



The Implementation of National Environmental Management Policy at a Rural University in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to investigate the challenges associated with carrying out the National Environmental Management Policy at a distant university in the Eastern Cape Province. The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the university's environmental management practices. The qualitative part of the investigation was a case study using convenience sampling. Ten managers who implement policies in their departments were chosen as participants in the case study. Phone interviews were also conducted in 2021 due to the COVID outbreak. Data analysis used content analysis. The results indicated that the university's implementation of the national environmental management policy lacked clarity. The study suggests that the university should create and implement an environment management policy for employees to use as a reference. Furthermore, managers should focus on using effective environmental tools and effective communication strategies. The institution should provide management with tools to explain clear directives under the National Environmental Management Act of 1998.

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INTRODUCTION

The study is concerned with the value of environmental education for administrators in rural universities. As a result, managers must be familiar with environmental management policies. The study focused on the implementation of the national environmental management policy at a rural university in Eastern Cape Province.¹ The fundamental idea of the National Environmental Management Act of 1998 is to provide guidelines for decision-making in environmental concerns in order to enable cooperative and environmental governance.² Kassim et al. suggest that businesses should follow environmental regulations such as minimizing their impact on the environment and conserving energy.³ According to Fawzy et al., an environmental management plan offers a path for

¹ National Environmental Management Act (2009) <https://www.environment.co.za/environmental-laws-and-legislation-in-south-africa/nema-south-africa-national-environmental-management-act-legislation-and-environmental-acts.html>

² National Environmental Management Act (2009).

³ Che Ku Hisam Che Ku Kassim et al., "Environmental Reporting by the Malaysian Local Governments," *Meditari Accountancy Research* 27, no. 4 (August 5, 2019): 633–51, <https://doi.org/10.1108/MEDAR-02-2019-0444>.

achieving sustainability in institutions and argues that good environmental management is crucial since it covers all troubling issues and seeks to minimize any bad effects wherever possible.⁴

The scarcity of literature on environmental management concerns at South African tertiary institutions and the need to learn more about environmental practices at a rural university served as the researcher's driving forces. Zhang, Yu, and Kong assert that a lack of environmental management policies inside an organization may lead to legal action.⁵ The study seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How is the National Environmental Management Policy carried out at an Eastern Cape rural university?

RQ2: What difficulties does an Eastern Cape rural university confront in carrying out the National Environmental Management Policy?

RQ3: What suggestions may be made to ensure that the National Environmental Management Policy is properly implemented at a rural university in the Eastern Cape Province?

The rural universities and other higher institutions in South Africa will benefit from the study's conclusions. The outcomes will demonstrate how the university should carry out the 2009 National Environmental Management Act's guidelines. The purpose of the Act is to establish institutions that will support cooperative governance, procedures for coordinating environmental functions performed by state organs, and principles for decision-making on matters affecting the environment. It also addresses matters related thereto. This will help the rural institution adhere to South African environmental rules and demonstrate how to put national government initiatives into practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Scholtz, the "environment" refers to the physical surroundings in which people live, which includes the earth's atmosphere, water, land, microorganisms, plants, and animals, as well as their interactions with one another and the physical, chemical, aesthetic, and cultural characteristics and conditions that have an impact on people's health and well-being. Environmental management, according to Eba, is multidisciplinary in nature and necessitates the training of specialists who will be endowed with vital analytical abilities to give both preventive and corrective measures to handle all environmental concerns.⁶

Alignment of Corporate Environmental Strategy with Environmental Practices

According to Clementino and Perkins, corporate environmental policies have changed from a regulation-driven reactive mode to a proactive mode that involves an internally motivated organizational transformation in corporate culture and managerial practices towards environmental self-regulation.⁷ This is in line with Samans and Nelson's argument that environmental plans should reflect an organization's perspective on how it interacts with the environment and serve as the foundation for managing its environmental impact.⁸ Strong environmental values can be spread throughout the organization by managers.⁹

⁴ Samer Fawzy et al., "Strategies for Mitigation of Climate Change: A Review," *Environmental Chemistry Letters* 18, no. 6 (November 30, 2020): 2069–94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10311-020-01059-w>.

⁵ Qi Zhang, Zhi Yu, and Dongmin Kong, "The Real Effect of Legal Institutions: Environmental Courts and Firm Environmental Protection Expenditure," *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 98 (November 2019): 102254, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2019.102254>.

