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Participatory research in south africa's socio-economic impact assessment systems (seias)

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PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

IN SOUTH AFRICA'S

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS (SEIAS)

In partial fulfilment of the requirement in

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List of abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ETF	European Training Foundation
FIA	Final Impact Assessment
IIA	Initial Impact Assessment
IJPS	International Journal of Political Science
NDP	National Development Program
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO	non-governmental organisations
OECD	organisation uses for economic cooperation and development
PAR	participatory action research
PMG	Parliamentary Monitoring Group
PP	public policy
PR	participatory research
PRS	policy and research services
RIA	Regulatory impact assessment
SEIAS	Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SMME	small and medium-sized enterprises

The DTI	The Department of Trade and Industry
TIPS	Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies
ToC	theory of change

Chapter 1: Research problem

1.1. Introduction

The title of this study isPARTICIPATORY *RESEARCH*

IN SOUTH AFRICA'S

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS (SEIAS)

. SEIAS is a systematic process that involves research, planning, and the management of socio-economic changes resulting from policies, whether intended or unintended (UNEP, 2007). According to Kole and Magoro (2020), it is a useful tool to help understand and mitigate the potential range of impacts of a proposed policy.

SEIAS provides a sound methodology for public officials to systematically use evidence to design and review policies. According to DPME (2015:09) it promotes a technical and participatory research (PR) approach to identifying, analysing, and mitigating socio-economic challenges connected with proposed policies or regulations.

PR is a well-known phenomenon. According to Breitbart (2021:14) PR is a study method emphasising people and group participation, which affects the study design and execution According to Lilja, Ashby, and Sperling (2001:15), PR is at the centre of high-diversity initiatives, requiring a collaborative approach to data collection and systematic knowledge attestation. This approach can lead to identifying and recommending alternative solutions. However, the conceptualisation and implementation of PR in SEIAS are unexplored. This study, therefore, investigates the nature, scope, and applicability of PR in SEIAS.

1.2 Background of the study

. PR is an integral part of the SEIAS methodology. When applied completely and effectively, it can expand the range of alternatives created for decision-making by allowing policymakers to document and interpret a policy challenge with those affected most.

PR promotes close collaboration between policymakers and the participants—traditionally considered the 'subjects' of a study. PR allows them to establish a research agenda, collect data, conduct critical analysis, and devise activities to achieve social change. According to Booysen (2007:172), participation in public policy (PP) decision-making is crucial. This involvement affords people and groups a 'transformational voice', enabling them to affect outcomes. This reasoning has severe implications for the ideals of democracy (Booysen, 2007). PR involvement in SEIAS improves the policymaking process in these ways:

1. It contributes to advancing knowledge in an academic and professional subject by documenting and analysing a phenomenon in partnership with the people most affected by it (Breitbart, 2012:14)
2. It expands the range of alternatives created for decision-making by considering the perspectives and information of those affected by it (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012:196). This raises acceptance of the assessments and decision's outcome since engagement by those affected may cause shared visions and a feeling of ownership of the outcome (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012:196)
3. Booysen (2007:172) asserts that PR contributes to the democratic nature of the process, depending on how participants are chosen, how the process is managed, and how the term 'democratic' is defined

Tacchi and Lennie (2014) contend that policymakers must understand how to adopt PR effectively. This study investigates the nature, scope and application of SEIAS PR. .

1.3 Research problem

PR is not a simple approach to implement (Du Plooy, 2013:339). Its emphasises on tight collaboration while distributing decision-making power to participants is something the South African Government was criticised for failing. SEIAS PR is often connected with a restricted delegation of decision-making power to participants, cherry-picking participants' feedback, competing expectations and agendas, and a lack of consensus on policy decisions (Kole & Magoro, 2020; Montmasson-Clair, 2020; Vegter, 2018; Tacchi &Lennie (2014).

Kole and Magoro (2020) assert that SEIAS PR is not conducted according to the script. The approach does not ensure that participants represent diverse stakeholder

groups. This can be observed in Kole and Magoro's (2020) critique of the SEIAS procedure being limited to "usual suspects". Vegter (2018) and Montmasson-Clair (2020) make similar criticisms, stating that participation in SEIAS is often restricted to a few participants while others are disregarded.

Second, the procedure does not value 'participants' input. According to Kole and Magoro (2020), some government organisations "cherry-pick" participant feedback in policy decisions. Finally, PR withholds consensus on policy recommendations. This is based on the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) (2020) assessment of the growing number of pushbacks from various civil society groups opposing passing policies or regulations.

The challenges involve intrinsic PR-related difficulties (Tacchi & Lennie, 2014). These complications arise in PR as a fixed procedure or a research plan lacking in conducting PR (Du Plooy, 2013:344). A fixed way to collect, select, and interpret findings is lacking because a fixed procedure or research plan does not exist for PR—often resulting in the selective choice of evidence to emphasise evidence supporting the desired result (Parkhurst, 2017:07). This is especially true in policy discussions regarding over-complicated or ambiguous issues with significant—sometimes contradictory—elements.

Tacchi and Lennie (2014) suggest that for policymakers to employ PR in consensus-driven and evidence-informed PP decisions, they must firmly understand the method. This is important to avoid policy pushback from stakeholders because government departments fail to consider stakeholder feedback to enhance policy decisions.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions are:

Research Question 1: How is SEIAS PR conceptualised by the officials from the Presidency, the National Treasury, the DPME and the Economic Development Department?

> **Sub-research Question 1:** What is the observation of officials from the Presidency, the National Treasury, the DPME and the Economic

Development Department? This question aimed to understand how policy-practitioners conceptualise PR in SEIAS.

Research Question 2: How are participants mobilised in SEIAS PR?

Sub-research Question 2: Who engages in SEIAS PR? This question aimed to understand how participants are identified and selected in SEIAS PR.

Research Question 3: How effectively is SEIAS PR applied?

Sub-research Question 3: What steps are taken to promote the successful implementation of PR? This question aimed to understand how SEIAS PR is implemented.

1.5 Significance of the study

Participatory research in facilitating the support of non-scientific evidence in the policymaking process is multifaceted and complex. It is proposed, therefore, that policymakers should share a basic understanding of the methodology to influence the process more effectively. Policymakers must perceive the intricacies of collaborating with participants to strengthen their interactions in PR. This study is important to academia and PP because it investigated SEIAS PR.

1.6. Data collection

One-on-one semi-structured interviews acquired qualitative data. Three (3) officials from the Presidency, the National Treasury and Economic Development Department, were one-on-one interviewed on the conceptualisation of SEIAS PR, and two (2) officials from the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies and the Department of Health were interviewed one-on-one on implementing SEIAS PR. The reason for this is that the Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS), the Economic Development Department, the National Treasury and Presidency commissioned a study which led to a decision on the need for SEIAS and SEIAS PR.

From the study, it was also decided in September 2015 that the DPME would establish a SEIAS unit to ensure the implementation, quality control, and capacity

support of SEIAS across the government. It would ensure that the guidelines and templates are updated regularly and help the system's institutionalisation. The SEIAS unit has since relocated from the DPME to the policy and research services (PRS) unit inside the Presidency.

Two officials from the Department of Health, and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies, were interviewed one-on-one on implementing SEIAS PR. This is because the departments submitted SEIAS reports for policy initiatives, legislation and regulations criticised for ineffectively implementing SEIAS PR. The participants were purposefully sampled. Purposive sampling is a technique that uses predetermined criteria to select candidates relevant to the research concern (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). Attributable to the research topic, it was necessary to pick informants based on their skills and knowledge of the area. The participants are not in the researcher's professional network of individuals.

The semi-structured interviews helped to conceptualise the reality of PR in SEIAS. According to Boyce and Neale (2006:03), semi-structured interviews are useful in requiring detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviours or when exploring a concern in depth. According to Makgale (2017:01), it provides a space for participants to bring meaning to their own experiences and encounters. Makgale (2017) further contends that one-on-one semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe deeper, which may cause further reflections from interviewees.

1.7. Data management

Data from the interviews were captured using a digital voice recorder for the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Further field notes were gathered to guarantee complete and accurate data capture. For analysis, qualitative data were transcribed. Nonverbal or background noises were included in the transcription of audiotapes. The transcriptions do not include the names of the participants.

1.8. Anticipated data processing, analysis, and interpretation

The study concerned officials' subjective experiences with SEIAS PR. It is anticipated that study participants can express themselves freely and honestly regarding their knowledge of SEIAS PR and its application. Throughout the

interviews, data was gathered. Handwritten field notes and recordings were made. The notes were turned into understandable reports, read, and adjusted for accuracy.

Theme identification was used to assess the regularity with which major constructions arise by recognising word repeats and keywords in interviews and documentary materials. Comparisons and contrasts would compare responses provided by various groups. This mechanism would be effective in data processing to ascertain the nature and character of public participation-related challenges in SEIAS.

The data was analysed using qualitative or thematic methods. As expressed by Holland and Kawulich (2012:231), "thematic analysis is a general technique to qualitative research that includes discovering themes or patterns in the data". The theme method aided in the analysis of textual material gathered from interviews and documentary sources. Coding made sense and gave the acquired data significance. Data might be "segregated, sorted, regrouped, and relinked to condense meaning and explanation" (Lincoln,1985:21). Pattern detection in data and ideas reveals why certain patterns occur. Coding therefore aided in the organisation and grouping of like coded material into groups that shared features.

Descriptive codes would characterise the nature of SEIAS. To allow for easy viewing, data interpretation information was sent through a data display. Data were classified into categories in order to discover trends in the data.

1.9. Research ethics

Before beginning the research, the authorities and participants were consulted. All participants were informed of the researcher's affiliation with the institution. The goal and advantages of the research were presented to the participants prior to their participation in the study. Permission to participate in the study was obtained, and everyone was informed that they might decline. According to Kawulich and Ogletree (2012:1), ethical issues cannot be foreseen; rather, ethics must be considered throughout the study process.

The research was not anonymised, but confidentiality was maintained. The researcher approached the interviewees through the Presidencys' SEIAS Unit. The researcher requested the information of the officials serving on the

Interdepartmental Steering Committee from the Presidency's SEIAS unit. Prospective interviewees were then contacted through email to schedule a research interview.

1.10. The structure of the research report

The report is structured into the subsequent chapters:

Chapter 1: Research problem.

Chapter 2: This section reviews the literature on PR, linking participants' knowledge about the anticipated and unexpected influences of a proposed policy to evidence-informed PP decision-making.

Chapter 3: This chapter describes the study design, methodology, and procedures employed. This chapter also embraces the data analysis technique.

Chapter 4: .

Chapter 5: Analysis and summary of findings.

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Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses SEIAS PR. This section attempts to link participation and PR to rational decision-making.

2.2 The definition of public policymaking

Since the inception of democracy in 1994, policymaking intended for socio-economic inequality in South Africa was the focus of the post-apartheid African National Congress (ANC) government. Cloete, De Coning, Wissink, and Rabie (2018:05) define 'policy' as "a course of action pursued by an actor or group of actors to resolve a perceived problem". It is an instrument of government, reflecting a willingness—or unwillingness—to act on societal issues (Dye, 2013; Anderson, 2011). An analysis of the definitions reflects a policy as a statement outlining a government's strategy for resolving society's (Anderson, 2011; Cloete et al., 2018; Dye, 2013). According to Dye (2013:02), it is a statement reflecting what the government "chooses to do or not to do" in resolving complex social, economic, and environmental challenges.

Thaman, Y. 2020. Purpose and Scope of Software Testing in Software Development Life Cycle. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342097085_Purpose_and_Scope_of_Software_Testing_in_Software_Development_Life_Cycle/link/5ee1f8c792851ce9e7d93452/download (Accessed 24 November 2022).

The European Training Foundation (ETF) (2015:03) corroborates this position by suggesting that PP is critical for changing societies and influencing individual and collective practices and behaviour. PP is a distinct way of labelling an idea describing society and how it should be and justifying practices and institutional structures. This includes emphasising the importance of participation in governmental procedures to establish decisive causes of action (ETF, 2015:04). The PP process is often long and complicated, involving numerous interests and participants (ETF, 2015:04). In the South African context, Booysen (2007:163) remarks it entails collaboratively developing "an acceptable course of action for addressing perceived socio-economic issues".

The SEIAS is a critical step in collaboratively developing an acceptable course for discussing perceived socio-economic issues (Kole & Magoro, 2020). SEIAS is a predictive study part of PP decision-making. It promotes a technical and participative approach to identifying, analysing, and mitigating socio-economic challenges connected with proposed policies or regulations (DPME, 2015:09). It also helps policymakers and researchers understand how policies can lead to socio-economic development (MacKenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board, 2007:03).

Booysen (2007:168) proposes that to understand policymaking—including SEIAS—greater clarity must be acquired regarding 'how?' PP decisions are constructed. Booysen (2007), Anderson (2015), and Cloete et al. (2018) supply theories on decision-making modes to aid in greater clarity about the public policymaking process. These theories can be summarised below (Anderson, 2015; Booysen, 2007; Cloete et al., 2018).

2.2.1 The comprehensive rational theory

According to Anderson (2015:135), the comprehensive rational theory for decision-making could be more widely known. The theory contends that decision-makers should not only follow a procedure for a rational decision; policymakers know what they want and have the information and capacity to obtain such (Anderson, 2015; Booysen, 2007). According to Booysen (2007:168), decision-makers have the information they need for thorough decisions. The comprehensive rational theory for decision-making relates to economic observations similar to the cost-benefit analysis (Henry, 2004:314). In cost-benefit analysis—decision-makers must:

1. Make an effort to learn all a society's value preferences;
2. Give relative weight to each value;
3. Determine the available policy alternatives
4. Understand the implications of each alternative
5. Determine how the adoption of any one policy impacts the other choices in terms of opportunity costs.
6. Choose the most efficient policy solution for cohesiveness (Henry, 2004:314)

According to Anderson (2015:135), this typically requires that the decision-making process follow a sequence of logical steps, starting with proving objectives or goals in a decision context, followed by identifying or designing alternatives, assessment

of the influences of alternatives, and choice of the 'best' alternative because of the goals. Kørnøv and Thissen (2012:192) agree, remarking that the process for rational comprehensive decision-making must proceed through the phases of explaining the problem, finding an array of options for achieving the goals, forecasting the effects of each alternative, comparing the expected consequences of the alternatives, and selecting the alternative.

According to Kørnøv and Thissen (2012:192), the purpose of the subsequent sequence of logical steps in rational comprehensive decision-making is to assert that policymakers make policy decisions based on knowing with certainty what works, obtaining which results for which groups of people, under what conditions, for how long, and at what cost. It also attempts to bring insights and evidence into decision-making sequentially.

