

Higher education institutions and the implementation of the SDGs – more challenges than opportunities?

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UNISA



The reach of universities in South Africa

- 26 public Universities
- 40+ private higher education institutions
- 6 Universities of Technology
- 800 000+ students

The role of higher education institutions

USAf (member organization of SA Universities) statement:
“transformation within the university sector should bear evidence of the four main pillars of transformation, namely

- equity,
- democracy,
- efficiency and
- responsiveness.”

This should result in

“...graduates who are not just capable professionals, but also conscious and sensitive intellectuals and critical citizens”.

1997 Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education

Challenges

- Full curricula
- Funding
- The academic / admin divide
- Conceptual research vs applied research
- Bureaucracy
- Nature of collaboration with public and private sector
- USAf review of its committees / structures
- Getting private institutions on board

Opportunities

Collaborations e.g. NBI, WWF

Establishing an Environmental Sustainability Community of Practice (ESCoP) of USAf

Communities of Practice (CoP) are USAf forums comprising of specialist professionals from a discipline in universities. They meet regularly to share knowledge and information, to network and foster collaboration of public universities on national initiatives, and to support one another by discussing common concerns and devising collective solutions for specific problems.

The CoP help USAf stay abreast of trends and issues in key areas which, in part, influence strategy. CoP make recommendations on various matters to the Board via the strategy groups.

- An exploratory meeting was set up with USAf in 2015 to discuss the principle of establishing an environmental sustainability community of practice (ESCoP) under the auspices of USAf.
- Inaugural meeting of the forum, held at Unisa on 5 July 2016, was attended by academic and operational representatives from seven institutions (UJ, UP, Wits, TUT, VUT, Monash SA and Unisa.)
- Terms of reference adopted by most universities.
- February 2019 – indaba – workgroups.

More challenges than opportunities?

Establishment of the ESCoP a watershed initiative

- ❖ Collaboration with local governments
- ❖ Collaboration with private sector
- ❖ International partnerships
- ❖ Opportunity to make an impact / contribute as a sector to the achievement of the SDGs in South Africa

It is not the panacea for all challenges

- ❖ Allows for collective learning
- ❖ Allows for economies of scale
- ❖ Potential to become an innovation hub

**Thanks
you!**