

# South Africans' understanding and commitment to sustainability

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As South Africa grapples with the environmental consequences of El Nino's arrival in 2023, citizens find themselves confronted with the pressing question of environmental sustainability amidst various socio-economic challenges. In response to these concerns, a study was conducted to understand how South Africans perceive sustainability in their daily lives and surroundings.

Leveraging KLA's YourView platform, a study was conducted, involving individuals from various income brackets, age groups, and genders. A total of 492 respondents participated, providing valuable insights into South Africans' perspectives on sustainability.

## Key findings

The survey results indicate a clear comprehension of sustainability among the respondents, with sustainability being broadly understood as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future'. Furthermore, respondents stressed the importance of long-term maintenance and achieving a delicate 'balance' between the present and the future. Notably, climate change and ecological consciousness were spontaneously mentioned even at this definitional level.

An overwhelming 90% of respondents expressed a high regard for the sustainability of our environment and planet, with a significant majority rating its importance at 8, 9, or 10 on a 10-point scale. This sentiment manifests through individual efforts such as recycling, reducing plastic usage, and a growing inclination towards plant-based diets, facilitated by brands supporting these initiatives.

Despite commendable individual efforts, challenges such as water shortages, electricity issues, incidents of illegal dumping, pollution, and inadequate infrastructure indicate that progress is required for complete environmental protection.

## International best practices

Sweden's unwavering commitment to sustainability serves as an inspiration, having achieved their 2020 target of making 50% of their energy renewable in 2012, a notable eight years ahead of schedule. This achievement is attributed not only to robust renewable energy programmes but also to innovative solutions like food banks, which play a crucial role in waste management through redistribution.

## A call to action

To achieve net-zero sustainability in South Africa, it is essential to address economic inequality and the current energy crises. Brands can play a pivotal role by creating opportunities and platforms for consumers to engage, such as Pikitup's "Seperation@source" initiative, encouraging recyclable materials to be disposed of separately in allocated bins in public spaces, shopping outlets, and Pikitup Garden sites.

## Conclusion



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As the impacts of climate change continue to manifest in daily lives, the importance of establishing a sustainable environment looms larger than ever before. While the survey suggests a commendable level of commitment, it also highlights persistent challenges. Sustainability encompasses environmental, social, and economic dimensions. To create a genuinely sustainable South Africa, concerted collaboration between individuals, businesses, and government is imperative. It is undeniably evident that attaining sustainability demands purposeful and resolute endeavours on a collective scale.

For more information, visit [www.kla.co.za](http://www.kla.co.za).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caroline Maphalala is managing consultant, Insights & Research at KLA.

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