![NWU® logo]

DVC: Community Engagement and Mahikeng Operations

SUSTAINABILITY GUIDELINES FOR THE NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

"Creating a sustainable future"

1   Introduction

As one of the largest universities in South Africa, the NWU currently supports almost 54 555 (2023) students. Approximately 45 272 (2023) of our students and as many as 3 954 (2023) academic and support staff visit one of the university's three campuses on a daily basis.

NWU is committed to applicable standards that will help it meet its legal, social and environmental obligations. The NWU adopted an Environmental Sustainability Policy and Guidelines in November 2022 which clearly articulate the NWU's conception of Environmental Sustainability and how it (as an institution of higher education) plans to manage its available resources, community interactions and mitigate impacts (various footprints) so that it can contribute to the quality of life and well-being of various stakeholders[1] and the biophysical environments in which its campuses are based.

"Sustainability is defined as meeting human needs in a fair, just, and equitable way that enables future generations to meet their own needs, while protecting and maintaining healthy ecosystems in perpetuity." *Auburn University, Alabama, US.*

"Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Brundtland, (1987).
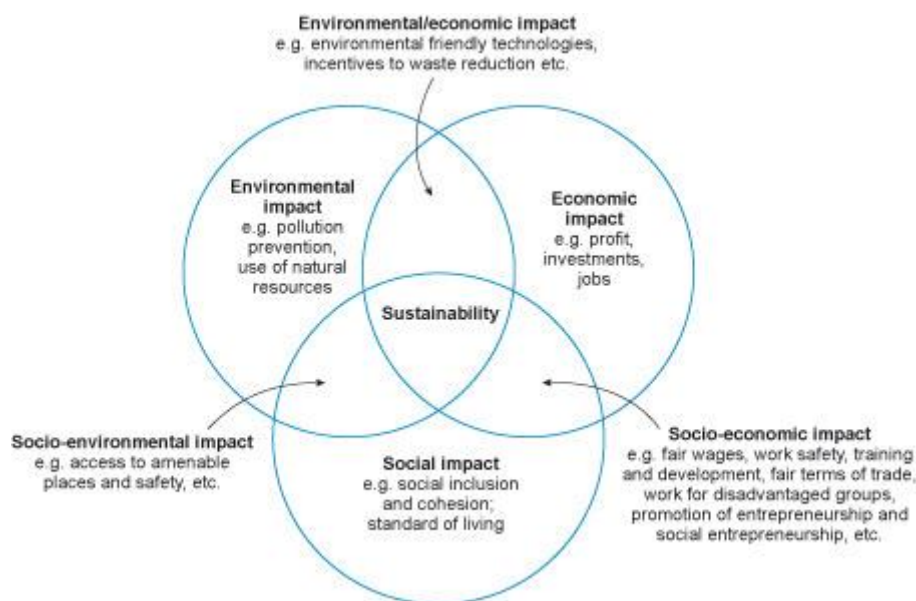

Figure 1: The three impact components of sustainability and their interconnections (The Open University)

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[1] **Stakeholder(s)** refer(s) to any group(s) or individual(s) who may affect or be affected by the University's activities, decisions, changes and/or improvements.

A sustainable NWU contributes to a sustainable society that must be socially responsible, ensuring environmental protection and quality of life for humans and equilibrium in the natural systems, thus developing Sustainable, Resilient and Agile Future for NWU as a responsible HEI in Africa.

2   The three (3) Pillars of Sustainability (Triple Bottom Line)
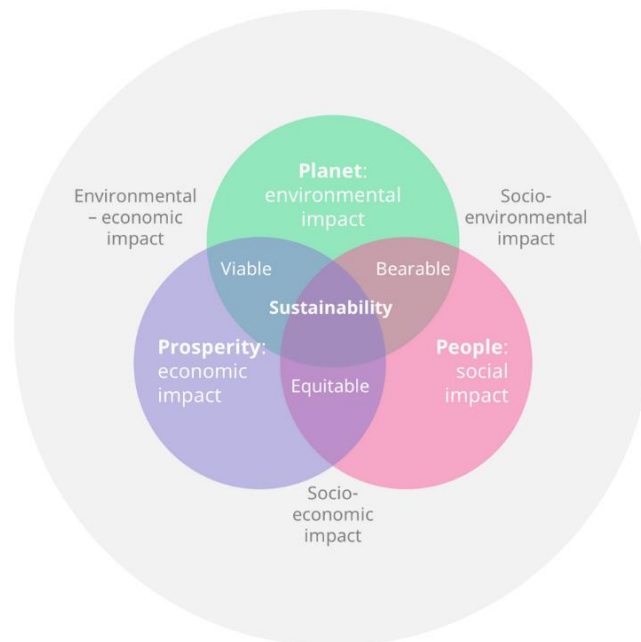
Figure 2: The Triple Bottom Line (D Jociute)

2.1   PLANET: Environmental protection is the most frequently discussed element. It is concerned with the reduction of carbon footprints, water usage, non-decomposable packaging, and wasteful processes as part of a supply chain. These processes can often be cost-effective, and financially useful as well as important for environmental sustainability.

2.2   PEOPLE: Social development is about workplace fairness and ensuring responsible, ethical, and sustainable treatment of employees, stakeholders, and the community in which NWU operates. This could refer to better maternity and paternity benefits, flexible scheduling, and learning and development opportunities. For example, operate using sustainable labour, which involves fairly-paid, adult employees who can operate in a safe environment.

Social initiatives are about doing "what is right and doing good positively" and can be reflected in employee/student attraction and retention, student/client/stakeholder loyalty, raising donations and bursaries, avoiding risk (mistreatment can lead to a backlash, reputation damage), and supply chain security.

Social initiatives might not be seen as profitable in the short run, but on a bigger scale and long-term horizon will affects NWU's standing amongst its competitors.

2.3   PROFITS: Economic performance is probably the simplest form of sustainability. To be economically sustainable, NWU must be a going concern. The challenge with this form of sustainability is achieving an equilibrium. Rather than making money at any cost, NWU should attempt to generate sufficient income in accordance with other elements of sustainability.

Sustainability strives for:

- **Viable** environmental-economic impact: NWU conducts operations by sustainable practices our business taking cognisance of the environment and resources, and exploring green solutions.

- **Bearable** socio-environmental impact: by creating education and awareness NWU allow people to make environmentally conscious decisions, curb consumption and develop healthy habits that directly impact the environment.

- **Equitable** socio-economic impact: people have an opportunity to work and earn a fair wage, and NWU strives to increase the general welfare of staff, students and communities and increase the standard of living.

3 The Importance of sustainability

3.1 Maintaining Earth's ecosystems to function without harm.

3.2 Clean air and nontoxic atmospheric conditions, growth of resources that can be relied upon, and water quality and cleanliness, are all benefits of sustainability.

3.3 It is ethical and important to meet UN Agenda 2030 SDGs and standards, it is also economical and allows a stronger business model.

3.4 Additionally, sustainability enables NWU to attract employees, shareholders and customers who are invested in the goals of sustainability and share these values.

3.5 The impact of sustainability can therefore be positive for NWU's image as well as revenue.

4 Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG)

The Sustainability guidelines unpacks the wider framework of Sustainability and the linkage to the Sustainability developmental Goals (SDG's). As a value led university our commitment to creating a sustainability future, matters to our students, staff, partners and communities.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action, to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Beyond this imperative, the African 2063 Agenda is aligned with the envisaged targets but focussed on our continent.

The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) to transform our world are:

1. Eliminate Poverty
2. Erase Hunger
3. Establish Good Health and Well-Being
4. Provide Quality Education
5. Enforce Gender Equality
6. Improve Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Grow Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Create Decent Work and Economic Growth
9. Increase Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
10. Reduce Inequality
11. Mobilize Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Influence Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Organize Climate Action
14. Develop Life Below Water
15. Advance Life on Land
16. Guarantee Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
17. Build Partnerships for the Goals

Figure 3: Sustainable Development Goals

5   The Principles of Sustainability

Cotter and Hannan (1999: 171-172) identify the key principles of sustainability as:

5.1   Integration

The three impact components of sustainability as depicted in Figure 1 requires an integrated approach in decision-making.

5.2   Community involvement

Sustainability cannot be achieved without the support and involvement of the community. A collaborative approach allows for ownership of the challenges and solutions.

5.3   Precautionary behaviour

A pro-active approach and careful consideration of adverse effects (such as environmental damage) implies a conservation ethic.

5.4   Equity within and between generations

This approach involves asking, "Is the current quality of life obtained at the expense of others, or of generations to come?"

5.5   Continual improvement

Refers to scientific and technological understanding of sustainability and increasing awareness of these challenges.

5.6   Ecological integrity

Recognising the inter-relatedness of ecological processes and life-support systems. Thus urban and more rural campuses have different perspectives, needs and conservation challenges.

6 Sustainable focus areas

The Sustainability Guidelines expands beyond the Environmental matters to also include social, ethical, economic, health and environmental justice commitments. Sustainability outcomes must be integrated in all the functional areas and goals of NWU.

NWU supports sustainable development on two levels:

- first, through sustainable development discourse on a scientific basis of research, teaching and learning, community engagement and operations;
- second, cognisance of the impact of our own activities regarding long term sustainability towards society.

Monitoring Relevance and Impact of efforts: a rubric to measure NWU's progress.

With this objective in mind, the NWU identified various thematic focus/intervention areas related to its conception of Sustainability:

6.1 Healthy People for a healthy Planet

NWU through its wellness projects support healthy lifestyles. In addition, the critical relationship between food provision on campus and health must be integrated.