According to Cloete et al. (2018:36), rational decision-making should be based on the best-quality evidence of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative strategies, ensuring a rigorous policymaking process. Evidence in rational, comprehensive decision-making is, therefore, used to determine the consequences of alternatives and choose the alternative expected to achieve best the policy goals or objectives (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2000; Cloete et al., 2018).

The most common criticism against the rational comprehensive decision-making model is that it is time-consuming and unrealistic about information and analytical requirements (Booysen, 2007). This careful and methodical decision-making process requires decision-makers to have unlimited time to judge their information and alternatives perfectly; however, decision-makers rarely access all information relevant to the decision (Booysen, 2007:168).

The information they access is often flawed and imperfect. Decision-makers also lack analytical and computational abilities and time (Booysen, 2007:168). These limitations inevitably lead to misjudgements in the assessment process (Booysen, 2007). Another prevalent criticism against the rational comprehensive decision-making theory is that it treats decision-making as an intellectual rather than a democratic process (Booysen, 2007:168).

2.2.2 The incremental decision-making theory

The incremental decision-making theory was formulated in response to the challenges of rational comprehensive decision-making (Anderson, 1997). The theory observes the rational, comprehensive decision-making theory as a time-consuming and complicated approach. According to Cloete et al. (2018:37), the initial decision to adopt a specific policy approach was justified, and a lack of progress towards achieving the policy goal could be improved by allocating resources and higher efficiency levels. It simplifies decision-making by restricting options to a few, deviating marginally from precedent, then selecting the option, commanding a consensus among decision-makers (Booysen, 2007:168).

Cloete et al. (2018) contend that the incremental decision-making theory was the preferred approach to decision-making; however, the approach is unsustainable for effectively discussing the policy problem—it exposes decision-makers to the risk of adopting decisions based on potentially flawed policy content (Cloete et al., 2018:37). Booysen (2007:168) arguments agree with that of Cloete et al. (2018).

2.2.3 The mixed scanning decision-making theory

The criticism levelled against rational decision-making- and the incremental decision-making theory prompted the introduction of the mixed scanning decision-making theory. According to Cloete et al. (2018:37), the mixed scanning theory integrates strong elements of rational and incremental decision-making by combining the high order. Fundamental policymaking is considered long-term scanning, and incremental processes related to fundamental decisions can be short-term scanning.

The scanning process provides a strategy for evaluation and flexibility to scan various situations, acceding to a useful device for decision-making at various levels. Etzioni (1986) presents the subsequent strategy:

1. List all alternatives that come to mind
2. Examine the alternatives briefly and reject those that reveal a ‘crippling objection’. These include:
    a. Utilitarian objection to alternatives that need means that are not available.

b. Normative objections to alternatives undermine the decision-makers' fundamental principles.

c. Political objections to alternatives contradict the fundamental values or interests of other actors whose support appears to be required for decision-making or/and implementation.

3. For all rejected alternatives under number two, repeat the second step in greater but not full detail

4. For those alternatives remaining, repeat in fuller detail, and continue until only one alternative is left

According to Cloete et al. (2018:37), the mixed scanning model is a realistic compromise between the two diametrically opposite approaches summarised above.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The study explored the comprehensive rational theory for decision-making about SEIAS PR. Rationality is essential in decision-making. Scientifically valid information or knowledge about a decision concern will help policymakers determine better decisions (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012:191). A literature review on a comprehensive rational theory for decision-making reveals that the rational decision-making model follows logical steps, starting by establishing objectives in a decision, followed by identifying or designing alternatives, assessing the effects of alternatives, and the choice of the “best” alternative, provided the goals (Henry, 2004; Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012). Decisions involving substantial long-term considerations can, therefore, be made, focusing on short-term logic. Rational may not be rational for society; therefore, implementing logical steps informs logical decision-making, increasing the prospect of reaching the desired long-term outcome (Cloete, 2018; Anderson, 2015).

A rationale analysis of the concept is required to maximise the effectiveness of the SEIAS process. This procedure involved identifying the logical processes followed to illuminate logical decision-making. Understanding the enforceability of the SEIAS process and identifying important aspects are crucial to a decision's usefulness. The

literature below demonstrates that a purely rational decision in the SEIAS process is difficult to attain (Kole & Magoro, 2020).

The main reason for this challenge is the absence of comprehensive information. According to the comprehensive rational theory for decision-making, relying exclusively on applying technical knowledge, expertise, techniques, and decision-making methods contradict the theory's mission and position (Kørnøv &Thissen, 2012). It also opposes the democratic values of the decision policymaking process (Booysen, 2007:168).

In a democratic decision-making process, the public determines its destination; and the function of policymakers and bureaucratic staff is to lead them to the purpose. Diverse groups and stakeholders inform policymakers of a society's value preferences, assigning each value a relative weight. They support policymakers in identifying policy alternatives and determining the consequences of each. According to Thissen and Twaalfhoven (2000), success criteria for such integrated support emphasise process efficiency and richness, stakeholder satisfaction, openness, and balanced knowledge provision, despite the decision outcome.

According to Kørnøv and Thissen (2012), the strategic notion in a participative mode of a comprehensive rational theory for decision-making involves relevant participants in the decision-making process. Participant importance may be established by their official position (for example, a government authority), possession of substantial resources (for example, money, skills), capacity to obstruct or prevent implementation (lobby organisations, implementers), and the stakes (for instance, proponents of some policy). The participative mode of a comprehensive rational theory for decision-making will improve the process in four ways (Kørnøv &Thissen, 2012):

1. The increased richness of information and creativity, as the perspective and knowledge of a variety of participants, are considered
2. Improved acceptance of the evaluation and decision-making process results, since involvement may lead to shared visions and a sense of ownership of the outcomes.
3. While a research process has predetermined aims and issues at the start, a participatory process allows for emergent insights and modifications in problem

perspectives and objectives throughout time, with the cooperation of all those engaged. Contributing to the democratic nature of the process is determined by how participants are chosen, how the process is administered, and how the term "democratic" is defined.

4. From the above discussion, there are similarities between PR and comprehensive decision-making theory. Both PR and theory are fundamental to democracy. They also enable the extension of decision-making knowledge and choices and can increase acceptance of the results of an assessment and a decision.

Stakeholder engagement is imbedded in the forging of a participative mode of comprehensive rational decision-making. According to Ekirapa-Kiracho (2017:17), stakeholder engagement in comprehensive and rational decision-making is important for improving PP development and implementation. Stakeholder engagement is the participation of individuals, groups, or organisations with the ability to affect and who may be influenced by actions or objectives (Ekirapa-Kiracho, 2017:17).

According to Ekirapa-Kiracho (2017:17), stakeholders vary depending on their resources, position, and interests in each situation. The motivations for engaging them and their commitment level to the decision-making process may fluctuate (Ekirapa-Kiracho, 2017:17). Arnstein (1969) proposed eight levels of stakeholder participation. The first level, manipulation, entails obtaining public support and swaying public opinion through propaganda. At this level, according to Arnstein (1969:218), “stakeholders are placed on rubber-stamp advisory committees or advisory boards to 'educate' them or get their support.” At the second level, therapy assumes that the stakeholders are incapable of making decisions, and those in authority subject stakeholders to paternalistic education exercises as a sort of enlightenment (Brooks & Harris, 2008).

The third level provides information. At this level, information flows from policymakers and bureaucratic staff to stakeholders with “no feedback route offered and no negotiating leverage” (Arnstein, 1969: 219). The most common “participation” and communication instruments employed in the “informing” process include the news media, brochures, posters, responses to inquiries, and meetings, which discourage inquiry and deliver superficial, irrelevant information (Arnstein,

1969:219). The fourth level, consultation, facilitate a two-way flow of information through meetings, hearings, and surveys; however, the stakeholders' input collected during this procedure is rarely considered.

This level is described by Arnstein (1969:219) as “participation in participation.” What the policymakers and bureaucratic staff accomplish in this proves that they have gone through the processes to involve “those stakeholders.” The next step of tokenism is placation, where “people begin to gain influence through boards or committees, but they can still be outnumbered or overturned, especially when their opinions are negative from the policymakers and bureaucratic staff” (Brooks & Harris, 2008:141).

The sixth level of Arnstein's ladder, partnership, begins when “stakeholders and powerholders agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through joint policy boards, planning committees, and methods for resolving impasses” (Arnstein, 1969: 221). Arnstein contends that qualities, such as organised stakeholder groups, effectively foster partnerships. At the seventh level, delegated power arises when stakeholders ensure the accountability of a programme by gaining decision-making authority over a plan or programme (Arnstein, 1969:222). Stakeholder control is the apex of Arnstein's hierarchy. Arnstein (1969) remarks, “stakeholders are just asking the degree of authority (or control) that ensures that participants may rule a programme or an institution, be fully in charge of policy and management and negotiate the terms under which “outsiders” may change them.

Stakeholder engagement can be mutually beneficial. According to Becker, Harris, Nielsen, and McLaughlin (2004:198), stakeholders may engage with policymakers because the policy decisions may directly affect their specific interests. They may also engage policymakers because the engagement may lead to outcomes and outputs benefiting the public. Policymakers and implementers may have varied reasons for engaging stakeholders, such as:

1. To understand the power, interests, perspectives, values, behaviours, and opinions of stakeholders
2. To understand the change in various contexts and among individuals
3. To build the capacity of local stakeholders by creating a learning process and developing leaders and teams

4. To create a stimulus for change and to promote local ownership (Becker et al., 2004)

According to Becker et al. (2004), when selecting a strategy for engaging the stakeholders, it is essential to examine the engagement goal, the resources, and expectations. Policymakers can adopt a variety of initiatives. Traditionally, information was presented to stakeholders through simple workshops or meetings. Alternately, stakeholders' consultation regarding their interests, needs, relationships, and perceived benefits of a policy has been conducted using various techniques, such as PR (Thiollent, 2011:162).

According to Thiollent (2011:162), PR facilitates high-level stakeholder engagement and develops active partnerships in comprehensive rational decision-making. PR is increasingly being advocated for because it presents stakeholders with a voice while allowing them to table their concerns; PR improves local problem identification, presents suggestions of feasible solutions, and promotes the uptake of local solutions (Thiollent, 2011:162).

2.4 The function of the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System in public policymaking

Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System (SEIAS) is defined provided the South African Government's objective of eradicating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030 (Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation [DPME], 2015:06). According to Gumede (2008:12), South Africa encounters socio-economic challenges, such as high unemployment, poverty, social inequality, and limited access to public services. These concerns remain, emphasising the crucial need for policy interventions tailored to the influence of socio-economic variables and influencing factors (Gumede, 2008; DPME, 2015; Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies [TIPS], 2017).

SEIAS is a decision-making practice in the public policymaking processes attempting to identify, analyse, and mitigate socio-economic challenges associated with a proposed policy or regulation (DPME, 2015:05). According to TIPS (2017:07), it involves collecting and analysing data to aid policymakers in decision-making. The data collected in SEIAS is typically used to verify a problem, identify the underlying causes of the problem, determine the need for policy action, and anticipate the

socio-economic consequences of policy action (TIPS, 2017:07). SEIAS can, therefore, be a decision-making device, attempting to ensure decision-makers are "armed with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions" by maximising the proposed policy's full benefits at the minimal risk (DPME, 2015; and TIPS, 2017).

2.4.1 The origin of the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System in South Africa's policymaking process

The SEIAS ideology can be traced to the environmental impact assessment (EIA), which arose in the United States in the 1970s because of passaging of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Vanclay, 2003:05). Cashmore (2004:404) describes the EIA as a decision-making instrument for identifying and evaluating the expected environmental consequences of certain proposed development activities. According to Vanclay (2003:05), federal agencies have had to compile an environmental impact statement using social scientific approaches since the 1970s to examine the planned and unintentional effects of proposed projects on the environment. Following the 1985 EIA regulation 85/337/EWG, this became law in European Union member states.

EIAs were limited to the natural environment, according to Vanclay, Estevens, Aucamp, and Franks (2015:05); however, when the 'human environment' was expanded, the focus switched; social, health and economic considerations were integrated, resulting in a 'Social Impact Assessment' (SIA). Vanclay et al. (2015:05) assert that since then, there has been a rise in interest in SIA and EIA, resulting in forming of a professional community of impact assessment practitioners and a discourse on impact assessment.

SEIAS falls within the discourse of impact assessment (Kole & Magoro, 2020). Based on the definition of ex-ante impact assessment (OECD, 2009), it could present an ex-ante impact assessment practice integrated into the preliminary stages of the South African public policymaking phase. It must identify specific policy needs and regulatory objectives and justify implementing the policy (OECD, 2009; Vanclay et al., 2015; Kole & Magoro, 2020).

SEIAS was institutionalised in South Africa's policymaking process in October 2015 to phase out the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). RIA was a cost-benefit

assessment used to analyse a proposed regulation plan (**Error! Reference source not found.** et al., 2016:04). It focused on whether costs exceeded benefits and recommended abandoning the proposed policy if it did since it put a higher premium on the economic effect of the policy than on the country's long-term developmental objectives.

According to **Error! Reference source not found.** et al. (2016), RIA was adopted in 2007 primarily to strengthen the regulatory environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs), which is vital to the economy's growth. According to The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2012) and **Error! Reference source not found.** et al. (2016), it was the National Treasury's methodical observation identifying how a proposed regulation would affect small businesses.

Unlike RIA, SEIAS enable policymakers to assess a proposed policy's social, economic, cultural, and environmental implications and establish the best risk and mitigation strategy. SEIAS also enables policymakers to identify the department's ability to implement policy decisions and produce realistic costing plans and monitoring and evaluation strategies. It regards the constitutionality of the policymaking process (Kole & Magoro, 2020)

SEIAS observes how well the proposed policy accedes to the national goals in the National Development Plan Agenda 2030 (Kole & Magoro 2020). It also observes the need to include stakeholders in data collecting (Kole & Magoro, 2020; DPME, 2015; DPME, 2021). According to Adelle et al. (2016), unlike the deployment of RIA, and crucial for this study, adopting SEIAS requires stakeholder interaction (DPME 2015a; DPME 2021). Consultants, researchers, and external specialists are important for primary data collection in SEIAS, according to DPME (2021: 04).

2.4.2 The rationality of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems public policymaking

Much of the work on SEIAS depends on if providing more accurate, scientifically reliable information or knowledge about a choice problem would cause a better, more informed decision on the alternatives (DPME, 2021:03). This observation conceives SEIAS from a rational perspective on decision-making (Kørnøv &Thissen, 2012; and DPME, 2021). A decision is more rational after considering the possible consequences of other choices during the decision process.

