EIA report quality: lessons from the first 17 years in South Africa

IAIA 2015, Florence 20-23 April 2015

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OUTLINE OF THE PRESENTATION

1. Introduction and background
2. EIA in South Africa
3. Report quality
4. Perceptions of the process
5. Digital divide
6. Conclusion

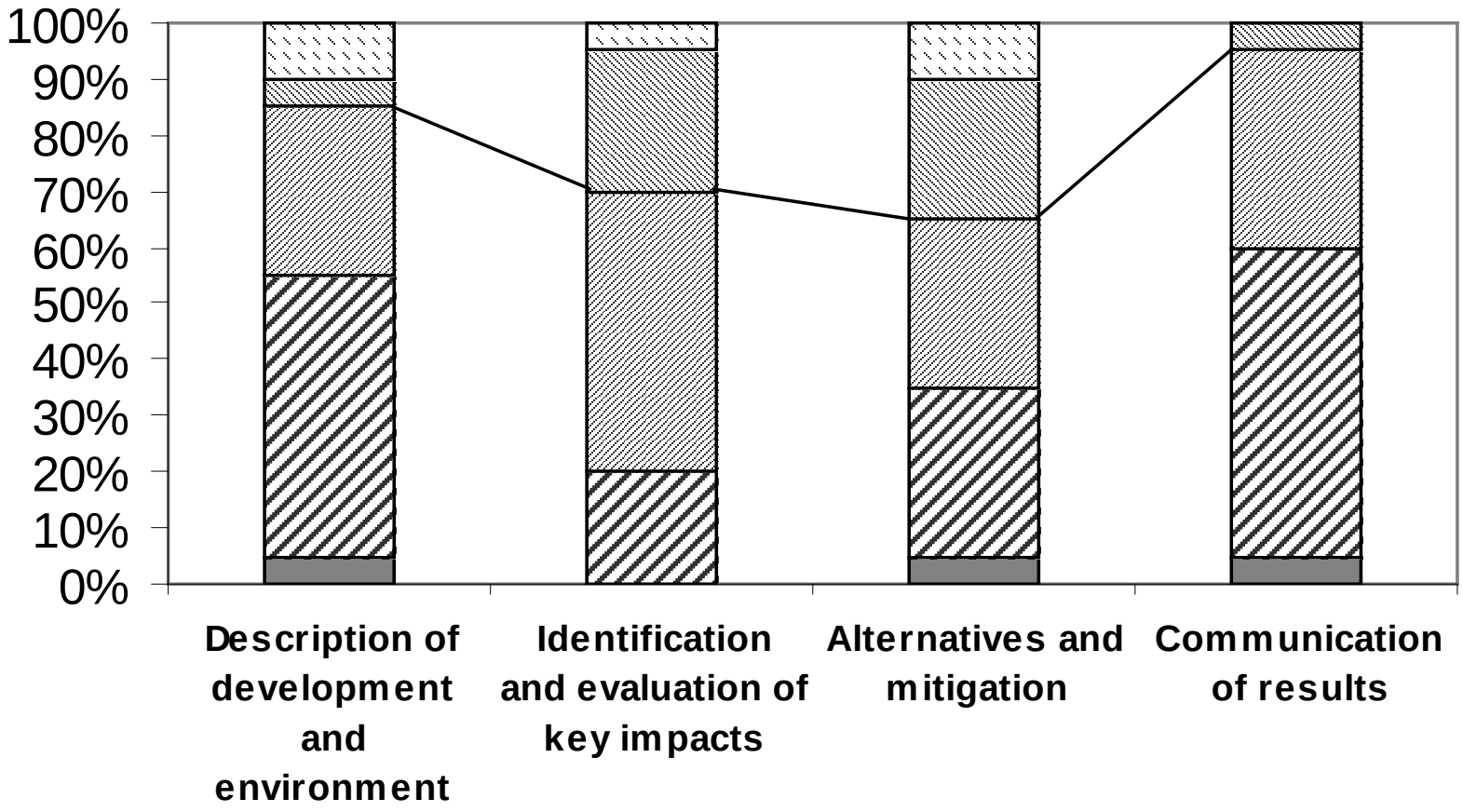
1. Introduction and background

- After 17 years of mandatory EIA in South Africa an investigation of the state and quality of EIA is appropriate.
- One approach is review of EIA report quality
- *Caveat* : Report quality is not a guarantee of EIA effectiveness nor of EIA quality, but the report has an important role, since it is read by the decision maker.
- Hence, a good quality report improves the likelihood of better decision making,
- ..and of a higher quality process..

2. EIA in South Africa

- Voluntary to 1997
- 4 Mandatory regimes:
  - Environment Conservation Act (ECA)
    - ECA: 1998 - 2006
  - National Environmental Management Act (NEMA)
    - NEMA 1: 2006 -2010
    - NEMA 2: 2010 -2006
    - NEMA 3: 2014 -

3. Report quality



3. Report quality results

Consistent pattern of generally satisfactory performance, conforming to international observations

- Stronger: descriptive and presentational components
- Weaker: impact significance, alternatives and mitigation

So, an overall picture of health regarding EIA report quality.

