

BOOK REVIEW



Nihal Amerasinghe:
*Design, Appraisal, and
Management of Sustainable
Development Projects*
Philippines: Demand Philippines,
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Overview

A project, whether it is funded by public or private funds, involves several stages or steps, each demanding careful consideration in guaranteeing its sustainability. This book written by Professor Nihal Amerasinghe provides a comprehensive discussion of both theory and practice on various stages in the project cycle. What makes this book particularly important is that it expands the literature on public sector projects.

The book comes at a time when many developing countries, including Sri Lanka, are concerned about improving the efficiency of public sector investments and their sustainability. There are a number of criticisms against development projects implemented in Sri Lanka in recent decades. Poor project identification & design, lack of sustainability, and inefficient project implementation (among other factors) are frequently highlighted by the critics. It is often argued that one of the reasons for project failure is the lack of sound knowledge related to various projects stages.

Hence, public investment projects, mostly financed by domestic and/or foreign loans, need to be both efficient and sustainable in the long-run. In Sri Lanka, many concerned citizens question the extent to which some the publicly-funded development projects implemented in recent decades have been efficiently implemented and the extent to which they have been sustained in the long-run. As shown by development literature, inefficient public sector investments not only waste scarce resources but they are also a

common source of macroeconomic instability and crises. Hence, officials responsible for project identification, design, appraisal, implementation, and monitoring require a comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge on those stages in a project.

Due to a number of factors, it is not an easy task to identify and effectively implement public sector investment projects. In the context of developing countries, it is often argued that analytical and technical capacity for project development and implementation has been quite inadequate. On the other hand, developing such capacity within the public sector and without has been greatly hampered by the lack of suitable courses and appropriate course material.

Most university- and other courses which teach the subject are designed to teach a limited scope related to project cycle such as project appraisal and management, giving greater priority to private sector investment projects. More often than not, course material is produced not by practitioners but by academics with limited hands-on experience in the subject.

This book distinguishes itself by covering almost all aspects of public sector investment projects, as related by an expert with in-depth theoretical, technical, and hands-on experience in these areas. It is comprehensive and encyclopedic in its coverage. It provides a compact, accessible and rigorous exposition of the theoretical underpinnings (and limitations) of key tools and techniques, and illustrates their application in practical settings. The step-by-step procedure and the use of case studies to illustrate the concepts, tools and approaches is particularly effective: they help to highlight the importance of many issues that are typically soft-pedalled or ignored altogether in academic courses.

Coverage

Split into five eminently readable parts, the book covers the entire project cycle. In Part I, the author attempts to discuss various broader topics that come under the key theme of projects and development. After a brief introduction, Part I goes on to discuss the evolution of development concerns around public sector investment projects, highlighting how concerns relating to public sector projects evolved from a mere six areas to 47. The evolution of development concerns is summarised diagrammatically, making it easier for readers to grasp key concerns in different decades. Moreover, Part I briefly discusses the role of planning in the development process.

Part II deals with the broader theme of project identification and design. Chapters in Part II discuss various tools and techniques employed in project identification and designing stages. Some tools, such as stakeholder analysis and problem- and objectives-

analyses are discussed in order to provide both technical and practical exposure. Interestingly, several cases studies and examples are given and discussed in order to help readers grasp the key ideas. Similarly, some concepts such as the logical framework are discussed in detail while providing sufficient coverage to some of the areas such as project scheduling and budgeting.

Part III of the book deals with project feasibility and appraisal, and covers areas such as financial-, economic-, market-, technical-, institutional- & organisational-, social-, and environmental analyses. Each Chapter equips the reader with both technical and practical exposure supporting their grasp of key messages in the topics. Standard project appraisal texts are often confined to financial and economic analyses, and ignore areas such as social-, environmental-, and market analyses, which have been essential to improving the socio-economic-environmental sustainability of development projects.

Part IV discusses several important areas related to project implementation and control: specifically the role of project manager, project management team, and project monitoring and supervision are discussed by providing both technical and practical tools. Tools and techniques discussed in this section are useful for project managers and potential candidates aspiring to be project managers. Project management is one of the most important areas for project sustainability. A number of tools and techniques for project monitoring and supervision are discussed, thereby equipping project managers with essential skills.

In Part V, Amerasinghe deals with project completion and evaluation-related topics. This section deals with project-completion reporting and evaluation techniques & criteria. The latter plays an important role in identifying project outcomes and impacts. Multi-lateral financial organisations adopt their own frameworks for evaluation: such frameworks being discussed in detail, thereby providing readers with an in-depth understand into the subject area.

Encyclopedic and Pedagogical Value

While the contents of the book are encyclopedic in detail, they are presented in pedagogical manner. Key points are summarised and references and notes presented at the end of each chapter. Relevant exercises and cases are provided to illustrate the points, which makes learning easier: particularly since the suggested solutions also follow. It is indeed clear throughout that the author has written this book solely to make it easier for the reader, in this case the student, to better understand and learn.

The book can be used both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It could also be used for courses of varying duration and scope. Given the in-depth coverage of the book, it is possible to develop a few course modules which could be taught at various levels, all of them based on the volume. Moreover, it could serve as a useful guidebook for practitioners who are new to different dimensions of public sector investment projects.