DPME (2021:09) affirms that SEIAS is a knowledge-based decision-making process based on rationality, built on a stepwise approach. Its guidelines and methods focus on collecting, analysing, and presenting objective information, based on which the decision-maker can make a sound judgement (DPME, 2021; Presidency, 2020). DPME, 2021 also observed that evidence is critical in knowledge-based decisions. **Error! Reference source not found.** et al. (2018:37) express a similar perspective, contending that it is crucial for making informed, thorough, logical judgements during public policymaking.

Academics, policy consultants, policymakers, and service providers sometimes differ on what constitutes evidence. According to DPME (2014:02), those approaching statistical conceptions of evidence often rely on information or data supporting or refuting a conclusion. Policymakers must indicate that an intervention does not work to know that it does. They need data and statistics confirming or disproving assumptions about a policy's expected effectiveness and the most effective manner of implementation (DPME, 2014:02).

Such evidence is seldom conclusive. Even when evidence is based on statistical sampling and comparative analysis of policy choices, it can only estimate the probability of obtaining the desired outcome, lacking context. Strydom, Funke, Nienaber, Nortje, and Steyn (2010:05) assert that evidence comprises various components—not only scientific—and should not be used in isolation. Strydom et al. (2010:05) contend that scientific should be used with non-scientific evidence to influence policy decisions. Non-scientific evidence is often more qualitative and focuses on 'why, how, and under what circumstances?' a policy intervention would be helpful (Strydom et al., 2010:05). SEIAS combines scientific evidence and non-scientific evidence in the decision-making process to help policymakers with more rational decisions after considering the possible consequences of other choices during the process that led to it.

In SEIAS, an evidence-informed rational decision would investigate the potential harms and benefits of a policy option. It would also involve an evidence-based assessment of the likelihood and magnitude of positively and negatively valued outcomes. The assessment should include stakeholder participation, affected by the policy outcome, through careful, targeted information communication. This is not an

easy task; however, provided the policy pushback in South Africa, such an approach is feasible, ethically mandated, and long overdue.

2.4.3 The rationality for a participative mode of rational decision-making

Participation implies that more than one stakeholder brings qualitative non-scientific evidence into decision-making on a policy matter. According to Kørnøv and Thissen (2012:195), vital participation involves actors in policy preparation. These participants include government officials, private sector members, international organisations, lobby groups, and civil society organisations with a stake in the policy (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012:195). They increase the information richness when deciding (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012:195). The authors' analysis parallels **Error! Reference source not found.**'s analysis of participation in decision-making (2006:31). For instance, **Error! Reference source not found.** (2006:31) contends that participation allows stakeholders to 'advise' decision-makers in the policymaking process. **Error! Reference source not found.** (2007:172) describes that this provides people and groups with a "transformational voice", enabling them to affect policy outcomes rather than a single actor called "the government" making policy decisions.

The term 'participation' has been used for a long time in South Africa's political system. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is the most frequently cited book discussing the importance of participation in socio-economic decision-making. One of the founding principles of South Africa's constitutional democracy is participation in state and policymaking affairs. According to Masango (2001), before democracy—participation in policymaking and implementation was limited and not supported by legislation. Black South African citizens were denied the opportunity to participate in making and implementing policies, affecting their socio-economic well-being. They were expected only to follow the rules established by the government (Masango, 2001:12).

The post-apartheid South African Government adopted a participatory ideology for decision and policymaking. It prides itself on being a democratic developmental state, adhering to the principles of good governance, and acknowledging the importance of stakeholders in state affairs; therefore, the right of stakeholders to participate in policymaking is stressed in the Constitution of the Republic of South

Africa (Nelson, D. 2014. *Participatory action research: A literature review*. Unpublished

manuscript.

Nyathi, 2008:103).

SEIAS promotes a technical and participative approach to identifying, analysing, and mitigating socio-economic challenges connected with proposed policies or regulations (DPME, 2015:09). According to Becker et al. (2004:198), the technical and participatory techniques are often portrayed as competing methodologies with opposing epistemologies and data collection procedures. With technical techniques, the researcher's or policymaker's role is to discover indicators, collect objective metrics relevant to the situation, and expertly opine on how the system will progress (**Error! Reference source not found.** et al., 2004).

A major assumption about the technical technique is that, provided adequate evidence, people educated in the social science of impact assessment can make accurate predictions. Participatory techniques project outcomes based on the knowledge and experiences of people most affected by proposed changes (**Error! Reference source not found.** et al., 2004:178). The responsibility of the researcher or policymaker is to encourage information flow, interpretation, and reporting of results.

Technical methods, in addition, are criticised (**Error! Reference source not found.** et al., 2004): Some have observed that they filter identifying effects through an inquiry model that implies people and groups react and adapt to change in comparable ways (**Error! Reference source not found.** et al., 2004:178). Despite their best efforts, indicators may be speculative and use data sources that may be inaccurate (**Error! Reference source not found.** et al., 2004:178).

2.5 The participatory research approach in the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System

According to Thiollent (2011:162), the PR approach is a well-known phenomenon in social science. PR is a research approach or "an attitude to inquiry". It is based on

critical social science theories and a participatory world observation where the primary purpose of human inquiry is practical (Thiollent, 2011:162).

PR aims to coordinate the research process with people whose lives are affected. Dinbabo (2003:09) describes PR as an inquiry into a social discipline in direct partnership with the stakeholders most affected by the subject under investigation with the aim of action or change. According to **Error! Reference source not found.** (2007), it is observed as an alternative perspective to conventional social research—It is flexible and open-ended. It has roots in the qualitative research tradition, but it is not anti-quantitative, as several PR devices collect quantitative data. PR aims to explore and interpret the observations, concerns, and experiences of people from their perspectives, allowing them to undertake measures to improve their situations (**Error! Reference source not found.**, 2007).

2.5.1 Fundamental principles of participatory research

Each research type necessitates creating social circumstances suitable to the concern and the epistemological method under consideration. PR, according to Lenz (2012), requires a democratic social and political setting. According to Lenz (2012), engaging various stakeholders and the social commitment required by policymakers and researchers are only conceivable if allowed by a political system.

The link between democracy and PR is present in South Africa, where—following the collapse of the apartheid system, there was a general increase in the participation of citizens and stakeholders in public policymaking and decision-making processes (**Error! Reference source not found.**, 2009:17). PR describes a process where people are treated as ‘participants’ rather than ‘research subjects. The research is *with* rather than *on* people (Tadevosyan & Schoenhuth, 2011:03). This emphasises creating knowledge that further applies to collective problems through social action.

Reason and Heron (1997:274) remark that PR invites people to participate in the co-creation of knowledge about themselves to change the world. It is aimed at generating knowledge and producing action, in common with other forms of action-oriented research. This, unlike academic research, is driven by practical outcomes rather than theoretical understanding. According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth

(2011:03), PR empowers people—especially socially marginalised ones, by involving them in the knowledge-creation process.

Knowledge is another basic principle of PR. According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011:03), it is based on the notion that “knowledge is power”, which is why this method advocates for people to examine their conditions, assess them and then take collective action to better their lives. Knowledge for knowledge is disregarded. Knowledge is closely related to solutions through PR, a tangible activity. According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011:03), the quality of knowledge is crucial since it may support decision-making.

PR is also beneficial in decision-making processes when government officials are ready to relinquish decision-making authority to stakeholders participating in the research process (**Error! Reference source not found.** & Lennie, 2014:03). The PR technique encourages power-sharing in the research and planning stages of development by including local people’s opinions. As observed by its interactions with members of disadvantaged groups wanting to better their social position, PR is devoted to the politics of equality and social reform (Jordan, 2008:601).

It also wishes to assist people and groups in becoming more powerful and emancipated, improving their circumstances, changing the cultures of groups and organisations, and producing various types of knowledge by empowering stakeholders to drive contextualised change initiatives by discussing identified problems affecting them (Berg, 2012:259).

2.5.2 Strengths and weaknesses of participatory research in rational decision-making

Participatory research—like other social research methods—has advantages and disadvantages. The PR technique has several benefits, making it effective for any study, particularly when practical, action-oriented decisions are required. According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011:03), PR allows decision or policymakers to understand the social reality of participants from their perspective. The participants analyse their own situation, observing a deeper understanding while providing decision-makers elaborative needs-based and right-based policy advice (Tadevosyan & Schoenhuth, 2011:03).

Error! Reference source not found. and Thomas (2012) corroborate the analysis above, contending that because PR is applied based on social research, it helps decision-makers discuss problems and find practical solutions. It provides decision-makers opportunities to re-think and re-interpret the participants' situation, which might increase the relevance, applicability and delivery of research findings to discuss problems in their daily life and improve them. This is usually impossible through conventional approaches.

According to Du Plooy (2013:339), the PR approach is adaptable to promote the communication of results for desired change. Du Plooy (2013) contends that incorporating participants in the research process would need a shift, such as research concerning producing "more flexible, relatively easy, and extensively generalisable field methodologies". It facilitates communication and exchange of essential information between participants and researchers and the research and development process, fostering a collective sense of ownership of the research process and discoveries (Du Plooy, 2013:339).

According to Du Plooy (2013), this leads to more concrete outcomes. Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011) observe that it leads to a culture of the long-term involvement of various levels of stakeholders in the research and mutual learning process. This promotes a culture of dialogue, partnership, and cooperation. According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011), this benefits democracy.

According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011) and **Error! Reference source not found.** and Mayoux (2003), PR is time-consuming—it is more than simply a research process—it is also a decision-making instrument. According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011:07), the experience revealed that for successful results, the preparation phase (stakeholder identification) and follow-up period (dissemination, advocacy, and policy connecting) take longer than the fieldwork. Engaging stakeholders, advocacy, and follow-up actions are critical to transforming social change (**Error! Reference source not found.** & Mayoux, 2003:24).

Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011) explain that the research approach's concentration on collaboration with study participants provides an opportunity for methodological critique. According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011:07), PR approaches enable the study process to be conducted mechanically. According to

Du Plooy (2013), PR should be based on transdisciplinary knowledge and capacities. A well-justified scientific approach, effective communication, and facilitation and conflict resolution talents are required for successful implementation. If it is applied in any other manner, the quality of the research findings may suffer.

Another significant observation by Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011) about PR is that it may succeed only in certain contexts. Researchers and policymakers must determine whether participatory techniques are suitable to prevent participation from becoming an aim and undermining the entire concept of 'participation' or 'participatory'. Understanding when to conduct interactive research may be a challenge. The research must consider outcomes, such as identifying study participants.

According to Tadevosyan and Schoenhuth (2011:07), participation involves more than people's involvement. It is a strenuous and time-consuming procedure. It necessitates forming partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders at all levels of society. This necessity starts long before the actual research process, necessitating the early and substantial engagement of all stakeholders in planning activities influencing them (Tadevosyan & Schoenhuth, 2011:07).

2.5.3 Criticism of participatory research in South Africa's Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems process

In a participatory democracy, such as South Africa, SEIAS PR would be expected to be rigorous and inclusive of participants from diverse stakeholder groups (Kakonge, 1996:314). According to Kakonge (1996), to develop acceptable PR outcomes, involvement from all socio-economic backgrounds should be included—this, however, is not the case. According to opponents, such as Goldenberg and Frideres (1986), participants from various socio-economic backgrounds are not involved in participation activities in impact assessment approaches (1986:273).

According to Kole and Magoro, with similar criticism to SEIAS (2002), various stakeholder groups' participation in SEIAS is limited. Goldenberg and Frideres (1986:273) assert that participatory programmes are often implemented in evaluation approaches to meet statutory criteria. They are unsuccessful as they do not enable people to obtain knowledge of government choices and policies while offering feedback to assist the government in creating and executing a better policy

process. According to Van Staden (2017), PR procedures in SEIAS are often passive activities. They do not correspond to PR.

Van Staden (2017) and Sebola (2016) observe that participatory activities do not enable the participants to influence and share power over decisions influencing them. According to Sebola (2016:60) and Molaba (2016:70), this is attributable to the government's lack of commitment to a participatory strategy. According to Sithole (2020:28), government officials often hesitate to share decision-making authority. They are unresponsive, refusing the significance of participants' contributions to the SEIAS process. Authorities observe themselves as experts in their domains and resist novel ideas from the community (Sithole, 2020:28).

Another challenge to SEIAS PR is a lack of preparation. This lack is a barrier to quality SEIAS PR (Van Staden, 2017). It limits the national government's ability to complete an impact assessment approach. In other cases, the SEIAS is developed after the policy process and only when certain principles are jeopardised, resulting in the most fundamental principles and standards of PR not being followed. This has serious implications for the effectiveness of SEIAS and policy decisions. This study will, therefore, investigate the nature, scope, and applicability of SEIAS PR.

The research confirms that SEIAS PR is intended for comprehensive rational decision-making; it considers people and group involvement crucial. SEIAS PR contributes to advancing native knowledge about societies and socio-economic and policy challenges. It also allows policymakers to document and analyse policy challenges from the perspective and, in collaboration with those most affected by it, to develop policies discussing their specific socio-economic challenges; however, policymakers must observe people and groups as equal partners in decision-making.

According to the definition of PR, people and groups participating in the research process must be treated as 'participants' rather than 'research subjects. People identify, design, and select the best policy options to meet their needs (Tadevosyan & Schoenhuth, 2011). PR allows policymakers to expand the range of alternatives created and considered for decision-making (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012); however, to achieve this, policymakers must collaborate with the people and groups most affected by them in this process (Henry, 2004; Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012).

As the findings chapter indicates, in implementing SEIAS PR, people and groups are not equal partners in decision-making. The collaborative relationship between stakeholders and policymakers is that they listen to each other's inputs. Stakeholders' inputs are considered after a policy problem has been conceptualised; they have no decision-making authority. **Error! Reference source not found.** identifies and recommends how to resolve this challenge.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

Participatory research is an important part of the SEIAS process. It is a study method that emphasises people and group participation and affects the study design and execution. PR promotes close collaboration between policymakers and the participants in a research process. Collaboration allows those traditionally considered the PR to establish a research agenda, collect data, conduct critical analysis, and devise activities to achieve social change; however, SEIAS PR has been criticised for several reasons. First, PR is neither a simple strategy nor a substitute for traditional research techniques. It also has inherent challenges. It will, therefore, require a fixed research plan to be conducted effectively.

Second, SEIAS PR is rarely conducted according to a script. Kole and Magoro (2020), remark that some government organisations were criticised for restricting and limiting the participation of stakeholders to a select few or for 'cherry-picking' participant feedback on policy decisions. This led to policy pushback from stakeholders because government departments disregarded their feedback to enhance policy decisions. Some contended that policymakers must understand the methodology to adopt PR effectively; therefore, the study investigated SEIAS PR's nature, scope, and applicability.

Three research questions and sub-research were formulated to explore SEIAS PR conceptualisation and implementation in South Africa while deliberating the research problem.

