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ASSESSING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 11 IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Abstract: *South Africa underwent apartheid, a system of racial segregation, during which the country's governance agendas did not offer too much emphasis on environmental issues. The policies implemented during that time were lacking the environment-inclusiveness, and thus regrettably remained unsuccessful in promoting sustainable development. This article aims to review the current state of SDG 11, which focuses on sustainable cities and communities, in South African context. This research is a qualitative analysis of secondary data obtained through reviewing literature. The data was analyzed using conceptual analysis. The literature review shows that the democratic governance in a post-apartheid era implemented some policies that now regulate various aspects of SDG 11 in the country-specific context. Some of the significant ones are the Housing Act (No. 107 of 1997); Water Services Act (No. 108 of 1997); National Environmental Management: Waste Act (No. 59 of 2008); Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000); Breaking New Ground, 2004; and the National Housing Code, 2009. However, despite these legislative frameworks, there are challenges that still hamper the effective achievement of SDG 11. The findings therefore explore these challenges that include insufficient skills, inadequate funding, and inadequate training to develop technical competence, among others. The study provides recommendations for addressing these issues and improving the situation.*

Key words: National development plan, sustainable development goal, South Africa, human settlement, qualitative

JEL code: Q01, R21

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1. Introduction

Sustainability, according to Ben-Eli (2021:1, in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023:627) can be defined as a balance between a population and its environment, where the population can thrive without causing harm to the environment that supports it. This was explained by Ben-Eli (2021:1, in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023:627) as a dynamic equilibrium in the interaction between the two. The aim is to enable the population to reach its full potential while maintaining the environment's carrying capacity. The situation required comprehensive sustainable development, which includes economic, social, technological, and environmental aspects. As a result, several actions were taken before the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The concept of sustainable development (SD) gained widespread recognition after the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report in 1987 (UN, 1987: par 27, in Jansen, 2023:59). According to the report, sustainable development means pursuing development that



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fulfills the present generation's needs while safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their own requirements (UN, 1987: par 27, in Jansen, 2023:59). Zwane & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014:72, in Malesa, 2023:17) also cited sustainable development as a concept that may seem abstract and challenging to connect with the concerns and objectives of individuals living in regions affected by neglect, poverty, economic decline, unemployment, and social exclusion. These issues impact the environment, economy, and community, making it difficult to achieve sustainable development goals. UN member therefore endorsed a new sustainable development plan titled 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' in September 2015. The SDGs were first proposed in 2012 and have since been expanded upon, comprising 169 objectives that are pivotal to the agenda, as emphasised by Haywood, Funke, Audouin, Musvoto and Nahman (2017: 1)

The SDGs theory proposes three interrelated pillars: preserving cultural diversity, promoting socioeconomic development, and safeguarding the environment (Lawal, Ayode, & Taiwo, 2016:356, cited in Jansen, 2023:59). Additionally, Jabbari et al. (2019:6405, cited in Jansen, 2023:59) have introduced a comprehensive multi-scale index that evaluates the accomplishment rates of sustainable development in over 150 UN member countries that have pledged to achieve the 17 SDGs. However, Osborn, Cutter and Ullah (2015:3) emphasize that depending on a country's specific circumstances, the SDGs' obstacles may vary.

Sexsmith and McMichael (2015:596, cited in Malesa, 2023) noted that governments committed to the 2030 Agenda, which involves conducting regular and comprehensive assessments of progress across different levels, from local to global. This is intended to promote ongoing improvement and accountability. The UN (2015:36, in Malesa, 2023:19) emphasized that the Rio+20 Conference established the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to improve sustainable development governance at the UN (UN 2015:36, in Malesa, 2023:19). The HLPF now has the power to oversee various follow-up and review processes on an international scale because of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. To fulfill its current duties, it will collaborate with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and other relevant bodies and platforms (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2015:14, in Malesa, 2023:19). Weber (2017:14, in Malesa, 2023:19) adds that one of the HLPF's duties is to make it easier for Member States to complete voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to assess how well the 2030 Agenda is progressing and how well the SDGs are being met. The VNRs are state-led and voluntary, but they also entail collaborations with important constituencies.

The sole focus of this study's assessment of SDG implementation in South Africa is Goal 11, which aims to create inclusive, secure, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements. This introduction is the first of the paper's five sections. The research methodology is covered in the second half of this article, which is followed by a review of the pertinent literature in the third section. The review of relevant papers is covered in the fourth part. The final section concludes with recommendations for improvement.

