



The dream of a **green economy**

Without credible and relevant information to guide implementation, the green economy could just be a pipe dream, says **Constansia Musvoto**.

The green economy, an ambitious economic approach for a developing nation such as South Africa, is a tool for achieving sustainable development. The philosophy underlying a green economy is to reduce dependence of economic development on increased consumption of, and damage to, natural resources, while improving human well-being. Many African countries, including South Africa, have adopted the principle of a green economy.

Globally, a green economy supported by agriculture (an agricultural green economy) is highlighted as offering potential solutions to the current social, economic and environmental challenges that we face. These include food security, climate change and increasing inequalities. The government of South Africa recognises the potential role of agriculture, in particular small-scale farming, in the country's green economy and in job creation. This is set out in strategies such as the National Development Plan and the Green Economy Accord.

Although the potential benefits of a green economy are well articulated, this is a theoretical concept which has yet to be broadly implemented. For green economy aspirations to be realised, the concept must be implemented and this occurs at project level. It is only through implementing projects that the

actual benefits of a green economy can be attained. Currently most of the documented information on the green economy in South Africa has been theoretical, with little information on practice. So although South Africa and other African countries have chosen the green economy development trajectory, there is a gap between theory and practice.

An agricultural green economy

South Africa is very dependent on the agricultural sector, both for local consumption and exports, making this sector key in driving the country's green economy agenda. In the agricultural sector, implementing this concept is not simple as it requires integrating agricultural practices and philosophies and green economy principles. With several green economy principles addressing diverse social, economic and environmental factors and the many different agricultural practices, for example organic agriculture, conservation farming and others, there are many factors to consider in implementing agricultural green economy projects. Attempting to randomly integrate all the pertinent issues would be daunting and likely to be discouraging. And without any yardstick it is difficult to plan and



Practical experiences of farmers should inform green economy project implementation guidelines. Image: CSIR

implement a project with certainty, and it is impossible to measure success or identify areas for improvement. Specific information and guidance on how to implement a green economy project in agriculture, or indeed any other sector, would facilitate green economy implementation.

The CSIR has, in the last three years, been conducting research to assess how agriculture could contribute to a green economy in South Africa. A key objective of the project was to contribute to closing the gap between green economy theory and practice by developing guidelines for agricultural green economy project design and implementation. The project was conducted in partnership with the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and small-scale vegetable farmers in the Tzaneen municipality. These farmers provided case study information for the research. Preliminary work identified the availability of relevant and credible project-level information as being critical for green economy implementation, with two categories of information being vital: (i) contextual information that builds an understanding of the green economy and thus flexibility in its implementation; and (ii) operational information that provides process-level guidance on how to design and actually run a project.

A good understanding of the green economy philosophy facilitates project design and implementation

The green economy is built on certain ideals and a key first step in successful implementation is understanding what a green economy entails. Such understanding enables informed application of the green economy concept to a specific project context. Green economy implementation guidelines have to provide this information. Furthermore, a good understanding of how agriculture and the green economy intersect is necessary, and this includes the impacts of agriculture on the environment, including on climate change and the role of agriculture in climate change mitigation and addressing human needs.

Part of understanding the green economy context entails appreciating farmers' experiences, local and national development priorities and aspirations. The guidelines developed by the CSIR provide this information in a succinct, easy-to-understand manner.

Process-level information

Process-level information provides specific guidance on how to run a project and it minimises doubts and uncertainties. The CSIR team showed that key process-level information has to be provided in project design and implementation guidelines as distinct operational steps. One of the steps covers integrating both green economy and agricultural factors into project-level principles, and using them to define the objectives of a project. This includes production practices, marketing, etc. Other steps relate to factors critical for a successful green economy project, monitoring and evaluating the performance of a project, and identifying a project's risks and challenges.

Making relevant green economy implementation information widely available is key

For South Africa to move beyond intent and make the green economy a reality, investments are needed, as well as policies that focus on and promote green economy information provision and capacity building. In addition, before investing in necessities such as infrastructure and equipment, it is necessary to build capacity to implement projects. Provision of relevant information to those involved in implementation (both directly and indirectly) is a key part of building capacity to plan and implement projects. This is particularly important given that the green economy is an emerging concept and there is no experience to draw on when making the transition. The agricultural green economy project design and implementation guidelines developed by the CSIR with input from other stakeholders provide a starting point for such an endeavour and provide a base for government and the private sector to build upon and distribute for wide use. **Q**

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