⁶ Maxwell-borjor EBA, "Education for Sustainable Development," *International Journal of Environmental Pollution and Environmental Modelling* 3, no. 4 (2020): 155–66.

⁷ Ester Clementino and Richard Perkins, "How Do Companies Respond to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Ratings? Evidence from Italy," *Journal of Business Ethics* 171, no. 2 (June 2021): 379–97, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04441-4>.

⁸ Richard Samans and Jane Nelson, "Corporate Strategy and Implementation," in *Sustainable Enterprise Value Creation* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 141–86, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93560-3_5.

⁹ Olawole Fawehinmi et al., "Assessing the Green Behaviour of Academics," *International Journal of Manpower* 41, no. 7 (January 3, 2020): 879–900, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-07-2019-0347>.

The Value of Environmental Education in an Organisation

According to Sengupta, Das, and Maji, environmental education is a process of recognizing values and demystifying concepts to create the knowledge and abilities needed to comprehend and value the interrelationships between man and his biophysical environment.¹⁰ Festus and Ogoegbunam imply that environmental education raises environmental consciousness by recognizing man's commitment to the environment, his responsibilities toward it, and his attitudes about it.¹¹ It also helps students build effective environmental skills for the survival of both the present and future generations.

The Importance of Environmental Management Policy for an Organisation.

The implementation of many environmental rights in the Constitution, as well as those relating to governance, administration, justice, and public participation, is of utmost importance for an organization because it contributes significantly to meeting the needs of people in democratic South Africa.¹²

An organization's objective to manage the environmental impact of its activities, as well as to reduce waste, pollution, energy use, and resource use, is outlined in an environmental management policy. Jain and Pant advise that managers must adopt environmental policies that incorporate a commitment to regulatory compliance, establish systems to notify them of their legal obligations, and set aims and objectives with compliance in mind.¹³ The mission statement places people at the centre of their sustainability concern and acknowledges the intrinsic value of all living things. Monitoring and evaluating environmental operations, reducing and eliminating unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and establishing institutional ecology policies and practices of conservation, recycling, and waste reduction are some of the other similarities.

Environmental policy primarily focuses on how to regulate interactions between people and the environment for the benefit of both.¹⁴ All environmental policy changes begin with a commitment from senior management in a "top-down approach," where good ideas permeate the entire university. According to Ikram et al., policy implementation is a crucial stage of the policy-making process when concepts are translated into practical activities that support the intended outcome of a given policy.¹⁵ Environmental management in the context of ISO14000 standards means what an organisation does to minimise harmful effects on the environment caused by its activities.¹⁶

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was adopted, with 10 managers chosen at random for the study. The researcher was granted permission to undertake the study. The interviews were conducted over the phone, with a series of questions guiding the conversation. The pilot study revealed that the interview guide was suitable for the study.

¹⁰ Madhumala Sengupta, Jayanti Das, and Pintu Kumar Maji, "Environmental Awareness and Environment Related Behaviour of Twelfth Grade Students in Kolkata: Effects of Stream and Gender," 2010, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:131100900>.

¹¹ Mbalisi Onyeka Festus and Offor Beatrice Ogoegbunam, "Imperatives of Environmental Education and Awareness Creation to Solid Waste Management in Nigeria," *Academic Research International* 3, no. 2 (2012): 253.

¹² Hendrik Andries Strydom et al., *Environmental Management in South Africa* (Juta and Company Ltd, 2009).

¹³ Suresh Jain and Pallavi Pant, "Environmental Management Systems for Educational Institutions: A Case Study of TERI University, New Delhi," *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 11, no. 3 (2010): 236–49.

¹⁴ David Benson and Andrew Jordan, "Environmental Policy: Protection and Regulation," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2015), 778–83, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.91014-6>.

¹⁵ M. Ikram et al., "Do Environmental Management Systems Help Improve Corporate Sustainable Development? Evidence from Manufacturing Companies in Pakistan," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 226 (July 2019): 628–41, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.03.265>.

¹⁶ Jonathan Ball, "Can ISO 14000 and Eco-Labeling Turn the Construction Industry Green?," *Building and Environment* 37, no. 4 (2002): 421–28; Whenama Ghea Setyo Nugroho, Zeplin Jiwa Husada Tarigan, and Hotlan Siagian, "The Influence of Top Management Commitment on the Operational Performance through the Mediating Role of the Green Purchasing and Iso 14000 Implementation," *Journal of Future Sustainability* 4, no. 1 (2024): 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.jfs.2024.1.002>.

