



Networking

Strengthen centres of expertise and communities of practice to learn together for a sustainable future

The networking component of the Southern African Development Community Regional Environmental Education Programme (SADC REEP) facilitates the sharing of knowledge and expertise across the sub-region. A formal inter-governmental networking and advisory structure exists comprising 15 country-based National Network Representatives (one from each country). This structure ensures that the programme remains relevant to SADC countries.

A regional environmental education centre is maintained in Howick, South Africa, to facilitate cross-country networking and knowledge exchange. This centre was recently declared a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) in Education for Sustainable Development by the United Nations University. It has since supported the establishment of three other RCEs in southern Africa, and supports and strengthens a range of other networks and communities of practice through its networking function, including the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa.

A regular newsletter and electronic EE Newsflash keeps environmental education practitioners and institutions in the SADC region updated on new events, programmes, courses, materials and other developments relevant to regional co-operation and development of environmental education for sustainable development in SADC. A database of active environmental education practitioners and organisations across the region is maintained, involving a network of over 400 active organisations and over 700 practitioners working with the programme.

Approach

The SADC REEP adopts an open and inclusive approach to networking. It seeks to strengthen existing centres of expertise and communities of practice in the SADC region, rather than creating new networks or communities of practice. The SADC REEP facilitates the expansion of networks and communities of practice within a co-operative regional framework that validates the importance of national and local networking structures. In line with the SADC Protocol on Education and the NEPAD Environmental Action Plan, the SADC REEP seeks to strengthen centres of expertise. To do this, it works with the United Nations University to give international recognition to Regional Centres of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development, linking southern African networks to a larger international network.

Activities

- Maintaining and extending the SADC Network Representatives structure to include





EDUCATION and SUSTAINABILITY



representatives from the environment and education sectors in all SADC countries.

- Strengthening and supporting environment and sustainability education communities of practice in SADC countries.
- Supporting centres of expertise (or noteworthy communities of practice) to link up with the United Nations University initiative to recognise Regional Centres of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development.
- Supporting networking activities of networks, organisations and individuals through publication support, database development, sharing of knowledge and information, and regular communication.
- Providing seed funding for networking activities at country level.

Policy and contextual relevance

Southern Africa has many assets. It is extremely rich in biodiversity and other natural resources, with an equally rich cultural heritage and a strong sense of community. It also has many challenges.

Addressing environment and sustainability issues that threaten the future well-being of southern African people and environments is a critical development concern. Southern Africa has been identified as one of the regions that are most at risk from the impacts of climate change and loss of ecosystem services. Approximately 70% of southern Africans live in rural areas, and depend on the natural environment for their livelihoods

and food security. Most economies in the SADC region are natural resource dependent. Environment is therefore intimately linked to development, poverty alleviation and future well-being in a southern African context.

The education sector plays an important role in the sustainable development of southern Africa, since it reaches the region's young people, and can contribute directly to change at community and institutional level. The SADC Treaty and the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan include a focus on environmental education for sustainable development. The SADC Education Protocol asks for co-operation across the region in areas of teacher education, professional development of educators, knowledge exchange, and development and sharing of learning materials. Specifically it seeks to develop Regional Centres of Expertise, regional professional associations, and mechanisms for knowledge exchange and networking.

The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) has noted the need for mainstreaming of environmental education and training into the education and training systems of countries in Africa. The SADC REEP activities support mainstreaming of environmental education for sustainable development into southern African countries. Through its focus on transformative learning and capabilities for socio-ecological resilience and sustainable development the SADC REEP contributes to the policy objectives of the environment and education sectors.



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SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme