and proactive issue resolution can foster cooperation in the SIA process (Bishop, 2009). Overall, educating contractors on the long-term benefits of sustainability and aligning SIA with business objectives can lead to increased project procurement opportunities and preference from authorities (Esteves, 2012).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

In summary, the research reveals that many contractors initially lacked awareness of Social Impact Assessment

(SIA) and its link to Corporate Social Responsibility. Despite this, respondents recognize SIA's value in identifying and mitigating negative effects on the community during building projects. When integrated into project planning, SIA helps balance social and economic considerations. Challenges include obtaining accurate data and managing stakeholders, but successful SIAs are seen as win-win situations that foster positive stakeholder relationships.

By providing valuable data, it promotes sustainability and informed decision-making. Despite obstacles like cost and time, participants emphasize the importance of proficient SIA to prevent persistent issues. Transparency, community understanding, and managing stakeholder interests are crucial for successful SIAs. Challenges include balancing project requirements with community expectations.

To encourage contractor involvement in SIA, training, awareness-building, and incentives are essential. Proactive engagement is seen as a strategy to enhance market competitiveness and prevent problems. Cooperation, early engagement, and open communication during the SIA process facilitate project planning. Informing contractors about the long-term benefits of sustainability and aligning SIA goals with corporate objectives are key tactics.

In conclusion, implementing SIA not only improves contractors' long-term success and reputation in the construction sector but also benefits the community. Proactive engagement, collaboration, and a solid understanding of SIA contribute to significant social impact and business opportunities.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

*The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Nurul Hazwani binti Yusri, Seow Ta Wee; **data collection:** Nurul Hazwani binti Yusri; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Nurul Hazwani binti Yusri; **draft manuscript preparation:** Nurul Hazwani binti Yusri, Seow Ta Wee, Zailawati Khalid. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.*

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