

**THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS IN URBAN
PLANNING PROCESSES IN ZAMBIA: AN EVALUATION OF REGULATORY
EFFECTIVENESS IN LUSAKA PROVINCE**

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ABSTRACT

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a crucial tool for balancing urban growth with environmental protection in Zambia. This article assesses the effectiveness of EIA within urban planning processes, with particular focus on the Environmental Management Act No. 12 of 2011 and the Urban and Regional Planning Act No. 3 of 2015. It examines how EIAs are integrated into urban development to mitigate risks such as pollution, habitat loss, and resource depletion, especially in rapidly expanding cities like Lusaka. The study adopts case studies and scholarly analysis to evaluate both the strengths and limitations of the framework. The findings highlight notable strengths, including mandatory EIA approvals for environmentally significant projects and provisions for public participation, which promote sustainable decision-making. However, persistent challenges undermine effectiveness. These include weak enforcement mechanisms, limited institutional capacity, data gaps, and overlapping mandates between the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) and local planning authorities. Such shortcomings often result in incomplete assessments and unaddressed environmental impacts. The study concludes that while EIAs have improved the integration of environmental considerations into urban planning, regulatory and institutional deficiencies restrict their full potential. It recommends stronger inter-agency coordination, capacity building for ZEMA, and clearer guidelines for harmonising EIA requirements with planning procedures under the Urban and Regional Planning Act. Ultimately, reforms are necessary to enhance the role of EIAs in fostering ecologically sustainable and resilient urban development in Zambia.

Keywords: *Environmental Impact Assessment, Urban Planning, Regulatory Effectiveness and Sustainable Development*

Introduction

In Zambia, it has been observed that urbanization is accelerating at an unprecedented rate as seen from the transformation of bare land in cities such as Lusaka, Kitwe and Ndola. These cities are transforming into bustling hubs of economic activities as seen from the growth of the business that is happening in these places. There is an increase in population as well as huge development of infrastructure in these cities in the last few years. Currently, more than 45 percent of the total population in the country live in urban areas and projections show that this figure might increase to 50 percent by the year 2050.¹ This rapid expansion presents opportunities as well as significant environmental challenges in many societies. As a result of this expansion, new residential estates, commercial buildings, roads and industrial zones are coming up to meet the demands of a rising middle class in the country. It is observed that foreign investments have emerged as a result of these developments despite coming at the cost of natural resources, air quality and community health. In Lusaka City alone, about 70% of the city is covered by informal settlement areas by the many people flocking to the city for better opportunities.² This has led to challenges such as uncontrolled waste disposal and water contamination due to improper drainage systems. There is a growing problem of the loss of biodiversity within the peri-urban green spaces as most of the land has been occupied by informal settlers.³ These challenges are further worsened by the problem of climate change, a factor that has been seen to increase flooding and heatwaves. The growing problem of climate change has made sustainable urban planning more critical than ever as the country continues to grapple with its caning effects.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a systemic process that is intended to foresee, evaluate and mitigate the environmental impacts of development projects before they begin.⁴ In many countries around the world, EIAs have been one of the cornerstones of environmental policy since the 1970s. They first originated within the United States' National Environmental

¹ Ephraim K. Munshifwa, Chota M. Mwenya and Anthony Mushingi. Urban Development, Land Use Changes and Environmental Impacts in Zambia's Major Cities: A Case Study of Ndola. March 2021. In book: *Sustainable Real Estate in the Developing World*, (pp.63-81). Chapter 5. Emerald Publishing Limited.

² Chanda Musenga, & Clinton Aigbavboa. Environmental Impacts of Construction Activities: A Case of Lusaka, Zambia. In book: *Advances in Human Factors, Sustainable Urban Planning and Infrastructure. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*. January 2019.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Aurelian M. Mhagama, Agabu Shane and Jhonnah Mundike. Role of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments in Advancing Sustainable Development under Mining Activities: A case study of Zambia's mining sector. *Next Research*, Volume 2, Issue 4. December, 2025.

