

Sustainability Starts with Teachers

Capacity Building Programme for Teacher Educators on
Education for Sustainable Development (CAP-ESD)

Sustainability Challenges

South Africa's 1997 White Paper on Environmental Management Policy states that culture, economic considerations, social systems, politics and value systems determine the interaction between people and the environment, the use of natural resources and the values and meanings that people attach to life forms, ecological systems, physical and cultural landscapes and places. People are part of the environment and are at the centre of concerns for its sustainability.

South Africa is ranked in the top three most biodiverse countries in the world due to our rich variety of plants and animals. Millions of South Africans depend on this rich biodiversity and the environment for their livelihoods (Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, 2020). Human activities are often concentrated in areas rich in natural resources; as a result ecosystems and species in these areas are particularly at risk of extinction or collapse due to the accumulation of pressures.

South Africa is particularly vulnerable to impacts of climate change due to its socio-economic and environmental context. It is an already water-stressed country and climate variability will disproportionately affect its population.

Against this background, the Sustainability Starts with Teachers consultation workshop was designed to assess how the education system, particularly teacher education, can respond to these challenges via Education for Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development

The South African Constitution recognises the importance of sustainable development. It aims to ensure that all South African citizens have access to a healthy environment and to ensure sustainable use of our natural resources. South Africa is a signatory to the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the Convention on Biological Diversity and United Nations



Policy Brief South Africa

This policy brief focuses on key issues emerging from policy dialogue in a consultation workshop of the UNESCO Sustainability Starts with Teachers programme held virtually on 23 June 2020. There were 41 participants from 13 Teacher Education institutions, 23 participants from six TVET colleges, as well as 11 government officials (Department of Higher Education and Training, Department of Basic Education, Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries), parastatal (SANBI) and NGO (WESSA) participants. The workshop built on progress made in Education for Sustainable Development in teacher education in South Africa over a fifteen-year period since the start of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in 2005.

Convention to Combat Desertification. Additionally, the country's National Development Plan 2030 aims to build environmental sustainability and resilience. Guiding principles have been developed towards an environmentally sustainable low carbon economy, moving from policy, to process, to action. Some of the guiding principles are:

- ♦ *Ecosystems protection:* Acknowledge that human well-being is dependent on the health of the planet.
- ♦ *Full cost accounting:* Internalise environmental and social costs in planning and investment decisions, recognising that the need to secure environmental assets may be weighed against the social benefits accrued from their use.
- ♦ *Strategic planning:* Follow a systematic approach that is responsive to emerging risk and opportunity, and which identifies and manages trade-offs.
- ♦ *Effective participation of social partners:* Be aware of mutual responsibilities, engage on differences, seek consensus and expect compromise through social dialogue.
- ♦ *Opportunity-focused:* Look for synergies between sustainability, growth, competitiveness and employment creation, for South Africa to attain equality and prosperity.

The work that is being done in South Africa, which takes into account the above principles and actions, is an indication of South Africa's commitment to achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Integrating Education for Sustainable Development in Teacher and TVET Education

Positive strides have been made in South Africa to integrate environment and sustainability education at all levels of education. At the Basic Education level, environment and sustainability education is integrated as one of the principles that underpins the national school curriculum. Additionally, evidence of the integration of ESD is found in the content knowledge that has been specified across different grades and subjects. A draft policy, the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications, in Higher Education and Training, has recommended that the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) be integrated across learning domains in teacher education programmes. The policy acknowledges that the aim of the 17 SDGs is to address issues like poverty, inequality, unemployment and climate. Additionally, it recognises that although quality education is a particular focus of SDG 4, education, including teacher education, can contribute significantly to achieving the other sixteen goals. Teachers are thus viewed as having an important role if the SDGs are to be achieved.



Sustainable Development Goal 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Target 4.7

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

In May 2013, the Department of Higher Education and training launched a "Greening of Colleges" initiative in order to establish Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges as green environments. The focus of the initiative is on the integration of green issues in TVET colleges. This initiative involves both internal and external stakeholders in the greening process through train-the-trainer programme for companies and supporting communities in improving their living conditions through green projects.



Following the integration of environmental education in the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training and the inclusion of environmental education, training and community empowerment in the National Environmental Management Act of 1998, the Department of Environmental Affairs (currently known as the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries), developed a 2019–2029 Environmental Education and Training Strategy and Action Plan. This plan encompasses a new demand for environmental education and training in light of the global Sustainable Development Goals and the National Development Plan 2030, as well as recent environmental policies that aim to address environment and sustainability challenges in the country. Some of the policies include the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (DEA, 2015), and the Climate Change Response White Paper (RSA, 2012). The signing of a Green Economy Accord in 2011, highlighted the need for green economy teaching and learning and for re-framing skills development in the country.

The 2019–2029 Environmental Education and Training Strategy and Action Plan aims to strengthen a systems approach to environmental education and training initiatives and interventions. This encompasses activities in formal education, the technical and vocational learning space, as well as public and community education and social learning. Additionally, the plan aims to improve coherence and synergy, policy alignment, and enhance the value of the effort of all engaging with environmental education and training for sustainable development in South Africa.

Education for Sustainable Development Challenges in Teacher Education

Despite efforts to include Education for Sustainable Development and sustainable development concerns in education, some constraining factors were identified that pose challenges in the integration and/or implementation of ESD in Teacher Education and in TVET colleges.

