

# Typologies of expected and idealised futures of environmental impact assessment (EIA) practice



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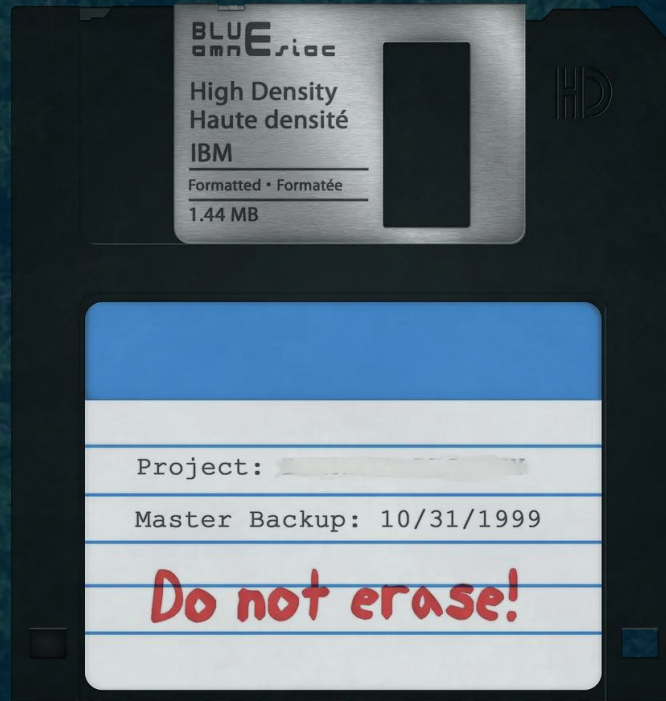
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# The Future of EIA Practice

*the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most successful environmental policy instrument – will it hold prominence in the coming decades of rapid change and global megatrends?*



\* Indispensable to  
the 1960s

# “Forward-looking”: the future of EIA practice

*Knowledge gap: what do we understand about the future of EIA practice?*

## EIA Context

Global megatrends  
A fast-changing world  
Novel obligations for development  
Persistent challenges



## EIA Research Focus [general]

“Looking back”  
Progress reviews  
Evaluation of effectiveness  
Methods and processes  
Challenges for practice  
Auditing & conduct, etc.

## Why is this useful?

Identifying risks & future-proofing  
a critical step towards identifying risks for EIA practice, and  
opportunities for future-proofing.

# Problem Statement

*A world that is developing with equal consideration for prosperity, human well-being and environmental factors remains elusive; hence the intended outcomes of EIA are not manifesting.*

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EIA objectives are not isolated from **global megatrends** and **novel obligations** –

*environmental and climate change  
societal transformation  
functioning of economies  
green recovery  
sustainable investment  
taxonomies of investment*

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Can the EIA practice's past performance in a static context, imply future influence in a fast-changing context?



Photo credit: Unequal scenes, Johnny Miller

# Expected vs. ideal futures

expected

*adjective*

1. regarded as likely; anticipated  
*“write down your expected monthly income”*

idealised

*adjective*

1. satisfying one's conception of what is most suitable  
*“in the ideal world, we might have made a different decision”*
2. existing only in the imagination; desirable or perfect but not likely to become a reality



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# Methodology

- The “Q-method” was applied to generate typologies of EIA perspectives



What will the future world look like?



What are the expected and idealised future of EIA practice?



