

Can social impact assessment contribute to social development outcomes in an emerging economy?

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ABSTRACT:

Social impact assessment (SIA) addresses the “people aspect” of development-induced change by empowering communities with a voice in the environmental impact assessment process. Globally, poverty and inequality is growing. Countries with emerging economies are especially affected, and SIA conducted within this context necessitates mitigation of both the direct impacts of particular developments as well as the social legacies that entrench poverty and inequality. Social development is an approach that can be used to reduce poverty and inequality. This paper analyses the practice of SIA and its potential to contribute to social development outcomes in emerging economies. SIA, as practiced in South Africa, was analysed from the theoretical framework of social development using an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The findings indicate that weak implementation of mitigation, monitoring and management measures dilute the potential for SIA to achieve social development outcomes. Through minor evolution of SIA practice, the process can lay a firm foundation to facilitate social development outcomes, especially considering its potential contribution to poverty reduction through the social protection floor, skills development and job creation.

KEY WORDS: social impact assessment, social development, emerging economy, poverty, inequality, South Africa

Introduction

Social impact assessment (SIA) emerged within the environmental impact assessment (EIA) field where it addresses ‘people-aspects’ and is recognised as being a voice for affected communities during the development process (Esteves et al., 2011; Vanclay et al., 2015). The guidance document for social impact assessment produced by the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) suggests that SIA is not only an impact assessment instrument, but also a methodological approach or framework that contributes to development by ensuring better outcomes for communities (Vanclay et al., 2015). Empowering communities

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that may be positively or negatively affected by development is a critical consideration in emerging economies where rapid economic development often precedes social development. Social inequality, high unemployment rates and disparity of education typify countries with emerging economies (OECD, 2011). These challenges are often exacerbated by uncontrolled in-migration, extreme poverty, conflict about resources, corruption and political instability. Notwithstanding the rapid development and perceived economic growth in emerging economies, the majority of the population often have inadequate access to basic services and live in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2012). Countries with emerging economies include India, Indonesia, Columbia, Kenya, Poland, Mexico, Malaysia, Brazil, Russia and South Africa, amongst others (Bremmer, 2015).

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development emphasises the importance of matching economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection to achieve sustainable development (United Nations [Sa]). Despite the fact that the Brundtland Commission definition of sustainable development stating ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED, 1987) has been used for about 30 years, and the emphasis placed on social and economic aspects by United Nations 2030 Agenda (UN [Sa]), the EIA process often emphasises ecological issues (Bijl, 2011). However, in countries with emerging economies the policy framework for sustainable development extends beyond the EIA process, and includes policies focussed on social reform that is not typical in developed countries. These may include, for example, strong economic incentives for job creation that become a dominant influence on the mitigation of impacts. Job creation may become an overriding consideration when weighed against other negative impacts of development in such circumstances. In the current global economic climate issues previously associated only with emerging economies are starting to affect developed countries as well. In 2015 approximately 197,1 million people were unemployed globally and this number is expected to increase by 2,3 million in 2016, and a further 1,1 million by 2017 (ILO, 2016). Income inequality has increased in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis and many developed nations now approach levels of inequality previously only observed in emerging economies (ILO, 2016). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that inequality in OECD countries is the highest since records began in the 1970’s (OECD, 2015). Inequality threatens economic growth and undermines social cohesion, increases social and political tension and can cause instability and conflict (UNDP, 2013). It would therefore be difficult to reduce poverty levels unless inequality is addressed as they are interrelated. It is within the context of poverty and inequality that SIA in developing countries is conducted.

SIA aligns closely with the field of social development, which deals with planned social change. Although social change is a natural process that takes place continuously, there are projects and policies that trigger social change (Vanclay, 2002). Development-induced social change is not voluntary, and therefore it is often perceived in a negative light (Harvey & Bice, 2014). Although social development also deals with planned social change, the focus is to promote the wellbeing of the population as a whole within the context of a dynamic multifaceted development process (Midgley, 2014). Social development aims to ensure that economic development results in real positive improvements in the quality of life of the poor through establishing empowering social programmes and administrative arrangements (Gray, 2006). Social development re-emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century as a response to unequal and distorted development (Patel, 2005) and is a pro-poor strategy promoting participation for those who are socially excluded in development activities, to ensure social and economic justice, human rights, social solidarity and active citizenship (Patel, 2008). Social development foresees a collaborative partnership approach between the government, civil society and the private sector, with the government playing an active leadership role (Patel, 2008).

The SIA guidance document suggests that all projects should aim for sustainable social development outcomes (Vanclay et al., 2015), and accordingly social development forms part of SIA best practice in theory. The aim of this paper is to analyse the practice of SIA and its potential to contribute to social development outcomes, especially in emerging economies. The study was done in the emerging economy context of South Africa, but the findings are relevant to emerging economies globally. The first section of the paper presents the South African perspective as an example of socio-economic aspects and policy frameworks in an emerging economy. The second section presents the theoretical framework outlining the specific challenge of poverty and inequality faced by emerging economies and how it impedes the impact assessment process. The third section presents the research methods, followed by a presentation and discussion of the findings and finally conclusions on whether SIA can be used to address some of the challenges through social development.