Policy Act and later spread to over 120 countries including many African countries.⁵ In developing countries like Zambia, the EIAs are not only a regulatory mechanism but also one of the ways for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in general. In particular, SDG 11 which aims for sustainable cities and communities and SDG 13 which aims to achieve the goal of climate action.⁶ This ensures that urban growth is in line with the principles of sustainability, equity and resilience. This will prevent irreversible environmental destruction such as soil erosion, deforestation and pollution aspects that could affect the long-term prosperity of the nation.

The EIA process in Zambia is set within a legal framework that includes the Environmental Management Act, which provides for the establishment of the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA), as the focal agency for EIAs.⁷ The Urban and Regional Planning Act calls for integrated planning that coordinates the environmental, social and economic factors.⁸ Under the Environmental Management Act (EMA), every project that “may” have an adverse effect on the environment, for example, large-scale housing developments or infrastructure in urban areas-must undergo a mandatory EIA involving public consultations, predictions of impacts and mitigation plans of any possible effects.⁹ The Urban and Regional Planning Act supplements this with the requirement for planning permissions to also provide EIA approvals to foster a devolved governance system where the local authorities shall work together with ZEMA to ensure multi-sectoral collaboration.¹⁰ This integration strives to attain cities that are not only economically vibrant but also environmentally sound. The importance of this collaboration is not only to ensure development that will respect ecological limits but also respects the needs of the community.

However, notwithstanding these frameworks, questions persist about the effectiveness of EIA in the real-world urban context of Zambia. For example, although studies indicate that EIAs have sometimes improved project design such as reducing emissions in industrial expansions, the actual implementation of these measures is often weak due to resource constraints or gaps

⁵ Makweti Sishekanu and Morgan Katati. ‘Subjectivity in the Logic of Zambia’s Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) Process. The Bedrock of Controversial EIA Approvals.’ *Law and Development Journal*. August 2022.

⁶ United Nations- The 17 Goals- Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁷ No. 12 of 2011.

⁸ No. 3 of 2015.

⁹ Section 62 (J), Environmental Management Act.

¹⁰ Section 52 (d), Urban and Regional Planning Act.

in enforcement.¹¹ For instance, in rapidly expanding urban areas such as the outskirts of Lusaka, projects may be approved when EIAs are incomplete, with adverse ongoing impacts related to air pollution from construction dust and the destruction of homes, among others.¹² This article evaluates the regulatory effectiveness of EIAs in the urban planning laws of Zambia through an analysis of the legal doctrines, case studies and scholarly literature to show strengths, weaknesses and avenues for improvement of the legal framework.

The study explores how well EIAs fit into urban decision-making, hence pointing toward the need for reforms to make regulations robust and actionable. In a country where the growth of the urban population surpasses infrastructure development at 4.3% per annum,¹³ among other contributing factors, effective EIA will prevent environmental degradation and support inclusive development. After all, this evaluation is not an academic exercise but a call to action for the policymakers, planners and communities to create cities that thrive and do not harm the planet.

Background to the Problem

Environmental governance in Zambia has undergone great transformations since independence in 1964. It has moved from an initial focus on resource extraction, such as mining, which created widespread pollution in urban-adjacent areas, especially on towns of the Copperbelt province.¹⁴ The first important step in legislation was the Environment Protection and Pollution Control Act (EPPCA) of 1990, which established the Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) and made EIAs compulsory for projects that are considered to be of high-risk.¹⁵ The main objective of this act was to reduce industrial impacts, but during increased urbanization in the 2000s—whereby cities like Lusaka grew from 1 million to over 3 million residents and then it was realized that urban-specific issues required stronger regulations.¹⁶ It is observed that specific issues that clearly pointed out the weaknesses of these early laws have been the sprawling of informal housing and inadequate municipal waste management. The problem of

¹¹ Patricia Mwelwa. An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Process in Zambia: A Case of the Chilanga Cement Plant. University of Zambia. 2024.

¹² See Chanda et al, *supra* note 2.

¹³ Ephraim Munshifwa, et al, *supra* note 1.

