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Africa Hub
Leadership Centre

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What, Why, How, and Where Is It?



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Advancing Sustainability Science in Africa: The Future Earth Africa Hub and its Leadership Centre

About Future Earth

Future Earth¹ is a global network of scientists, researchers, and innovators collaborating for a more sustainable planet. Its **vision** is of a sustainable and equitable world for all, where societal decisions are informed by openly accessible and shared knowledge. Its **mission** is to advance research in support of transformations to global sustainability.

Future Earth is supported by nine Global Secretariat Hubs, including the Future Earth Africa Hub, which is hosted by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa. The Africa Hub joined eight existing Global Secretariat Hubs of Future Earth located in Canada, China, France, Japan, South Asia, Sweden, Taipei, and the United States (Figure 1).

Future Earth brings together nineteen National and Local Networks, along with twenty-seven Global Research Networks (GRNs). These networks unite innovators from academia, policy-making, business, civil society, and other sectors to tackle the world's most urgent sustainability challenges. Together, they generate the multifaceted knowledge needed to inform solutions for complex societal issues.

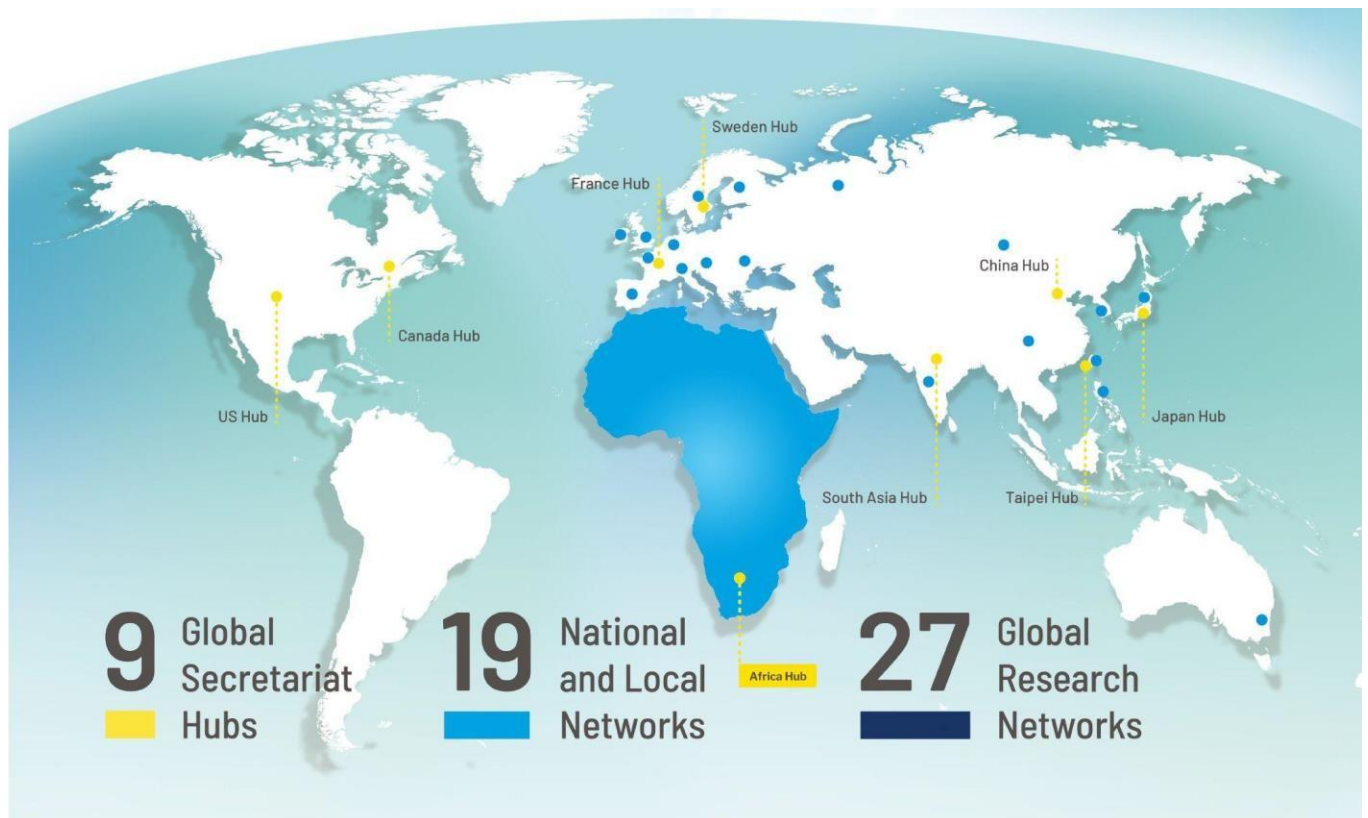


Figure 1: Future Earth's Global Secretariat Hubs, Research Networks and National and Local Networks.