Socio-economic aspects and policies in an emerging economy: the South African perspective

South Africa is similar to countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, Sweden, Finland, China and Malaysia, amongst others (Burdge & Taylor, 2012), in which SIA is predominately commissioned by the government as part of the EIA legislation (Du Pisani & Sandham, 2006). In other instances SIA may be a requirement from bi-lateral lending and aid organisations (Burdge & Taylor, 2012), especially if the project in question has international

investors. South Africa has one of the strongest economies in Africa and the World Bank ranks it as an “upper middle income country” (RSA, 2013), but despite this many South Africans are still trapped in poverty. Similar to other countries with emerging economies, South Africa has a dual economy, meaning that there is a well-developed “first economy” with a mature financial and industrial base where people are paid well and have access to collective bargaining, and a “second economy” which is underdeveloped, informal, remuneration is low and living conditions are poor (RSA, 2013). The biggest challenges in South Africa are poverty and inequality as millions of people are still excluded socially and economically (NPC, 2012). The report on Poverty Trends in South Africa indicates that roughly 23 million people, almost half the citizens of the country, live below the poverty line (StatsSA, 2014). The gap between rich and poor is significant, and the majority of the poorest people are black Africans, an indicator of the legacy of apartheid (RSA, 2012; Woolard, 2002). The South African Gini-coefficient, an indication of the disparity between rich and poor citizens in a country, is 0.69, which is in the top five per cent globally (IMF, 2013). One of the root causes of poverty in South Africa is the inability of the labour market to create opportunities for low-skilled workers (Chibba & Luiz, 2011). South Africa had an official unemployment figure of 25.5% in 2015 (StatsSA, 2015). This means that almost a quarter of economically active people in South Africa are unemployed. In September 2015, almost 17 million people relied on social grants (Ferreira, 2016).

The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) in South Africa regulates the EIA industry as custodian of the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) 107 of 1998. SIA is not an explicit regulatory requirement, but NEMA gives the social component of environmental management equal status to environmental and economic components and stresses that people and their needs must be the first priority of environmental management (Du Pisani & Sandham, 2006). SIA is fully integrated into the EIA process (Du Pisani & Sandham, 2006). South African legislation is anthropocentric and human rights are enshrined in the Constitution (RSA, 1996). Building sustainable human communities is one of the key focus areas of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and Action Plan (NSSD1) published by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA, 2011). The NSSD1 defines a sustainable human settlement as ‘meeting the different needs of its residents, including housing, basic services, community facilities, transport and livelihood/job opportunities, while at the same time, being sensitive to the surrounding ecosystems and natural resources’ (DEA, 2011:28). Section 24 of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) and the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 unambiguously provide an opportunity for sustainability thinking by highlighting the connection between poverty, environmental degradation and quality of life issues (Bond et al., 2014). Despite this clear mandate and the

intent behind the legislation, the EIA regulatory environment has been exposed to frequent alterations since 2006 in an effort to make the process quicker and more efficient, which resulted in an overly structured legislative process (Bond et al., 2014). Although the rights underpinning public consultation remain in place, the refinement of the EIA legislation has resulted in erosion of some of these rights in practice (Retief, 2010). The current reality is that communities are rushed through consultation processes, with little allowance to honour cultural and traditional procedures, which in turn instils a sense of mistrust in the EIA process.

Public hearings on the *Efficacy of South Africa's EIA Regime* conducted in 2013 by the Portfolio Committee on Water and Environmental Affairs in the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, considered that although EIA is a key support tool for sustainable development, aspects of its implementation continue to be a challenge in a developing context, especially when attempting to balance local socio-economic, political and ecological priorities (De Lange, 2013). A particular challenge that was identified is addressing social, economic and environmental aspects in an integrated manner (De Lange, 2013). There is a perception that public involvement complicates the EIA process and is seen as a threat to economic development rather than an opportunity for sustainable development (Bond et al., 2014). This view is not only held in developing countries, as Bond et al. (2014:52) states: "Indeed, the highest level of Government seem to now view IA as a burden that threatens economic development and has sought to restrict its application through screening changes for EIA in Canada and the UK, through restrictions and increased focus on timelines in South Africa and Western Australia".

Although the policy context in South Africa, as in many other countries, is supportive towards the social aspects of environmental management, it is arguably being eroded by the desire for economic development. Economic development is often viewed in isolation, and the synergy between social development and economic development is not taken into account. Given this context, SIA's potential to contribute to social development provides an opportunity for impact assessment to regain its role in the quest for sustainable development. To understand why SIA should contribute to social development, it is necessary to take cognisance of some of the challenges of poverty and inequality faced by emerging economies.

