

The history of the SAIEA

The Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment's (SAIEA's) 'platform' is the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Sustainable Development Strategy, which identifies environmental impact assessment (EIA) as a key planning tool in the promotion of sustainable development in the SADC Region. Most Governments in the region have developed adequate policies, laws and guidelines requiring an EIA to be completed for projects that may have significant impacts on the social and natural environment. However, government departments and their officials cannot cope with the volume and complexity of the EIA reports they must review. Similarly, they lack the resources for the long-term monitoring, research and strategic analysis that are needed to track progress towards achieving sustainable development. This often results in inadequate EIAs and a lack of enforcement of the recommendations made in the EIA, resulting in the implementation of projects that are often inappropriate or unsustainable.

After a number of years of planning and consultation, SAIEA was established in 2001 to support public and private sector institutions involved in EIA, and to help overcome the capacity gaps that currently exist in this field in southern Africa.

SAIEA has been led and guided through its infant years by the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA), and directed by its Board which consists of prominent individuals from academic institutions, government departments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector within the region, as well as representatives from IAIA and SADC.

How SAIEA provides its services

SAIEA has its headquarters in Windhoek, Namibia, where a small core staff manages a network of specialists located throughout SADC and beyond. These specialists are engaged through short-term contracts, so that the specific needs of the client can be matched with the required skills.

EIA guidance

SAIEA assists clients in the initial stages of an EIA study by helping to develop the terms of reference for the EIA. This results in a more efficient and effective EIA that focuses on the main issues relating to the project, and provides appropriate mechanisms for stakeholder input.

Reviewing EIA studies

On request, SAIEA conducts independent reviews of completed EIAs by contracting a small team of experts to review the report using a comprehensive review format. The review assesses the quality of the EIA report, the consideration of alternatives, the extent to which the process included stakeholder participation, and whether the EIA provides decision-makers with practical suggestions of how to reduce negative impacts whilst augmenting the positive ones. SAIEA does not take any decisions regarding the future of a project: this is the responsibility of the Government or competent authority concerned, depending on the legislative framework of the relevant country and the recommendations of the EIA.

Monitoring implementation

SAIEA assists with monitoring the implementation of projects and adherence to environmental management plans that have been developed as a result of the EIA.

Strategic research

SAIEA conducts research into the effectiveness and potential role of EIA and assists Governments and other organisations with policy development and revision, and strategic planning.

Capacity-building

In order to strengthen capacity within the region, SAIEA provides a range of training and skills-development programmes relating to EIA and sustainable development. Training is targeted at government officials, developers, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and EIA practitioners. Current activities include the development of training materials, presenting short training courses and hosting the Professional Development Programme, which provides participants with hands-on experience in conducting an EIA under field conditions.