Introducing the Future Earth Africa Hub

The **Future Earth Africa Hub (FEAH)** was launched by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa during the 2023 Sustainability Research and Innovation Congress Africa Satellite event hosted by Nelson Mandela University in Gqeberha, South Africa.

The Hub’s primary aim is to contribute towards Future Earth’s mission by strengthening African sustainability science capacities, connections and global contributions. It seeks to build a strong and well-coordinated African sustainability science community, putting mechanisms in place that advance leadership for sustainability science in Africa and driving the advancement, advocacy and leadership of African priorities at the global level.

The Africa Hub is envisaged as a continentally representative structure, which comprises the National Research Foundation and the Leadership Centre with Consortium Partners, and the Regional Nodes (Figure 2). The Africa Hub leads and supports the fundraising and capacity development strategies, leveraging resources, driving innovation, and contributing towards the publication of research outputs.

The advancement and strengthening of strategic South-South collaboration is a key tenet of the Africa Hub, and it invests significantly in expanding existing networks and establishing or enhancing new programs, including Global Change² research. A phased implementation process enables the Africa Hub to operate as a truly global initiative with a strong African presence and voice, integrating Africa’s thriving and expanding sustainability science, policy, and funding communities into the global sustainability science arena.

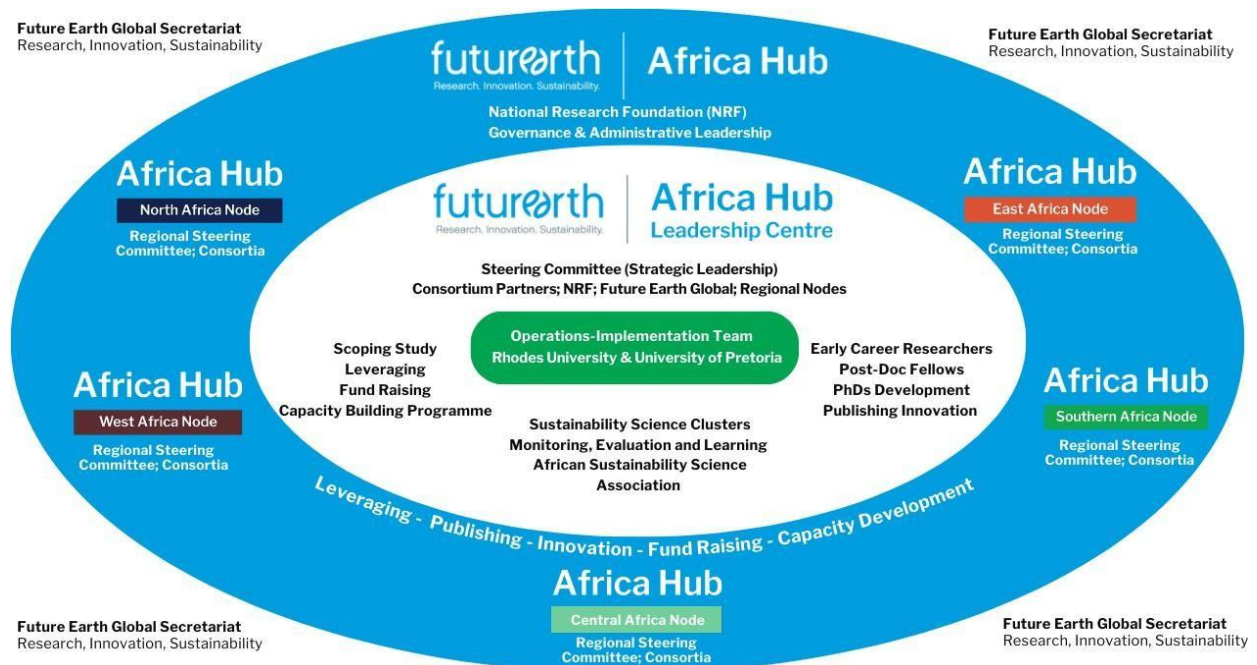


Figure 2: A visual configuration of the Future Earth Africa Hub

² <https://www.nrf.ac.za/global-change-research/?hilite=global+change>



The **Leadership Centre**, with consortium partners, designs a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework for the Future Earth Africa Hub, and is piloting thematically defined **Sustainability Science Clusters (SSCs)**, as well as an **African Sustainability Science Association**.