The challenge of poverty and inequality in emerging economies

Many of the challenges faced by emerging economies originate in poverty and inequality. These challenges often have a direct effect on the impact assessment process, as they can influence the ability of affected communities to fully participate due to power imbalances or lack of resources. Poverty is a multidimensional concept. Traditionally a person has been

defined as poor only if their income is below the defined poverty line of their country (UNDP, 1997). This perspective is still used by institutions such as the World Bank, the United Nations and other development agencies to enable them to track global poverty and measure progress on global goals (World Bank, 2015). According to the United Nations Development Plan, a more comprehensive way to view poverty is through the basic need perspective, which states that poverty is a deprivation of material requirements for minimally acceptable fulfilment of human needs, including food. It goes beyond the lack of private income and includes needs for basic health and education and essential services that the community must provide to prevent people from being poor. It also recognises the need for participation and employment (UNDP, 1997). Closely associated to the basic need perspective is the capability perspective, which describes poverty as the absence of some basic capabilities to function (Sen, 1999). A poor person lacks the opportunity to achieve minimally acceptable levels of this functioning. The functioning can vary from physical aspects like being well nourished, adequately clothed and sheltered, to complex social functions such as participating in community life (UNDP, 1997). It is here where SIA intersects with poverty. If people's basic needs are not met, it is not only challenging to ensure participation in external processes such as an impact assessment, but it also indicates that their basic human rights are affected. People's participation may be influenced by what they perceive as desirable outcomes, which would in many cases put their basic needs ahead of long-term sustainable outcomes. There will also be power-imbalances between poor communities and rich proponents, which makes engaging from an equal basis almost impossible.

There are different types of inequality. Income inequality is concerned with the degree to which income is distributed in an unequal manner amongst a population (UNDP, 2013). Income gaps between the rich and the poor have expanded in the last 20 years (UNDP, 2013). Inequality of opportunities occurs when people, either because of circumstances or discrimination, are denied access to basic necessities such as water, sanitation, shelter, energy, healthcare or education (UNDP, 2014). Inequality of opportunities often results in inequality of income later in life (UNDP, 2013), which also has a direct impact on the available opportunities to an individual. Inequality threatens economic growth and poverty reduction (UNDP, 2013) and leads to social exclusion.

When SIA is conducted in a community experiencing inequality of opportunity it may stir certain feelings in the community and lead to social unrest. As an example, if a responsible mining company proposes to develop infrastructure for its workforce that includes access to running water, sanitation, electricity, health care and education, the community members that will not be employed by the mine may feel excluded. Although it is not the duty of the mine

to provide infrastructure, as that is the responsibility of the government, the community may have certain expectations. These expectations may be transferred to the proponent, or lead to protests against the government. There are power imbalances and greater societal factors that come into play that have little to do with the actual SIA process. There are complexities associated with any impact assessment process, but different layers are added in emerging economies.

One way to address poverty and inequality is by means of a social protection floor. The Institute for Development Studies (IDS) (2013) suggests that social protection is the combination of formal and informal plans that provide income or in-kind allocations combined with other forms of support to poor and vulnerable households to act as a safety net for extremely poor people, protect them against risks and livelihood shocks, help them out of poverty and support social justice for more equitable justice for all. The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation (WCSDG) introduced the concept of a Social Protection Floor (SPF), which entails that a certain minimum level of social protection is accepted in the global economy (WCSDG, 2004). The United Nations Chief Executives Board accepted the idea of a social protection floor as one of nine core crisis response policies in 2009 to cope with the economic crisis (Van Ginneken, 2013). Social protection plays an important part in the post 2015 development agenda, as it has demonstrated its effectiveness in confronting multiple dimensions of poverty. The Sustainable Development goals include targets and indicators such as ending poverty, addressing food security, promoting health, wellbeing and education, gender equality, water and sanitation, economic growth and employment creation, sustainable infrastructure, reducing inequality, creating sustainable cities and human settlements, and addressing challenges in the physical environment such as climate change and environmental resources (UN, 2014). The philosophy behind social protection and the sustainable development goals both align with the core values of SIA (Vanclay, 2003). Given the context of poverty and inequality in emerging economies it can be argued that the need to ensure social development outcomes of SIA processes is acute.

Methods

SIA, as practiced in South Africa, was analysed from the theoretical framework of social development. The research used an exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, 2014). The first qualitative phase used an instrumental case study design (Durrheim, 2011) to explore the perceptions of the SIA community about the practice of SIA. Two data collection instruments were used: one-on-one interviews and World Cafés. An interview schedule with twenty open-ended questions was used to guide the one-on-one interviews. The questions

revolved around the participants' involvement in the SIA field, their experience, the purpose of SIA, how they conduct SIA (methods, process), obstacles preventing thorough SIA and potential improvements to SIA. Twenty-four people, including three EIA practitioners, six academics and fifteen SIA practitioners were interviewed.

Three World Café meetings were conducted. The World Cafés took place in sociable spaces (Burke & Sheldon, 2010), with round tables seating about eight people at a table to enable groups of all sizes to participate in the dialogue while remaining part of a larger, connected discussion (Fouché & Light, 2011). One hundred and forty-three people, representing industry, academics, EIA practitioners, SIA practitioners and the government attended these meetings. The topics discussed included sharing of SIA experiences, current SIA practice and discussion on how to improve the practice of SIA. The results obtained in the interviews and World Café events took the form of opinions expressed by the participants. Thereafter the synthesis of the opinions involved the extraction of themes and assessment of the relevance of all the inputs to these themes. The same process was followed to extract themes from the interviews. The emerging themes from the two data sets were then compared and the common themes were distilled.