2. Research Methodology



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This paper makes use of the qualitative research methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2005:8, Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020:2) emphasise that qualitative researchers focus on the social construction of reality, the strong relationship between the researcher and the subject being studied, and the constraints imposed by the context. They place great importance on the inquiry's subjective nature and seek answers that highlight how social experiences are created and interpreted. The information was compiled through literature review. Nhlapo (2020:42) and Mutenga (2021:40) cite that literature reviews have several objectives. These include offering the researcher a comprehensive view of current research in the field, identifying areas for further study, highlighting flaws in prior research, and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of research methods utilized by others. The information was analyzed using conceptual analysis. According to Maxwell (2005:66; Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020:235), a conceptual analysis is an explanation that helps to understand a social reality or phenomenon being investigated. It consists of a set of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that guide the study. The next section presents the findings of the article.

4. Results

The United Nations (UN) defines SDG 11 as the goal of creating inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and settlements. This objective is crucial due to the widespread impact of urbanization affecting many nations, particularly emerging ones. With more people relocating to cities, over half of the world's population now resides in urban areas, as per the UN. Achieving this goal is imperative (United Nations, 2023:1). Aust and Du Plessis (2018: 201) explain that SDG 11 is set out to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable by the year 2030. In addition, the authors (Aust & Du Plessis, 2018: 201) also state that in 2016, during the Habitat III conference held in Quito, the New Urban Agenda was adopted. This agenda emphasized that SDG 11 serves as an international standard for sustainable development and urban governance matters. Gupta and Vegelin (2016:441) say that SDG 11 aims to promote safe and resilient communities in cities and human settlements, with a focus on inclusivity. It prioritizes access to housing, basic services, and transportation for women, children, older persons, and people with disabilities. In their explanation of what inclusivity means at the regional level, Gupta and Vegelin (2016:441) emphasized that it means fairly distributing transnational resources and taking into account the concerns of the more vulnerable nations. It entails considering underrepresented groups, regions, and communities at the national level. Accounting for certain people and groups would entail doing so locally.

Therefore, the interconnection between Goal 11 with goal 9 and 12 seems to be significant. Goal 9 deals with infrastructure, business, and innovation: Effective infrastructure and building design is a vital element of urban resilience; and Goal 12- responsible consumption and production: Cities are big consumers of resources and major producers of emissions, pollution, and waste because of their high population density and concentrated economic activity. To ensure sustainable cities, the issue of sustainable consumption and production must be addressed (Statistic SA 2019). Tanya dos Santos, as a Global head of sustainability at Investec (2022) added that the advanced inter-connectedness is as follows.



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The ultimate goal for urban sustainability should be to promote and enable the long-term well-being of people and the planet. In the development of sustainable cities, we need to ensure we consider the full spectrum of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The efficient use of natural resources (SDG15); together with urban planning, efficient transport systems, clean water and sanitation (SDG6); the provision of healthcare (SDG3); the responsible management of waste (SDG12); disaster risk reduction, economic opportunity (SDG8); connectivity and access to information (SDG9); affordable housing and student accommodation (SDG4); and capacity-building. These are all relevant issues when developing a sustainable roadmap for cities and urban developments (dos Santos, 2022:1). Du Plessis (2018:244) also cites and highlight that This goal is ambitious. It ultimately suggests global agreement that a sub-national scale of intervention is necessary for sustainable development; intervention that requires spatially targetted planning and various other actions across scales of government. Goal 11 endorses the view that globally cities (a)contribute to unsustainable development, but (b) can be drivers of change with respect to basic services, accessible and sustainable transport systems, human settlement planning, the reduction of the risk of disaster, climate change mitigation and adaptation etc., as cited by Du Plessis (2018:244)

This duality finds itself in line with broader characterizations of cities and urban settlements as being simultaneously the source of pressing contemporary problems as well as the answer to these problems. The Goal is broadly framed, relates to various other SDG and speaks to the dimensions of sustainable development—it is highly inclusive, in accordance with the view that cities are pathways to social, economic and environmentally sustainable development, cites Du Plessis (2018:244). This inter-linking connection may form part of future studies.

However, SDG 11 comes with its own challenges. In recent decades, the world has experienced unprecedented urban growth. In 1960, when the urban population reached the 1 billion targets, only about a third of the world’s population lived in urban areas. Today, taking action towards making cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is more relevant than ever before, as 4,2 billion people, 55% of the global share, live in cities. By 2050, almost two thirds of all humanity, 6,5 billion people, will be concentrated in cities (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), 2019:1).

