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## City of Cape Town

Cape Town and its path to sustainability

By Dr Johannes Van Der Merwe



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Cover image courtesy of Mohamed Shinaz.



While Cape Town is committed to sustainability and protecting its biologically diverse environment, the city is also focused on addressing social inequity in communities in the context of increasing urbanization and unemployment. Harmony Flats. Image: Bruce Sutherland.



Cape Town, South Africa



## Cape Town and its path to sustainability

Dr Johannes Van Der Merwe, Mayoral Committee Member, Economic, Environmental and Spatial Planning, City of Cape Town, South Africa

Cape Town, the legislative capital of South Africa and a major African hub, is well known for its natural beauty. Blessed with rich biological diversity but also facing challenges from rapid urbanization and unemployment, the City of Capetown is investing in a sustainable future.

Cape Town is located in one of the world's six plant kingdoms, the Cape Floristic Region, which is the smallest but most biologically diverse of its kind. Cape Town's botanical diversity is mirrored by its diversity of spirit. Often referred to as the 'mother city' or the 'gateway to Africa', Cape Town is home to an eclectic and vibrant social fabric that is tightly interwoven with the city's heritage.

Acknowledging the complexity of its social and environmental challenges has been the first step towards realizing the City of Cape Town's vision of creating a sustainable city that empowers growth and champions environmental protection.

Cape Town, as with all cities within developing countries across the globe, faces challenges brought about by urbanization and unemployment. It also combats a history of social divide, which has fed threats of indigence and inequality. Within the realm of environmental prosperity, Cape Town must combat water and air quality degradation, the functionality of ecosystems, the conservation of critically endangered vegetation (11 of the 21 nationally critically endangered vegetation types are found in the municipal boundaries of Cape Town), and the looming effects of climate change.

### Building a path to long-term sustainability

The City of Cape Town has sought to be proactive in addressing these complex issues. In 2001, Cape Town became the first city in Africa to approve and adopt a comprehensive city-wide environmental policy: the Integrated Metropolitan Environmental Policy (IMEP). The IMEP set out the city's environmental commitments and the policy was accompanied by a series of strategies and plans that outlined specific steps for achieving sectoral goals. Most recently in 2014, Cape Town actively worked towards the city's designation as the first metro bioregion in South Africa. This bioregion is planned to cover a metropolitan area of 2,460 km<sup>2</sup>. The Cape Town

Bioregional Plan, through which the declaration will be drafted, is a spatial plan that will showcase terrestrial and aquatic features that are critical for conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecological functioning. The implications of this will be that issues of biodiversity and ecological management will be considered within development planning, placing them at the forefront of progress.

Cape Town is committed to improving the way it works in order to produce better outcomes for its public. It acknowledges innovation and creativity as being fundamental developmental tools for public sector bodies. As the city celebrates its status as the World Design Capital 2014, and embraces design-led thinking as a transformational tool, it is exploring sustainable and creative approaches to intricate urban problems.

### The Mayor's Portfolio on Urban Sustainability

This innovation is enshrined in the Mayor's Portfolio on Urban Sustainability, a tool to embed sustainability principles in the heart of the city's operations while simultaneously promoting holistic, design-led thinking in project development.

This portfolio serves as a city handbook on sustainable development. By actively taking into account lessons learnt from past mistakes, project managers will be able to inspire sustainable results across broad categories of service delivery: in project design, implementation and managerial action. Ideally, this evolving, ground-up method of addressing sustainability principles will lead to more holistic and efficient outcomes that support Cape Town's comprehensive long-term vision for sustainability.

Through the assessment of 34 key projects against 12 objectives or criteria for sustainable development (profiled in the Mayor's Portfolio), project managers are being encouraged to consider, plan and implement strategic aspects of sustainability within their project frameworks. Projects that previously had a narrow focus on social upliftment or economic development are now promoting

a broader environmental awareness linked to low-carbon solutions or biodiversity enhancement. Similarly, 'green' projects, which have had a specialized biodiversity focus, are now also exploring socio-economic opportunities through, for example, connecting people and nature, creating 'green jobs' and considering broader social improvement opportunities.