¹⁴ Joanna Lindahl. Environmental Impacts of Mining in Zambia. Towards a better environmental management and sustainable exploitation of mineral resources. *SGU Rapport*. Geological Survey of Sweden. July, 2014.

¹⁵ Ministry of Finance and National Planning—Draft Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF). Zambia Green Resilient and Transformational Tourism Development Project (GREAT -TDP). April, 2023.

¹⁶ See Chanda et al, *supra* note 2.

water scarcity due to unregulated development is another challenge that many growing cities continue to be grappled with.

In 2011, the EPPCA was replaced by the Environmental Management Act (EMA), which renamed the Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) to the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA). The mandate of this new institution was expanded to include proactive environmental protection.¹⁷ The key provisions of the EMA on EIAs are found in sections 29-30, which calls for developers to submit project briefs for screening.¹⁸ This is followed by full Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for projects that are likely to have significant impacts on the community, such as urban developments in the form of housing estates or roads that will interrupt air and water quality or biodiversity.¹⁹ Principles such as polluter pays, precautionary principle and public participation are underscored in the Act through Sections 6 and 91 to 94, which provide for consultations and hearings to be held to allow the views of the community to be taken into account.²⁰ It is observed that, for urban areas, the EMA works in conjunction with other laws such as the Town and Country Planning Act, despite the fact that it is now repealed but it was influential in the development of the EMA and the Water Resources Management Act to ensure that EIAs are undertaken before any permit is issued and that cumulative impacts are considered for densely populated areas.

In complementing the EMA, the Urban and Regional Planning Act, moved away from centralized to devolved planning through various provincial and district planning authorities that are responsible for preparing IDPs with environmental safeguards.²¹ Section 49 of the URPA requires that planning permissions should be compatible with EIA approvals as allowed by ZEMA, while Section 35-37 details public consultation in town planning schemes.²² This will prevent a situation where there is disjointed development and ensure that urban development projects take into account environmental hazards and also align these with socio-economic factors.

¹⁷ United Nations Environment Programme—Report on the Environmental Management Act, 2011, Zambia. 19 August, 2011.

¹⁸ Environmental Management Act No. 12 of 2011.

¹⁹ Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA). Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines. (2016). Lusaka: ZEMA.

²⁰ The Environmental Management Act

²¹ Bowen Banda, Dewald Van Niekerk, Livhuwani NemaKonde & Charley Granvorka. 'Integrated Development Planning in Zambia: Ideological Lens, Theoretical Underpinnings, Current Practices and Views of Planners.' Development Southern Africa, *Taylor and Francis Journals*, Vol 39(3), 338-353. May 2022.

²² See Urban and Regional Planning Act.

Despite these advances, there are a number of practical challenges that remain in many cities. In Lusaka, for instance, construction activities continue to cause environmental degradation through dust, noise and waste, this results into a compromise of both the quality of air and the health of the community.²³ Case studies such as the Chilanga Cement plant expansion illustrate this as it needed an EIA that highlighted the probability for air pollution. This would have led to the adoption of mitigations like dust suppression, but its implementation was faced by funding shortfalls and weak monitoring. This development in itself has seen sustained complaints from the community as they have been affected by the expansion of this plant. Similarly, a case study of the Lions Hill Estate, located in Lusaka's Chongwe District, had an EIA that incorporated the loss of homes and water contamination concerns by creating green spaces and methods for wastewater treatment, yet indicated weaknesses in public participation and cumulative impact assessment.²⁴

It is seen that wider issues involve subjective EIA approvals, where terms such as "may" allow discretionary decisions based on economic pressures and not science. This leads to controversial urban projects that in the end take a big toll on the community where such project is located. Overlaps in institutional roles between ZEMA and the local councils create delays in processing, while capacity constraints such as understaffing and budgets deficits contribute to the poor enforcement of the law.²⁵ The gaps in information that exist such as outdated environmental baselines weaken the assessments in rapidly changing urban areas.²⁶ These problems are compounded by rapid foreign investments, often at the expense of sustainability, thus turning what might have been green growth into environmental liabilities. While the law in Zambia provides a solid foundation for EIAs in urban planning, the background showcases an existing tension between policy ambition and the realities of the ground and therefore sets the stage for evaluating the effectiveness of regulation.

