



NMMU Sustainability Research Unit

Strategic Plan

2016-2020

<http://www.nmmu.ac.za/sru>

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Brief Business Overview

Established in 2009, the Sustainability Research Unit (SRU) is the first dedicated inter-disciplinary research group focusing on the sustainability of complex social ecological systems in the Garden Route, Western Cape of South Africa. The Unit, based at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's George Campus, is home to a community of critical thinkers who recognise the need to cross the boundaries of the social and ecological disciplines in order to promote sustainable management of social ecological systems. The work undertaken by the SRU develops the capacity of NMMU students and community stakeholders for the sustainable management of ecological, social and economic systems through user-inspired research, training, policy-related work and stakeholder engagement. The Unit raises awareness of sustainability issues amongst stakeholders and collaborates with decision makers and researchers from universities, local government and private sector, to collectively address sustainability challenges.

The SRU was established by the George Campus Academic Board in response to a need amongst land users, decision makers and the public in the Garden Route for an applied sustainability research presence in the region. This was fuelled by a number of environmental crises, notably the 2006 and 2007 floods, the 2009 drought, anxieties about water security, aggravated by burgeoning urban development, population influxes and the threats of climate change, exacerbated by rapid land transformation and proliferation of invasive weeds. A 2009 SRU report "*Challenges to Sustainability in the Garden Route*" (Pauw 2009), which was widely shared amongst stakeholders, and a number of press releases and public lectures by SRU members brought further attention to these issues. In addition, the University welcomed the establishment of a dedicated Unit focusing on an issue at the heart of NMMU's mission and values, central to its research, engagement, teaching and learning objectives.

Over the past 5 years the Unit has developed a strong "evidence seeking" transdisciplinary research ethos which gained momentum with the appointment of a full-time Leader in January 2013. The SRU's projects and programmes combine qualitative and quantitative methods, in response to the complex environmental and societal challenges and we pride ourselves in validating our work through peer-reviewed publication.

The SRU plays an important strategic role in generating scientific information, educating students, citizen and communities, and through participatory approaches, develops capacity for the sustainable management of natural resources in the southern part of the Western Cape, nationally and globally. Using the Garden Route as a social-ecological 'laboratory', our work finds national and international relevance through inter-regional comparative analysis, policy inputs and publication in international journals and books.

The SRU is now at a pivotal stage in its history, where choices need to be made about the Unit's geographic and conceptual focus, size and positioning in NMMU, as well as nationally and internationally. This document focuses on the following scenario which was recommended by the Unit and accepted by a recent 5-year review panel:

A compact and focused national and internationally relevant Centre for Ecosystems and Society, with strong collaborative links with mandated organizations and other national and international research groups, and with an emphasis on decision making, governance and capacity development for a Good Anthropocene.

Who we are



Our values

SRU people are guided by six values:

- **Stewardship:** being compassionate; being concerned about human well-being and the biosphere; taking responsibility to make a difference; being worthy ancestors
- **Integrity:** being honest, open and truthful
- **Support:** providing a space of happiness, intellectual growth and fulfillment
- **Learning:** a culture of listening, thinking, sharing knowledge, reflecting and grappling with complex problems
- **Relevance:** making a difference; having impact; gaining recognition; attracting talent
- **Professionalism:** being productive, target orientated and adaptive; communicating effectively.

Our identity

The SRU does action research at the interface between people and ecosystems. We are a transdisciplinary hub for new thinking where scholars, decision makers and practitioners gather to deliberate social-ecological problems and re-frame them as opportunities, which the SRU helps to address through proactive research. We are bridging agents, connectors and communicators, agents of change who gather multiple evidences and then facilitate the translation of science into social

understanding. The Garden Route is our laboratory but our work has national and international relevance in advancing a new understanding of sustainability through engaged science: connecting society to the biosphere.

Our vision

The SRU is a catalyst of change towards more harmonious relationships between society and the biosphere - a Good Anthropocene. It is an energizing open space for transdisciplinary thinking and learning where talented people can come together to think, learn and co-create inspiring ideas. The SRU's inclusive, humanizing culture provides the space for motivated students and academics to grow and thrive. Our research and engagement makes a difference on the ground in the Garden Route and has national and international relevance and influence.

Our purpose

The SRU's focus is to gather and communicate evidence to promote a better understanding of the challenges facing society and the natural environment in our quest for a Good Anthropocene. We strive to adaptively address these challenges using transdisciplinary complex systems frameworks and participatory learning and action. We build credibility and relevance by listening, asking the right questions, providing reliable information and learning with our stakeholders through action on the ground. Conventional academic silos do not restrict us.

Goals, Objectives and Activities

Goals

In order to develop stakeholder capacity to cope with sustainability issues within the Garden Route, high quality scientific information, models, and strategies are required and need to be transferred to relevant stakeholders. Goals are to:

1. Develop integrated information systems and models, based on good science, to enable more sustainable management of social-ecological systems
2. Provide scientific information about the causes, impacts, consequences and good ecosystem management practices related to climate change
3. Develop and implement strategies to promote sustainability in urban development, tourism, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and biodiversity conservation
4. Offer training courses to raise awareness and build capacity
5. Promote the health and wellbeing of society and the ecosystems we are part of.

Objectives

Current measurable objectives for the next 5 years are:

1. Develop and implement the Unit's financial sustainability plan
2. Develop and implement a leadership succession plan
3. Develop proposals for financial interdependence, nationally and internationally, through partnerships with NRF, SAEON, CSIR and SANParks, and the private sector
4. Enter into MOA's with government departments, offering research expertise and creating job opportunities and exposure for students
5. Grow the SRU to an efficient, compact and effective research and engagement Centre with meaningful contributions to local and regional sustainability as well as to the theory and practice of trans-disciplinary engaged scholarship
6. Develop and implement a marketing and communication plan to overcome the lack of interconnectedness between SRU and bigger NMMU, to introduce the unit to more stakeholders and to re-engage SRU, SNRM and government departments
7. Strengthen links with NMMU faculties, and national and international researchers by encouraging post-graduate registration in a variety of departments or schools
8. Increase ecological research projects that can be translated in terms of potential economic consequences
9. Initiate joint projects with members of departments and faculties in NMMU
10. Use this experience to recruit additional senior NMMU researchers and supervisors including expertise in the fields of GIS, economics, soil sciences and sociology
11. Selectively invite additional Research Associates to join the SRU
12. Increase Master's student numbers, with a special emphasis on recruiting high performing Honours and BTech graduates

13. Attract more black, disadvantaged postgraduate students
14. Raise funds for and recruit 2-4 additional post-docs
15. Increase the mean throughput rate of Master's and PhD students to 2, and 3 years, respectively
16. Increase the number of international scientists visiting the SRU
17. Strengthen cooperation with the DVC:IS by becoming a source of reliable and up to date scholarly information and advice on sustainability issues to NMMU
18. Increase the number of registered students
19. Increase peer reviewed research outputs to an average of 3 papers per academic member and post-doc per annum
20. Assist NMMU in developing and offering an Honours in Integrated Natural Resource Management at the George Campus
21. Continue with current teaching at BTech and undergraduate levels
22. Develop a Short Learning Programme strategy by end 2015
23. Increase community engagement and dialogue with government and private sector stakeholders to at least one event per quarter
24. Offer at least two major research capacity development programmes per annum (e.g. post graduate orientation week), and one minor capacity development initiative (e.g. journal club, writing sessions) per week
25. Arrange at least four SRU excursions per annum.

Activities

Over the next five years the SRU aims to develop and implement a succession and financial sustainability plan, increase the visibility of the Unit, the income, student numbers and associated academic outputs. The SRU also wishes to increase its capacity development and stakeholder engagement efforts. Several activities have been planned to meet these targeted objectives.

Financial sustainability planning

The SRU is in the process of developing proposals and initiating negotiations for financial sustainability. Opportunities currently being explored include:

- Negotiations and proposals for collaborative Social-Ecological Systems Research Centre with SANParks
- Discussions around a collaborative Long Term Social-Ecological Research site, linked to a SAEON node, with SANParks, CSIR, SAEON and France's CNRS and IRD
- Concept proposals for industry-funded Chair in resilience, risk and vulnerability to climate change
- Proposals for medium-term funding from the Department of Environmental Affairs for a technical support team for ecosystem management initiatives
- Preparing an application for an NRF Chair in Social-Ecological Resilience and Vulnerability to Climate Change in the event of an NRF SARCHI call for proposals

- Intention to collaborate with the NMMU Global Leadership Institute, to more closely integrate research, engagement and teaching and learning activities and programmes with those of the GLI once the Institute becomes fully fledged
- Proposal to NMMU for increase of funding for more staff in order to achieve increased research output and future growth.

Leadership succession planning

A succession plan is being developed with the following in mind:

- Plan for the next five years
- Identify potential successors considering a required expansion in the fields of GIS, economics, soil sciences and sociology
- Groom potential successors by transferring the skills and experience of the Unit Leader through mentoring
- Focus on leadership development

In the short term, deferred retirement needs to be put in place for the SRU Head to enable him to explore financial and growth opportunities over the next five years. The Unit Head has indicated his preparedness to gradually reduce his employment contract to a 5/8 position to provide flexibility for the appointment of a successor who he would mentor.

Increase postgraduate numbers and throughput

- Create awareness of SRU PhD opportunities amongst Master's students in NMMU and elsewhere, using SRU website and social networks
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- Supervise and co-supervise Master's, BTech and Honours research projects congruent with the SRU research themes and focus
- Facilitate undergraduate orientation programmes introducing students to the SRU for post graduate studies Recruit supervisors to provide enrolled students with supervision and good mentorship
- Provide students with the capacity required to complete their research through seminars, workshops and exposure to conferences.

Increase research outputs

- Attract PhD students and post-doc fellows
- Organize sabbaticals, think-tanks and writing retreats to produce peer reviewed papers, research reports, journal articles, books and popular media articles
- Provide existing students with capacity through writing workshops and training programmes
- Encourage SRU students to co-author papers with more experienced SRU members
- Employ dedicated professional editors.

Increase funding

- Respond to and win tenders (visibility of tender databases)
- Strengthen relationships with current funders
- Identify and pursue new funding streams
- Deliver quality work to current funders.

Increase visibility

- Encourage and facilitate student attendance at national and international conferences and NMMU events
- Present keynotes, presentations, abstracts, posters
- Increase collaboration on joint projects
- Host international visitors
- Take up leadership positions on professional disciplined-based forums

Develop a Short Learning Programme (SLP) strategy by end 2015

- Establish a SLP development committee
- Facilitate development planning meetings
- Write a SLP strategy document for implementation

Increase community engagement (educating, training, information sharing) and dialogue with government and private sector stakeholders

- Host community engagement workshops and events
- Host stakeholder dialogues related to sustainability issues in the Garden Route
- Arrange 4 field trips that highlight community projects contributing to sustainability of the social and ecological environment
- Increase academic capacity development
- Host teaching and learning workshops for postgraduates
- Host an annual winter / summer school for postgraduates.

Inspire and care for students whilst studying with SRU

- Continue with weekly update meetings with staff and students
- Host quarterly social events with staff and students
- Celebrate and reward staff and students who have excelled
- Have monthly group meetings with students to update all on SRU strategy and progress.

Stakeholders

Internal

- NMMU researchers across the Science, Business and Economic Sciences and Arts faculties
- NMMU executive
- Current students
- Prospective students
- Staff
- Affiliated staff
- George MANCO

External

- Current funders: NRF; WRC; DST; Department of Environmental Affairs
- Prospective funders: NERC; NSF; FutureEarth; Belmont Forum; ESPA
- Research collaborators: CSIR; Stellenbosch University; international universities and research institutions
- Local government: Eden DM; George, Knysna, Mossel Bay, Bitou, Oudtshoorn Municipalities
- Organizations with environmental mandates: SANParks, Department of Environmental Affairs, Cape Nature, Provincial Department of Environment and Development Planning;
- National and international universities
- Forums and associations: Southern Cape Landowners Initiative; Kaaimans to Touw Forum; catchment management forums; community-based organizations; ratepayers associations.

Industry Analysis

Our prediction is that demands for specialized sustainability capacity development and advice within business, government and parastatals will increase significantly over the next 5 years. The reason is increasingly demanding legislation, increased awareness amongst the public and consumers of sustainability challenges, including climate change, and growing understanding amongst decision makers of the need for different and more innovative approaches. Therefore the greatest opportunity for growth lies in providing technical support and monitoring services, underpinned by good, primary science.

- Prospective funders: NERC; NSF; FutureEarth; Belmont Forum; ESPA
- Research collaborators: CSIR; Stellenbosch University; international universities and research institutions
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- Organizations with environmental mandates: SANParks, Department of Environmental Affairs, Cape Nature, Provincial Department of Environment and Development Planning;
- National and international universities
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Marketing Plan

The SRU's research marketing takes place through our impacts and relevance to society, our peer reviewed scholarship and the quality of students we produce. Stakeholder engagements are central to our word-of-mouth marketing strategy. We have an active and up to date web site and make opportunistic use of opportunities to show-case our work in the media and other platforms, and at scientific events such as symposia and conferences.

Our SLP and consultancy marketing plan, on the other hand, is more targeted and proactive. Here we strive to be registered on all major supplier databases, strengthen our links with potential clients and service providers, and become known as a source of expertise.

We believe the best marketing tool is to offer quality short learning programmes that are in high demand, and to use social media and 'word of mouth' marketing to our advantage. Skilled word of mouth marketing is our strongest and most cost-effective tool, and would require a) **engaging** with our communities by being part of the many sustainability conversations that are gaining momentum everywhere; b) **equipping** our communities to understand the sustainability challenges facing our planet and local area through information sharing, capacity development and regular dialogue; and c) **empowering** our stakeholders to be part of the solution, to gain agency and capacity; to become adaptive co-managers of a Good Anthropocene instead of remaining powerless spectators or angry complainants.

Financial Projections

The SRU’s revenue stream has increased steadily since 2009, with a major change in the ratio of council to non-council funds.

While income from non-council funds remain by far the largest proportion (85%), the SRU will rely on a minimum continuous investment by NMMU Council in:

- the salary of the SRU Head (not included in Figure 8 due to the normal academic duties associated with the position);
- an administrator’s salary;
- 50% of a Director Designate salary
- one post-doctoral grant.

The remainder of revenues will be generated from non-council funds.

SRU maintains good governance in managing financial matters, its budget and expenses.

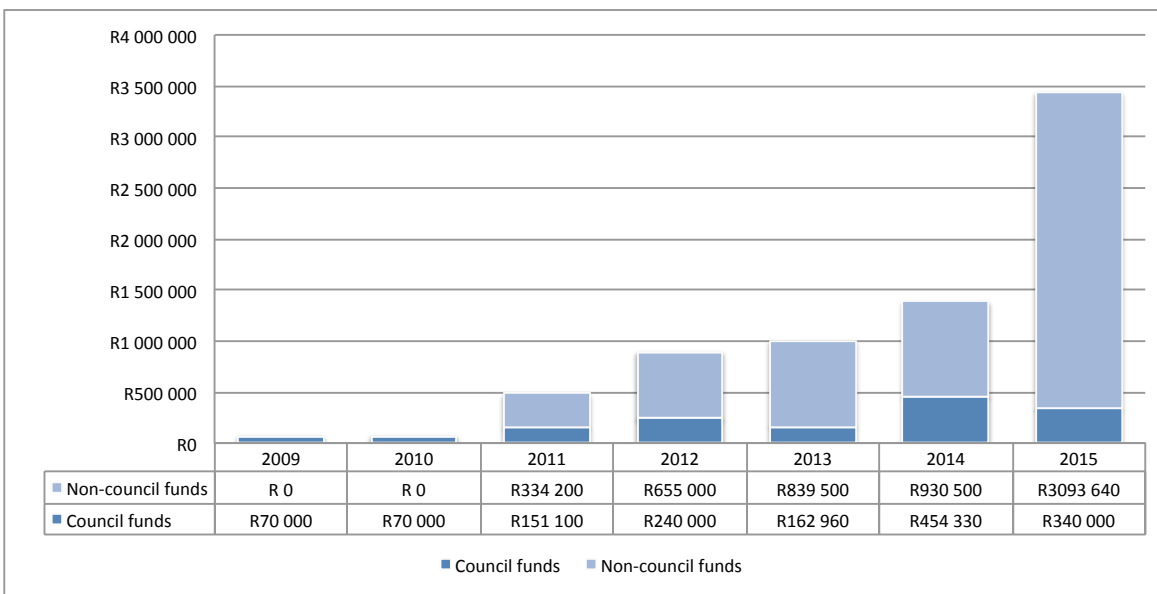


Figure 1. Income, 2009-2015

Financial projections until 2020