Best practice projects in sustainability – those designated as 'gold star' – broadly demonstrate positive outcomes against all sustainability criteria, encouraging an inclusive approach to service delivery. For example, the Pelican Park integrated housing development project facilitates the formation of a healthy community by bringing together people from different income groups whilst still meeting the specific needs of each group. Meanwhile, for the project 'Friends and Neighbours: The Other Side of the Fence', project managers used intelligent design and natural intuition to connect Village Heights, a small informal settlement in Lavender Hill, with the False Bay Ecology Park. In doing so they created a new living environment that builds opportunities for disadvantaged communities and improves quality of life. Another instance of a best practice project is the Kraaifontein integrated waste management facility. This waste management facility is unique. Not only has it set the benchmark for solid waste management, it has also changed the way people think about waste and recycling.

This portfolio is an important tool in building a socially, economically and ecologically prosperous Cape Town that aligns with some of the core theme areas of the Global Compact Cities Programme.

The protection and careful use of Cape Town's rich natural resources has the potential to inspire social upliftment and create economic opportunities for local people. As a universal society, we need to challenge the all-too-common paradigm of natural resource depletion resulting in social and economic impoverishment.

The key to usurping this thought model is harnessing natural resources to stimulate economic development. This is, however, only possible through the creation of partnerships across lines of government, the private sector and civil society.

### Green technology

Through dynamic processes of cooperation, Cape Town is actively assisting the launch of the green economy within South Africa. Currently, 70 per cent of renewable energy measures are housed within the Western Cape. Cape Town, with an aim to be dependent on renewable energy for 10 per cent of its energy needs by 2020, has created the Green Technology Hub. The Hub services the industrial needs of companies involved in the supply of components to utility-scale renewable energy installations, those that manufacture and maintain energy efficiency equipment, as well as those that are engaged in research and experimentation for renewable energy innovation.

Companies are enticed to the Hub by a number of enterprising financial and non-financial incentives. These fiscal and administrative benefits are designed to cut through red tape, facilitate business and employment creation and fast track the availability of alternative energy to the South African market. This incentive package has



Cape Town combats a history of social divide that has fed threats of indigence and inequality. The city's 'green' projects have a specialized biodiversity focus, however, they are now also exploring socio-economic opportunities by connecting people and nature, creating 'green jobs' and considering broader social improvement opportunities. Image: Stephen Granger.

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already borne fruit, with a sizeable investment in a state-of-the-art wind power facility having been secured.

#### **Safeguarding biodiversity**

A measure of particular ingenuity within the investment incentive scheme is Cape Town's land-bank program. A first for any South African metropolitan area, the city has purchased tracts of land laden with Cape Town's unique Cape Flats Dune Strandveld and Atlantis Sand Fynbos vegetation. This has been done in anticipation of the biodiversity loss within the urban area as a result of critical green technology developmental growth. However, this expected loss is simultaneously being offset by the proactive securing of land flourishing with rare biodiversity, thereby safeguarding its existence into perpetuity.

Sustainability, recognized within Cape Town as one of the foundation stones of development, requires that every major long-term decision taken by a local government should consider the best interests of the city according to a balance of needs. Cape Town is a unique city, blessed

with enviable natural resources and cultural vitality. It is one of the most sought-after destinations in the world for both vocation and lifestyle. This will count for nothing however, if the city cannot sustain its growth by amalgamating the sanctuary of its natural asset base into daily existence.

Consideration and cooperation are crucial to this ideal. To be achieved, sustainability has to equate to progress. Cape Town is committed to an identity of progress and opportunity. From the Mayor's Portfolio, which holistically challenges citizens and government officials alike to replicate and improve upon best-practice approaches, to the corporate incentives to support the growth of the green-energy sector, to biodiversity protection mechanisms, the City of Cape Town is investing in its future to sculpt a more sustainable, vibrant and equitable tomorrow.

*Cape Town committed to the Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact in 2014.*



An environmentally rich city, Cape Town is situated in one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world. Image: Bruce Sutherland.