Statement of the Problem

Zambia is urbanising at 4.3% annually and will be majority-urban by 2050. The Environmental Management Act No. 12 of 2011 and the Urban and Regional Planning Act No. 3 of 2015

²³ See Banda, et al, *supra* note 20.

²⁴ Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (EIS) for the Proposed Mixed Use of Development on Sub No. 12 and 31 of farm 28A in State Lodge Area, Chongwe, Lusaka, Zambia. Afritec Asset management Company Limited, Final Report, November 2022.

²⁵ Sishekanu and Katati, *supra* note 5.

²⁶ Ephraim Zulu, Sambo Zulu, Mwansa Chabala, Innocent Musonda, Neema Kavishe & Nicholas Chileshe. Challenges and advocated solutions for environmental protection legislation for building infrastructure projects in developing countries: Evidence from Zambia. Project Leadership and Society, Volume 3. December, 2022.

together create an EIA regime that is modern and mandatory. This regime on paper, requires ZEMA approval and full integration of EIA outcomes into every significant urban planning decision. This legal framework is comprehensive and internationally aligned. However, in practice, EIA is routinely bypassed or ignored in urban projects and those mitigation measures that are approved are almost never monitored or enforced.

This research addresses the persistent systemic failure of the EMA–URPA linkage to deliver effective environmental prevention in Zambia’s rapidly growing cities, despite a strong statutory mandate. We still do not adequately understand the exact breakdown points in the legal-institutional chain, the relative weight of design flaws versus capacity, coordination and enforcement deficits or the feasible reforms that could make EIA genuinely operative in the urban context.

Without resolving this regulatory failure, Zambia’s urbanisation will continue to generate irreversible ecological damage, heightened flood and pollution risks and deepening inequality and direct contradiction of SDG 11 and national development commitments. The study therefore maps and analyses the legal integration of EIA into urban planning law, evaluates its real-world effectiveness through doctrinal and case-study analysis, identifies the critical regulatory and institutional gaps and proposes targeted, evidence-based reforms that will restore EIA as an effective preventive instrument for sustainable urban development in Zambia.

Discussion

The discussion section critically assesses the integration as well as effectiveness of EIAs within the urban planning system of Zambia. This will be done by engaging legal frameworks, empirical case studies, stakeholder insights and recent regulatory developments. The discussion examines the interplay between the Environmental Management Act (EMA) No. 12 of 2011 and Urban and the Regional Planning Act (URPA) No. 3 of 2015 while identifying systemic barriers to successful implementation as a guide in managing environmental concerns in rapidly urbanizing contexts like Lusaka.

Legal and Institutional Integration of EIAs in Urban Planning

The Environmental Impact Assessment regime in Zambia is anchored in the Environmental Management Act, which mandates assessments for projects likely to cause significant environmental harm environment.²⁷ This includes urban infrastructure like housing estates,

²⁷ Section 29, Environmental Management Act, 2011.

roads and any commercial developments.²⁸ The Act emphasizes principles such as the precautionary principle, the polluter pays principle and public participation in the management of the environment.²⁹ The URPA reinforces this by requiring integrated development planning, where local authorities must ensure that planning permissions align with the EIAs that are approved by ZEMA.³⁰ This linkage promotes multi-sectoral collaboration that aims to balance economic growth with environmental safeguards in line with Sustainable Development Goal number 11 (SDG 11).³¹

The whole idea behind the Environment Impact Assessment framework in Zambia is to serve as a proactive preventive tool that is designed to integrate environmental sustainability into development projects.³² This is the case especially in rapidly urbanizing cities such as Lusaka. The framework provides a structured approach to identifying and mitigating adverse impacts of infrastructure and urban development.³³ It covers things like screening projects, figuring out the scope, predicting impacts, planning ways to fix problems, talking to the public and keeping an eye on things after. In urban settings like Lusaka, the EIA framework tackles acute environmental and social issues such as losing habitats, dirty water, air getting polluted from dust during building and floods that get worse because informal settlements take up around 70 percent of Lusaka.³⁴