In the second quantitative phase a structured non-participant observation design (Babbie, 2010) was used to collect data from 15 SIA reports conducted between 2008 and 2014 to determine whether social development aspects are included. A set of criteria that characterise SIA best practice as defined by Esteves et al. (2011) as well as social development criteria indicators identified in the literature, where categorised under the themes established from a literature review and the qualitative study described above. The criteria are listed below in the section describing the results of the study. The 15 SIA reports were then analysed by means of univariate analysis (Fouché & Bartley, 2011) and a Guttman scale (Guest, 2000) to ascertain whether these criteria for best practice were addressed. Since it is not obligatory to specifically address the criteria in SIA reports there was a possibility that the interpretation of the coverage relative to the specified criteria assessment may be subjective. Two additional practitioners were used in a blind test to determine the reproducibility of the method.

Results

Three themes were identified from the World Cafés and the interviews. These were the legal and institutional mandate for social development in SIA; the potential for SIA to act as a tool for social development, and whether mitigation and monitoring recommendations go beyond the minimum requirements for SIA towards social development outcomes. Within these themes there were thirty-four criteria (developed from the qualitative study and the literature

review) that are considered by the SIA community to be indicators of best practice. The themes will be discussed next. The figures in parenthesis indicate the percentage of the reports that were analysed that addressed the respective criteria posed in the form of questions:

Theme 1: Legal and institutional mandate for social development in SIA

- Is there background information on the relevant legislation in the report? (40%)
- Is there reference to international standards? (27%)
- Is there reference to local guidelines? (8%)
- Are human rights considered? (13%)
- Are there any social, environmental or restorative justice issues? (100%)
- Does the report make use of an explicit methodology? (100%)
- Are there any equity issues? (Who pays the price versus who gets the benefits?) (100%)

Theme 2: SIA as a tool for social development

- Was a participatory process followed? (93%)
- Was the process inclusive? (7%)
- Is the wellbeing of the entire population considered and promoted? (93%)
- Do mitigation measures discourage dependency on proponent? (20%)
- Do mitigation measures promote active involvement of people? (87%)
- Is a multi-sector approach to mitigation promoted? (80%)
- Are any partnerships between civil society, government and private sector suggested? (47%)
- Do mitigation measures require cooperation between several role-players? (100%)
- Will mitigation increase capabilities and productivity of people? (60%)
- Are impacts on family stability mitigated? (7%)
- Is mitigation on social service organisations included? (0%)

- Will the outcomes be project-neutral? (53%)
- Will mitigation contribute to poverty alleviation? (40%)
- Does mitigation address inequality issues? (60%)
- Will there be in-migration? (73%)

Theme 3: Going beyond minimum requirements for mitigation and monitoring towards social development outcomes

- Is the mitigation specific to the South African context? (100%)
- Is monitoring of mitigation measures suggested? (73%)
- Who is proposed as the funder of on-going monitoring? (7% not clear, 15% proponent, 33% government co-fund)
- Are impact benefit agreements (IBA) proposed? (0%)
- Is there any reference to Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC)? (7%)
- Are there any proposals for economic development processes? (60%)
- Will the outcomes enhance the social environment? (67%)
- Are the affected communities involved in the execution of the mitigation measures? (87%)
- Do mitigation measures contribute to the social protection floor via suggestions regarding creation of employment? (73%)
- Do mitigation measures contribute to the social protection floor via suggestions regarding contributing to education/skills development? (73%)
- Do mitigation measures contribute to the social protection floor via potential establishment of infrastructure? (47%)
- Are regional development issues considered in the study? (100%)

The replication of the analysis of the SIA reports against the criteria by two additional practitioners yielded very similar results. In only two instances was there a discrepancy between the different reviewers. These related to social service organisations, both reviewers were of the opinion that impacts on these organisations are mitigated due to the reference to NGOs in general. The researcher of this study was looking specifically at social service organisations, and not NGOs in general. The interpretation of the term was therefore problematic, as the reviewers and the researcher interpret the term social service organisation

differently. The second ambiguity was whether impacts on family stability would be mitigated, where the researcher and one reviewer were of the opinion that it would not be mitigated, whilst one reviewer thought that it would be mitigated. The last point where one of the reviewers differed from the researcher and the other reviewer was on whether the mitigation measures would discourage dependency on the proponent. The discrepancies have little influence on the conclusions that are reached.

The distillation of themes from the interviews and World Cafés was based on a large number of inputs that are too extensive to be comprehensively presented here. Some of the comments raised by the participants will be elevated as specific examples of obstacles in the use of SIA as a tool for social development. Although these form part of the dataset in the foregoing analysis, the entire commentary by the participants was given equal status throughout. A full compilation of the results is presented in Aucamp (2015). The focus of the following findings is on the obstacles that prevent SIA from being used as a tool for social development. The findings reflect the opinions of the participants unless explicitly stated otherwise. Some of the comments raised by the participants will be elevated as specific examples of obstacles in the use of SIA as a tool for social development.