Abastante, Lami and Gaballo (2021:3858) state that the link between the constrained availability of resources and SDG 11 is intricate. Although this Goal seeks to transform cities into inclusive, secure, resilient, and sustainable places by the year 2030, it has difficulties balancing resources and available space. Abastante et al. (2021:3858) also cite and emphasise that SDG11 in the 2030 Agenda is the ultimate outcome of a journey that starts at the global level with the aim of achieving sustainable development in a wider context. This process has gradually acknowledged the crucial role of cities and has established a comprehensive framework for pursuing sustainable development, covering various interconnected issues with a particular emphasis on urban sustainability.

Additionally, SDG 11 requires an effective infrastructure for successful realisation of its objectives. According to Franco, Vaidya and Chatterji (2020:179) to ensure proper infrastructure alignment, local development plans must be linked with budgetary priorities. Additionally, urban sustainability should



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not be pursued as a singular goal, but rather as an opportunity to address climate change, poverty eradication, and access to necessities such as water and energy, among other objectives. These points were emphasized by the authors Franco et al. (2020:183). In order to turn rhetoric into actionable sustainability, authors (Franco et al., 2020:183) also emphasize the significance of sustainability science in recently developed and creative ways to research, teaching, capacity-building, and practice.

Local authorities and cities play a crucial role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, particularly in achieving SDG11 and other urban-related targets. This is especially important in South Africa, where the following section examines the current state of SDG 11 in the country's context.

Before 1994, South Africa's government neglected sustainability concerns, was characterized by discriminatory, disjointed environmental legislation, and failed to advance sustainable development. South Africa is one of the countries with a lengthy, century-long history. The ecological and physical environments are connected to the important aspects of sustainability (Van-Schalkwyk 2018:13). It was also added by Van-Schalkwyk (2018:73) that establishing viable rural communities is fraught with difficulties. Even while the most of these difficulties are generally recognized, there are a handful that are exclusive to South Africa's rural areas. Sustainable community development won't be achievable in rural South Africa if development strategies and policies aren't specifically designed to respond to these particular obstacles.

According to the Statistic SA (2019:7) South Africa was among the first countries to embrace the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This dedication is tied to its role in determining Africa's long-term development objectives. In 2013, the African Union (AU) defined eight long-term development agreements for the continent, with South Africa taking the lead in this process. The seven goals of the AU's Agenda 2063 were later developed from these concepts. A High-Level Committee, made up of 10 AU member states, including South Africa, was created at the same time by the organization's heads of state and government. According to Statistics SA Africa (2019.1) South Africa and 192 other nations ratified the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 at the Sustainable Development Summit. South Africa created an SDG Baseline Report in 2017 and a Country Report in 2019, both of which include all indicators that are currently available and use official and other information. With the help of the Goal Tracker tool, individuals, the government, and policymakers can monitor the SDGs' progress, spot gaps, and ultimately determine where further action is required. The study outlines SDG 11 overview using online tracker and reviewing official documents and reports. However, the Statistics SA (2019) also noted that although there are 232 indicators in the Global SDG framework, due to agreed standards and procedures, nations could often only report on 199 of them. Of the 199 reportable indicators, South Africa was able to provide data on 128 (64%) of them. The nation also reported an extra 26 SDG indicators that were not included in the initial list.

At governance level, it is also realised to assess the status of SDG 11 at local government level. It was found that there is still a significant issue with the housing backlog, estimated at 2.1 million dwellings, due to ineffective housing delivery and higher demand than anticipated. Currently, both metropolitan and local governments are developing Integrated Development Plans (IDP) for their regions. These plans aim to determine the most sustainable development for equal socioeconomic progress (Nel, Teffo, Mabuyakhulu,



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Munnisunker, Kruger & Nzimande 2020:5). Transforming municipalities into smart cities is a difficult task. However, many are choosing to do so to provide convenient and efficient services that are integrated with housing. These services include smart electricity, infrastructure, transport, and more innovative facilities to improve the situation.

To improve this situation, in 2015, the former president of the Republic of South Africa, Jacob Zuma declared that there were eight municipalities in South Africa that were ready for full broadband and were set to be technologically equipped (e-government) in a timeframe of five years (South African Local Government Association [SALGA], 2015: 5, in Maseko, 2018:38). These municipalities are Dr Kenneth Kaunda (in North-West); Gert Sibande in Mpumalanga; O.R. Tambo (in the Eastern Cape); Pixley ka Seme (in the Northern Cape); Thabo Mofutsanyane (in the Free State); Umgungundlovu and Umzinyathi (in KwaZulu-Natal); and Vhembe in Limpopo. In addition to these eight, the cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ethewkini have e-government plans and/or programmes in place (Maseko, 2018:38). In the 2021 State of Nation Address (SONA), the President announced that several post-apartheid cities will be conceptualized across the country (The Presidency 2021). After the announcement, though, many people demanded clarification on what a 'smart city' is. Zutari defines a 'smart city' as a place where opportunities, amenities, safety, resilience, inclusivity, and prosperity are demands, and where all stakeholders embrace innovation in finance, design, building, operations, and governance to meet these demands (Business Tech, 2021). To solve social, economic, and environmental challenges, it is crucial to keep in mind that a smart city is a location where information technology (IT_ is merged with infrastructure, architecture, and common items (cited in Maseko, 2018:16; Maseko & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2018:173).