The Leadership Centre is co-hosted by Rhodes University and the University of Pretoria, with an operations Implementation Team led by a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee provides the Leadership Centre team with strategic decision-making, while the Advisory Board provides strategic advice to the whole Africa Hub.

The Future Earth Africa Hub Advisory Board gives strategic guidance, advice and support to the Hub guided by Future Earth global objectives and priorities, as well as continental sustainability frameworks such as Agenda 2063. It ensures that the Africa Hub's guiding principles are aligned with those of Future Earth globally, supporting fundraising and the mobilisation of other resources.

The NRF is the lead organisation of the Future Earth Africa Hub. It provides governance leadership and administration guidance throughout the ecosystem, raises funds for the Hub's activities and contributes towards the Global Secretariat's functions. It is also responsible for establishing Regional Nodes in five regions of the African continent and will coordinate the activities of these nodes once they are fully functional.

Regional Nodes, known as the North Africa Node, East Africa Node, Southern Africa Node, West Africa Node and Central Africa Node, have been established and are now operational. The establishment of these Nodes is funded by the NRF. The Nodes support the coordination and implementation of the FEAH objectives in their respective regions in collaboration with national and regional structures, and other Sustainability Science stakeholders. The Nodes mobilise resources for the implementation of regional activities that are supported and coordinated by regional steering committees and regional consortia.

Regional Steering Committees play key roles in developing and implementing a strategic plan for the regions and work with local governments and stakeholders to ensure that the activities are aligned with the regional and continental goals as well as those of Future Earth. These committees also promote collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders within their respective regions to address common challenges and goals. They oversee the monitoring and evaluation of regional projects and initiatives to ensure that they are meeting their objectives and making necessary adjustments when needed.

Regional Research Consortia advance the understanding of regional dynamics, initiating and implementing research projects focused on addressing issues of importance to their respective regions and to the continent in general. They support evidence-based decision-making for the sustainable development of regions and localities.

The Leadership Centre has been established primarily to support the NRF by leading the sustainability science agenda on the African continent, coordinating and developing the requisite research capacity, as well as building networks in support of this research agenda.



The Leadership Centre has articulated a powerful vision of Africa's sustainability science leadership, which will ensure Africa's visibility and voice are represented in the Future Earth's Global Secretariat and accelerate and amplify Africa's contribution towards the pursuit of Future Earth's global mission. The success of the Leadership Centre rests on the establishment of the Regional Nodes, Consortium Partners, the Sustainability Science Clusters and Early Career Researchers, as well as the development of a strong and well-coordinated African Sustainability Science Association. These will be united in the common purpose of advancing Sustainability Science in and for Africa, advocating its priorities at a global level.

Consortium Partners (which are also founding partners) are leading sustainability science research institutes with strong African and international partnerships. They include the University of Witwatersrand Global Change Institute, the University of Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research, and the University of Limpopo SARChI Chair in Ecosystem Health. These partners are actively collaborating on building the sustainability science base of the Leadership Centre and are supporting the Leadership Centre's scientific research networks.

The Sustainability Science Clusters are thematically oriented and function cross-regionally to connect scientists and strengthen sustainability science research capacities, practice and transdisciplinary learning across the continent. The clusters focus on key thematic areas, which are of importance to address sustainability challenges in Africa. In collaboration with the Regional Nodes, the Leadership Centre is currently coordinating a consultative process to determine the priority areas and the processes that will involve major sustainability science stakeholders on the continent and potentially lead to establishing more clusters addressing sustainability challenges on the continent.

The African Sustainability Science Association, which is being constructed, will be inclusive of all major sustainability science stakeholders on the continent. It will promote and build capacities and sustainability science networks and connect the research community while also promoting knowledge production in sustainability fields relevant to African priorities. It will convene and collaborate through the regional nodes as well as Science Clusters.

Leadership Centre location

The Leadership Centre and its administrative staff are located at Rhodes University and the University of Pretoria. These universities serve as co-leads of the Leadership Centre, supported by the Consortium Partners. The Leadership Centre's director and administrator sit at the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at Rhodes University, while the Leadership Centre's deputy director sits at the Future Africa campus of the University of Pretoria.