This chapter describes the study methods and approaches employed to discuss the research questions and the data collection methods used to understand SEIAS PR in South Africa. The chapter acknowledges the unique relationship between one-on-one interviews and qualitative research design. Adhabi and Anozie (2017:86) contend that interviews, whether one-on-one or another form, structure the support of primary data collection in qualitative research designs. Interviews can be understood as an interactive process where a person directs questions to pursue particular information (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:86). From a scholarly perspective, Sewell (n.d) contends that interviews in a qualitative study allow an understanding of

the world from the perspective; the unfolding of the meaning of people's experiences; uncovering their lived world before scientific explanations. One-on-one interviews provided the study with a unique advantage in achieving these clarifications.

3.2 Research methodology

To improve understanding (e.g., where the concept originates from, how it is implemented, and what makes it change or develop?) of SEIAS PR, the qualitative research methodology was used in this study. According to Cleland (2017:61), qualitative research methodology answers the “how?” and “why?” research questions while allowing for a more in-depth understanding of experiences, phenomena, and context. It permits directing questions that cannot be easily answered numerically. It also allows those who respond to the questions to determine how they share their everyday realities of social phenomena to broaden their knowledge and understanding (Makgale, 2017:1).

According to Busetto et al. (2020:02), flexibility, openness, and responsivity to context characterise qualitative research. According to Cleland (2017), they grant increased spontaneity in the interaction between the researcher and study participant. For instance, qualitative approaches often direct ‘open-ended’ questions phrased differently for each participant. Open-ended questions allow participants to react in their own words; their responses are more complex than ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (Cleland, 2017).

In this study, the qualitative research approach allowed a relationship with the participant to be less formal than what would have been in a quantitative research approach. Participants could answer the questions more intricately and comprehensively than customary with quantitative methodologies. The study directed tailored, follow-up questions to participants to retrieve greater insight.

According to Busetto et al. (2020), flexibility is the main advantage of qualitative research methodology— the flexibility to use open-ended questions and probe further to allow the participants to respond in their own words rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses quantitative methods; however, it required listening carefully to what participants alleged while engaging with them according to their personalities and styles.

3.3 Data collection techniques

Using a correct qualitative data collection technique enabled quality data collection through deep engagements with participants, ‘probing’ them to elaborate on their answers. The interview is one of the data collection techniques for qualitative researchers. According to Adhabi and Anozie (2017:86), it is distinct from other methods, having unique features compelling them as superior.

An interview can be described as a form of consultation where the researcher attempts to know more of a concern as opinionated by the individual being questioned (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:86). In research, this form of consultation is motivated by a reputable purpose of unfolding the meaning of participants' experiences, to uncover their lived world before scientific explanations. An interview is an interactive process where questions are directed while perusing particular information (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:86).

The interviews were formal. According to Edwards and Holland (2013), interviews can be classified from their nature of implementation to their ideal motives in qualitative research. Adhabi and Anozie (2017:88) distinguish between formal and informal, contending that “informal interviews ask questions, which are based on the casual everyday lived experiences of participants, while formal interviews are very rampant, more so in the professional world.” They further contend that a research analyst usually conducts formal interviews, an aspect understated in informal interviews—meaning anyone can conduct them. The research analyst oversees the entire process; they ensure the subject acquires an understanding of the concern under analysis (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Adhabi & Anozie, 2017).

The interviews were semi-structured. According to Alshenqeeti (2014), semi-structured interviews are the most frequently used type of interview in qualitative research, similar to structured interviews—controlled by the researcher with little room for flexibility and casual conversation; this interview requires and uses prepared questions; their implementation depends on how the interviewee responds to the question or topics presented (Alshenqeeti, 2014). According to Alshenqeeti (2014), participant responses supply flexibility to the study to present more enhanced questions than those initially drafted.

The study employed formal semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were pursued to understand the participants' consideration of SEIAS PR contextualisation and implementation in South Africa's policymaking process.

The research process started with protocol questions, according to Johnson, VanGeest and Cho (2002). These are introductory questions before continuing to what Johnson et al. (2002) call transition questions, clarifying the purpose of the interview to the participant. Finally, questions are directed at the research topic. All participants were honest, transparent, and willing to share their experiences and perception of SEIAS PR conceptualisation and implementation in South Africa. Essential topics related to the research subject matter were discussed during the interviews.

3.4 Participants' profiles

From 18 August 2022 to 29 August 2022, five (5) participants were interviewed for a study titled "PR in South Africa's SEIASs". Three (3) officials from the Presidency, the National Treasury and Economic Development Department, were interviewed one-on-one on the conceptualisation of SEIAS PR. This is because the TIPS, the Economic Development Department, the National Treasury and Presidency commissioned a study, leading to a decision on the need for SEIAS in South Africa's policymaking. No one from the DPME and the TIPS was interviewed owing to unavailability, despite numerous emails requesting an interview om the conceptualisation of SEIAS PR in South Africa's policymaking.

Two officials from the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies and the Department of Health were interviewed one-on-one on implementing SEIAS PR. An interview was also pursued with officials from the Department of Employment and labour; however, also owing to the unavailability of the director-general to delegate an official to participate in the study, the interview did not occur. No official from the Department of Labour and Employment would participate in the study without the consent of the director-general because they would be interviewed on their work.

The minutes spent on all interviews were 490 minutes and 48 seconds. The longest interview was one hour, 50 minutes, and 38 seconds, whereas the shortest interview was 38 minutes and 38 seconds. These were conducted on a team's platform.

According to Badampudi, Fotrousi, Cartaxo, and Usman (2022: 02), social science or research involving humans must adhere to ethical principles, including the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. In anonymous research, neither the researcher nor anyone involved in the project knows the identities. The acquired data contain no personally identifiable information (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2017:59). Confidential research implies that protections are implemented to protect the privacy of participants and their data against unauthorised access, use, disclosure, modification, loss, and theft (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2017:60).

This study ensured that participant identities were not compromised by using obscure terms and categories to keep them concealed. The research interview records are secured through password-protected files. Three were interviewed on SEIAS PR conceptualisation in South African policymaking; two participants were interviewed on implementing SEIAS PR in the South African policymaking process.

Table 3.1: Participants' profiles

Participant (s)	Gender	Description	Duration
Participant 1	Male	Implementation of SEIAS PR	38 minutes 35 seconds
Participant 2	Female	Conceptualisation of SEIAS PR	1 hour, 50 minutes, 38 seconds
Participants 3	Male	Implementation of SEIAS PR	1 hour, 38 minutes, and 55 seconds
Participants 4	Female	Conceptualisation of SEIAS PR	1 hour, 38 minutes, 6 seconds
Participants 4	Male	Conceptualise of SEIAS PR	1 hour, 20 minutes, 10 seconds

The participants were purposefully sampled. According to Shaheen, Pradhan, and Ranajee (2019:25), purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. The participant sample for this study was identified and selected based on their knowledge and experience working with SEIAS PR. They were identified based on the work they did in SEIAS. Interviewees were approached through the Presidency's SEIAS unit to recruit participants.

They were requested to provide information on the officials serving on the Interdepartmental Steering Committee from the Presidency's SEIAS unit. Prospective interviewees were contacted through email to schedule a research interview. Only three participants responded to emails sent to departments serving on the Interdepartmental Steering Committee and were available to be interviewed on conceptualising SEIAS PR in South Africa.

The participants interviewed on implementing SEIAS PR were identified through previous Portfolio Committee briefings on the socio-economic impact assessment study. Only two officials responded to an email distributed to departments that had briefed their Portfolio Committee on their socio-economic impact assessment study and were available to be interviewed on implementing SEIAS PR in South Africa.

All the participants work within government departments with conceptualised and implemented SEIAS PR. The participants were available and willing to contribute to the research. They communicated their SEIAS PR experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.

3.5 Data analysis

The data collected through one-on-one interviews were transcribed verbatim into the script, with behavioural annotations. The transcripts were marked with short descriptions connected to theoretical terms. Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3352) describe this process as coding. They contend that coding is labelling and organising your qualitative data to identify various themes and their relationships (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017: 3352). Coding assures sortable raw data; It organises and reduces data into meaningful and systematic small chunks of meaning. According to Busetto et al. (2020:04), it can extract and examine all segments from

multiple data sources. The outcome of a coding process is a descriptive theory of the behavioural pattern under investigation (Busetto et al., 2020:04).

Coding forms part of a larger process of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006:78) contend that it is a method rather than a methodology separate from a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective. They remark that it is flexible, considering several other forms of qualitative analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006:78) contend that thematic analysis is one of the first qualitative methods to learn as “it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis”.

Following Maguire and Delahunt’s (2017:3358) steps of thematic analysis, the study proceeded from coding to searching for theme patterns, capturing something significant or interesting about the data or research questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:79), no hard and fast rules exist regarding the theme's merit. This was observed in this research as the study objective characterised the theme; however, it was important to peruse and make sense of the themes to ensure that the themes worked in the study objective to move on to the write-up.

The study we sought to maintain objectivity by incorporating multiple perspectives, which helped enhance the thoroughness and depth of our findings. Objectivity in scientific research refers to conducting the study without being swayed by bias or personal opinions (Mohajan, 2018). To remain objective, it was important for the research to recognise and transparently communicate its limitations.

3.6 Trustworthiness and credibility

In qualitative research, trustworthiness and credibility are crucial values. Researchers must be aware of their own subjectivity and prejudices, as well as how these perceived biases may impact study outcomes (Nieuwenhuis & Smith, 2012). The researcher ensured verifying the participants' understanding of what was verbalised. This eliminated the possibility of misrepresenting participants' words and experiences. For this study, five participants were interviewed. To ensure the data were properly captured, the raw data were distributed to three participants to validate their credibility.

3.7 Research ethics

After the research purpose was explained in the research information sheet, each participant signed a consent form. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without penalty. Participants were assured that the study findings would be processed anonymously into a report. There is no conflict of interest because the researcher has no professional or personal relationship with the participants. A foreknowledge position of SEIAS was obtained, which could create a bias in sampling or biased research.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The small sample size is identified as a major limitation of the research. Qualitative research requires the participation of a sample size that is big enough to allow the unfolding of a deep and detailed understanding of the topic under study. The small sample size is owing to the participants' inaccessibility and unavailability. Various challenges were encountered in accessing participants owing to their busy schedules. No one from the DPME and the Department of Labour and Employment could be interviewed. Numerous efforts to interview representatives from the two government departments were made, which were unsuccessful owing to bureaucratic restrictions.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter presents the research methodology of the study. It explains the rationale for the proposed methodology, devices, and designs. This chapter considers the proposed participants and why they were selected for the study. Finally, the chapter presents the data analysis technique employed.

The study employed a qualitative approach, which Ronald, Drummond, and Camara (2007:21) contend is "primarily concerned with understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach". Benefits exist to using qualitative research approaches and methods. For this study, the most important benefit was that the qualitative research approach produced a detailed description of participants' emotions, opinions, and experiences, enabling deeper insights into designing, administering, and interpreting the information collected from the participants (**Error! Reference source not found.** & Deville, 2008).

This method also assisted in observing how others understand SEIAS PR holistically (Neuman, 1997:73). The qualitative research approach enabled the collection of rich, deep data from each research participant. This allowed a deeper and clearer understanding of the study topic.

Chapter 4: Presentation of data collected

4.1 Background on South Africa's Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System

SEIAS was established as an ex-ante policy analysis instrument designed to strengthen policy and law-making in South Africa (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). An ex-ante policy analysis instrument, also known as an anticipatory or prospective policy analysis instrument, influences agenda setting at the initial formulation of a policy and its future change. According to Broniewicz (2019:121), ex-ante policy analysis helps in decision-making by assisting decision-makers to determine and analyse the potential solutions to the problems they encounter. This includes analyses of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the options, providing decision-makers with quantitative data to help them weigh the possible outcomes and political ramifications of their choices (Broniewicz, 2019:121).

SEIAS is a thought-provoking, interactive, independent, and multidimensional policy device that examines the country's history and attempts to identify policies that can discuss issues, such as poverty, inequality, economy, sustainable environment competitiveness, and governance. It is applied to "all public policies, excluding corporate policies," private members and money bills (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). According to the Presidency participant, some bills, such as those relating to money, the division of revenue, and inflation, do not go through SEIAS (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

Other policies require an exemption to avoid SEIAS. According to the Presidency participant, this occurs when a department constructed a policy established to be ineligible for SEIAS, requiring the issuance of a formal SEIAS exemption (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

SEIAS must be used throughout the policymaking process. It is not a "one-time occurrence" (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022). Government should not make policy decisions without examining the SEIAS process (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

SEIAS was introduced into South Africa's policymaking process in “2014, and Cabinet approved it in February 2015. SEIAS is a unit established within DPME, now located in the Presidency PRS, having been transferred in 2020” (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

SEIAS arose in response to “concerns about implementation failures and, in some cases, a failure to understand the full costs and benefits of policy initiatives, laws, and regulations. It replaced the RIA, which is used in Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries” (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

RIA, like SEIAS, involved analysing, identifying and defining the policy problem, options analysis, and discussing the intended and unintended consequences of a proposed policy before it was adopted. According to participants from the Presidency and the Economic Development Department, RIA was perceived to “perpetuate exclusion through bureaucratic processes” and was not approaching broader national priorities (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). The participant from the National Treasury agrees that RIA was a positive practice, but it was overshadowed by political opposition, which is why it was changed from RIA to SEIAS (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

SEIAS “assesses policies holistically by identifying and analysing the effects of regulations on the National Development Program (NDP) social, economic, and environmental priorities” (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). This includes “assessing the anticipated implications, costs, benefits, and risks of a proposed policy statute, legal change, or regulation” (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

4.2. Introduction

This chapter summarises and presents the data collected. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with five government officials were used to collect the data. Three government officials were interviewed about SEIAS PR conceptualisation, and two were interviewed about SEIAS PR implementation in South African policymaking. The three government officials interviewed on the conceptualisation of SEIAS PR came from the Presidency, the National Treasury, and the Economic Development

Department. The two government officials interviewed on implementation were from the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies and the Department of Health.

Participants received a definition of PR at the start of each interview to enable them to express their responses to the questions posed. The data display a direct correlation between SEIAS PR conceptualisation, SEIAS PR implementation, and successful policymaking in South Africa.

4.3. Data presentation process

The subsequent research questions shaped the structure of the research:

Research Question 1: How is SEIAS PR conceptualised by the officials from the Presidency, the National Treasury, the DPME and the Economic Development Department?

Research Question 2: How are participants mobilised in SEIAS PR?

Research Question 3: How effectively is SEIAS PR applied?

