

# Can AI make Strategic Environmental Assessment stronger?

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Sibout Nooteboom

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

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

VIEWS ARE PERSONAL

See also [siboutnooteboom.nl](http://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



### Thuisbatterij- project Den Haag

- ✓ Verlaag automatisch uw 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

Villages





# 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 inter-ministerial 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

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Unofficial  
thematic joint  
fact finding



Official projects:  
cocreation of  
siloed decisions  
with SEA



Debates,  
hearings,  
press  
communi-  
cations

# 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 be 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.