

Sustainable Development Criteria for Built Environment Projects in South Africa (CSIR)

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Abstract:

South Africa faces a range of social, economic and environmental challenges. HIV/AIDS has resulted in life expectancy dropping from 52 years in 1997 to 43 years in 2007 (Harrison 2009). Unemployment is estimated to be 23.5% and about 6.7 million people in South Africa are functionally illiterate (Presidency 2009, DoE 2009). Climate change is likely to make this situation worse and will lead to increasing water stress, reduced food security and loss of species and ecosystems (DEAT 2009). Sustainable development, which aims to achieve social and economic improvement while reducing, or avoiding, negative environmental impacts can be used to address these challenges. However sustainable development is difficult to achieve. It requires a holistic and integrated approach and the development sector and in particular, the construction industry, tends to operate in a highly fragmented way. The application of sustainable development is also not well understood and has not been adequately translated into practical actions that can be implemented. This paper is based on work undertaken for the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) developing a set of sustainable development criteria for built environment projects requiring environmental impact assessments. (Gibberd 2010). Some aspects therefore refer specifically to Gauteng-based policy, although the general principals of the work are applicable to other areas of South Africa. The paper provides a definition of sustainable development and shows how this can be translated into objectives and criteria which can be used to guide the development of more sustainable built environment projects.