# Typologies of the future EIA across emerging and developed economies



## Developed Economies

Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Europe, Scandinavia, Israel, Portugal

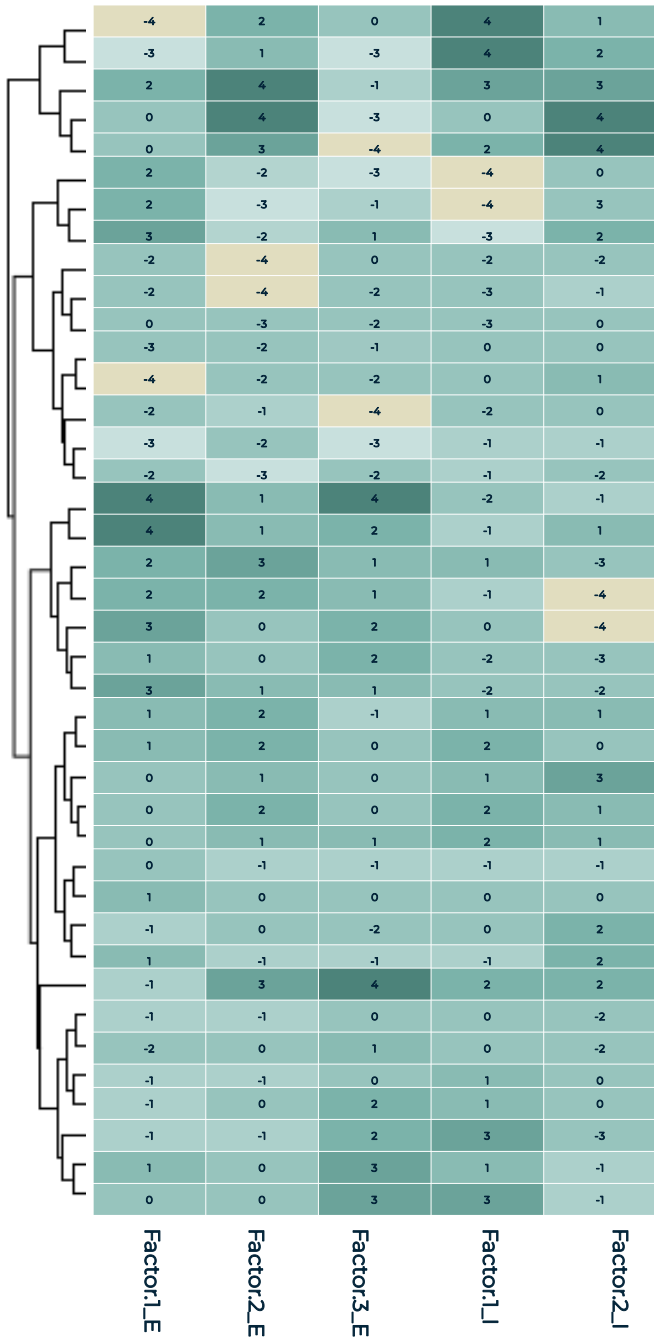


## Emerging Economies

South Africa, Namibia, Kenya, Brazil

Respondent	Developed Economies	Emerging Economies	Total no. of respondents
EIA practice	10	10	20
ESG + EIA practice	3	3	6
EIA Authorities	2	2	4
EIA Academia	5	5	10
<b>Total</b>			<b>40</b>

