# Can Al make Strategic Environmental Assessment stronger?

Paper at IAIA25, Bologna

Sibout Nooteboom

Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) S.G.Nooteboom@ESSB.EUR.NL

Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) snootebooom@eia.nl

**VIEWS ARE PERSONAL** 

See also siboutnooteboom.nl

# Making SEA strong again

• Three essays and a draft IAPA paper

Key messages:

- If AI is to make SEA stronger, we must first know what is needed to make SEA stronger in the first place
- SEA's goal 'to further sustainable development' (UN): SEA must encourage collaboration between interdependent actors as only together they can further the necessary transformations
- Focus for now: 'how can SEA encourage collaboration?'
- Successful examples from Mali, Senegal and the Netherlands

# What kind of transformations?

Mali: modern agriculture (Sourou river basin)

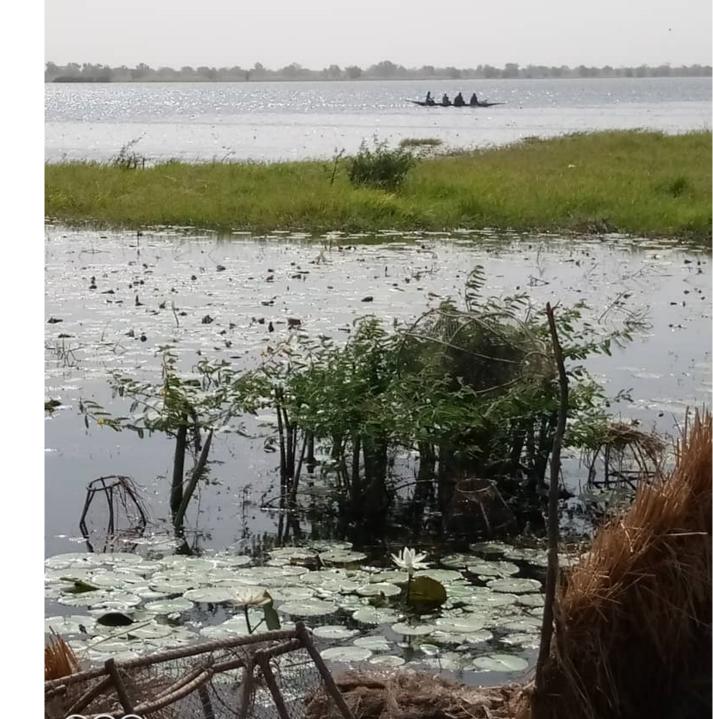


Photo courtesy Etienne Bello

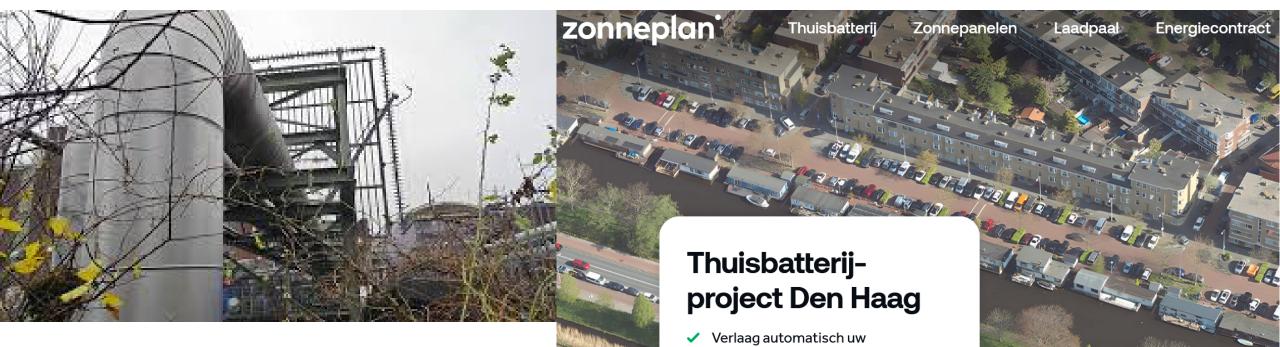


What kind of transformations?

Senegal: a new economy based on natural gas production

### What kind of transformations?

# The Hague: a sustainable energy system for the city



- energierekening
- Geen spaargeld nodig
- Mogelijk mét en zonder zonnepanelen

# What kind of collaboration is needed?

- Societal transformations need collaboration between the actors that can change society
  - Public authorities
  - Civil society
  - Private sector
- Actions: add up to a set of interventions that have a transformative impact on development (synergy)
- Trust emerges first in small groups, that then communicate with large groups

### Who collaborated in Mali?

Mayors





### Who collaborated in Senegal?

#### Ministries

#### Multi-stakeholder platforms

#### Public hearings



#### Mr Papa Samba Ba, Hydrocarbons Director at the Senegalese Ministry of Energy

"A main takeaway from the whole process is that we need to strengthen ad hoc interministerial cooperation, in this sector and elsewhere."



#### Mr Baba Drame, Director of the Environment and Classified Establishments

"It makes me proud that the Senegalese government, from the outset, has been determined to integrate the environmental and social dimension into oil and gas development."



### Who collaborated in the Hague?

Departments of the city administration Departments of the city administration

Politics and the public

Official projects: cocreation of siloed decisions with SEA Debates, hearings, press communications

# How did SEA encourage collaboration in Mali

- The transformation challenge was unaddressed
- Need for transformative interventions clear
- No 'problem owner'
- A donor proposed to support a public planning process
- Joint ownership of the official representatives of the population
- Public process that was officially announced, no SEA required
- Calling this process an 'SEA' empowered the population by enabling decentralised collaboration with the state

# How did SEA encourage collaboration in Senegal

- Prime minister asked for a voluntary SEA
- The environment ministry initially prepared for a solo action
- At informal MSPs other ministries were identified as having key responsibilities
  - Energy: will an ambitious level playing field harm revenue?
  - Navy: responsible for monitoring and enforcement at sea
  - Fisheries: finding futures for thousands of fishermen
- The SEA was started **formally** with an interministerial decision and a wider scope
- SEA contributed to decisions by several ministries (not one specific plan or programme)



# How did SEA encourage that collaboration in the Hague

- Knowing that in the future SEAs must be done for formal planning decisions, the civil servants anticipated the analysis that will then bee needed to justify that decision
- It included a joint capacity to prepare better ToRs for SEA consultants
- That is why they joined in informal 'learning circles' engaging in a data-driven approach.
- None of this collaboration is required by the SEA procedure. The formal transparency the SEA procedure creates a preventive effect.
- If this preventive effect 'works', the SEA procedure becomes easier.

## So, how can SEA be stronger?

- Its transparency exposes the need of ad hoc joint ownership that itself is not legally required by any procedure
- By separating joint fact finding from joint decision-making (cocreation)
- It requires a delicate process of leadership to build trust in small groups before jointly engaging with larger groups
- The profession of joint fact finding and cocreation is encouraged by the SEA procedure
- Note: SEA is not the only procedure that can trigger joint fact finding and cocreation
- Note: AI can help make SEA strong if AI helps cocreation, which means AI must be trusted.