However, first longitudinal analyses reveal some concerns

Longitudinal study

EIA system		1997			2006			2010		
		A-C	A-B	E-F	A-C	A-B	E-F	A-C	A-B	E-F
Overall grade		91	18	0	80	7	0	70	17	3
RA 1	**Description of development, local environment & baseline conditions**	91	45	0	80	13	0	83	43	0
1.1	Description of the development	100	45	0	100	27	0	97	83	0
1.2	Site description	82	36	0	53	7	20	87	50	0
1.3	Wastes	9	9	45	53	20	40	53	30	23
1.4	Environment description	91	64	0	93	67	0	73	27	10
1.5	Baseline conditions	100	64	0	100	67	0	77	47	3
RA 2	**Identification and evaluation of key impacts**	36	0	0	33	0	13	80	13	3
2.1	Definition of impacts	45	27	0	47	0	7	90	47	3
2.2	Identification of impacts	36	9	45	27	13	53	73	27	0
2.3	Scoping	91	55	0	80	47	7			
2.4	Prediction of impact magnitude	0		91	0	0	87	63	13	7
2.5	Assessment of impact significance	64	18	9	53	13	20	67	13	20
RA 3	**Alternatives and mitigation**	55	9	9	53	13	7	57	27	10
3.1	Alternatives	64	9	0	67	47	20	63	15	17
3.2	Scope and effectiveness of mitigation measures	82	64	0	87	53	0	47	27	23
3.3	Commitment to mitigation	18	18	36	33	13	33			
RA 4	**Communication of results**	100	64	0	100	40	0	50	23	10
4.1	Layout of the report	100	73	27	80	60	7	67	23	10
4.2	Presentation	100	82	0	93	73	0	67	17	0
4.3	Emphasis	100	82	0	100	67	0	40	17	17
4.4	Non-technical summary	82	82	18	100	60	0	43	37	50

Key

Weaker 1997- 2006	Weaker 1997- 2010	Improved 1997-2006	Improved 1997- 2010	Improved 2006-2010	No change

Regulatory era		ECA [n= 10]			NEMA [n= 13]		
Summary grades		A-C	A-B	E-F	A-C	A-B	E-F
Overall grade		40	20	10	53	15	0
RA 1	Description of development, environment & social baseline	70	30	0	70	16	0
1.1	Development and local environment	90	20	0	77	39	0
1.2	Social baseline	60	30	10	54	16	0
RA 2	Identification and evaluation of key impacts	40	20	40	54	8	39
2.1	Identification of impacts	40	20	30	39	8	38
2.2	Social vs. biophysical impacts	50	30	30	70	16	23
2.3	Impact significance	40	10	50	53	15	38
2.4	Duration	40	30	40	61	46	23
2.5	Public participation	80	30	20	62	16	30
RA 3	Alternatives and mitigation	40	10	40	53	15	46
3.1	Alternatives	40	10	50	38	15	46
3.2	Mitigation measures	30	10	40	47	16	46
3.3	Commitment to mitigation	50	0	40	38	15	46
RA 4	Communication of results	80	20	0	77	46	0
4.1	Layout of the report	80	40	0	92	54	0
4.2	Presentation	100	70	0	100	85	0
4.3	Emphasis	60	20	10	61	23	8
4.4	Non-technical summary	50	20	0	69	23	0

Key

Strength

Potential strength

Acceptable

Potential weakness

Weakness

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3. Report quality

- This decrease is in contrast to observations abroad.

Moreover…….

- preliminary investigations into perceptions of the EIA process reveal a different picture,
- of disappointment, discontent and apathy towards the EIA process.

4. Perceptions: preliminary study

Proponents

If effectiveness of EIA is seen as achieving objectives including improved Environmental awareness (Arts *et al*. 2012), a sombre picture emerges.

- Even after the EIA process & authorization, environmental issues are still seen as less important than profit.
- EIA is a legal hurdle that limits wealth creation.

4. Perceptions of public stakeholders:

Rural and urban poor communities:

- Ignorance and apathy towards the EIA process
- Inability to participate in terms of commonly used PP methods
- Investigation of their perceptions was used as an opportunity to air grievance and issues about non-environmental issues

- Currently – investigation into more participatory approaches to EIA PP e.g. Participatory Rural Appraisal

4. Perceptions of the EIA process

Partly rooted in the dualism of South African society where first and third world are confronted by conflicting demands of development, poverty alleviation, and conservation.

EIA practice is anomalous with a conceptual base in first world decision making, while the basic survival needs of poorer communities pose serious threats to the environment.

5. Digital divide

Dualism also reflected in a digital divide.

Digital : First world component of EIA

- Legislation, authorities, proponents, EIA practitioners, first-world stakeholder component.

Non-digital : Third-world component of EIA

- Stakeholders from impoverished, undereducated communities

6. Conclusions

- These findings raise questions as to the utility of the report quality results and how quality review should take place in different contexts to those for which review packages were designed.

- Research suggests that, whilst EIA Report quality is used as a surrogate for EIA quality – it is somewhat restricted in terms of the conclusions that can be drawn.

6. Conclusions

1. The EIA report quality review process only looks at the written document, and not the extent to which EIA has developed thinking and changed attitude and learning - like the IEMA Quality mark processing the UK aims to identify.
2. There is a need to advance the review process, but also to advance practice.
3. South Africa may need to learn from practice elsewhere in order to be able to develop its own system that addresses the persistent duality.

Thank You

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