



The Emerging Policy for Green Economy and Social Development in Limpopo, South Africa

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United Nations
Research Institute
for Social Development

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Social Dimensions of Green Economy and Sustainable Development

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Acronyms

ARC	Agricultural Research Council
CO₂	Carbon dioxide
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DEA	Department of Environmental Affairs
DEAT	Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism
DFID	Department for International Development
DME	Department of Minerals and Energy
DST	Department of Science and Technology
GDP-R	Regional gross domestic product
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
LDA	Limpopo Department of Agriculture
LPG	Limpopo Provincial Government
LEGDP	Limpopo Employment Growth and Development Plan
LGEP	Limpopo Green Economy Plan
MMI	Mapfura-Makhura Incubator
NAFU	National African Farmers Union
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RAPS	Rural Area Power Solutions
SBU	Strategic Business Unit
SEDA	Small Enterprise Development Agency
SHS	Solar Home Systems
SMME	Small, medium and micro enterprise
STP	SEDA Technology Programme
TIL	Trade and Investment Limpopo
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNIL	University of Limpopo
UNIVEN	University of Venda
WfW	Working for Water programme
ZAR	South African rand

Summary

Many countries in Africa are already experiencing negative impacts of climate change, prompting the emergence of various policies to mitigate and adapt to these changes. This paper evaluates the emerging green economy in South Africa, using ideas from the concept of sustainable rural livelihoods. Rural livelihoods in Africa and other developing countries are intimately connected to ecological services. Contrary to the dominant development discourse where African societies are reflected as being helpless, communities and governments are prioritizing green economy for job creation, poverty alleviation and reducing inequalities, while addressing global environmental concerns. But the concepts of sustainable development and green economy have both been criticized for lack of clear definitions. While it is agreed that there is a lack of clarity on the two concepts and failure in implementation at the global level, this paper argues that the key tenets of the two concepts are particularly relevant for rural development.

What remains problematic, however, is how objectives of a green economy and sustainable development are to be achieved. One of the key challenges in South Africa, and other developing countries, is the gap between policy and implementation of sustainable development, the Millennium Development Goals and other such globally driven initiatives. A central question is, therefore: what needs to be done in order for local economies and societies to realize mutual objectives of investing in natural capital, decarbonizing the economy and creating green jobs? Of major concern in this paper is how green economy policies and proposals can stimulate growth and development in rural areas and improve rural livelihoods. For the rural poor (and particularly women) to cope with environmental degradation and to reduce their vulnerabilities, they need to access capital assets, energy, good infrastructure, community support and functional institutions.

South Africa is vulnerable to climate change scenarios of increased frequency and magnitude of extreme events such as droughts and floods. Other environmental problems leading to human vulnerability include air and water pollution, the deterioration of rivers and land degradation. The country's path to a green economy is therefore a response to these looming threats. It is also influenced by international agendas that call for adaptation and mitigation strategies against climate change and the global financial crisis.

Unlike countries that show a strong urban bias in greening the economy, social equity components are key features of national plans in South Africa. The Limpopo province, for example, is committed to championing sustainable development through (among other things) the promotion of green economy and creation of green jobs. Limpopo is the most northerly province in South Africa and is significantly rural in character. From a developmental perspective, the key tenets of sustainable development, including environmental conservation, social development and economic progress with reduced impacts on the natural resource base, are still relevant in seeking solutions to rural development problems due to the importance of ecological systems for the survival of whole communities. Achieving sustainable rural livelihoods—through developing policies that take into account the developmental needs of local economies and societies—therefore remains a key objective in many initiatives in Africa. The concept of sustainable rural livelihoods is especially relevant to exploring gender and poverty issues in the emerging green economy policy.

In Limpopo province, providing jobs and addressing poverty issues will require interventions at both local and regional levels to bridge the gap between policy and implementation. For pro-poor policies to work there must be concerted efforts to direct resources to sectors where poor people are employed, locations where they live and to producing food which they consume. Unskilled labour needs to be valued and remunerated accordingly.

Green economy policy therefore needs to consider poverty reduction and women's empowerment in order to promote rural sustainable development. For this to occur, the following mix of strategies is recommended:

- link pro-poor policies such as land reform, rural development and social support to the overall green economy policy;
- address women's empowerment and gender equity issues by ensuring that women and men have equal access to resources such as land, technology information, extension services and decision making;
- ensure benefits accruing from the processing and sale of products are extended to both men and women equally;
- provide opportunities for livelihood diversification beyond agriculture;
- protect the rights of both men and women in green projects;
- ensure access to markets for products from green economy initiatives;
- ensure access to skills development of both men and women participants in green projects;
- improve participation and decision making by all stakeholders including beneficiaries of green projects;
- ensure long term provision of solar energy to poor rural communities at affordable prices; and
- incorporate communities into green economy plans and programmes.

In conclusion, the paper argues that social development issues are important for successful implementation of green economy policies that are able to transform rural livelihoods, alleviate poverty and ensure gender equality.

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Introduction

Climate change and the financial crisis are now recognized as presenting major threats to economic growth and development in the world. One of the key responses is what is now referred to as green economy, which involves “changes in the patterns of investments, technology, production and consumption taking into consideration sustainable development imperatives” (UNRISD 2011:1). At the centre of this new economic approach is the necessity to shift from high to low carbon footprints. There are many interpretations of how this is to be achieved, and various governments, scholars and civil society are in the process of developing policy, theories and concepts that would guide this process (Huberman 2010).

Using the sustainable rural livelihoods framework, this paper reviews emerging green economy policy in the Limpopo province in South Africa. The aim is to establish the impacts on women and poor rural communities, thus contributing to advancing a better understanding of equity as an important component of the emerging green economy. The research for this paper included a review of official plans, programmes, feasibility studies, and environmental and social impact studies of projects, complemented by project field visits and interviews with relevant key informants and authorities. To illustrate the advantages of actions taken by multiple stakeholders to achieve sustainable rural livelihoods, two projects are discussed: the Mapfura-Makhura Incubator (MMI), a biofuel project; and Solar Vision Limpopo, a solar energy public-private partnership providing electricity to the rural poor—the majority of whom are women. The empirical findings of this research show how community resilience, local level efforts and alliances contributing to green initiatives may promote rural livelihoods and reduce poverty and gender inequalities in an African context.

The paper begins by presenting a global view on the green economy. This is followed by a brief discussion of South Africa’s current path towards a green economy. Presented next are (i) the economic employment and growth plan; and (ii) the proposed green economy plan of Limpopo province showing how the green economy is being interpreted at the provincial level. Two models that may be adopted for transitioning to a green economy in rural areas are presented, evaluated and discussed. One involves farmers growing soya for biofuel production; the other involves a collaborative effort between local government, communities and the private sector to bring solar energy to poor rural communities. Opportunities and constraints are highlighted and discussed. The paper finally outlines key policy messages regarding social development derived from this research.

Green Economy: A Global View

Green economy refers to the holistic view that a new global economy is required in order to counteract the negative impacts of overexploitation of natural resources, poverty and inequality, the financial crisis, climate change and other global changes that are threatening

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