Regulatory SIA is not the answer

Participants were critical of regulatory SIA and indicated that the private sector undermines SIA by doing it just for compliance purposes. SIA is sometimes not considered a useful tool, but it is done because it ‘looks good’ and creates a perception that the developer cares about the people. In most cases the business objectives of meeting minimum requirements, and SIA objectives of meeting international best practice and protecting the interest of the community are often in direct competition with each other. Harvey and Bice (2014) describe their experience of regulatory SIA as “a permitting hurdle rather than an integral part of operational planning and management, let alone a tool for democratic development”. This approach undermines building strong relationships with affected communities. Regulatory SIA focuses more on compliance with global practices in which community members are often seen as environmental objects, assumed to be submissive and vulnerable (Harvey & Bice, 2014), rather than focussing on exploring local concerns and objectives. The way the private sector acts towards communities in these situations is alienating; it takes away the community’s right to self-determination and marginalises them even further. In contrast, if communities are recognised as key stakeholders, consulted regularly, and included in discussions about impacts, it results in better company-community relations and more sustainable long-term outcomes (Harvey & Bice, 2014).

The current formulation of SIA, as a subsidiary entrenched in the EIA process, is reactive and undermines the role that SIA can play in development. SIA should be conducted earlier in the planning process, as it would enhance the social development agenda through the potential links with existing initiatives and co-operative planning. Pre-emptive SIA outcomes would align with social development practice, where economic, social and other interventions are linked and social investments are used to advance social wellbeing (Midgley, 2014).

Participants expressed their concern about the limited time and budgets allowed for SIA studies. This constrains efforts to involve communities and technical experts in the SIA process (Harvey & Bice 2014). The authors indicated that the long-term involvement of SIA practitioners is imperative to add more value and to contribute to social development as an on-going process (cf. Maistry, 2012), something that the once-off SIA process could not do.

Ownership of social impact management is weak

Participants indicated that proponents often expect SIA to deliver on aspects that are not the responsibility of the SIA practitioner, but that of the proponent or the government. They expressed that developers do not take ownership of social management plans. A recurring theme was that external consultants conduct SIA for regulatory purposes, but the management of social impacts falls within the ambit of the project developer and are managed in-house. The management of social impacts requires coordination across the operation, but this frequently fails to happen and remains the responsibility of a small section of the business (Franks et al. 2009). Social impact management not only requires coordination across operations, but also across other role players such as local government. Harvey (2014) warns against the one-sided delivery of programmes that are not related to the company's core business, and/or implemented by outsiders or company people who are isolated from the rest of the company. He recommends that internal business activities must be aligned with the achievement of human and social development goals to ensure greater success. If Harvey's (2014) argument is accurate, then unless the company buys-in to a multi-party approach to mitigation, social development outcomes would be unlikely, since companies would only uphold initiatives while they are in business, and the end result would not be sustainable. Social development theory, and the participants in this study, suggests that the mitigation of social impacts must involve multiple stakeholders, including communities in the implementation of mitigation measures (Midgley, 2014). Despite this, partnerships are seldom recommended as part of SIA mitigation, and independence from the proponent is not promoted. Companies do not (or cannot) take ownership of social management plans because they are too far removed from their core business, and companies do not have the expertise or inclination to afford them attention. Furthermore, they do not have the skills or receive the necessary guidance to assist them with achieving social development outcomes.

Participants indicated that there is a lack of enforcement of social mitigation/ enhancement measures. Post-implementation monitoring and auditing of social impacts are not legally enforced, although it is a legal requirement in South Africa to appoint an environmental control officer (ECO) to ensure that the conditions of authorisation are met (Du Pisani & Sandham, 2006). Social aspects are seldom considered by ECOs as the focus is on the biophysical components of sustainability (Wessels et al., 2015). On-going monitoring, management and evaluation processes contribute to social development outcomes by allowing adaptive management as the project progresses, ensuring the wellbeing of people is promoted throughout the process (Midgley, 2014). On-going monitoring, management and evaluation processes promote the nurturing of relationships with affected communities, which in turn assists with the achievement of a social licence to operate (Parsons & Moffat, 2014).

SIA can identify social risks in emerging economies

In an unequal society social risk and conflict may have severe implications for the private sector and communities alike. This can be seen in the frequent labour unrest in the mining sector, primarily fuelled by structural inequality in South Africa. Labour actions can spill over to host communities. Employed people can express grievances through strikes or labour actions, but the unemployed often have no other mechanism than protesting (Alexander et al., 2013). Participants indicated that SIA is an important tool in the management of risks to companies, since it assists with understanding the context in which activities will take place and the dynamics of communities. This finding is supported in the literature where Vanclay and Esteves (2011) describe SIA as an investment in risk management, and that it is important to introduce SIA findings into risk management language to ensure that the private sector can relate to SIA within their existing management frameworks (Kemp, 2011). Social risks, if not managed, can culminate in damage to property and loss of lives. Research by Alexander et al. (2013) indicates that peaceful protests and formal processes to express grievances often precede disruptive and violent protests in South Africa. Through grievance management mechanisms the SIA process can direct the issues of displeased community members towards the correct recipients, and may mitigate the characteristic violent protests that are commonplace in South Africa.