The first research question investigated the conceptualisation of SEIAS PR in South Africa's policymaking process. It began by examining the participants' understanding of the phases involved in the SEIAS process while attempting to determine its strengths and weaknesses. The research continued to probe the participants' perception of PR in the SEIAS process, inquiring into their understanding of PR's purpose and implementation process.

The literature review on SEIAS PR provides little insight into the SEIAS process followed in South Africa's policymaking process. This research question enabled determining where in the SEIAS process PR begins. The data needed to answer the study questions were collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews. To effectively answer how SEIAS PR was conceptualised, the subsequent research questions were asked:

4.3.1. Research Question 1

How is SEIAS PR conceptualised by the officials from the Presidency, the National Treasury, the DPME and the Economic Development Department?

4.3.1.1. Can you take me through the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems process?

The research participants agree with one another in response to this question. They all describe the two stages of the SEIAS process, including the key parts in each stage. These are the opinions of the research participants regarding the SEIAS process:

According to the Presidency participant, the SEIAS process is divided into initial impact assessment (IIA) and Final Impact Assessment (FIA). The IIA occurs early in the SEIAS process and is associated with research and understanding socio-economic status problems and opportunities. This stage, according to the participants, “allows for problem analysis and evaluating alternative solutions to identified problems” (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

According to the Presidency participant, IIA uses a template, directing crucial questions about the main reason for socio-economic problems, the reasons for their persistence, and the behaviours contributing to the problem. Participants from the National Treasury confirmed this, Economic and the Development Department (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

Participatory research, according to the National Treasury and Economic Development Department participants, must be introduced at the IIA stage of the SEIAS process (interview, Department of National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). The Presidency’s participant contended that government departments are correctly expected to use “participatory action research (PAR) in the IIA” (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

PAR extends the PR research methods because it is applied research, leading to action that improves a problematic situation (interview, Presidency official, 20

September 2022). According to the Presidency participant, it differs from academic research because it aims to advance the body of knowledge (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The National Treasury and Economic Development Department's participant explained that participatory research in policymaking "is a constitutional requirement", citing the South African Constitution of 1996, remarking that "people must be encouraged to participate in policymaking" (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). According to the participants, "government officials engage with stakeholders to collect information about the main reasons for socio-economic challenges, identifying behaviours contributing to the problem" (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

Government departments develop a *Green Paper*, concept document, or discussion document to narrow the general thinking, informing a particular policy (National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). An important question directed in the IIA, according to the Presidency participant, "is the category of stakeholders affected by the socio-economic problem that requires a policy". This question considers the stakeholders who must be involved in PR.

These stakeholders include vulnerable groups in impoverished communities, SMMEs, government departments, state organisations, civil society organisations, and large corporations (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). To ensure that all stakeholders affected by the proposed policy are accounted for, the stakeholders engaged must not only be affected by the proposed policy but also benefit from the challenge. "Diverse and inclusive participatory research is required" (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

Once an IIA has been approved, the FIA will follow a policy, draft bill, draft regulations, or propose improved implementation mechanisms from the IIA. It provided a "complete evaluation of the policy's potential consequences concerning implementation and compliance costs and expected outcomes" (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). According to the Presidency participant,

the FIA enables public authorities to consider the implications of a proposed policy, law, legal reform, or regulation using the theory of change (ToC) (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The FIA provides a more detailed evaluation of the final legislative/policy proposal. It also allows policymakers to consider how the policy will be implemented (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). Participants from the National Treasury and the Economic Development Department confirmed this. Departments must submit draft policies and FIAs to PR for review, PR analyses and feedback. If all issues are resolved, sign-off is as follows (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022):

4. Cluster sign-off form for presenting policy or legislation to director-general (D-G) clusters
5. Preliminary approval form for regulations and the bill to be gazetted for public comment
6. Final approval form: policies, regulations for implementation, and bills to be approved by Cabinet before being introduced to Parliament

4.3.1.2 How were the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems in policymaking successful?

The research participants agreed on this question. They described the institutional success of SEIAS in policymaking but disagreed on whether SEIAS succeeded in approaching policy concerns. These are the opinions of the research participants regarding the success of SEIAS policymaking:

According to the Presidency participant, “SEIAS improved the policymaking process” (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). This differs from the argument made by another participant. According to the Economic Development Department participant, a successful policy outcome directly reflects the policymaking process. The participant contends SEIAS is unsuccessful because of insufficient only positive policy outcomes—socio-economic development remains relatively low (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

The participant acknowledged that the institutionalisation of SEIAS is a success (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). These are the same sentiments shared by the Presidency and National Treasury participants.

The Presidency participant remarked, “SEIAS improved the policymaking process” (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). It succeeds because “it is conceptualised in such a way that it is recognised by state organs and has been institutionalised”. This is clearest in the number of bills and policies passed through SEIAS. According to the Presidency’s participant, 608 proposals have been subjected to SEIAS since its inception in October 2015, with 79% being bills, policies, and regulations (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

SEIAS has also been introduced to provinces and municipalities, with over 2500 officials trained to use the system (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). The National Treasury participant agrees, claiming that, unlike RIA, SEIAS could be implemented. It is structured but not rigid, and it is more evidence-based than RIA (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

The National Treasury participant also remarked that “SEIAS is mandatory, contributing to the success of SEIAS - RIA was not mandatory” (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022). The Economic Development Department participant alleged that, even though the policies presented by SEIAS have not translated into socio-economic development, a significant benefit of “SEIAS is that it forces an individual to elucidate the problem, providing the policy developer with a frame to analyse the problem (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). This will result in developing policies addressing socio-economic concerns that will result in socio-economic development” (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

4.3.1.3 What are the challenges of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems in policymaking?

The participants provided a variety of opinions about what they perceived as challenges to SEIAS. These challenges range from being participatory related to how participation supports evidence. Implementing PR in SEIAS may prove difficult.

These are the participants' observations on the challenges of SEIAS in policymaking.

According to the National Treasury participant, SEIAS was conceptualised to use anecdotal evidence (PR) and scientific evidence (technical analysis). The participant contends that PR cannot be used without technical analysis (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

The participants agreed that using anecdotal evidence in SEIAS is challenging in most departments. They contend it is challenging because of “limited stakeholder participation” in participatory processes (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

According to the National Treasury participant, using limited stakeholders’ feedback often leads to insufficient evidence, which leads to an incorrect diagnosis of policy problems, leading to incorrect policy options. The implication is that resources will be directed to something without influence (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

Unfortunately, the SEIAS framework does not specify the minimum number of stakeholders involved in the SEIAS PR process. According to the Economic Development Department’s participant, this often leads to only a few stakeholders participating in SEIAS PR (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). The participants from the Presidency and the Economic Development Department agree that it is worsened by the inflated costs of involving a stakeholder in the SEIAS process (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

Another challenge to SEIAS PR, emphasised by the Presidency participant, is that some officials cannot engage stakeholders and analyse and interpret the data obtained from engagements. SEIAS PR is not conceptualised as resistant to political instability, and the constant turnover of ministers creates instability in SEIAS and the policymaking process (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The Presidency, National Treasury and the Economic Development Department participants, contended that the challenges mentioned had reduced SEIAS into a box-checking exercise that often causes rushed processes and the method not

followed, compromising the quality of the SEIAS PR process (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

The Economic Development Department's participant claimed that because SEIAS PR is rushed, "the problem statement is insufficiently interrogated. The problem statement is constructed, so it assumes a preferred policy to approach the problem, resulting in implementation failure" (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

4.3.1.4. What is your understanding of participatory research?

Participants were also interviewed regarding their knowledge of PR. According to the research's background, PR is a relatively unexplored topic. It differs from traditional research and public participation, but it is often used interchangeably with public participation.

The research participants understood the concept. They did not use the term interchangeably with public participation, and they were able to sufficiently engage in the essential elements of PR within the SEIAS process. This is the participants' opinion of PR in SEIAS:

Participatory research (PR) is conceptualised as a constitutional requirement, encouraging engagement with stakeholders and communities affected or benefiting from a proposed policy. Policies are developed for communities. According to the Presidency participant, communities or stakeholders received government services through the policies developed. It is critical to engage with them to collect indigenous wisdom that can improve policy recommendations (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The Economic Development Department's participant contended that PR is a research technique to enable experts in specialised sectors to understand what is happening in their field from the perspective of the stakeholder affected by their activity (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). The participants claim that PR is delicate because it requires experts to open themselves to scrutiny and debate.

The participant claims that PR excludes no one. It calls for everyone's involvement in everything, including determining the policy issue, its causes, and who developed solutions. It creates those options and policy scenarios using the stakeholders' perspectives (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

Both the National Treasury and Economic Development Department participants agree. The participant contended that "PR involves engaging stakeholders when drafting a problem statement. SEIAS cannot be conducted using only one technical or participatory approach" (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022). A problem statement that accurately identifies policy issues, according to the participant, cannot be constructed without stakeholders.

The technical approach would be incorporated into the SEIAS process to identify the best ways to resolve the policy issue; however, as the National Treasury participant emphasised, even that process would require PR to determine the risks and benefits of starting the proposed policy option (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

4.3.1.5. What is the objective of participatory research in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems?

Participants were interviewed regarding their knowledge of the objective of PR in SEIAS. Two indicated that its goal is to eliminate bias and ensure consensus on the policy issues and to identify policy issues from stakeholder experiences (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; Presidency official, 20 September 2022; Economic Development Department, 29 September 2022).

One participant contended that PR in SEIAS attempts to make sure that specialists do not introduce their prejudices while identifying policy options (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022), while the Presidency participant contends that PR in SEIAS explore ways to help with stakeholder "acceptance and buy-in" on a policy case. It strives to maintain "neutrality" (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

According to the National Treasury participant, it is critical to identify the source of an issue. He adds that the department cannot understand a policy concern without

PR - they do not have all the knowledge. They must interact with stakeholders to learn about their genuine experiences (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

This is similar to the Economic Development Department's participants' statement. The participants contend that PR's goal is to present specialists' access to stakeholders' real-world experiences relating to policy issues to have recommendations to discuss those issues (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

4.3.1.6. How should participatory research be implemented in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems?

Participants were questioned about their understanding of how PR should be conducted. This, and the subsequent question, are related.

The questions emphasise the best practices for PR implementation and compare them with current practices. These were the participants' observations on how PR ought to be initiated in SEIAS:

"Feedback" was a recurring theme in the participants' comments on implementing PR in SEIAS. They acknowledged there was no ideal PR implementation strategy other than making it easier for stakeholders and policymakers to provide and receive feedback (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

According to the Presidency participant, stakeholders who receive feedback can better understand whether their input has been considered and, if not, why. It allows for discussion of concerns, which help policymakers identify the main reason for a policy concern (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The National Treasury participant contends that the PR methodology depends on what is being investigated. If the policy approaches socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and unemployment, the method will comprise interviews and a two-way consultation process, ensuring stakeholders provide and receive feedback. If the policy attempts to discuss economic issues, a combination of surveys and

interviews would be sufficient. The method changes depending on the information required (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

The Economic Development Department's participant alleged that PR could occur through consultation but contends that consultation should be avoided to inform stakeholders what policy options will be presented to them. Consultation is aimed at collecting solutions from stakeholders (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

The Presidency participant also makes this argument. The participant contends that consultation in PR should not be to inform stakeholders what policy options will be presented to them. Rather, consultation should be aimed at collecting information from stakeholders that will identify the policy option (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The Presidency participant provided structures that could facilitate participation in SEIAS. The participant contends that structures, such as traditional leaders, ward councillors, NGOs, and community-based organisations (CBOs), must encourage participation and help with feedback to stakeholders. Engagements should not be one-way (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The participants from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies agreed with this but added that "desktop research" enables a form of PR as well (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

4.3.1.7. How is participatory research initiated in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems?

This question emphasises the current practices for PR implementation and compares them with the best practices. These were the participants' observations on how PR is being initiated in SEIAS:

The participant from the Presidency and the Economic Development Department participant contends that "some departments implement PR correctly, and some incorrectly implement PR". The Economic Development Department participant

remarks that SEIAS PR is started in departments and their branches in a manner that provides the impression that “there is a SEIAS champion in the department” (interview, Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

The Presidency participant criticised PR implementation by claiming they frequently discover that stakeholders are not completely engaged in the SEIAS process (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). The participant maintains that when they examine stakeholder engagement, several disputes are discovered. They frequently have to present department instructions to conduct more consultations. The participant claims that departments occasionally disregard some contradictory concerns and remarks made by stakeholders, which goes against PR procedures (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The National Treasury participant also contends that they seldom witnessed PR properly implemented (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022). The participant claims that on the few occasions she has witnessed PR successfully implemented, researchers visited towns and cities to speak with stakeholders and obtain suggestions for some of their ideas. When the pilot did not yield the desired results, they revised it using focus groups to hone down on the research concern successfully. According to the participant, there is no longer that level of involvement with stakeholders (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022).

The Presidency participant contends that the implementation of PR results from inadequate planning and ethical conduct – “most public servants do not want to listen to stakeholders” (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

The next questions explain how SEIAS PR started in South Africa's policymaking process. They were directed to the participants from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies to investigate who engages in SEIAS PR and gain insight into how participants are identified and chosen in SEIAS PR. These questions were developed to respond to the questions below:

4.3.2. Research Question 2

How are participants mobilised in SEIAS PR?

4.3.2.1. Which stakeholders are usually involved in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems participatory research?

This question and the next question are related. The question aimed to determine which stakeholders are typically involved in PR and compare it to how they are chosen. These were the participants' perceptions of stakeholder involvement in PR:

According to the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies' participant, "regulators, NGOs, representatives from businesses, unions, consumers, and community representatives are typically involved in SEIAS PR." According to the participant, these are typically the stakeholders inclined to be affected by the proposed policy. Each stakeholder enters into the PR process regarding their own interests. Businesses enter the PR process hoping their proposed solutions will not affect their capacity to continue to profit. Other stakeholders enter the PR process with diverse goals. Regulators participate in the PR process to regard the interests of people affected by the regulation. They attempt to minimise administrative burdens as much as possible while ensuring that the needs of all stakeholders are balanced during the PR process (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September).

According to the Department of Health participant, they would want to incorporate all community members, but "not all of them can be active in the SEIAS PR". It is too costly and time-consuming to consult all societal representatives (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). The participant remarked that "various stakeholders are engaged in SEIAS PR at various stages of the SEIAS process. When a policy problem is being conceptualised, or a *Green Paper* is being drafted, only research experts and the relevant directorate are engaged and consulted" (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

"Once a *Green Paper* has been drafted and gazetted, all other relevant stakeholders inclined to be affected by the proposed policy are invited to present written submissions towards the *White Paper*. They are also invited to participate in public hearings" (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

4.3.2.2. How are the stakeholders identified?

Participants were questioned about their understanding of how participants in SEIAS's PR are normally identified. It comes from the backdrop of Du Plooy's (2013:344) argument that complications in PR arise owing to a lack of fixed procedures, and they attempt to see how participants think stakeholders are identified for PR.

Neither the Department of Health nor the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies participants mentioned using a formal approach to map out and identify SEIAS PR stakeholders. The Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technology participants mentioned that "besides desktop research, which answers the question, what is the problem, how can the problem be addressed, who is likely to be affected by the problem and who is likely to be impacted by the problem" - helps officials identify stakeholders (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

The Department of Health participant claimed that talking to people within the sector also helps when it is time to map out stakeholders (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). The participant contended that "stakeholders involved in the conceptualisation stage of the *Green Paper* are identified based on their expertise and relevance to the processed policy. Those in power are responsible for selecting them" (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

4.3.2.3. What skills are required by the stakeholders to participate in participatory research?

Participants were questioned about their understanding of the skills required to participants in SEIAS's PR. Diverse responses were received from the participants. The Department of Communication and Digital Technologies participant contended that "no skill sets are required from stakeholders to participate in SEIAS PR. The most important requirement for stakeholders to participate in SEIAS PR is an understanding of the issue at hand" (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022).

The Department of Health participant contended that “legal expertise and research skills are required” (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). The participant contended that these skills are needed to analyse and interpret the data (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). The experts and researcher perused each comment, divided the comments into groups, and analysed their influence on the proposed policy. Legal expertise interrogates the *Green Paper* to ensure it is legally acceptable (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

4.3.2.4. How is the responsibility for tasks presented?

Participants were questioned about the responsibility of tasks presented to participants in SEIAS's PR. Diverse responses were received from the participant. There was no clear response to how responsibilities are received from the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies participant (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022).

The Department of Health participant contended that “the responsibilities of policymakers and stakeholders are the same—to share and receive information on the proposed policy” (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

Drawing from the responses to the question above, experts and the researcher perused each comment, divided the comments into groups, and analysed their influence on the proposed policy. Legal expertise interrogates the *Green Paper* to ensure it is legally acceptable” (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

4.3.2.5 What are stakeholders' legal rights in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems participatory research?

Assuming the participants were provided responsibility, they were questioned about the legal rights of stakeholders of participants in SEIAS's PR. Both the research participants based their answers on the Constitution.

The Department of Health participant contended that “the identified legal rights for stakeholders in SEIAS PR are based on what is stipulated in the Constitution - that

stakeholders have a right to participate in the policy process" (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). The Department of Health participant stated that "the department measure policymaking process against Constitution" (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

The participant Department of Communication and Digital Technologies claimed that even though they disagree with stakeholders, they must hear them out by the Constitution. The participant admitted that they do not always concur with suggestions made by stakeholders but conceded that the collaborative approach entails hearing them out, which is their legal right under the Constitution (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022).

The participant contended that they could challenge departmental decisions using the law and the Constitution. The participant claims that because they are defined as people or businesses with rights, they may appeal SEIAS judgements to the Constitutional Court. If they disagree with your decision, they may contest it (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022).

4.3.2.6 What is the relationship between the stakeholders and the co-researcher in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems participatory research?

There was no indication of a relationship between stakeholders and co-researchers in the SEIAS PR process. They were not identified as equal partners by the participants from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies when developing the policy framework.

According to the participant from the Department of Health, the stakeholders have only consulted once a concept or a *Green Paper* has been developed (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). The participant from the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies confirmed this.

4.3.2.7 How and by whom is the collective decision reached and taken forward in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems participatory research?

The participants were questioned about the understanding of how and by whom collective decisions are reached and taken forward in SEIAS's PR. The interview question arises from the definition of PR, which contends that PR is at the centre of high-diversity initiatives, requiring a collaborative approach to data collection and recommending alternative solutions.

According to the participant from the Department of Health, experts decide about the *Green Paper* and the minister, who is the custodian, decides on the *White Paper* based on the political mandate (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

According to the Department of Health participant, administratively, the experts and researchers decide what comments and suggestions need to go into the *Green Paper* (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). As indicated, “Experts and researcher perused each comment, divided the comments into groups, and analysed their influence on the proposed policy. Legal expertise interrogates the *Green Paper* to ensure it is legally acceptable”. The *Green Paper* and the IIA are submitted to the DPME (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

The minister of the respective portfolio then decides on *White Paper*, which will be submitted to the FIA.

The participant contends that it is important to remember that political considerations play a role in South African policymaking. A political party's policy mandate directs the policy and decision-making process. The proposed policy is decided upon by the minister of the relevant portfolio, who is a member of the relevant political party, after considering input from stakeholders and judgements made by experts and researchers (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

The Department of Communication and Digital Technologies participant also alluded to politics playing a role in decision-making (interview, Department of

Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022). The participant claims that promises made at political party conferences are the basis for choosing policy solutions and making policy decisions. The participant asserts that the minister's mandate is to conduct the political party's mandate. This is also clear in decision-making. Officials summarise the report to represent the contributions made by stakeholders and equally reject contributions that do not persuade them towards a particular perspective and meet the requirements within their programme (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022).

The next questions explain steps taken to promote the successful implementation of PR. They were directed to the participants from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies to understand how SEIAS PR is initialised. These questions were developed to respond to the questions below:

4.3.3. Research Question 3

How effectively is SEIAS PR applied?

4.2.1.1 What steps are followed to ensure Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems participatory research implementation?

While the participant from the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies could not sufficiently answer the question, the participant from the Department of Health contended that “the SEIAS form itself enforces PR with stakeholders. The questions on the SEIAS form are coined so as not to allow an option to consult with stakeholders and record the issues they present and how those inputs would be incorporated into the policy” (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

4.2.1.2 What methods are used to collect the data?

The participants provided diverse perspectives on how data are collected during PR. While the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies participant indicated that officials relied on desktop research to collect data, the Department of

Health official indicated that they relied on diverse interactive data collection devices.

According to the Department of Health participant, the data collection method is divided into two stages, depending on the policy development phase. For the participants from the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies and the Department of Health, data collections start with desktop research to understand the need for a policy (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

The participant from the Department of Health also emphasised that sometimes, officials travel overseas to investigate and collect evidence about how the recommended policy is implemented. Following this, the experts, researchers, and relevant directorate gazette a concept note, discussion document or *Green Paper* (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

The participant from the Department of Health also expressed that they use social partners (including the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) and trade unions) to spread the news about the concept note. This process invites stakeholders to present written submissions towards a *Green Paper* (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

Two-way consultative workshops follow this process. According to the participants, they attempt to convince stakeholders to agree on what they want, to plan in collaboration to develop a proposal or advance an argument, and to decide how to act (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

Public hearings follow this. Public hearings are held as part of the public inquiry process. According to the participant from the Department of Health, they provide interested parties with the opportunity to expand on written submissions and to discuss inquiry issues with policymakers in a public forum (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

4.2.1.3 What methods are used to analyse and interpret data?

The Department of Health participant indicated that experts and the directorate affected by the policy inputs usually interpret the data collected from the PR process (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). The participant from the Department of Communication could not answer this question.

4.2.1.4 How are collaborative decisions reached and taken forward in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Systems participatory research?

After perusing the written submission and analysing the inputs collected from the PR process, the experts consider the relevance of the inputs to decide with the directorate affected by the policy proposal. The collaborative relationship between stakeholders and policymakers is that they listen to each other's inputs. Conversely, the decisions about the inputs are determined by those in power or policymakers (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

Participatory research stresses the importance of treating stakeholders or people as ‘participants’ rather than ‘research subjects’. While the conceptualisers of SEIAS PR contend that stakeholders need to conceptualise a policy problem, the implementers contend that it is impossible unless a stakeholder presents a complaint on a socio-economic challenge to those in power - who will then decide if their complaint calls for policy action.

The participants from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication contend that stakeholders are not involved in conceptualising the policy concept or *Green Paper*. Conversely, experts and those in power decide on the need for a policy and then draft a *Green Paper*. Stakeholders are only consulted once a *Green Paper* has been drafted; their inputs are received and used to revise it into a *White Paper*. The participant from the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies emphasised that those in power (political parties) decide on the need for a policy. This was corroborated and confirmed by the Department of Health’s participant.

Despite the conceptualisers of SEIAS PR stressing that stakeholders need to be involved in the SEIAS process from the conceptualisation of policy problem, discord

exists in the conceptualisation and implementation of SEIAS PR. An important observation in the discussions with the representatives from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies is that robust SEIAS PR is implemented after a *Green Paper* has been conceptualised.

SEIAS PR process occurs once experts and policymakers identify a problem and develop a *Green Paper*. Conversely, representatives from the Presidency, the National Treasury and Economic Development Department contend that SEIAS and SEIAS PR processes must transpire at the conceptualisation stage. They contend that SEIAS and SEIAS PR help the policymakers conceptualise and frame the policy problem.

4.2.1.5 Participatory research stresses the importance of treating stakeholders or people as 'participants' rather than 'research subjects'

While the conceptualisers of SEIAS PR contend that stakeholders need to conceptualise a policy problem, the implementers contend that it is impossible unless a stakeholder presents a complaint on a socio-economic challenge to those in power - who will then decide if their complaint calls for policy action.

Besides this, the participant from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies contends that stakeholders are not involved in conceptualising the policy concept or *Green Paper*. Conversely, experts and those in power decide on the need for a policy and draft a *Green Paper*. Stakeholders are only consulted once a *Green Paper* has been drafted; their inputs are received and used to revise it into a *White Paper*. The participant from the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies emphasised that those in power (political parties) decide on the need for a policy. This was corroborated and confirmed by the Department of Health participant.

Yet again, discord exists in the conceptualisation and implementation of SEIAS PR, despite the definition of PR indicating that stakeholders need to form part of the decision-making process. An important observation in the discussions with the representatives from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies is that robust SEIAS PR is implemented after a *Green Paper* has been conceptualised. SEIAS PR process occurs once experts and policymakers identify a problem and develop a *Green Paper*.

Conversely, representatives from the Presidency, the National Treasury and Economic Development Department contend that SEIAS and SEIAS PR processes must transpire at the conceptualisation stage. They contend that SEIAS and SEIAS PR help the policymakers conceptualise and frame the policy problem.

Chapter 5: Analysis and summary of findings

5.1 Introduction

Badenhorst (2010:23) claims that the overarching objective of the research, the intentions, and questions, should be continually reviewed. This is crucial because it proceeds as a constant reminder of the study's intention during data collection and analysis. The study's primary objective was to ensure responses to the major research questions.

This chapter explains and examines the data in Chapter 4. The conceptual and theoretical framework in Chapter 2 serves as the background for the analysis in this chapter. The data analysis process also builds on the knowledge established in the literature review in Chapter 3. The study objective characterised the themes analysed in this chapter. These themes involve the nature, scope, and applicability of PR in SEIAS.

5.2. Updated definition and background of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System in South Africa's policymaking

According to Kørnøv and Thissen (2012) rational comprehensive decision-making aims to ensure policymakers make informed decisions. It is based on the clear evidence of what works, for whom, under what conditions, and at what cost. It seeks to bring insights and evidence into the decision-making process in a structured manner.

The study indicated that the use of SEIAS in policymaking facilitates rational decision-making. It is described by the participants as an ex-ante policy analysis instrument designed to strengthen policy and law-making (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). The study demonstrates that an ex-ante policy analysis instrument is a forecasting instrument that entails projecting the effects of policy decisions for specific policy objectives. An ex-ante assessment of a policy involves observing in-depth knowledge and evidence of the potential social and economic impacts of policy options. This entails gathering and analysing historical, environmental and socio-economic data to discover patterns, trends, and systematic correlations that can be seen to facilitating rational policy decision-making.

SEIAS, as an ex-ante policy analysis instrument, makes use of an initial impact assessment (IIA) and final impact assessment (FIA) to gather insights and evidence of the socio-economic problems and opportunities and “allow for problem analysis and evaluating alternative solutions to identified problems” (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). According to the rational decision-making theory, the use of thought-provoking, interactive, multi-stakeholder, and multidimensional insights and evidence can lead to more rational decisions (Kørnøv and Thissen, 2012). In other words, a decision is considered more rational if the process leading to it is based on insight into the consequences of alternatives, and the selection follows the logic of choosing the alternative that is expected to best achieve one’s goals or objectives.

The aforementioned considers the participation and involvement of stakeholders as essential for success. Even though SEIAS can be conducted through technical analysis to determine how policy options can be started, only PR can display the necessity for policy options. According to the research findings, without PR, it is impossible to justify the need for policy alternatives (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). As presented in Chapter 2, in democracies, citizens are presumed to be important stakeholders in that they are able to participate either directly or indirectly in the formation, adoption and implementation of the laws and policies that affect them. The rational decision-making theory makes a similar point, emphasizing that rational decisions are likely to embody democratic values such attentiveness to stakeholders’ concerns and openness to their input (Booysen, 2007).

The aforementioned justifies the importance of PR in SEIAS and indicates that SEIAS PR assisted policymakers in making rational policy decisions by examining policy problems from the perspective of diverse groups and stakeholders affected by the country's history and social and economic challenges. It is also intended to enable them to identify and select policy options that approach their long-term social and economic challenges and best meet their needs (interview, official of the Presidency, 20 September 2022). This is how rational policy decisions should be made, according to the rational decision-making theory (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012; Anderson, 2015; & Cloete, 2018).

5.3. The nature of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research in South Africa's policymaking

Four important characterisations of SEIAS PR were observed from the research. The first characterisation is that SEIAS PR was conceptualised to help policymakers understand the main reason for socio-economic problems, the reasons for their persistence, and the behaviours contributing to the problem. The research findings indicate that using the IIA and FIA template is important. These templates allow policymakers and officials to respond to the questions "why?", and under what conditions? A policy option would be helpful (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). This is important for evidence-based problem analysis and evaluation of alternative solutions to identified problems.

SEIAS PR helps policymakers with the task collecting non-scientific evidence for rational decision-making. Chapter 2 presents that scientific and non-evidence are essential for rational decision-making, and neither should be used in isolation (the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.3). SEIAS PR enables policymakers and officials to collect information from the observations and experiences of diverse groups of stakeholders. It enables policymakers and officials to respond to the questions "why?", and under what conditions? A policy option would be helpful.

The research established that evidence collected through the observations and experiences of diverse groups and stakeholders is unreliable (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022). Non-scientific evidence not being evaluated and being vulnerable to exaggerated leads to misguided decisions on policy options (Strydom et al., 2010:05). The study observed that non-scientific evidence lacks a scientifically justifiable method for implementing policy options (Henry, 2004). According to DPME (2014), officials and policymakers need to provide scientifically reliable options of "how?" will be implemented.