A critical issue in Lusaka is that there is a huge population that reside in informal settlements and these places generally lack basic sanitation and waste management services.³⁵ There is an increased chance of environmental risks in such kind of settlements. The expansion of such areas when combined with industrial growth places severe pressure on local water resources especially in shallow wells and boreholes which get contaminated easily.³⁶ The EIA system is crucial in mitigating these risks by regulating construction and infrastructure development.

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ Section 6, Environmental Management Act, 2011.

³⁰ Section 49, Urban and Regional Planning Act, 2015.

³¹ United Nations, 'Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)' <https://unsdg.un.org/sdgs/sustainable-cities-and-communities> accessed 27 February 2026.

³² United Nations Environment Programme. Environmental Impact Assessment Process in Zambia. UN Annual Report, 25 January 2013

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ UN—Habitat. Country Brief-Zambia, 2023. A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world. Briefing Note | Zambia.

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ Future Resilience for African Cities and Lands (FRACTAL). Lusaka Groundwater Pollution: Key Threat to Water Security & Health Policy Brief. Lusaka, Zambia | November 2018.

The recent changes in 2026 through Statutory Instrument No. 3³⁷ have made the process more modern by introducing fees based on risk so that those projects that are considered to have low impact on the environment pay less. Also introduced are reviews that take only 20 to 30 for certain assessments, exemptions for minimal impact activities and formal integration of social impact assessments from ZEMA. These reforms are aimed at reducing delays and lower costs for developers. These reforms will also enhance efficiency in many fast growing urban sectors like Lusaka, Ndola and others.

Despite these strengths, this integration is not all perfect because there are overlaps between ZEMA which handles the national environment regulations and the local planning authorities. This in itself causes confusion about who does what and decisions end up all over the place. The discretionary language in the EMA such as projects that “may” have significant impacts allows economic priorities to influence approvals over scientific evidence.³⁸ In urban contexts where foreign investments and demand for housing drive rapid development, this subjectivity often results in approvals despite the assessments being incomplete.

Strengths of the EIA Process in Urban Contexts

EIAs have demonstrated increased environmental awareness in urban planning in Zambia. The mandatory requirements ensure that major projects are observed closely, which leads to design changes so as to include green spaces or water waste treatment and sometimes even dust control. The provisions that speak to public participation helps to get input from the community as they too add their voices in the process. This aligns with the principles of equity and resilience which are of utmost importance in such a process. For example, in some infrastructure projects in Lusaka, EIAs have identified risks such as deforestation and water pollution.³⁹ This has prompted mitigation measures that stakeholders view as partially effective. The new regulations of 2026 show good progress towards achieving greater accessibility and enforcement. By shifting to impact based fees and faster reviews, this will encourage compliance among urban developers that are faced with resource constraints. Scholars are of the view that the system has improved in terms of the procedures compared to

³⁷ Statutory Instrument No. 3 of 2026 – The Environmental Management (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations, 2026.

³⁸ Kambili Chilufya. ‘Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management in Zambia.’ (Presentation, 1 October 2018, EHC Lusaka).

³⁹ ‘Understanding Public Input in Local Decisions’ (Think Lawfully)
<https://www.thinklawfully.com/understanding-public-input-in-local-decisions/> accessed 13 March 2026.

the previous frameworks, which then is contributing to better consideration of cumulative impacts in densely populated areas.⁴⁰

Persistent Challenges and Implementation Gaps

The problem of enforcement continues to persist as the primary barrier to regulatory effectiveness. There are a number of challenges that are faced by ZEMA such as chronic understaffing and limited budgets which hinder their operations. The fact that their operations are mainly centralized in Lusaka makes it difficult to monitor peri-urban and other expanding districts.⁴¹ After approval, the follow ups are weak which makes it impossible to implement mitigation measures due to inadequate funding or the lack of audits. There is also a problem of gaps in the available data and the insufficient monitoring of cumulative effect of urban growth. This undermines assessments in dynamic environments where urbanization rates exceed 4% annually.