SIA has potential to contribute to poverty reduction and social protection

From a social development perspective the study showed that recommendations about economic development processes were included in SIA reports and the outcomes of some studies could potentially contribute to poverty alleviation. Ending poverty has been on the development agenda for a significant period of time. The Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals highlight the end of poverty as a global goal (UN, 2000).

Bringing an end to poverty and hunger remain priorities in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, the 17 Sustainable Goals include aspects such as employment, sustainable human settlements, climate change and environmental resources, all with distinct social dimensions, which are included in most environmental impact assessments.

A proven way to alleviate poverty is through social protection, and although far removed from SIA, there are some interfaces since the philosophy behind social protection aligns with the core values of SIA (Vanclay, 2003).

The findings indicate that SIA has the potential to contribute to the social protection floor, especially through the contributions of the energy and mining sectors to skills development, job creation and economic development initiatives. Aspects like the establishment of basic infrastructure such as water, housing, energy and schools, often recommended as mitigation and management measures for large infrastructure projects, also contributes to the creation of a social protection floor (ILO, 2011). Employment creation and support of small or micro enterprises are specific high potential focus areas that are typically included in SIA mitigation. Regular employment plays a significant role in social development (Midgley, 2014), and is the most effective form of social protection (NPC, 2012). Facilitating employment opportunities is a significant component of SIA practice. The study showed that mitigation recommendations included funding for infrastructure development and associated skills development initiatives, thereby creating more sustainable funding sources for a social protection framework. Although the provision of basic social services is the responsibility of the government in South Africa, SIA mitigation recommendations were often synergistic, especially in areas where the project proponent holds related expertise. Social development can be achieved through different interventions, for example community-based sanitary and water supply interventions (Midgley, 2013), which relates to the social protection floor. It is here that SIA can provide a direct link between the government and communities with specific infrastructural needs, especially if their human rights are affected by the lack of infrastructure.

Despite the potential of SIA to contribute to poverty alleviation and social protection via infrastructure or skills development, there are some caveats. The results show that project proponents are only capable of making sustainable contributions in large-scale projects. Participants indicated the importance of involving all parties in a collaborative planning process to ensure sustainable outcomes. Furthermore, the findings confirm that this is implemented in SIA practice, since collaborative planning involving multiple stakeholders are recommended in the majority of the reports. Despite this, the study shows that the weight of the responsibility for carrying the costs for the mitigation was on the proponent alone. The

results indicated that 73% of the SIA reports recommended mitigation that will only be successful if funded by the proponent. Imposing the sole financial responsibility on project proponents means that they are often left with significant financial obligations to implement mitigation measures that may not necessarily be their responsibility. SIA should not require companies to provide or fund a service that is normally the function of government (Holm et al., 2013), although social impact management strategies could assist with reaffirming the role of government in providing these services (Franks & Vanclay, 2013; Holm et al., 2013). The private sector needs a framework to identify, assess and manage social impacts in their control and sphere of responsibility (Franks & Vanclay, 2013; Holm et al., 2013), which will ensure that they contribute without taking over the responsibility of the government. Social impact management is only one aspect of a company's social performance (Holm et al., 2013; Parsons & Moffat, 2014), and aspects such as community engagement, benefit sharing, social return on investment, social auditing, social licence to operate, stakeholder engagement and grievance management also form part of the SIA social performance package and can potentially contribute to the social development and social protection needs of communities in project-affected areas (Holm et al., 2013; Parsons & Moffat, 2014).

SIA contributes to social and environmental justice

Social justice is an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protection, opportunities, obligations and social benefits, and it is about ensuring resources are equitably distributed (Patel, 2005). Decreasing socio-economic status is related to an increasing burden of environmental hazards (Hornberg and Pauli, 2007; Ikeme, 2003) and environmental justice relates to uneven distribution of environmental quality between different social groups. Every report analysed in this study considered equity issues and social, environmental or restorative justice in the description of the environment and in the mitigation measures. The rights-based approach is embedded in social development (Patel, 2005), and social and environmental justice forms the fundamental basis of the core values of SIA (Vanclay, 2003). Social justice is also one of the primary values of social development practice, and includes economic and environmental justice (Lombard & Twikirize, 2014).

The recommendation of mitigation and management measures that will protect the social environment could be the most important contribution SIA makes to social and environmental justice, but the study identified mitigation, monitoring and management of social impacts as a particular weakness of current SIA practice in South Africa. Community's participation in decision-making processes is especially important when dealing with communities vulnerable to social and environmental injustice. Mitigation, management and monitoring are part of the

SIA process, but management and monitoring specifically received little attention in practice until recently. SIA has historically been regulated as a once off, point-in-time assessment document (Franks & Vanclay, 2013, Vanclay et al., 2015, Parson & Moffat 2014, Harvey 2011), rather than a process enduring for the lifetime of a project. Social and environmental justice, and explicitly the patterning of costs and benefits, are therefore not explicitly managed and monitored from a social perspective throughout the project cycle (Walker, 2010). Conducting SIA in a regulatory context as part of the EIA process may explain the lack of focus on the management and monitoring of social impacts, as numerous social aspects seem to be diluted in the EIA studies (Hildebrandt & Sandham, 2014). As long as SIA is used and regulated as a point-in-time assessment, it will be limited in its usefulness to contribute to social development (Lombard, 2008). However, longitudinal models for SIA that take the evaluation, monitoring and management of social impacts in consideration are emerging (Parsons & Moffat 2014) and this requires longer-term involvement of SIA practitioners. This is a clear opportunity to include social development outcomes in the SIA process and to ensure social and environmental justice. It can be argued that the successful management and monitoring of social impacts will not be possible without the involvement of the affected communities.