# Output: not individual views but statistical impressions



- Environmental regulation will drastically change to keep up with high environmental impacts.
- EIA decisions will be guided by new progress indicators, shifting away from GDP growth as main socio-economic indicator.
- EIA will serve a role of aligning financial investments with climate and other sustainability goals.
- Sustainable development will be determined by green and sustainable finance taxonomies, including climate risk financial disclosures in EIA.
- Green and sustainable finance taxonomies will advance the EIA system for better environmental protection.
- EIA will have limited ability to prevent environmental degradation outside of protected areas.
- EIA role and function will reduce as the economic outlook worsens.
- EIA will still represent development that erodes natural resources as acceptable.
- Green and sustainable finance will weaken environmental outcomes of EIA.
- EIA will become redundant to boost economic activity.
- How authorities evaluate development projects for environmental authorization will remain unchanged.
- EIA will advance sharing economies as opposed to limited ownership.
- Automated EIA decision-making will improve the handling of environmental complexities.
- EIA will consider GDP growth as priority factor for achieving green growth.
- Mandating new technologies through EIA will make development economically unfeasible.
- How alternatives are assessed in EIA will remain unchanged by the rise of green and sustainable finance taxonomies.
- EIA will face environment-economy conflict against substantial political pressure.
- Shifting from an economic to an ecological framing of sustainable development will remain a challenge.
- EIA will be streamlined to deal with emergency and disaster events.
- De-regulation of environmental protection will affect EIA.
- EIA procedures and decision-making will still be value-laden and influenced by subjectivities.
- EIA policies will lag behind in guiding EIA towards other economic objectives (i.e. well-being, equity, safe environmental space).
- EIA will be challenged by beliefs about the need for economic growth.
- EIA will rely on greater implementation of economic instruments to guide sustainable development.
- The role of EIA will be expanded to include sustainability assurance.
- EIA will give effect to green economic development.
- The mitigation hierarchy of impact assessments will shift focus to positive contributions of development.
- EIA will include an accounting indicator to account for environmental loss or gains.
- Lengthy and complex EIA regulatory processes will remain a key barrier to green economic investments.
- EIA will be improved by automated assessments and automated datasets.
- EIA will standardise financial innovation - i.e. payments for nature-based solutions, climate finance, etc.
- Environmental liability insurance will remain outside the scope of EIA procedures and decision-making.
- EIA procedural changes will affect how development projects are designed, appraised and selected.
- EIA will be complicated by new modelling tools (i.e. Systems Methodology, System Dynamics).
- EIA will shift in norms from efficiency to sufficiency.
- EIA will include mandatory "environmental protection deposits" - to cover future environmental damages caused by development.
- EIA will prioritise alternative development models - i.e. socio-technical innovation.
- EIA will become a collaborative space for alternative futures.
- The range of EIA regulating activities will expand - such as assessing the impacts of crypto mining and its impacts on climate goals.
- EIA will apply new dynamic EIA tools to engage with exponential change.





# EIA practice perceives the 'Future Of EIA' according to three expected typologies, and two ideal typologies:

"The future EIA, *expect*..."

1. Conflicted Policy Instrument



2. Aligning with New Finance Environment



3. Support Alternative Futures



"The future EIA, *idealise*..."

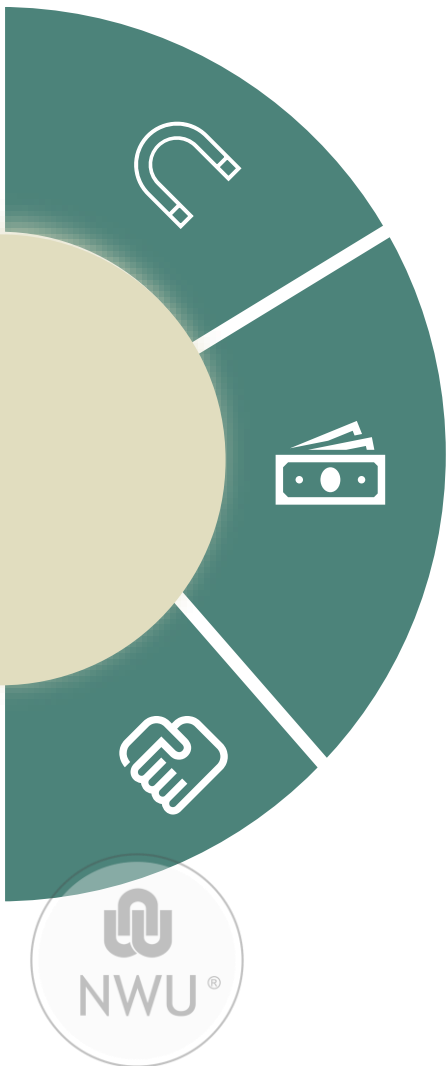
1. Fulfill its Potential as Policy Instrument