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to find patterns or themes in the data, content analysis was used to analyse the data. The researcher used questions developed from earlier studies covered in the literature review of this study to ensure validity and reliability. The researcher made an effort to confirm that the sample population was representative of the entire population to support the generalization to assure the validity of the study.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The information is laid out in accordance with the research questions. Results were interpreted using both inductive and abductive reasoning.

Research question 1: How is the National Environmental Management Policy carried out at an Eastern Cape rural university?

Policy exists on paper, but there is no effective plan for implementation.

Frequently, a policy will exist, but its execution will be sluggish or non-existent. This typically occurs in settings where the policy is imposed or comes from another organization. The application of the policy appears to be problematic at this institution. Participant A said: We are unaware of the environmental policy, albeit our policy documents take it into consideration. However, it has been extremely difficult to put it into practice.

Participant B said: *The university does have something of that nature, but I haven't seen it being put into practice here, Perhaps I am the only one who is unaware of the implementation process, but I don't believe we have something similar in our current projects or programs...*

This demonstrates that the policy at the institution has not been implemented in any way. The National Environmental Management Policy is acknowledged by this institution, although implementation strategies have not yet been developed. This could be because there isn't any immediate risk associated with breaking the rules.

Participant C revealed this, saying that: *The management does not believe they will be put in danger if they do not adhere to the policy's provisions, hence they have not taken it seriously. Because of this, the university is implementing the policy very slowly.*

Participant D said:

"The university is taking the time to adhere to all the policy's criteria. This might be because there aren't enough resources to hire competent workers to protect and monitor how the policy is being applied in this place."

The information above demonstrates that although the institution is aware of the policy, not much has been done to adequately execute it. Thus, it may be concluded that the university's execution of the policy has been subpar. There is no plan for implementation. The way the policy is initially implemented is one factor that influences how it is applied. All of these need a plan that can be employed to carry out the policy.

According to Participant E: *We might have it here on paper, but we haven't yet come up with a mechanism to make sure the policy is properly implemented. If there is no plan or approach to properly implement the policy, then the implementation will be very weak. Every policy needs an implementation strategy.*

Participant F implied that everything, including laws and policies, must be driven by a certain strategy. This is not offered here. When there is no plan or clear guidance for how things should proceed, even if there were a policy, how would it be put into practice? The aforementioned response

demonstrates the lack of a defined implementation plan for the policy at the university. It appears that the institution has not produced anything useful that may serve as a guide for people on how to adopt and make sure that the policy is implemented properly. A policy cannot be implemented or be successful if there is no implementation strategy. Any policy must be accompanied by plans and strategies that direct the individuals who will implement it if it is to be successful.

The management has not taken the policy seriously since, according to Participant G, they believe they won't be put in danger if they ignore the environmental management criteria. According to Participant H,

The university must convene and form a committee to supervise the execution of policies. The institution has been hesitant to oversee the effective application of the policy. It hasn't been supported or taken into account fully. This has prevented the execution of policies. Inconsistent administration in administering the policy.

Training and responsibility are essential for the uniform and equitable application of workplace rules. Failure to adopt new rules must include training for both supervisors and employees, and supervisors must be held accountable for consistently enforcing corporate regulations are two reasons why policies fail. The researchers concur with Participant I in saying that the institution has not been handling the process of implementing policies adequately. Perhaps a different scenario would be discussed if there was proper administration. However, the fact that policies have not been effectively implemented has led to failure. Participant J agreed, saying that the university was taking its time to adhere to all of the policy's requirements. This could be as a result of their lack of financial resources to hire qualified environmental specialists. According to Participant C,

Serious administration is required, and university management must instruct all managers in different departments on the requirements of the policy. "I don't think things will go well here without the right direction."

This demonstrates that management's efforts were not properly managed. This has made it challenging to execute policies. Things won't run well if management is not well-organized.

Research question 2: RQ2: What difficulties does an Eastern Cape rural university confront in carrying out the National Environmental Management Policy?