Mobility challenges such as low carbon transportation, on and around campuses must receive attention.

6.2 Responsible Management/Governance

The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) is a United Nations-supported initiative founded in 2007. These principles seeks to establish a process of continuous improvement among institutions of management education in order to develop a new generation of business leaders capable of managing the complex challenges faced by business and society in the 21st century.

6.3 The pursuit of environmental justice

To facilitate an understanding and to grasp how racial injustices contribute to unequal distribution of environmental costs, benefits, and conditions in communities. How to include the marginalised groups (who is most often the closest to the challenge) and can contribute to innovative solutions.

6.4 Creating a sustainability culture

Sustainability necessitates that we change people's perception and raise awareness which promotes and prioritise sustainability among staff, students and communities.

*Values of NWU***:** Responsibility and accountability as a NWU value includes how we as staff and students integrate sustainability into our work to ensure a sustainable future.

"Not only does technology and social media continue to change and expand its influence in everyday life, but new research is rapidly revealing how educators and researchers can harness new tools, updated pedagogies, and better communication platforms to revise their own teaching and research" (Nickerson & Zodhiates, 2013).

6.5 Partnering to advance sustainability

Build reciprocal relations with diverse networks, communities and partners to learn and share knowledge to ensure solutions for sustainability towards a just, equitable, safe, and sustainable future.

6.6 Empower, educate and equip our staff, students, partners and communities

Training and Development: Provide students, faculty, and staff with learning, development, and engagement opportunities to understand the ethics, principles, and practices of sustainability (ecological, social, and economic systems and their complex interdependence). NWU can contribute to play a key role in training a workforce that can meaningfully engage with sustainable development.

To inculcate sustainable principles in the teaching and learning curriculum and train academic staff to facilitate these challenges. Sustainability as a graduate attribute will ensure that every student has the trans-disciplinary

skills and knowledge to navigate, grasp and support the journey to a sustainable future throughout their lives (De Rijdt *et al.*, 2013).

Academic project: The compulsory module: Understanding the world must include SDG's in the curriculum. To ensure that one of our graduate attributes is the creation of responsible citizens embracing SDG's. To develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes of our students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society.

Research focus: Incorporating SDG's in our research projects. The approval of research and ethics proposals to indicate the keywords that are applicable to SDG's. Thus an awareness campaign to inform academics and students to deliver impactful research to transition to a sustainable future. To include sustainability as part of Internationalisation focus. The research agenda (conceptual and empirical) can be expanded by students examining a given sustainability challenge through different disciplinary lenses.

6.7 Sustainable planning

To encourage inclusivity to participate in the sustainability dialogue, planning process, and implementation of solutions. These solutions support and incorporate indigenous research and knowledge.

6.8 Open spaces

Everyone on campus, and communities adjacent to campus, have access to and feel welcome to use green, outdoor spaces that provide cooling, recreation, and connection to nature.

6.9 Food systems

Sourcing of producers and vendors that provide safe and healthy working conditions and fair compensation for employees.

NWU supports food security solutions in communities adjacent to campus.

Efforts to provide affordable, healthy, culturally-relevant, and sustainably-sourced food.

NWU and food service organizations shall collaborate to provide information and/or training to staff and students on the benefits of, and how to successfully participate in sustainable food service operations.

6.10 A 'circular economy'

Reuse of resources to suit the global increase in population. This change would allow one person's waste to be another's resource, in a process that would greatly reduce waste and create a more efficient supply chain.

6.11 Sustainable Building and Land Practices

Future construction, macro maintenance, renovation, and refurbishment projects, will be designed with consideration of optimum energy utilization, decarbonization, and low life-cycle operating costs.

Energy efficient and sustainable design features in the project plans and specifications will be considered and features of a sustainable and durable design to achieve a low life cycle cost.

Planning for facilities and infrastructure shall consider design, construct, operate, and maintain green building high performing buildings,

Existing building energy performance will be optimized through improved operation, maintenance and repair, and capital improvement, enabling NWU to meet carbon reduction goals. Sustainable design for capital projects is a process of balancing long-term institutional needs for academic and related programs with environmental concerns.

NWU sustainable building (in a cost effective way) will identify economic and environmental performance measures; determine cost savings; use extended life cycle costing; and adopt an integrated systems approach. Such an approach treats the entire building as one system.

NWU will embrace the 17 SGDs and integrate them into our infrastructure and service offerings.

7 UNEP's Sustainable University Framework

The United Nations Environment Programme provide a framework: UNEP's Sustainable University Framework. This framework seeks to define what it means to be a sustainable university and lays out a pathway to becoming one.

Figure 4: United Nations Environment Programme – Sustainable University framework

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