2. Contribute to Social and Environmental Value



# Findings: Typologies on the expected future EIA



## Conflicted Policy Instrument

- Economy-environment conflict
- Substantial political pressure
- EIA remaining prominent but with a **loss of influence**, particularly against its initial role and function

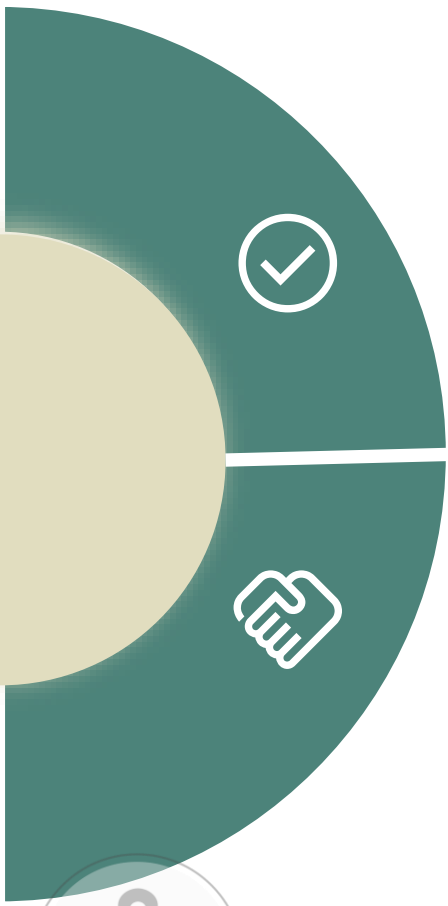
## Functioning in a New Financial Environment

- EIA aligning investment with climate & sustainability objectives
- EIA alignment with green/sustainable finance taxonomies
- EIA making provision for sustainability assurance
- **Integration: environmental outcomes & financial investment**

## Supporting Alternative Futures

- Cohort of **change & collaborative space**
- **New EIA procedures** – changing how development is designed & appraised
- **Novel environmental impacts** – impact of blockchain technology

# Findings: Typologies on the idealised future EIA



Future EIA  
Fulfilling its  
Potential

- Inherent potential to **advance environmental protection** and **equitable distribution** of benefits, impacts and risks
- Drastic change in environmental regulation
- **EIA capability to increase** its role in environmental impact prevention outside of protected areas
- Shift in focus: from mitigation hierarchy to focus on **positive contributions of development**

Future EIA for  
Social &  
Environmental  
Value

- **New generation EIA** guided by multiple novel tools, instruments and approaches developed to give effect to sustainability, human well-being and nature-based solutions
- New progress indicators guiding EIA decisions
- EIA policies will guide **alternative economic objectives**: well-being, equity, environmental boundaries

# Consensus

“  
**A shared vision for a desirable  
future may be the most critical task  
facing humanity ~ Robert Costanza**