South Africa's economic center is the Gauteng Province, which boasts modern transportation infrastructure. The province, which is sure that this initiative is following in the footsteps of other cities across the world in giving priority to smart transportation, published its Smart transportation 2030 Vision in October 2020. The proposed strategy aims to facilitate mobility by integrating current public transportation and developing a smart transportation infrastructure that will help to take use of current technological advancements (Government of South Africa, 2021). The City of Johannesburg (CoJ)'s Growth and Development Strategy (GDS) 2040 outlines the City's chosen development path. Confronting complex challenges, it links medium-term operational plans with long-term, city-wide outcomes and operational outputs. As a long-term strategy, Joburg 2040 GDS outlines the city's mission, vision, outputs, and outcomes as a resilient, liveable, sustainable, and future-focused city (COJ GDS, 2016:51, in Maseko & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2018:181). More specifically, Joburg 2040 GDS is a prerequisite for medium-term, strategic, spatially oriented plans for the housing, infrastructure, and transportation sectors (Maseko & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2018:181).

5. Discussion

The findings show that there are several challenges to realise SDG 11 in South Africa. The challenges that have been identified include a lack of funding, resources, expertise, capacity building,



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environmental, social, and economic, and political considerations. Below these challenges will be emphasized.

There is a lack of political alignment. This statement is substantiated with the fact that the Republic of South Africa follows a parliamentary representative democratic republic system, as enshrined in its Constitution of 1996 (RSA, 1996). The African National Congress (ANC) has been the ruling party since 1994, but due to internal problems, some members have left to form their own political parties. This has caused divisions within the group, potentially leading to ineffective internal controls. In some municipalities, coalition governments have been formed because of these divisions, but conflicts have arisen as a result. Political disagreements within and between parties could hinder progress towards achieving the SDGs, including SDG 11 in this study, and may also impact the implementation of policies and programs aimed at benefiting community members.

There is a lack of resources. This statement is supported with the fact that it is essential to consider the availability of natural resources and the condition of ecosystem services for economic development through shared growth and poverty eradication. The analysis of natural resource trends reveals that the degradation of ecosystems and depletion of natural resources pose significant risks and challenges. This creates a gap between the resource base and the social and economic policies that aim to achieve shared growth, generate employment opportunities, and end poverty (Department of Environment and Tourism, 2008 :22).

There is a lack of capacity building. Therefore, the Department of Environment and Tourism (2008:10) suggests that based on governance trends research, sectoral governance is well-coordinated and has capacity-building programs in place. However, the potential for cross-sectoral cooperation and trans-disciplinary thinking is hampered by limited resources and capacity at the local municipal level. Integrating environmental concerns into sectoral policies and actions remains a significant challenge for sustainable development governance.

There is a lack of integration of policies. According to the Department of Environment and Tourism (2008:31), managing water resources, land use, and land development presents challenges due to the lack of integration and coordination between different regulations and agencies responsible for each area. This hinders effective planning and decision-making. This situation is supported by National Planning Commission (NPC) (2019:96) stating that in order to create productive, inclusive, and livable communities, it is crucial to actively integrate investment in infrastructure, public transportation, and human settlements into planning and land-use management techniques. The NPC (2019:98) also accepts that despite South Africa's established policy frameworks, there is a need for significant strategic interventions to achieve urban sustainability and resilience goals by the 2030 deadline. These interventions are necessary to achieve the targets outlined in SDG 11. Despite efforts to improve public transportation networks in large urban regions, such as metropolitan areas, most people in rural and peri-urban areas still rely on minibus taxis and private cars for transportation. It remains a challenge to better integrate the current public transportation networks in metropolitan regions.



