

Preface

The long-term objective of this publication is to improve the role of environmental impact assessment (EIA) in promoting sustainable development in southern Africa. Its short-term objective is to provide a constructive analysis of the application of EIA so that southern African countries can apply EIA more effectively within decision-making processes.

To improve the effectiveness of EIA and to maximise its role in promoting sustainable development, it is necessary to first have a clear understanding of the current application of EIA and the factors that influence its effectiveness – this publication attempts to do this. These factors include the following:

- Governance and the participation of the public in decision-making
- The policy and legislative framework
- The political and institutional environments
- Attitudes and awareness of decision-makers towards EIA and the environment
- Poverty and human development (including HIV/AIDS and gender)
- Economic and development characteristics (including demographic changes), and
- Transboundary issues.

Other 'frame conditions', such as globalisation, also affect the ability of governments to plan (and adopt tools such as EIA), but were not part of this study. However, they remain central to the 'big picture' and must thus be recognised in the contextual setting.

Against this background, this publication provides a regional analysis and a situation report of 13 southern African countries on their –

- national vision for sustainable development
- biophysical, social and economic characteristics and limitations
- transboundary impacts and issues
- current and emerging policies and legislation for EIA
- current and emerging institutional arrangements relevant to EIA
- human resources and capacity
- use of EIA in the planning and implementation of policies, plans, programmes and projects (and, thus, the contribution of EIA in promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty), and
- critical areas for future study and support.

Methodology

Compiling this publication required extensive research and consultation throughout the region. Multi-stakeholder workshops and focus group discussions were held in most countries, where local experts shared their knowledge and provided their opinions on the state of EIA within their country.

The bulk of this publication is structured as a series of country reports, which on their own provide an insight into the state of EIA at their respective national level. The country reports were compiled according to a pre-determined template, but individual authors have used their own judgement to emphasise issues expressed during the in-country consultations. The case studies selected for inclusion in each chapter are meant to illustrate how EIA influenced the decision-making process, generally in a positive way.

Whilst there are many examples of poor EIA practice we have tried to show the value of EIA rather than dwell on the disappointments. Appendices to each chapter provide additional information and a list of references and contact persons in each country. Whilst much of this information will date rapidly, it is of immediate value and can be updated in the future.

The country reports are preceded by two introductory chapters which give an overview of the state of the environment in southern Africa, and summarise the key concepts of EIA as a tool for attaining sustainable development. Lastly, the common threads in the region are identified in the final chapter of the book, which also provides an analysis that captures the bigger picture of EIA in southern Africa.

What next?

The Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment (SAIEA) hopes to use the information gathered during the preparation of this publication to seek ways of supporting the development of policy and the improvement of EIA practice in southern Africa. Issues such as the greater application of Strategic Environmental Assessment, achieving greater efficiency in the EIA process, involving all stakeholders and transforming EIAs into management actions, require greater attention. Similarly, the role of EIA in guiding the growing informal or small-scale sector and in addressing cumulative and transboundary impacts is not well developed in the region.

This publication is a modest contribution towards assessing our progress since the 1992 United Nations 'RIO' Conference on Environment and Development, and will hopefully result in heightened awareness and improved EIA practice over the next decade and beyond.