# Consensus: Expected Future EIA

*“EIAs will not become redundant, but the way we do EIAs will change....”*

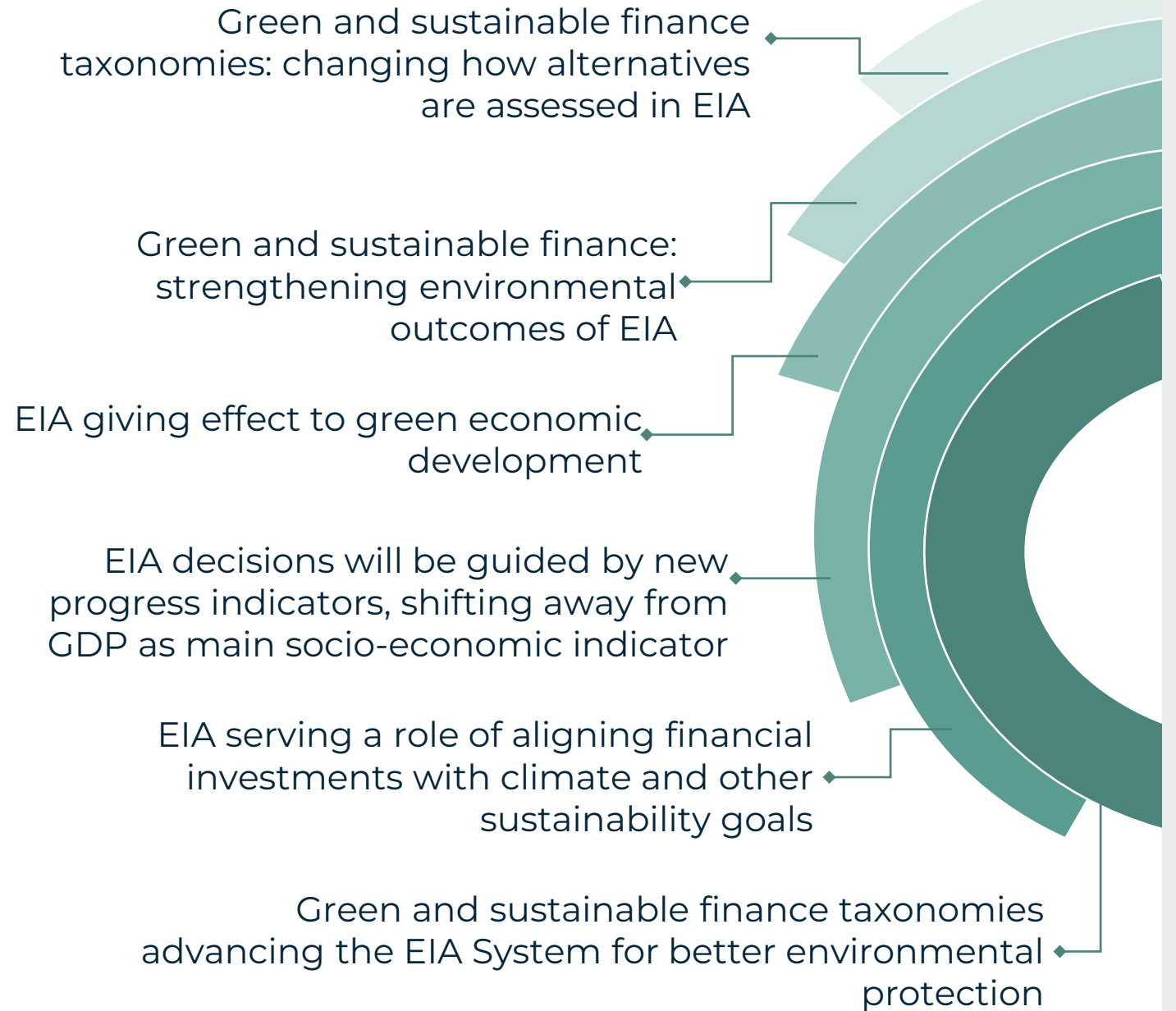
*on its current trajectory, it will likely lose influence, if not engaging with the alternatives of taking up a more pragmatic role, away from end-of decision-making instrument to integrate more meaningfully with investment and sustainability objectives in a new financial environment...”*



# Consensus: Idealised Future EIA

*“The ideal is to advance EIA practice, to gain influence...”*

*The ideal future EIA gains influence by expanding its capability. It responds to a new financial environment. It responds to the future shift in what developers/investors consider 'value' - from economic to social and environmental value... it is a critical future tool for environmental outcomes...”*



# Key take-away

- EIA practice needs ‘future-proofing’ to avoid a loss of influence.



‘Ideal future’:  
plausible and practical focus areas  
for EIA future-proofing.



Acknowledgement

Prof Francois Retief &  
Prof Reece Alberts

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Unit for Environmental  
Sciences & Management,  
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# Let's continue the conversation!

Post questions and comments in the IAIA24 app.



## #iaia24

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