

## **WITHOUT CREDIBLE AND RELEVANT INFORMATION TO GUIDE IMPLEMENTATION, THE GREEN ECONOMY COULD JUST BE A PIPE DREAM**

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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 reducing the dependence of economic development on the increased consumption of; and damage to natural resources, whilst 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 particularly highlighted as offering potential solutions to current social, economic and environmental challenges which humanity faces. These challenges 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 articulated in strategies such as the National Development Plan and the Green Economy Accord.

Although the potential benefits of a green economy are well articulated, the green economy is a theoretical concept which is yet to be broadly implemented. For green economy aspirations to be realised, there has to be execution of the concept, and this occurs at project level; and it is through executing 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 in nature; with little information on actual green economy practice. Thus although South Africa and other African countries have chosen the green economy development trajectory, they find themselves in a situation where there is a gap between green economy theory and practice.

### ***An agricultural green economy***

South Africa has a large dependence on the agricultural sector, both for local consumption and exports, making this sector key in driving the country's green economy agenda. In a sector such as agriculture, which has been in existence for millennia, implementing a concept such as the green economy is not simple as it requires integrating various factors, including agricultural practices and philosophies and green economy principles. With several green economy principles addressing diverse social, economic and environmental factors; and the numerous ways of practising agriculture, 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 dissuasive. Furthermore without any yardstick it is difficult to plan and 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 the agriculture or 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 green economy project implementation is having a good understanding of 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.



### ***Practical experiences of farmers should inform green economy project implementation guidelines***

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 is vital for addressing uncertainty in green economy project design and implementation***

Process level information provides specific guidance on how to run a project and it minimizes doubts and uncertainties. The CSIR team identified 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 to making the green economy a reality in South Africa***

For South Africa to move beyond intent and make the green economy a reality, investments are needed. However, 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 rely on in making a transition to a green economy. Different stakeholders would have to work together to compile and disseminate the requisite information. 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. These guidelines provide a base for key stakeholders such as government and the private sector to build upon and distribute for wide use. Policies which focus on and promote green economy information provision and capacity building are needed to ensure sustained information provision.