SIA is an entry-point for community involvement

Participants in the study pointed out community relations and participation as key motivations for SIA. They agreed that SIA involvement in communities should be on grassroots and leadership levels and that communities should become more involved in SIA processes. Community participation from the onset, and following a comprehensive and representative process, are crucial. SIA must provide civil society with the opportunity to give their opinion, communicate their concerns and be used as a tool to empower communities. A consistent observation was that SIA facilitates two-way communication, assisting communities to understand major issues about potential development projects and the implications of these issues. The study demonstrates that communities access information more easily if a project has an associated SIA. This aligns with Buchan (2003) who indicates that community participation is a principle tool used as part of the SIA methodology with the objective of developing an informed community that can express its interests and make informed personal and shared decisions. Community participation is a key aspect of community development, which is a strategy of social development (Midgley, 1995). It promotes the active involvement of people in their own development (Gray, 1996; Patel et al., 2012), and is also a core element of a SIA (Parsons and Moffat, 2014). The study confirms that SIA plays an

important role in enabling communities to contribute to processes pertaining to physical development that may affect their lives.

Participants deemed aspects such as social and community dynamics, social justice and power relationships important for every SIA. The short-term involvement of practitioners emerges as a shortcoming in SIA, as this makes the participation process more challenging. Rowan and Streather (2011) indicate that meaningful stakeholder engagement and consultation can act as a catalyst for community development in areas in vulnerable, disempowered communities with a lack of entitlement. This affirms that power and politics play an important role in development (Lombard, 2014).

From a social development perspective informal, community-based organisations are seen to have an advantage over formal organisations, as they are more accessible at the local level (Patel, 2003), and it is important that SIA practitioners include these organisations in the participation process. Local development partnerships strengthen democracy in the sense that communities can participate in their own development (Patel 2003).

Participants view SIA practitioners as advocates for the voiceless and for sustainability and emphasised the important role the public plays in SIA. Aspirations for community engagement often fall short in practice (compare Esteves et al., 2011; Harvey & Bice, 2014 and Parsons & Moffat, 2014). Managing social change and addressing inequality, especially if the proposed development project may result in cumulative impacts, requires SIA practitioners to engage with other professionals and to refer relevant aspects to the most appropriate profession to deal with the aspect in question, for example social or community workers. This resonates with the multi-faceted and multi-sector approach required to ensure social development (Gray, 1996; Patel et al., 2012). The SIA often sets the scene for the proponent's future interaction with affected communities and can assist with initiating networks. Participation in development, active citizenship, and individual and collective empowerment are essential to ensure social development outcomes (Patel & Hochfeld, 2013). However, the reality of community interventions is that it is time and resource intensive, and non-material goods such as participation and social capital adds little value if communities do not have access to resources, services and infrastructure (Gray, 2010). It is therefore important to enable communities to participate by providing the necessary material support such as transport to meetings and venues.

Many projects subjected to SIA have a significant construction period, and may cause social impacts in the operation phase, meaning that there is potential for long-term community involvement.

SIA assists in creating linking capital

The study shows that community participation conducted as part of the SIA process assists with identifying and establishing networks for further interaction. Networks, direct and indirect, provide ties to people and resources, which may assist with development efforts (Adler & Kwon, 2000). Networks form part of social capital, which is defined as the norms and networks that facilitate action (Woolcock, 2001). There are three primary forms of social capital, namely bonding, bridging and linking capital (Woolcock, 2001). SIA can play a role in creating linking social capital. Linking social capital has the capacity to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community, and allows the less powerful to access resources that otherwise might have been outside their reach, an essential requirement to ensure social development outcomes (Evans & Syrett, 2007). The poor often have limited access to linking social capital (Woolcock, 2001), and if SIA can be harnessed as a form of linking social capital it can enhance its usefulness as a tool for social development. The vehicle for the link with social capital may be the execution of the mitigation measures suggested in the SIA. In this study, the majority of the SIA reports required the active involvement of communities in the implementation of mitigation, and in all the reports mitigation required the active cooperation between several role players. The mitigation process brings all the relevant parties together to ensure equitable outcomes, which could promote social development.

SIA can enhance development agendas in emerging economies

The findings indicate that SIA should be used in a strategic manner to optimise its effectiveness, as using it only on project level limits its usefulness. In order to add value and contribute to the development agendas, SIA practitioners must remain involved in projects in the long-term and not only as part of a once-off SIA process. Participants indicated that the focus of SIA should not only be on the specific project, but also include broader development opportunities. Local government was identified as a key role-player as SIA should feed into the planning and local economic development processes. In this way SIA can be used as a planning tool to ensure sustainable outcomes and to link projects with existing initiatives.

