

Economic recovery from Covid-19 relies on green economy

By [Janiva Da Silva](#)

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Looking at the socio-economic blow South Africa was dealt by the Covid-19 pandemic - causing job losses and widespread devastation as well as exacerbating environmental issues - governments must ensure economic recovery plans are heavily geared toward the development of the green economy.



Janiva Da Silva, director of programmes at GreenMatter. | Source: Supplied.

Sustainable economic recovery cannot be achieved by simply returning to economic activity in the pre-Covid-19 sense.

Not only will this leave South Africa vulnerable to economic collapse in the event of future unforeseen disruptions (like pandemics), but it also does not serve the environmental goals of the country or the world at large.

Pandemic exacerbates environmental and social challenges

It's no secret that climate change, biodiversity loss, waste management as well as air and water pollution were problems that the world faced long before the onslaught of Covid-19.

A great deal of these challenges is the result of commercial activity such as the manufacturing of goods made from non-recyclable materials, resource inefficiency and a lack of strict policing on the disposal of harmful chemicals used in the production of some of the world's most in-demand goods and services.

However, these challenges became even bigger issues as a result of the pandemic. While carbon emissions and water quality did see slight improvements in 2020 as a result of people being under lockdown and there being no cars on the road, the pandemic left other issues in its wake. For instance, medical waste in the form of discarded PPE gear has become an additional environmental challenge to contend with.

Job losses due to the Covid-19 outbreak have also been a major challenge facing the country, with South Africa's unemployment rate reaching a [record high of 34.4%](#) in the second quarter of 2021 - an increase from 32.6% in the first quarter.



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Green economy has the potential to create job opportunities

Developing South Africa's green economy, with targeted environmental policies put in place by the government, ensures more investment from private and public entities is channelled into environmentally responsible economic activities, infrastructure and assets.

This in turn reduces carbon emissions, promotes resource efficiency and prevents biodiversity loss, all while pursuing economic growth that does not degrade the environment. The green economy also paves the way for more employment opportunities through the creation of green jobs.

Contrary to popular belief, these are not careers reserved for people who are considered activists or "eco-warriors", but those who will advocate for the environment in their specific capacities and professional contexts. This could range from graduates in natural science fields to, for example, a law graduate focusing on environmental concerns.

SA must nurture talent pursue green careers

Creating an enabling environment for these graduates from all walks of life and learning backgrounds is an essential part of building the green economy. As the future custodians of the country's natural heritage, South Africa must ensure it nurtures talent and prepares graduates across sectors to pursue sustainable, green careers.

It is for this reason that initiatives like the GreenMatter Fellowship exist. The programmes such as this are designed to equip graduates of all disciplines with the skills they need to succeed in the workplace, to advocate for the environment and to help sustainably manage our natural resources for the benefit of all South Africans for generations to come.



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The road to economic recovery from the devastating effects of Covid-19 is certainly not an easy one and there is simply no way South Africa can return to economic activity in the traditional sense and expect to make a real recovery, much less a sustainable one. Ensuring the country's economic recovery plan is geared for sustainability and environmental conservation is the key to building a thriving, resilient economy.

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