Leadership Centre funding and operations

The Leadership Centre is funded primarily by the NRF, with 25% of the total operational budget provided as in-kind contributions by the co-leads and co-implementing Consortium Partners. The Leadership Centre is run by the Director and Deputy Director. They report regularly to the Steering Committee, which includes representatives of the following organisations:

- a) The University of Pretoria (FA), (co-chair)
- b) Rhodes University (ELRC, IWR and ISER), (co-chair)



- c) Co-implementers (at Wits University, the University of Limpopo and the University of Fort Hare)
- d) National Research Foundation
- e) Africa Regional Node representatives (once nodes are operational)
- f) Future Earth
- g) Rotational representation of the science cluster leads

In addition, the Steering Committee, whose role is to oversee and make decisions on the Leadership Centre's strategic work, may co-opt individuals with specific expertise, as deemed necessary.

Governance of the Future Earth Africa Hub

To ensure effective governance of the Future Earth Africa Hub as a whole, including accountability of the Leadership Centre's Steering Committee and a Hub Advisory Board that is representative of key sustainability science stakeholders across the continent. The Board convenes annually and is supported by the NRF. It is tasked with facilitating access to existing African and global networks for all elements of the Hub, including the Leadership Centre, Regional Nodes, and science clusters, advising on strategic opportunities and challenges, and supporting fundraising efforts.

Current activities in the Future Earth Africa Hub

The **NRF**, in its leadership role of the FEAH, is currently engaged in the following activities:

- a) Building the capacity of early and mid-career researchers in Africa
- b) Establishment and piloting of new science clusters
- c) Engaging with international partners to promote global collaboration and exchange of ideas
- d) Facilitating Africa Hub's contributions to the Future Earth Annual Report
- e) Collaborating with other Hubs to plan Annual Future Earth General Assembly Meetings and progress recommendations
- f) Coordinating the overall Africa Hub communication and marketing strategy and implementation

The **Leadership Centre**, in its supporting role to the NRF within the Hub, its leadership of sustainability science efforts, the establishment of a science community, and the development of Early Career Researchers, is currently engaged in the following main activities:

- a) A Scoping Exercise, which is a rigorous analysis of the sustainability science Landscape in Africa that provides baseline information on the existing and absent sciences. It identifies key concepts, priority themes, structural support, research networks, types of resources and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) approaches. It will provide a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge, which will be crucial in informing the direction of further sustainability science research in Africa and help stakeholders make informed decisions. A key outcome of the scoping study would be a comprehensive report that summarises



the study's findings, methodology and recommendations, and recommendations will serve as the strategic document to guide the work of the Future Earth Africa Hub.

- b) The development of a framework and processes to establish Sustainability Science Clusters (SSCs) that are semi-autonomous, transdisciplinary communities of practice organised around a particular priority theme. The Clusters promote disciplinary excellence and multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge production in identified priority sustainability thematic fields relevant to Africa. The SSCs are continental in nature and will seek to strengthen the Future Earth Africa Hub's science networks, partnerships and African sustainability science while connecting to relevant international science networks, systems, structures and the Future Earth GRNs.
- c) The development of a MEL framework for the Future Earth community that is a systematic and structured approach to assess and improve the effectiveness and impact of GRN projects, programmes and activities. The framework is also essential for identifying areas for improvement and ensuring that the GRNs achieve their goals. By piloting and implementing a robust MEL framework, Future Earth can better assess its impact, enhance its research activities, and contribute more effectively to addressing sustainability challenges at regional and global levels. The continuous improvement and learning facilitated by the MEL process are key to achieving long-term success and the impact of Future Earth.
- d) Establishment of an African Sustainability Science Association (ASSA) as a network of scientists in Africa that focuses on advancing knowledge and action in areas related to sustainability, environmental conservation, and sustainable development. It will play a crucial role in advancing sustainability science in Africa and addressing the continent's unique sustainability challenges while promoting the well-being of both the environment and society. Its efforts will be essential for achieving a sustainable future for Africa and the global community.

An invitation to get involved

Without leadership and engagement from African researchers, scholars and stakeholders, it would be impossible for Future Earth to help create a sustainable and equitable world for all. The research and knowledge from this continent are critical to transformations to global sustainability.

Interested parties are invited to get involved in building Future Earth's Africa Hub by supporting the projects listed for the NRF and the Leadership Centre in the areas of:

- a) Human Capacity Building (e.g. early career researchers, post-doctoral fellows and PhDs)
- b) Sustainability science innovation development
- c) Research publications
- d) Establishing a Journal
- e) Resource mobilisation
- f) Participation in the identified structures
- g) Convening meetings/round table discussions
- h) Establishing an African Sustainability Science Association



Your strategic ideas, expertise, participation and local knowledge of regional and global sustainability science connections will be key determinants of our success.

To discuss your interests and ideas and to explore possibilities for engagement and support, please contact the Leadership Centre Director and administrator.

Contact Details:

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