SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES

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What is the current landscape for impact assessments?

- Types – sustainability, integrated, regulatory, environmental, economic
- Levels – local, national, regional, sectoral, international
- Targets – policies, programmes, projects, regulations, agreements
- Timing – before (ex ante), during, after (ex post)

What makes an impact assessment "sustainable"?

- Examines LONG-TERM flows, investments and effects
- Examines economic, environmental and social impacts in equal measure
- Identifies synergies and trade-offs across domains
- Respects open and transparent processes

What should be the relationship to other types of assessments?

- Integrate sustainability criteria into other assessment approaches
- Conduct assessments separately and use sustainability assessments as integrating mechanism
- Merge all approaches into overarching sustainability assessments
- Develop general methodology for “impact assessments”

What are the main steps for sustainability assessments?

- **Relevance analysis** -- is sustainability relevant?
- **Scoping analysis** – what are the extent/depth, procedures and tools for the assessment?
- **Impact analysis** -- what are the short-and long-term economic, environmental and social impacts?
- **Comparative analysis** – what are the major synergies, conflicts and trade-offs?
- **Associative analysis** – what measures can be put in place to mitigate harmful impacts?
- **Political analysis** – which path is the least-cost (economic, environmental and social) option?

What are the main sustainability assessment tools?

- Economic – cost/benefit analysis, modelling, regressions, scenarios
- Environmental – life-cycle analysis, material flows, resource accounting, NAMEA, ecological footprint
- Social – sustainable livelihoods, human and social capital measurement, participatory processes

How can synergies and trade-offs be identified?

- Comparative value analysis – impacts are scored according to pre-set values
- Utility analysis – impacts are rated on a uniform scale and weighted
- Cost-benefit analysis – positive and negative impacts are assigned monetary values and compared
- Multi-criteria analysis – both quantitative and qualitative impacts are ranked on pre-set criteria
- Risk assessment – degrees of risk reduction identified with pre-set risk thresholds

How can long-term and intergenerational concerns be identified?

- **Capital indicators** – assess stocks and flows of economic, environmental, human and social capital according to discount rates
- **Trend lines** – identify positive, negative or constant
- **Irreversibility** – determine degree to which effects can be reversed
- **Burden-shifting** – determine degree to which negative impacts are shifted to future generations
- **Cost of inaction** – estimate long-term costs of failure to act at present

What are the important procedural aspects of sustainability assessments?

- Which agency should carry out the assessment and which other agencies should be involved?
- How and at which stages should stakeholders/civil society be involved and consulted?
- How and to whom should the assessment results be communicated?
- What is the legal and political status of the assessment recommendations?
- To what extent should sustainability assessments be mandated and embedded in existing procedures?

What are the main difficulties with sustainability assessments?

- Giving equal attention to the three spheres and adequate attention to the longer-term
- Assigning monetary values to environmental and social assets for comparisons
- Identifying trade-offs – presenting positive vs. negative assessments in the three spheres on a comparable basis
- Reconciling conflicts between economic, environmental and social goals and providing the basis for political decisions

Is it possible to recommend general steps for sustainability assessments?

- Identify level and target (e.g. national policy, local project)
- Establish sustainability relevance
- Select quick scan vs. more detailed assessment
- Identify relevant tools (qualitative, quantitative)
- Assess impacts, synergies and conflicts
- Identify alternative policy paths from least to most sustainable
- Present findings to policy-makers and stakeholders