The problem of institutional coordination makes these challenges even bigger. The local authorities under the URPA sometimes approve developments without the full integration of ZEMA which then leads to superficial EIAs that are driven by economic pressures instead. There is empirical evidence to show that high density areas like the informal settlements in Lusaka, continue to face the challenges of poor waste management, flooding as well as continuous pollution despite having regulatory mandates.⁴² The subjectivity in approvals of the projects that should commence is also a big challenge. There are reports of allowing controversial decisions that prioritize short term goals over long term sustainability as a result of having vague thresholds. It is observed also that the lack of capacity at ZEMA makes rigorous enforcement a challenge and the rapid urban projects that are foreign driven usually bypass the thorough scrutiny of the agency.

Case Study Analysis: Chilanga Cement Plant Expansion

The expansion of the Chilanga Cement plant provides a clear illustration of the limitations of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) when they operate as mere administrative hurdles rather than proactive management tools. The EIA identified the obvious risks of air pollution

⁴⁰ 'Zambia's 2026 Budget: New Tax and Business Reforms Strengthen Transparency and Compliance' (Africa Tax Review, 30 October 2025) <https://africataxreview.com/2025/10/30/zambias-2026-budget-new-tax-and-business-reforms-strengthen-transparency-and-compliance/> accessed 20 March 2026

⁴¹ 'ZEMA Accused of Frustrating Zambia's Development' *Zambian Business Times* (Lusaka, 23 March 2026) <https://zambianbusinesstimes.com/zema-accused-of-frustrating-zambias-development/> accessed 23 March 2026

⁴² Joy Sambo Mazuba Muchindu, Sikopo Nyambe and Taro Yamauchi, 'Sustainable Solid Waste Management: An Assessment of Solid Waste Treatment in Lusaka, Zambia' (2020) 4(2) Sanitation Value Chain 39

from dust emissions and recommended mitigations measures such as suppression systems, the subsequent operational failures demonstrated significant gaps between planning and reality.⁴³ However, using the Lee and Colley review package, evaluations revealed that there were deficiencies in predicting impacts, alternative analyses, public participation and monitoring.⁴⁴ After the approval, the community in Chilanga continued to complain about the dust as it was affecting their health, plants, vegetation and local air quality over distances up to 1.6 km away.⁴⁵ Enforcement actions, such as reduced license validity and increased monitoring by the predecessor agency Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) highlighted non-compliance and sustained implementation failures underscore weak follow ups.⁴⁶ This case demonstrates how EIAs can prompt initial mitigations but fail in practice when there is the absence of robust enforcement. In those urban areas that are near industrial zones such as Chilanga and surrounding areas, the economic side of things, like cement for building often overshadow damage to the environment which then reflects broader tensions in the development model of Zambia.

Case Study Analysis: Lions Hill Estate Development

The Lions Hill Estate development in the Chongwe district of Lusaka, presents a compelling case study on the intersection of urban growth and the practical challenges of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). While the project aims to address housing needs through an "eco-estate" approach, it highlights a common friction point that exists in developing areas balancing development with conservation of the environment.⁴⁷ The EIA dealt with losing habitats, water contamination, clearing vegetation by recommending green spaces, wastewater management, tree preservation (mapping trees over 20 cm diameter) and progressive rehabilitation.⁴⁸ The project incorporated eco-friendly features such as revamping a dry gully into a park and

⁴³ Camnet News. 'ECZ acts against Chilanga pollution.' *Tradeship Publications Ltd.* 16 March 2009. <https://www.cemnet.com/News/story/134603/ecz-acts-against-chilanga-pollution.html#:~:text=16%20March%202009,within%2021%20days%20for%20approval>.