Weak Structural Support

Policies must be in line with the goals the business is trying to accomplish by putting them into place for them to be effective. This implies that for a policy to be effective, managerial support is necessary. If there is no support there may be issues with the policy. Participant B stated that: *Although our department is in charge of monitoring the policy's execution, the management has not provided us with the required go-ahead. We are unable to bypass the management and take independent action.* Participant A said that the management has not taken the policy seriously because they believe they may not adhere to its criteria. This explains why they are taking so long to put the policy into effect. The claims demonstrate that the university has not provided managerial assistance.

Participant D stated:

If the institution was serious about implementing the policy, it should provide us with the resources to do so. We could need the university's legal department to explain the legal ramifications of not following the policy's general guidelines, for instance.

It is obvious that the administrators of this university lack the skills necessary to implement the policy. Lack of support equates to difficulties in putting the policy into action. The question of whether any type of implementation support mechanism must be required and, if so, what strategy is feasible arises. All of these strategies would call for frequent communication and an awareness of the implementing agencies' perspective. It is obvious that the administrators of this university lack the skills necessary to implement the policy

Non-compliance with Government Laws and Policies by University Managers

The problem of establishing some consistency in implementation at the subnational level for policies developed at the national level. The fact that the university administration is aware that it is only a government policy may explain their behaviour.

Participant C brought this up:

The management hasn't taken the policy seriously since they believe they won't be in danger if they don't follow its standards, so they're putting off putting the policy into effect.

Inadequate Collaboration on Policy

Most initiatives will almost likely have effects on outside parties, yet policymaking has a tendency to evolve in different administrative silos. Policies' progress is contingent on the implementation process, rather than their inherent advantages, as is becoming increasingly clear.¹⁷ Additionally, they contend that rather than just being a succession of discrete and different steps, policy formulation and implementation should become an interconnected process. This might have applied to this policy. Before putting the policy into effect, the government was supposed to consult with the university and other interested parties.

Participant K reported:

In essence, individuals who create policies should work with the ones who will implement them to ensure that they have the necessary training and understanding. We have professors and medical professionals who can help the management put the policies into practice remains one of the main causes of upcoming implementation challenges.

Ansell, Sorensen and Torfing's study places a strong emphasis on the necessity of creating policies that connect stakeholders vertically to encourage cooperation and shared decision-making.¹⁸ The shortcomings of collaborative policymaking and the inability to create a consensus for solving public problems through positive management of differences remain some of the key reasons for subsequent implementation difficulties.

No Policy Monitoring

The creation of some sort of central delivery unit is what is being concentrated on in order to monitor how policies are being implemented. Due to the lack of a plan or implementation guide, this has not been done at the university. Participant F said, *I've been the department head for three years, but I didn't know the institution didn't have an environmental policy. How can something that doesn't exist be monitored?* It is clear that the university does not engage in policy monitoring.

SUMMARY

The study discussion has revealed that the university hasn't developed a clear implementation plan for the policy. The institution has not provided direction on how administrators of different departments should adopt and make sure the policy is properly implemented. A policy cannot be implemented or be successful if there is no implementation strategy. Any policy must be matched with plans and tactics that direct the implementers if it is to be successful. The company's intended outcomes for putting forth particular policies must be in line with its strategic aims. The managers have also not been assisted in carrying out the policy.

¹⁷ Bob Hudson, David Hunter, and Stephen Peckham, "Policy Failure and the Policy-Implementation Gap: Can Policy Support Programs Help?," *Policy Design and Practice* 2, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2018.1540378>.

¹⁸ Christopher Ansell, Eva Sørensen, and Jacob Torfing. "Improving policy implementation through collaborative policymaking." *Policy & Politics* 45, no. 3 (2017): 467-486.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is suggested by the researcher:

- (i) The university must establish a committee to make sure that the National Environmental Management Act of 2009 is reflected in the institution's environmental policy.
- (ii) Managers should have the training and tools they need to implement the policies.
- (iii) To avoid lawsuits and safeguard the university, legal personnel should be hired to provide advice on environmental issues.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the challenges associated with carrying out the National Environmental Management Policy at a distant university in the Eastern Cape Province. The study discussion revealed that the university hasn't developed a clear implementation plan for the policy. Recommendations have been made for the University to establish a committee to create the policy and the various stakeholders should put in the necessary strategies to implement the policy. When these crucial steps are taken in addressing environmental concerns it would ensure efficient cooperative and environmental governance for the growth and development of society.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to time and money constraints, the study was limited to the managers of different departments. All stakeholders, including academics, support workers, product vendors, and students, may have been included in the sample.

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