

Environmental Assessment practitioners

What we can do better

Overall standard of EIAs in Namibia

'best-guess' score-card:

- Very few are excellent (<5%)
 - EIA contains everything required for decision-making - no gaps, good process
- Maybe 10% are good
 - EIA report contains most of the information required; gaps relatively minor and an informed decision can be made. Process OK.
- Maybe 50% are satisfactory
 - Information incomplete; there are significant omissions but in the context of the proposed project, these do not prevent a decision being made.
- Maybe 30% are inadequate
 - major omissions which must be addressed before a decision can be taken (EIA must be re-done or re-worked).
- At least 5% are poor
 - Information, process and report substantially inadequate. Reject EIA.

Ethics

- Independence
 - No matter who pays, the client is the **environment**
 - Avoid taking sides, neither with the proponent nor with a 'populist' anti-project lobby
 - Resist pressure, including the need to finish the EIA with undue haste
- Honesty and integrity
 - Get into the field (not via Google Earth)
 - Less 'cut and paste', more originality
 - Support conclusions with facts
 - State confidence limits

Stakeholder engagement

- Design engagement to be appropriate to the project
- Start engagement early (at scoping), and keep up the momentum
- Too much reliance on ‘town hall’ meetings – invest more in focus groups
- Over-emphasis on ‘those who shout loudest’ – be more discerning and broad-based
- Always include an issues-response chapter in the EA report

Don't follow recipe approach!

Scoping and the team

- Design the EA at the correct level to address the scale of the project
- Build the EA team to address the project at the right scale of detail and right levels of specialisation.

Don't follow recipe approach!

Integration

- Few EIAs properly integrate specialist reports into one, coherent story. Instead they typically summarise along sectoral lines
- Even when EIAs do integrate sectoral components, they seldom create a linkage between the EIA and techno-economic studies

Deferring

- Many EIAs avoid tackling issues head-on, preferring to defer the confrontation to the EMP (which is often done at a later stage)
- If there's a fatal flaw or red flag, say so as early as possible.

Message delivery

- EIAs generally heavy on content, light on crisp analysis and shy away from delivering a ‘bottom line’ message
- Need more “punch”, less “paunch”
- Write more simply, more clearly
- Improve illustrations – maps, graphs, diagrams and photos improve digestion
- Help the Environmental Commissioner make a decision!