

SRK solution will help energy roll-out in southern Africa

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An Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) developed by SRK Consulting (South Africa) for the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) is being rolled out among Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries states to help accelerate priority electricity projects.

The framework, commissioned by the SAPP in 2016, will facilitate the screening of key power projects in line with lenders' requirements – in turn speeding up their implementation across the sub-continent. A key obstacle to energy access in southern Africa is the quality of the existing power grids, which limit the ability of new power generation to be harnessed and distributed. The SAPP – which supplies electricity to consumers in 16 SAPP utilities and independent power producers (IPPs) – is busy improving these grids.

In 2009, the SAPP had identified a number of priority projects that would improve the region's power grids, and by 2011 many of these were found to require extra developmental work to bring them to bankability stage. In response, the SAPP Coordination Centre – with financial assistance from the World Bank's International Development Association – set up a Project Advisory Unit (PAU) that would accelerate the implementation of these projects.

Among the implementation delays was a lack of alignment between the compliance requirements regarding environmental and social management in the projects concerned. One of the PAU's first tasks, therefore, was to commission technical specialists to help prepare an ESMF, which would act as a reference manual for the high-level environmental and social screening of projects – to strengthen the assessment, mitigation and management of risks and impacts. The ESMF would provide a solution to facilitate both alignment and compliance, thereby improving the pace of implementation of projects that extend access to affordable electricity.

SRK was awarded the contract to develop the ESMF and prepared it in three phases. The first phase was the preparation of an inception report and initial consultation with the SAPP Environmental Sub-Committee – comprising representatives of SAPP utilities and IPPs. In the second phase, the terms of reference – and the framework itself – were developed after consultations with SAPP stakeholders including member utilities, relevant government institutions, international financial institutions, civil society organisations and research institutions. The draft ESMF was then presented to the SAPP stakeholders and finalised; this was the third and final stage.

Developing the ESMF required consultation with all relevant SAPP structures, so between June and October 2016 – and again in May and June 2018 – various stakeholder consultations were conducted; this was done through workshops, in-country site visits, focus group meetings, face-to-face meetings, telephonic interviews and public hearings.

The resulting framework provides a baseline context for the SAPP region, an overview of regulatory frameworks, and a methodology to identify, categorise and rate risks and impacts. It also includes procedures for environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA), as well as arrangements and cost estimates for implementing the ESMF.

“This framework is particularly relevant where project loans are required from international financial institutions that apply policies, standards and guidelines to safeguard environmental and social sustainability,” said Darryll Kilian, partner and principal environmental consultant at SRK.

Providing a practical solution to the challenges faced by the SAPP utilities, the ESMF also includes a suite of tools to guide officials through the environmental and social screening, scoping, assessment, management planning and monitoring processes. These tools include checklists, examples of management plans, and lists of national, regional and international environmental and social requirements.

“The SAPP utilities and IPPs will be responsible for the on-the-ground implementation of the ESMF, and they will be the main users of the framework,” said Kilian. “As member utilities and IPPs are also represented on the SAPP Environmental Sub-Committee (ESC), they will report back on the application of the ESMF – to ensure alignment in the screening and scoping of priority power projects.”



Darryll Kilian Partner & Principal Environmental Consultant at SRK Consulting (SA)

He emphasised that the PAU will play a key co-ordination role, and also facilitate capacity building and training among the planning, financial, environmental and social personnel of SAPP utilities. In April 2018, SRK was appointed to update the ESMF and facilitate the translation of the English report in French and Portuguese. The document has been disseminated to all SAPP utilities and independent power producers, and is available on the SAPP website.

Country

South Africa