Chapter 2 presents that policy decisions involving substantial long-term implications require scientifically valid information or knowledge about a decision. The concern will help policymakers make better decisions (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012:191). To help policymakers make more rational decisions, SEIAS requires a combination of scientific evidence and non-scientific evidence in the decision-making process. The research found it essential for rational decision-making.

The second characterisation is that SEIAS PR allows policymaker to select the 'best' course of action to achieve the policy objectives. The study upholds that diverse groups and stakeholders should inform policymakers about the value preferences of society and assign relative weights to each value (the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.3). Consultation and engagement with stakeholders are essential for achieving this objective, and are acknowledged by the participants from the Presidency, the Department of Health and the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies as a constitutional requirement (interview, Department Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; Department of Health official, 19 September 2022; and Presidency official, 20 September 2022). According to the participants and literature, this allows for establishing shared goals and objectives, which aid in achieving consensus among policymakers and stakeholders (Kørnøv &Thissen, 2012).

The research observed that the aforementioned will be impossible to achieve without PR. Technical analysis cannot be used without PR in SEIAS (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022). It is beyond the capacity of PR to enable policymakers to gain an in-depth understanding of the policy problem and to frame policy options from the perspective of stakeholders to make an informed decision. PR also facilitates collaboration between policymakers and diverse groups and stakeholders, which is crucial for achieving consensus in decision-making (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012).

The third feature perceived is that SEIAS PR is required. This characterisation is in the justification for replacing RIA with SEIAS. Chapter 2 presents that RIA was a cost-benefit analysis used to evaluate a proposed regulation plan. It recommended abandoning the proposed policy if its costs outweighed its benefits, as it emphasised its economic impact. SEIAS replaced it because it was considered to “perpetuate exclusion through bureaucratic processes”. It was not required.

The research observes that, contrary to the RIA system, policy proposals cannot be presented to Cabinet without undergoing the rigorous SEIAS process (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). This mandate is unambiguously acknowledged by state organs and institutions, as confirmed by the number of policy proposals submitted to SEIAS since its establishment in October 2015 (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

Conceptualisers have ensured over 2500 officials have trained to ensure they know how to use the system (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). From the research, some observed that without the training, officials could not engage with stakeholders, record the problems, and describe how those inputs will be incorporated into the policy—important to complete the SEIAS questionnaire (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 18 September 2022). Failing to complete the SEIAS questionnaire adequately could cause a rejected SEIAS report.

Why is there opposition to the policy proposals if SEIAS PR is democratic, evidence-based and required? As presented in Chapter 1, SEIAS PR has been criticised for not valuing participant input and "cherry-picking" participant feedback when deciding on policy options. Could it be that stakeholders engaged in SEIAS PR are not diverse enough for officials and policymakers to widely identify and record the problems raised by stakeholders and record policy options that represent a wide number of views? The next section interrogates SEIA PR in South Africa's policymaking.

5.4. The scope of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research in South Africa's policymaking

The term "scope" can be used synonymously with "reach". It can be the number of stakeholders included or excluded in a study (Thaman, 2020). Chapter 2 presents that when conducting meaningful PR, officials should collect input from a broad spectrum of stakeholder interests. They must consider the interests of a wide range of stakeholders, including those not only affected by the proposed policy but also benefit from the challenge (the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.3). This is because engagement with diverse groups and stakeholders promotes efficiency and richness of information, stakeholder satisfaction, transparency, and balanced knowledge provision despite the outcome, ensuring fair treatment, meaningful involvement, and social inclusion for all people (the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.3).

However, the research noticed that it is impossible to engage with each stakeholder in SEIAS PR. This is because the process is expensive and time-consuming (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08

September 2022; Department of Health official, 19 September 2022; and Presidency official, 20 September 2022). The research contends that officials must map, identify and select the most relevant stakeholders to engage in the SEIAS PR process (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

According to the study, the relevant stakeholders may be determined by their formal position (such as a government authority), their control of significant resources (such as money or knowledge), their ability to impede or block implementation (lobby groups, implementers), and the stakes involved (proponents of some policy) (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

The findings contend that stakeholders typically involved in SEIAS PR include regulators, NGOs, representatives from businesses, unions, consumers, and every person inclined to be affected by the proposed policy in the sector (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

Chapter 1 of this research noticed that criticism might arise from how stakeholders are identified and selected. According to the theory, selecting a strategy for identifying and engaging the stakeholders is essential for understanding the engagement objective, the resources, and the stakeholders' expectations (the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.3). The research observed that the SEIAS framework does not provide a method for identifying and selecting candidates to make sure relevant stakeholders are recruited. The study notes that officials rely on desktop research and word of mouth to identify relevant stakeholders (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

Desk research is a data collection technique conducted without fieldwork (Du Plooy, 2013:220). To most people, it suggests published reports and statistics, and these are important sources; however, identifying stakeholders for SEIAS PR, refers to building profiles of stakeholders, covering issues, such as their observation on a policy issue, how they are affected or benefits from the policy issue, and how they also benefit from the challenge (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

Using desktop research and referrals to identify stakeholders presents limitations. The first limitation is that the information of stakeholders retrieved from desktop research and referrals is limited. According to Latkovikj and Popovska (2020:44), the information retrieved through desktop research is constrained by the information available on the Internet. Valuable information on stakeholders is inclined to be missed. This is worsened by the restrictive regulations to protect access to people's information (Latkovikj & Popovska, 2020:44)

It is hard to believe that referrals can provide officials and policymakers with essential information about stakeholders. According to Devanathan (2007), referrals are inherently limited in their reach. They are limited to a select few people known by the referring person. Devanathan (2007) remarks this limits the SEIAS PR process to vulnerabilities of not being inclusive. Devanathan (2007) contends this from the perspective that it discriminates against stakeholders eager to be part of processes but are not known by the person doing the referring. This excludes stakeholders who may present a new perspective on policy issues and propose new ideas for policy options.

The Presidency participant contended that, ideally, stakeholders that should be included in the SEIAS PR process should include vulnerable groups in impoverished communities, SMMEs, government departments, state organisations, civil society organisations, and large corporations (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). The research observes that relying on desktop research and referrals limits the ability of officials and policymakers to reach the diverse groups and stakeholders needed to ensure robust discussion on policy challenges and options. The research recommends that the SEIAS framework be expanded to include a chapter or a section that guides officials and policymakers in identifying and selecting stakeholders.

As presented in Chapter 1, complications arise in PR owing to a lack of a fixed procedure or a research plan, including a way to identify and map stakeholders and collect, select, and interpret findings. This results in the selective choice of evidence to support the desired result (Parkhurst, 2017; Du Plooy, 2013). This is especially true in policy discussions regarding over-complicated or ambiguous issues with significant, sometimes contradictory, elements. The research observed that the lack of a framework to guide officials and policymakers on how to identify and map the

stakeholder for SEIAS PR contributes to the inconsistencies that emerge during data collection, selection, interpretation, and decisions, for which SEIAS has been criticised.

The framework should not only guide officials and policymakers in identifying stakeholders needed for SEIAS PR. It should also guide them on how to create objective and meaningful partnerships. Currently, the SEIAS framework does not provide such guidance (DPME, 2015).

Chapter 2 concludes that PR is an inquiry into social discipline, conducted in direct partnership with the stakeholders most affected by the subject under investigation with the objective of action or transformation (theoretical framework). The partnership between officials and stakeholders is a fundamental part of high-level stakeholder engagement in comprehensive rational decision-making (Thiollent, 2011:162). It raises acceptance of the assessments and decisions' outcomes since engagement may cause shared visions and a feeling of ownership of the outcome (the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.3).

The absence of a controlled method for selecting stakeholders, partnership with stakeholders, and delegation of responsibility to stakeholders may lead to inconsistencies in how SEIAS PR is conducted. It may also cause dissatisfied stakeholders who feel their inputs were ignored, leading to policy pushbacks and increased criticism of the SEIAS PR process. The research observes that this may be the primary reason for criticism of SEIAS PR.

5.5. The method of data collection in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research

Stakeholder engagement is embedded in the forging of a participative mode of rational decision-making (Kirapa-Kiracho, 2017; Kørnøv & Thissen, 2012). Stakeholder engagement in comprehensive and rational decision-making is important for improving PR development and implementation. According to Kørnøv and Thissen (2012), it increases the richness of information and creativity. The perspective and knowledge of a variety of participants are considered, increasing the acceptance of the result of the assessment and decision process, as participation may lead to shared visions and a sense of ownership of the results; it

contributes to the democratic character of the process—depending on how the participants are selected.

In the literature review, using Arnstein's (1969) eight levels of stakeholder participation, the most effective stakeholder engagement methods allow stakeholders and policymakers to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through joint policy boards, planning committees, and methods for resolving the impasse. The participants from the Presidency and the Economic Development Department contend that the method used to engage stakeholders depends on the socio-economic issues the policy attempts to discuss. If the policy attempts to discuss socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and unemployment, the method for SEIAS PR will comprise interviews and a two-way consultation process that ensures stakeholders can present feedback; however, if the policy attempts to discuss economic issues, a combination of surveys and interviews would be sufficient. The method changes depending on the policy being investigated (interview, National Treasury official 18 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official 29 September 2022).

The research participant from the Presidency assured the researcher that structures, such as traditional leaders, ward councillors, NGOs, and CBOs, are available to encourage participation and to help with feedback to stakeholders (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). The research participant from the Department of Health and the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies remarked that in addition to research, they also used two-way consultative workshops to obtain stakeholders to agree on what they want, to plan together to develop a proposal, or to advance a contention and to decide how both will act. Public hearings follow this. Public hearings are held as part of the public inquiry process. It provides interested parties with the opportunity to expand on written submissions and to discuss inquiry issues with policymakers in a public forum (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies, 8 September 2022; and Department of Health official, 19 September 2022).

The challenge with these methods of stakeholder engagement is a critique for being ineffective. According to the theory, the stakeholders' input collected during this procedure is rarely considered. The theory contends that, what the policymakers and bureaucratic staff accomplish from these procedures, proves that they

experienced the processes to involve those stakeholders. This is according to the critics against the SEIAS PR process—that some government organisations “cherry-pick” participant feedback in policy decisions (the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.3).

According to Mambwe, Mwanaumo, Nsefu and Sakala (2020:1398), inadequate stakeholder consultation can have adverse effects. Mambwe et al. (2020:1398) contend that when stakeholders feel they are not being consulted or communicated with adequately, it may result in them becoming difficult or losing interest. This can cause a loss of morale, a poor PR process and a delay in the policy process.

As presented in Chapter 1, adequate stakeholder consultation and engagement is a critical part of PR and an integral part of the SEIAS methodology. When applied completely and effectively, it can expand the range of alternatives created for decision-making by allowing policymakers to document and interpret a policy challenge with those affected most. Conversely, if it is not applied correctly, it could affect ‘buy-in’ to a policy option, resulting in anything from a simple lack of enthusiasm for a process to complete pushback of a policy option in more extreme circumstances. It can also cause a breakdown of trust resulting in a lack of collaboration which may result in delays in a policy process being completed (Kirapa-Kiracho, 2017).

5.6. Applying Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research in South Africa’s policymaking

According to the Presidency participant, the SEIAS process is divided into two stages: IIA and FIA (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). SEIAS PR must be conducted in the IIA and the FIA to accurately identify a policy problem and develop a policy option to approach.

5.6.1. Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research as a device for identifying and framing policy problems

According to Kørnøv and Thissen (2012), all rational decision-making processes should begin with identifying a policy problem in a decision context. Anderson, (2015) and Cloete (2018) contend that identifying a problem and understanding why

it is necessary to make a policy decision is important in rational decision-making. Describing the problem can also help policymakers determine the desired outcome.

The IIA is a SEIAS template used in the first phase of the SEIAS process to help officials and policymakers identify and frame the policy problem (DPME, 2015). It helps drafters to avoid finalising an inappropriate solution by directing questions about the main cause of the problems, the reasons for their persistence, and the behaviours contributing to the problem (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; Department of Health official, 19 September 2022; Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022).

According to the National Treasury and Economic Development Department participants, to collect the information that will help officials and policymakers accurately identify policy issues, PR must occur in this phase of the SEIAS process (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; Department of Health official, 19 September 2022; Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). PR is a democratic process which entails collaborating with diverse groups and stakeholders to collect non-scientific evidence on why a policy intervention is necessary. According to participants, in the IIA process, government officials engage with stakeholders to collect information on the primary causes of socio-economic challenges, identify behaviours, contribute to the problem, and produce a *Green Paper* or a concept note that narrows down and frames policy issues (DPME, 2015).

Ideally, the IIA process should involve diverse groups and stakeholders consisting of vulnerable groups in impoverished communities, SMMEs, government departments, state organisations, civil society organisations, and large corporations to ensure the correct identification of the policy problem (interview, Presidency official, 2022). The research has revealed that it is impossible to engage with all stakeholders. Drawing on the suggestions provided by research participants, it contends that participants should ideally include those affected by the proposed policy and those inclined to benefit from the challenge (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022; Department of Health official, 19 September 2022; and Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

There were obvious inconsistencies where stakeholders are typically involved in PR in this phase of the SEIAS process. Fredl (2018) defines an inconsistency as a lack of agreement or alignment in a project. It occurs when there is no uniformity throughout a project (Fredl, 2018). The author contends that there are two main reasons for inconsistent results in projects. The first reason is an error, and the second is uncontrolled conditions.

The inconsistency observed in the research is in the participants' responses to the question, “which stakeholders engage in SEIAS PR?” The Department of Communication and Digital Technologies participant contended, that “regulators, NGOs, representatives from businesses, unions, consumers, and community representatives are typically involved in SEIAS PR” (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies, 8 September 2022). The participant stressed that these are typically the stakeholders to be affected by and involved in the policymaking process (interview, Department of Communication and Digital Technologies official, 08 September 2022).

The Department of Health participant contends that stakeholders consulted in the IIA are researchers, experts, and the proper directorate (interview, Department of Health official, 19 September 2022). These stakeholders are consulted when a policy problem is conceptualised, or a *Green Paper* is prepared. All other stakeholders affected by the proposed policy are invited to submit written comments following the drafting and to gazette a *Green Paper*. The responses display a lack of uniformity among the participants involved in the IIA PR process, with one participant arguing for diversity in the IIA process and the other arguing for the Domaine of bureaucratic staff members in IIA.

Chapter 2 presents that in a democratic rational decision-making process, the public determines its destination, and the function of policymakers and bureaucratic staff is to lead them to the purpose. Diverse groups and stakeholders inform policymakers of a society’s value preferences, assigning each value a relative weight (theoretical framework in Chapter 2). The lack of diversity in IIA goes against what is contended rational decision-making and implies that officials and policymakers are not recognising policy problems from the perspective of those affected.

