



Research

Deepen understanding, generate knowledge reflexively and learn together for a sustainable future

The research and evaluation component of the Southern African Development Community Regional Environmental Education Programme (SADC REEP) seeks to support innovation and reflexive practice. Collaborative research activities have been initiated, and a research network involving a number of southern African higher education institutions exists. Research to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between poverty, health, environment and education in the SADC Region has been conducted to reflexively evaluate and review educational responses in the context of the SADC policy framework, and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Research has also been initiated to articulate how environmental and sustainability education is contributing to educational quality and relevance in SADC countries, to inform mainstreaming of environment and sustainability education in formal education systems. The research component is implemented in partnership with Rhodes University in the Makana District in South Africa, where a Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development recognised by the United Nations University has been established. Formative and summative evaluations of the SADC REEP have been based on new evaluation approaches that are participatory but not relativist. These have strengthened reflexive programme development and management.

Approach

Research and evaluation in the SADC REEP reflects a commitment to enhancing reflexivity and learning. Such research and evaluation is *learning centred*, and requires participatory, inclusive and critical

approaches. The research component adopts a mix of regional deliberation and theory development, and local innovation and enquiry through case study work. This provides for development of a regional perspective based on local experience and knowledge, and is generative from context and experience. The evaluation work involves regular reflexive monitoring, based on policy and contextual reviews. A mix of policy and contextual relevance monitoring strengthens a *learning centred* approach to evaluation, contributing to continuous improvement of the programme. This approach does not discount the value of summative and impact evaluation work, but rather grounds these in ongoing reflexive monitoring, making for a more holistic approach to evaluation.

Activities

- Establishment and support of a collaborative research network and research programme





EDUCATION and SUSTAINABILITY



involving 10 higher education institutions in southern Africa.

- Providing support for regional participatory research activities, country-level research activities, research-based centres of expertise, and a research access mechanism for practitioners.
- Implementation of a formative monitoring and evaluation process to reflexively manage the programme and its implementation, as well as mid-term and summative evaluation processes.

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 ensure greater collaboration and co-operation amongst universities in the SADC, with emphasis on research capacity building and the improvement of post-graduate research quality and capacity.

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