

## Defining security negotiating rights: The influence of environmental impact assessment legislation

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Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is used to determine a development project's environmental and social costs and benefits. In the 1980's, environmental groups in Sri Lanka lobbied for, and in many cases won, inclusion of environmental regulations into their legal systems. Simultaneously, many international financial institutions began to require the completion of an EIA for securing funds. The EIA process institutionalizes opportunities for groups in society to enforce public accountability through a provision for mandatory public hearings. In the case of energy-sector development, EIA has forced the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) to interact with citizens in very direct, and often unpredictable, ways. During public hearings and social protests, disagreements between state officials and local residents over a project's potential costs and benefits frequently arise. Litigations following from such disagreements have increased the influence of the public in development planning and as a result have influenced political culture. Exploring how the EIA process has been used in energy-sector development (i.e., Norachchulai and Ethul Kotte), this paper examines how different ideas of 'security' are constructed and become premised on a notion of citizen rights. Using written documents, participant observation at local protests and public hearings, and stakeholder interviews, I illustrate how the use of environmental legislation reshapes energy-sector planning from a technical exercise to a political process and re-orders relationships of power between state institutions and groups in society. An examination of the struggles over producing power in Sri Lanka has implications for other states in the process of redesigning energy security strategies and for citizen-action groups trying to protect their local environments and maintain access to their livelihood resources.

Key words: Public accountability; Negotiating rights; Environmental impact assessment; Livelihood security; Sri Lanka; Energy sector