⁴⁴ Patricia Mwelwa, 'An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Process in Zambia: A Case of the Chilanga Cement Plant' (Dissertation, University of Zambia 2024)

⁴⁵ CamNet News. 'ECZ acts against Chilanga pollution.' *Tradeship Publications Ltd.* 16 March 2009. <https://www.cemnet.com/News/story/134603/ecz-acts-against-chilanga-pollution.html#:~:text=16%20March%202009,within%2021%20days%20for%20approval>

⁴⁶ Business Regulatory Review Agency, *Regulatory Impact Assessment Handbook* (2019) 15

⁴⁷ Sydney Kamara. 'The Changing Face of Lusaka: Introducing Lions Hill Estate.' June 2026. *The Nkwazi Magazine*. <https://interactive.nkwazimagazine.com/the-changing-face-of-lusakaintroducing-lions-hill-estate/#:~:text=Lions%20Hill%20Estate:%20The%20Next,the%20estate%20against%20such%20risks>.

⁴⁸ Preeti Maurya and Anamika Akarsh, 'Environmental Impact Assessments: Ensuring Sustainability' [2020] Faculty of Fishery Sciences, Kolkata, West Bengal (700 094), India.

limited the clearing of land. However, critiques highlight gaps in cumulative impact assessment (considering surrounding developments) and meaningful public engagement.

While the EIA promoted sustainability, for instance, limiting the disturbance of habitats and the introduction of alien species, implementation challenges persists in peri urban settings where broader urban sprawl fragments eco-systems. This case shows EIAs' potential to guide better design but limited influence when monitoring is inadequate or cumulative effects that are unaddressed. The case study of the Lions Hill Estate illustrates that EIAs can effectively influence better site-specific planning and may push developers towards sustainable practices. However, without addressing the cumulative, regional effects of urban sprawl and implementing robust independent monitoring, such developments may fail to achieve long-term ecological goals.⁴⁹ The project highlights the need for sustainable development to be in tune with the surrounding landscape, rather than merely as an island of green spaces surrounded by destruction.

Broader Implications for Sustainable Urban Development

These case and literature indicate that EIAs enhance environmental consideration in urban planning but fall short in preventing irreversible degradation. In Lusaka, rapid growth leads to land use transitions and increased vulnerability to climate risks like flooding. Without stronger enforcement urbanization contradicts SDG commitments deepening inequality and ecological damage. The link between the EMA and URPA provides a foundation but effectiveness hinges on bridging policy practice gaps. Recent 2026 reforms offer optimism by promoting risk based approaches and stricter penalties but its success will depend on sustained development.

Conclusion

Overall, Zambia's EIA setup has moved forward on mixing environment into city planning, but issues with enforcing, skills, and teaming up hold it back. Getting past those with specific changes is key to make fast city growth fit with lasting good, so places like Lusaka can grow without wrecking nature or hurting people.

Recommendations for Reform

⁴⁹ Zhenfeng Shao, Neema S. Sumari, Aleksei Portnov, Fanan Ujoh, Walter Musakwa and Paulo J. Mandela. 'Urban sprawl and its impact on sustainable urban development: a combination of remote sensing and social media data', *Geo-Spatial Information Science*. 2021. Vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 241-255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10095020.2020.1787800>

To improve the efficacy of regulations:

- (3) **Improve Inter-Agency Coordination:** Develop joint protocols and urban-specific EIA guidelines under URPA with dedicated liaison units between ZEMA and local authorities.
- (4) **Build Institutional Capacity:** Increase ZEMA funding by decentralizing offices to provincial levels and provide training in urban impact monitoring and cumulative assessment.
- (5) **Strengthen Monitoring and Enforcement:** Mandate regular audits, digital tracking of mitigation and stricter penalties including suspensions for non-compliance.
- (6) **Enhance Data and Participation:** Increase public participation through easily available consultations, mandate updated environmental baselines and use GIS and remote sensing for urban monitoring.
- (7) **Address Subjectivity:** Revise discretionary language with clearer, science based thresholds and independent review panels for controversial projects..

By putting these changes into practice, EIAs could become powerful instruments for resilient urban settings.

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