5.6.2. Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research as a device for analysing multiple policy options and choosing the best option to achieve policy goals and objectives

The FIA is a SEIAS template used in the second phase of the SEIAS process to help officials and policymakers collect a more detailed assessment of the ultimate legislative proposal. The Presidency's participants contend that it provides a "complete evaluation of the policy option's potential consequences concerning implementation and compliance costs and expected outcomes" (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022). According to the Presidency's respondent, the FIA enables public authorities to consider the implications of a proposed policy, law, legal reform, or regulation using the ToC (interview, Presidency official, 20 September 2022).

Similar to IIA, FIA requires PR to complete an evaluation of the policy option's potential consequences concerning implementation and compliance costs and expected outcomes (interview, National Treasury official, 18 September 2022; Department of Health official, 19 September 2022; Presidency official, 20 September 2022; and Economic Development Department official, 29 September 2022). The Department of Health participant contends that "once a *Green Paper* has been drafted and gazetted, all other relevant stakeholders inclined to be affected by the proposed policy are invited to present written submissions towards the *White Paper*. They are also invited to participate in public hearings". The research observes that in the FIA, PR is consistently acknowledged by implementers of SEIAS PR.

5.7. Conclusion

There is an apparent discord in the conceptualisation and implementation of SEIAS PR. An important observation in the discussions with the representatives from the Presidency, the National Treasury and Economic Development Department, is that SEIAS PR was conceptualised for rational decision-making. It is conceptualised to follow the logical steps outlined in the rational decision-making theory, but its implementation is such that it limits PR and decision-making authority to restricted stakeholders.

Even though it is impossible to engage with all stakeholders, inadequate and limited stakeholder consultation can adversely influence stakeholder participation and consensus-building initiatives in the SEIAS process. These often result in pushback, which delays the policymaking process (background into the research in Chapter 1).

The SEIAS process requires diverse group and stakeholder participation, but the study demonstrates that the lack of a unified framework to guide officials and policy on stakeholder engagement compromises the scope and methods of stakeholder engagement. This reduces SEIAS PR into a box-checking exercise, demonstrated by the criticism levelled against SEIAS in South Africa's policymaking.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and conclusion

6.1 Introduction to recommendation and conclusions

The objective of the study was to investigate critically participatory research (PR) in South Africa's SEIAS. The focus of the study was on the conceptualisation and implementation of PR within the South African SEIAS process. Increased criticism levelled against SEIAS participation procedures influenced the focus of the study. Recognising that SEIAS PR is neither a straightforward strategy nor a simple replacement for conventional research techniques, the study sought to comprehend how SEIAS PR is conceptualized and implemented.

The study's primary conclusion is that SEIAS is designed to take a comprehensive, rational approach to decision-making. It is assumed that providing more accurate and reliable information about the policy problem would lead to more informed decisions regarding alternative courses of action. Diverse groups and stakeholder must be involved with SEIAS through PR. It asserts that trustworthy information about a policy problem can be gathered from the perspective of and in collaboration with those most affected by it. The study confirms that information gathered from the perspective of and in collaboration with those most affected by it broadens the decision-making alternatives. It also increases acceptance of assessment and decision results because those involved may share a common vision and a sense of ownership over the result.

Even though it is impossible to involve all stakeholders, inadequate and limited stakeholder consultation can have a negative impact on stakeholder participation, consensus building initiatives, and the SEIAS process, according to the study. These can and frequently do result in pushback, which delays the policymaking process. The SEIAS PR requires participation from various groups and stakeholders. The study found, however, that a unified framework is required to guide officials and policymakers in the implementation of PR.

This chapter concludes the report with a summary of the major themes covered in Chapter 5. Each theme concludes with recommendations for future SEIAS PR processes that officials and policymakers may wish to consider

6.2. Recommendations on the nature of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research in South Africa's policymaking

The study found that the participation of diverse groups and stakeholders is essential for identifying and framing policy problems and analysing policy options in order to select the best option that will allow policymakers to achieve policy goals and objectives. This is deemed necessary to uphold South Africa's democratic principles, as it gives participants a "transformational voice" that allows them to influence policy outcomes. In addition to ensuring

However, the participation of diverse groups and stakeholders does not guarantee the availability of trustworthy evidence for decision making. According to a participant in the research, the evidence provided by various groups and stakeholders is "anecdotal." It cannot be tested and is frequently exaggerated, resulting in flawed policy decisions (Strydom et al., 2010:05).

In addition, non-scientifically vetted evidence cannot provide plausible alternatives for "how" authorities and policymakers can implement policy decisions. In order to assist policymakers in making more reasonable decisions, SEIAS PR requires a mix of scientific and non-scientific evidence in the decision-making process. This is crucial for rational decision-making and upholding democratic principles, both of which the SEIAS PR seeks to uphold.

Even if democratically desirable, it is impractical to interact with every stakeholder in SEIAS PR. This is because interacting with stakeholders is both time-consuming and expensive. Implementers of SEIAS PR are therefore responsible for mapping, identifying, and selecting the most relevant stakeholders for participation in the SEIAS PR process.

The study observed and criticised the use of desk research and referrals to find and select stakeholders identified by the research participants, noting that these methods are inherently limiting and can be biased against other eager stakeholders. Consequently, the study recommends adopting a standardised method for identifying and mapping stakeholders. The study found that the absence of a framework to instruct officials and policymakers on how to identify and map stakeholders for SEIAS PR contributes to the inconsistencies that arise during data

collection, selection, interpretation, and decision-making, for which SEIAS has been criticised.

The framework should not only instruct policymakers and officials on how to identify SEIAS PR stakeholders. It should also instruct students on how to form objective and meaningful partnerships. In Chapter 2, it is defined that PR is an inquiry into a social discipline conducted in direct partnership with the parties most affected by the issue under consideration, with the goal of action or transformation (see Theoretical Framework). Cooperation between officials and stakeholders is essential for high-level stakeholder participation in rational and exhaustive decision-making (Thiollent, 2011:162). Participation can lead to shared visions and a sense of ownership, thereby increasing acceptance of assessments and decisions (see Theoretical Framework in Chapter 2).

6.3. Recommendations on the scope of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research in South Africa's policymaking

Even if the participation of a wide range of groups and stakeholders is considered democratically desirable for SEIAS PR, it is impractical to interact with every stakeholder in SEIAS PR. This is due to the fact that engaging with stakeholders is both time-consuming and costly. Consequently, the implementers of SEIAS PR are responsible for mapping, identifying, and choosing the most pertinent stakeholders for participation in the SEIAS PR process.

The study has observed and criticised the use of desk research and referrals to find and choose stakeholders noted by the research participants, noting that the methods are inherently restrictive and can bias against other eager stakeholders. Therefore, the study suggests adopting a standardized approach for identifying and mapping stakeholders. The study found that the lack of a framework to guide officials and policymakers on how to identify and map stakeholders for SEIAS PR adds to inconsistencies that arise throughout data collection, selection, interpretation, and decision-making, for which SEIAS has been criticised.

The framework should not only direct officials and policymakers on how to identify SEIAS PR stakeholders. It should also instruct students on how to form meaningful and objective collaborations. It is explained in Chapter 2 that PR is an inquiry into a

social discipline undertaken in direct partnership with the stakeholders most affected by the issue under consideration with the objective of action or transformation (see Theoretical Framework). The cooperation between officials and stakeholders is essential for high-level stakeholder engagement in rational and comprehensive decision-making (Thiollent, 2011:162). It increases acceptance of the assessments and decisions since participation can lead to shared visions and a sense of ownership (see Theoretical Framework in Chapter 2).

6.4. Recommendations on the method of data collection in Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research in South Africa's policymaking

Chapter 1 demonstrated that stakeholder consultation and engagement are essential PR components. By allowing policymakers to document and interpret a policy challenge with those most impacted, this method, when applied thoroughly and effectively, can increase the number of options available for decision-making. In contrast, if it is not applied correctly, it can affect 'buy in' to a policy option, resulting in anything from a lack of enthusiasm for a process to, in extreme cases, a complete rejection of the policy option.

The study found that there is no established method for engaging stakeholders in SEIAS PR. Engagement is contingent upon the socioeconomic issues the policy seeks to address. If the policy attempts to address socio-economic issues such as poverty and unemployment, then the SEIAS PR methodology would include interviews and a two-way consultation process to ensure stakeholder feedback. If, however, the policy seeks to address economic issues, a combination of surveys and interviews would suffice. The methodology differs depending on the investigated policy.

Nevertheless, SEIAS PR has been criticized for inefficiency. Therefore, the study suggests employing broader data collection methods. The study actually proposed a standard Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework.

PAR is a research approach with a lineage dating back to the 1940s. It is characterised by strict collaborative efforts between researchers and participants aimed at comprehending and ameliorating complex issues (Bergold and Thomas (2012:01). While diverse definitions of PAR exist, they commonly encompass

several key attributes. According to Nelson (2014) PAR centres its approach on fostering societal change that upholds democratic principles and confronts disparities. It exhibits a context-specific orientation, often concentrating on the exigencies of specific demographic groups (Nelson, 2014). PAR operates as an iterative process, cyclically encompassing research, action, and reflection, with an overarching aspiration to empower participants by heightening their awareness of their circumstances, thereby motivating them to take remedial measures (Bergold and Thomas (2012; Nelson, 2014). This approach employs a diverse array of research techniques, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative methods.

According to Bergold and Thomas (2012:01), a research technique is typically considered a data collection or generation technique. Conventionally, research methods are classified as quantitative (i.e., surveys, questionnaires), qualitative (i.e., interviews, focus groups), or mixed (i.e., a combination of the two) methods.

There are a variety of research methods, including written, visual, verbal, observational, arts-based, and active approaches. Participatory research includes tools, tasks, and structured activities to facilitate participation, shared decision-making, and mutual learning in each step of the research process. Nelson (2014) defines research methods as the concrete tools, techniques, and procedures utilized throughout the entire research process, not just at the time of data collection. For example, a method could be developed or adapted for use in forming a research partnership or co-designing research questions. Methods of research can include processes and techniques for data collection, data analysis and interpretation, dissemination, and effecting change.

According to Nelson (2014), people and groups must be active participants in the research process in order to develop the knowledge and ability to take action to improve the situation. According to Muntean and Nagy (2017:147), PR involves the dissemination of useful information, which enables people to collaborate with policymakers to solve their problems and improve their lives. According to Muntean and Nagy (2017:147), it is empowering to have knowledge about the existing oppressive reality and control over the process of knowledge generation and its outcome. People are empowered when they participate in determining their own future.

Therefore, researchers employing a PAR strategy frequently select research methods and instruments that can be conducted in a democratic, participatory manner. The fundamental premise of (PAR) methods is the value placed on genuine and meaningful participation – methods that offer "the ability to speak up, to participate, to experience oneself and be experienced as a person with the right to express oneself and have that expression valued by others" (Abma et al., 2019, p. 127). Participation of stakeholders will vary at each stage of the research process, and there are innumerable options for decision-sharing in each research task.

6.5. Recommendation on applying Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System participatory research in South Africa's policymaking

Inconsistencies in the application of PR were observed in the Initial Impact Assessment, according to the study (IIA). SEIAS PR is not implemented in the same manner by each implementer. For example, one respondent argued that "regulators, NGOs, business representatives, unions, consumers, and community representatives are typically involved in SEIAS public relations. While another respondent argued that researchers, experts, and the appropriate directorate are consulted for the IIA, stakeholders. When a policy problem is conceptualized or a Green Paper is drafted, stakeholders are consulted, according to the latter. Following the drafting and publication of a Green Paper, all other relevant parties who may be affected by the proposed policy are invited to submit written feedback. One participant argues for diversity in the IIA process, while another argues for the Domaine of bureaucratic staff members in the IIA.

The inconsistencies demonstrate that the application of SEIAS PR lacks uniformity. Therefore, the study suggests the development of a uniform framework to guide SEIAS PR implementation. A framework like this would be really helpful for government officials. It would assist them in figuring out who the important players are in a given situation, based on different factors. These factors should include things like their official roles (like being a government authority), how much power they have (in terms of money or knowledge), whether they could help or hinder a plan (including groups that lobby for certain policies and those who actually implement them), and how invested they are in the issue.

The research we did showed that there's a wide range of people and groups involved in this kind of government decision-making. This includes regulators, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, labor unions, consumers, and basically anyone who might be affected by the policies being discussed. While this framework might not completely solve all the problems with identifying and selecting the right people to involve, it's a strategic way to make sure that the stakeholders who are part of the process are able to provide evidence and insights that can facilitate evidence-based rational decision-making.

6.6. Final conclusion

6This chapter presented recommendations based on the previous chapter's findings discussion. SEIAS PR demonstrates a great deal of complexity and vitality. This implies that linearity is inapplicable to any attempt to gain insight into the conceptualization of SEIAS PR. The relationship between the conceptualization and implementation of SEIAS is necessary to realise the dual goals of public relations: knowledge production and collaborative, democratic action in the real world.

The study also highlighted the difficulties of stakeholder engagement in SEIAS's public relations. At each stage of the SEIAS process, the framework can assist officials and policymakers in engaging diverse groups and stakeholders more deeply. This participation enables officials and policymakers to benefit from the collective intelligence of researchers and communities, resulting in more meaningful findings that can be translated into action.

There is a compelling case for conceptualizers to investigate how to improve SEIAS PR processes at this stage. Further scientific research will aid officials and policymakers in enhancing the framework for SEIAS PR, which will benefit South African policymaking.

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Appendix 1: Interview questionnaires

1. **SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH CONCEPTUALISATION QUESTIONS:**

- Can you take me through the SEIAS process?
- What has been the success of SEIAS in policymaking?
- What are some challenges of SEIAS in policymaking?
- SEIAS promotes a technical and participative approach to policy decision-making.
    - What is your understanding of PR?
    - What is the objective of PR in SEIAS?
    - How do you think PR should be implemented in SEIAS?
    - How is PR actually implementing SEIAS?

2. **SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION QUESTIONS:**

- What steps are followed to ensure SEIAS RP implementation?
- What methods are used to collect the data?
- What methods are used to analyse and interpret data?
- How are collaborative decisions reached and taken forward in SEIAS PR?
- Does PR stress the importance of treating stakeholders or people as 'participants' rather than 'research subjects?
- Which stakeholders are usually involved in SEIAS PR?
- How are the stakeholders identified?
- What skills are required by the stakeholders to participate in PR?
- How is the responsibility of tasks allocated?
- What are the legal rights of stakeholders in SEIAS PR?
- What is the relationship between the stakeholders and the co-researcher in SEIAS PR?
- How and by whom is the collective decision research taken forward in SEIAS PR?