Feedback from teacher educator participants highlighted that some academics are unaware of the critical linkages between education and sustainable development. As a result, they do not integrate ESD in the teaching and learning process. Other concerns were that lecturers lack capacity for ESD, be it mainstreaming or offering full curricula on ESD. Incapacity due to a lean staff component results in maintaining the same programmes to manage workload.

Additionally, some participants stated that there is limited knowledge about Education for Sustainable Development as it seems to be new concept to most people. In some institutions, during a recent re-curriculation of their teacher training programmes, no one thought of including ESD. A crowded curriculum also means that there is competition with other modules for teaching time.

The TVET sector is experiencing similar challenges. One is the lack of capacity to implement ESD in the curriculum; lecturers lack knowledge and skills. There is lack of knowledge in defining sustainable development skills and approaches to use to integrate ESD in the curriculum. Infrastructure, equipment and resources have also been highlighted as constraints in the implementation of ESD. Time constraints were also noted.

The Contribution of the 'Sustainability Starts with Teachers' Programme in South Africa

The Sustainability Starts with Teachers programme aims to build on progress being made in countries to integrate Education for Sustainable Development into teacher

education with a focus on Early Childhood Care and Education, primary, secondary and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) teacher education institutions.

Special focus is on Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is oriented towards the achievement of educational quality within a lifelong learning framework, and Target 4.7 which emphasises integration of Education for Sustainable Development.

The Sustainability Starts with Teachers programme is an action-learning programme centred on a contextually defined Education for Sustainable Development Change Project. A **Change Project** is an institutional curriculum or educational transformation initiative, relevant to a given context.



Nine institutions in South Africa are participating in the programme and participating teacher educators have conceptualised various Change Projects with a specific focus on the following:

1. Building capacity of educators and learners

Rhodes University ELRC / University of Cape Town / Wits University

An important focus for Education for Sustainable Development is building the capacity of teachers and communities to engage with, and participate in sustainable development activities and practices. Participants, through their Change Projects, are planning to engage colleagues and local communities, train practitioners, teachers and student teachers. Additionally, some will work with learners in local schools to support the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development.

In supporting the schooling sector, one of the Change Projects will develop a portfolio of active learning activities supporting school-based curriculum lesson plans for teachers and learners incorporating global SDGs. Another project will focus on implementing transformative pedagogies to promote sustainability education in formal courses and qualifications. One of the projects will support student teachers to engage with ESD through initiating their own change projects in the schools where they will conduct their work-integrated learning, which is a practical component of pre-service programmes.

2. Whole-system and institution Education for Sustainable Development approach

Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries / Fundisa for Change

Sustainable development requires whole-institution approaches to reflect the principles and practices of sustainability. This requires re-orienting practices in every aspect of school/institutional life. This includes governance, teaching content and methodology, campus and facility management as well as cooperation with partners and the broader communities.

One of the Change Projects aims to strengthen the national system of engagement in teacher education. This will enhance coherence and synergy across ESD initiatives delivered by multiple sectors and partners. This concerted effort will support the institutionalisation of ESD in the education system, both in the schooling and post-schooling sector.

A government department plans to develop a knowledge resource to support managers, leaders and practitioners of Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) colleges in improving their basic understanding and implementation of ESD. It is hoped that the resource will assist TVET colleges in exploring the significant role they can play in contributing to the production of green skilled human resources. Green skills have a significant association with green technology which contributes to sustainable development in terms of the environment, economy and social activities.

3. Improving the quality and relevance of education by harnessing Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and formal education

Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs

Mainstreaming culture and heritage issues into the South African curriculum is very important in implementing SDG 4; cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems need to be valued in the national school curriculum. One of the principles that underpin the South African national school curriculum acknowledges the rich South African history and heritage which should find expression in the classrooms. This will enhance the relevance of the curriculum to learners' everyday lives.

One of the Change Projects that will be implemented by a provincial government department will redesign their resource materials (toolkit) to include stories of IKS in order to support both teachers and practitioners to engage with culture and heritage issues in the school curriculum.



4. Collaborating with communities

North-West University / South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)

Education for Sustainable Development involves processes of engaging communities, youth and indigenous knowledge holders in expanding education and learning opportunities and activities, making connections to the cultural and social worlds of community members.

One of the teacher education institutions will strengthen engagement between university and surrounding communities as the institution will work collaboratively with the local communities to address environmental issues. Additionally, they will strengthen community-based research activities. Another project by a parastatal entity is focusing on developing community-based programmes to bring ESD awareness to local communities.



Implementation and monitoring of Target 4.7 of SDG 4

One of the outcomes of the Sustainability Starts with Teachers programme is increased national capacity for monitoring and evaluation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7. Through the Sustainability Starts with Teachers Change Projects teacher/TVET colleges are being supported to contribute towards preparing teachers for critically engaged, participatory citizenship, peace and sustainable development with respect to: rights, duties and responsibilities; tolerance and mutual respect; management of diversity, differences and conflicts; preserving and protecting the environment and resources and social cohesion among others. Governments can monitor the outcomes of the Change Projects for reporting on SDG 4, Target 4.7.

References

Government of South Africa. (2019). Voluntary National Review: Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/southafrica>

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For further information on the Change Projects and the Sustainability Starts with Teachers Programme, visit www.sustainabilityteachers.org

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