Participants were explicitly aware that the evaluation and implementation of SIA requires co-operative governance as issues not related to the Department of Environmental Affairs (the responsible government department in South Africa) are often key. Co-operative governance is also a requirement for social development (Midgley, 2014). Unfortunately there was an expressed lack of faith in cooperative governance in South Africa, especially considering that a multi-sector approach and partnerships between the government, civil society and the

private sector would be required to mitigate impacts in the majority of the reports that were reviewed. While partnerships were predominantly encouraged in the mining and energy sector, only a third of the reviewed SIA reports recommended that the local government contribute to the cost of the mitigation measures, notably in projects with more significant capital outlay.

Although the regulatory approach typifies profit-driven projects, it emerges that these are more inclined to contribute to economic development processes within communities, skills development and job creation than infrastructure projects. This may be attributed to legal and Corporate Social Investment (CSI) requirements for industry and to the fact that the proponent of the study is not a government department. SIA practitioners have the opportunity in these developments to assist developers to go beyond impact assessment and contribute to social development. In this way, SIA practitioners can ensure that economic development results in real positive improvements in the quality of life of the poor through initiating empowering social programmes and administrative arrangements (Gray, 2006).

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that SIA is mandated to contribute to social development. The recommendations made in SIA reports should have social development outcomes if it is implemented as suggested in the reports. However, in reality SIA does not attain social development outcomes because of the obstacles identified in this study. The main obstacles which emerged from the findings preventing SIA from reaching social development outcomes are:

- Focussing only on compliance with regulatory/funder requirements rather than focussing on the concerns and objectives of the affected communities;
- Viewing SIA as a once-off occurrence rather than an on-going process, often due to budgetary issues;
- Lack of a multi-party approach to mitigation and management, leading to confusion about who takes ownership of social impact management plans;
- Lack of partnerships between skilled parties to address social impacts and gaps in knowledge (for example a mine's core business is not managing HIV/Aids, but a skilled NGO can assist with this aspect);
- Lack of enforcement and monitoring of social mitigation and management measures;
- Lack of collaborative planning between parties involved in managing and mitigating social impacts, and placing the sole financial responsibility on only one of the parties involved;

- Short term involvement of SIA practitioners – there is no time to establish meaningful relationships and facilitate change; and
- Lack of strategic focus.

These obstacles are not easy to overcome, as it will require a change in focus and deviation from the way in which SIA has been done traditionally. In some instances, intervention on policy level will be required to ensure that the practice of SIA changes. This does not only refer to government policies, but also to corporate policies. Doing SIA on a project-by-project basis is not effective and does not allow for the strategic long-term management of social impacts. Therefore, changes in the practice and regulation of SIA are required to move from the project focus to a more strategic view. The involvement of multiple parties in mitigation and management of social impacts implies that certain stakeholders must give up some of their power, and invest more time and resources in the process, underlining the need for long-term involvement of practitioners. Involving SIA practitioners in the long term, and managing social impacts over time have financial implications for the private sector and governments, and unless the benefits of such an approach is proven, it will be difficult to sell the concept to these parties. The research findings indicate that the SIA process in itself can potentially contribute to social development outcomes, but also that there are some obstacles that prevents this from happening. The obstacles identified in this study shows that changes in administrating the SIA process are needed to ensure social development outcomes, and a need to redefine the roles, responsibilities and involvement of all the stakeholders.

Conclusions

This study confirms that SIA can enhance development agendas in emerging economies. The foundation for SIA to become a tool to ensure social development agendas is in place as the current practice of SIA and social development include the promotion of people's wellbeing, the requirement of input from different role players to achieve sustainable social development outcomes, the link between social impact assessment and economic development, and the multifaceted processes involved (Midgley, 2014, Vanclay, 2003). SIA's contribution to social and environmental justice creates an environment in which social development can thrive. It assists project proponents with entering communities and creates a basis for further community involvement, another requirement for social development. Through this mutually beneficial arrangement, SIA act as linking capital (Woolcock, 2001) that brings networks that were previously inaccessible into communities.

The challenge is now for SIA practitioners to recognise this potential and to ensure that the practice of SIA advances to embrace its role and responsibility in reducing poverty and inequality through safeguarding social development outcomes in every SIA process. Social

impact management and mitigation measures show great potential to ensure social development outcomes, but this remains a particularly weak area of SIA. For SIA to contribute to social development outcomes, the focus should shift to mitigation and management, and here current practice requires significant changes and adaptations. SIA has unambiguous potential to contribute to poverty alleviation and the social protection floor. This potential can be realised through collaborative planning involving stakeholders from across the board and not only relying on project proponents.

In order for mitigation measures to serve the project development and simultaneously the social development agenda, the SIA field needs to be defined within a broader context than the strict sense of the EIA process. The best practice criteria identified in this study contributes towards a broader understanding by practitioners and regulators alike. While the best practice needs to be cultivated, the emphasis should be on achieving community and project proponent buy-in to the social development agenda rather than the imposition of a regulatory framework. Regulating SIA will not necessarily lead to social development outcomes, but could potentially inhibit social development outcomes and long-term involvement of social development specialists in emerging economies.

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