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There is a lack of finances. It is noted that departments get funding each fiscal year to carry out their mandates and commitments. The departments associated with SDG 11 were given a budget of more than a trillion rands (National Treasury [NT], 2021: 24). One may counter that the funds given to each department did not meet their stated goals. The SDG 11 objectives cannot be realized without funding, and South Africa is now grappling with how to allocate and hold the government accountable for its use of funds. Out of 257 municipalities in the country, only 27 were able to obtain clean audits, as reported by the former Auditor-General (AG) of South African municipalities. This indicates the worsening financial situation of the country. The report by the AG reveals that there were 66 qualified audits, six unfavorable audits, 12 disclaimed audits, 89 unqualified audits, and 57 incomplete audits in municipalities (Jason Felix reported to News24 on 22 Jun 2021). It is highlighted that governments depended on quick fixes that were expensive, such as consultants, to make up for a lack of expertise in financial management and reporting, while oversight and monitoring were lacking (News24, 2021). The AG further notes that the practice of such reports is a result of a lack of responsibility and consequence management, which leads to resource mismanagement and a lack of service delivery (Jason Felix reported to News24 on 22 Jun 2021). It appears that the South African government has set aside funds to attend to the needs of its citizens. Unfortunately, these finances are not being managed properly, which could have a negative impact on the successful execution of projects required to achieve the implementation of SDG 11.

The National Planning Commission (NPC) (2019:7) has noted that the South African government is dedicated to enhancing science, technology, and innovation as these play a crucial role in addressing societal challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and inequality (NPC, 2019:7). The significance of technology cannot be undermined, especially in developing nations. It enables these countries to actively take part in the global scene. Furthermore, amidst the ongoing global pandemic, technology has played a crucial role in ensuring that work continues, governments are able to provide essential services, and most importantly, it has facilitated economic progress. However, the progress may get hampered due to natural calamities, such as covid-19 pandemic, fire, floods, climate change, that negatively impact on ecology, environment, and infrastructure.

Other challenges include the availability of energy that is now in short supply in South Africa, which is preventing the country from developing and reaching SDG 11. Lack of competence, corruption, and environmental harm are further difficulties (NPC, 2019:68) that may hinder the realization of SDG 11.

It is important to note that the South African Government is aware of challenges hampering the realisation of SDG 11. According to the UN (2019, in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022:274), developing and preserving secure and eco-friendly cities and communities require a focus on research and development, as well as the integration of advanced technology solutions through the Service Delivery Innovation Program. The government is committed to prioritizing the deliberate and sustainable implementation of technical solutions.

5.Conclusion



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The democratic governance in a post-apartheid era implemented some policies that now regulate various aspects of SDG 11 in the country-context. Some of the significant ones are the Housing Act (No. 107 of 1997) that is carried out by the Department of Human Settlements and establishes the groundwork for allocating funding for the execution of national housing programmes; the Water Services Act (No. 108 of 1997) aiming that in all human settlements, the Department of Water and Sanitation provides basic sanitation and water services; the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000); and the National Environmental Management: Waste Act (No. 59 of 2008) whereby the basic waste management services are provided in human settlements by the Department of Environmental Affairs. In addition to these laws, there is a strategy called the Breaking New Ground, 2004 that expects that the Department of Human Settlements is in charge of implementing housing frameworks, policies, and regulations, and it emphasizes the need for a sufficient supply of homes in secure neighbourhoods. In response to environmental and social concerns, it proposes the construction of inclusive, integrated human settlements. There is also a National Housing Code, 2009 that demands that the Department of Human Settlements simplifies policies, and required interventions that promote the supply of safe and appropriate housing, dependable services, and the upgrading of informal settlements to streamline the execution of housing projects. However, despite these legislative frameworks, there are challenges that still hamper the effective achievement of SDG 11, explored in the study. The highlighted challenges make it difficult to achieve the suggested SDGs and put them into practice. Corruption and poor management issues hinder the needs of regular people, and the expected outcomes of those funds never seem to be accomplished. A lack of water and sanitation facilities, a lack of energy with advanced levels of load-shedding, and traffic congestion also due to load-shedding are just a few of the problems South Africa is currently facing. South Africa could find it challenging to meet SDG 11 due to these resource shortages.

The study's findings also make it abundantly evident that South Africa lacks the capacity to implement policies and programmes in an efficient manner. Corruption, poor financial management, and ineffective administration are to blame for this. To fulfill Sustainable Development Goal 11, several cities have begun adopting smart city projects. The implementation status and resource-gaps of these smart city projects may form part of future publications.

After conducting a desktop analysis, it has been determined that the study is qualitative in nature. To enhance upcoming publications, it may be necessary to interview the Department of Human Settlement. However, it should be noted that one of the limitations of this study is the absence of perspective inclusion. The future publications aim to overcome this limitation by advancing empirical-based studies to assess the status of SDG 11 and inter-linkages with other SDGs in South African context.

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