

ENGAGE CONNECT



EngageSDG Newsletter
June 2025

Webinar Reflection

Interregional Dialogue on Participatory Approaches in Higher Education

Held on 20 May 2025, Hosted at Unicaf Zambia & Online (hybrid)

SARUA, in partnership with OBREAL and the EngageSDG project, successfully hosted a vibrant interregional webinar focused on deploying participatory approaches in higher education. This hybrid event brought together institutional leaders, academics, students, and civil society actors from across Africa and Europe to explore how participatory methods can strengthen community engagement and accelerate progress on the SDGs.

The dialogue was structured around four core themes, including the role of universities as catalysts for local innovation, digital ecosystems for collaboration, and strategies for embedding PAs in teaching, learning, and research.



“The experience reaffirmed the power of education rooted in real-world challenges and the importance of a regional vocation. We believe that the university must be necessary — ethically engaged, socially relevant, and territorially grounded”.

– Hector Godoy

Universities must become catalysts for societal change by connecting knowledge with community needs through inclusive and collaborative methods.

Themes and highlights from the webinar

Universities as Catalysts for Local Innovation and Societal Change

- Prof. Andrea Vargiu (Italy) emphasized transdisciplinary co-creation and participatory innovation systems.

- Prof Teerooven Soobaroyen (Aston University, UK), presented the SADC Research Uptake guidelines. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Research Uptake Strategy provides a structured framework towards the practical impact of research. The strategy centers on key elements of stakeholder mapping and engagement, diverse and targeted communication, capacity building, and robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) mechanisms. Stakeholder engagement ensures that research is closely aligned with community and policy needs, increasing the likelihood of implementation. Communication strategies within the framework emphasize presenting research findings in clear, accessible formats tailored to policymakers, practitioners and communities, facilitating better understanding and wider adoption. Capacity building is central to the strategy,



empowering researchers and end-users with necessary skills to conduct impactful research and effectively use its outcomes, whereas the monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes ensures continuous improvement and adaptability in research uptake efforts.

The SADC Research uptake strategy is relevant to the EngageSDG programme, which promotes **Participatory Approaches** within HEIs to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This allows the EngageSDG to enhance stakeholder participation, ensuring research efforts directly respond to local needs and priorities. Effective communication ensures findings are disseminated widely, maximizing impact. Furthermore, the strategy's focus on institutional capacity development aligns with EngageSDG's objectives, equipping HEIs with the essential competencies to conduct meaningful, participatory research. The inclusion of rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes supports EngageSDG's continuous improvement and sustainable contribution to the achievement of the SDGs across the SADC region.



Participatory Approaches for Community Engagement and SDG Implementation

- Prof. Chanita Rukspollmuang (Thailand) shared an institutional model integrating SDGs across curricula.
- Dr. Dudziro Nhengu (Zimbabwe) demonstrated gender-sensitive digital learning models.
- The UFS team revealed gaps and opportunities in SDG engagement across South Africa.

Key takeaways

1. Mainstream community-based learning
2. Incentivize SDG-linked academic programs
3. Build regional consortia to share tools and methods

Building Capacity for Participatory Teaching, Learning & Research

- Héctor Godoy (Colombia) showcased the *Peace & Region* initiative in post-conflict zones.
- UCC (Ireland) team introduced an **SDG Toolkit** enhancing participatory curricula across continents.

Key takeaways

1. Scale up experiential learning models
2. Offer faculty training in participatory pedagogy
3. Encourage interdisciplinary co-teaching



Monitoring & Evaluation for Engagement and Impact

- Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar (India) presented the SCOPE model, focusing on community feedback and impact.
- Dr. Franz Ferdinand Rothe introduced the Integrated Participatory Framework (IPF) to structure engagement strategies.

Key Takeaways:

1. Use inclusive metrics co-developed with communities
2. Adopt IPF and regional benchmarks for cross-country evaluation
3. Foster continuous learning through M&E tools

This dialogue formed part of the First SARUA Conference: Innovating Higher Education for Sustainable Development across the SADC – Innovation for Impact that was held in Lusaka in May 2025.

It also contributes to preparations for the **Third Interregional Dialogue on Education and Development** in **Bogotá, Colombia** (November 2025), continuing global cooperation for sustainable development in higher education

"Complexity theory shows that great changes can emerge from small actions. Change involves a belief in the possible, even the 'impossible.' Moreover, social innovators don't follow a linear pathway of change... Developmental evaluation accepts such turbulence as the way the world of social innovation unfolds."

— Michael Quinn Patton, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*

Some moments from the event





Project Management Committee (PMC) Meeting

Strengthening Strategic Alignment

Held on 19 May 2025, Hosted at Unicaf Zambia & Online (hybrid)

Ahead of the interregional webinar, the EngageSDG consortium hosted its PMC meeting in Lusaka. Bringing together core project stakeholders in a hybrid format, the meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on progress, share work package updates, and ensure alignment across regional activities. The PMC concluded to host a planning meeting on 4 June about the pilot projects.

Project Management Committee (PMC) Special Planning Meeting 4 June with full consortium

As part of its mission to strengthen the capacity of SADC universities in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), EngageSDG is launching a series of pilot projects grounded in participatory approaches (PAs).

The pilot projects are described in **Deliverable 5.1: Integrated report on local PAs is developed, based on experiences and insights of SADC partner universities in implementing their pilot projects**. These pilots are designed to address local challenges through inclusive, community-engaged methods of knowledge co-production.



Key features of the pilot projects

Context-driven design, grounded in each university's experience with PAs.

- Clear problem statements linked to community challenges.
- Specific, measurable objectives aligned with one SDG.
- Structured timelines and milestones, aligned with WP5.

- 
- Evaluation plans to refine the Integrated Participatory Framework (IPF)
See: <https://engagesdg.softtr.app/approaches-directory>
 - Sustainability strategies to institutionalise PA practices.

Implementation teams

Each pilot project will be implemented by a multidisciplinary team consisting of at least 8 university staff members and 20 students. These teams will be supported by EU university partners offering expertise and guidance throughout the process.

Ethics and community involvement

Pilot projects will ensure rigorous ethical standards and inclusive community engagement, involving local stakeholders such as NGOs, municipalities, and civil society organisations as co-creators in the process. Although initial Ethics clearance was obtained by North-West University, each university will be required to apply for additional clearance based on their specific case study.

Looking ahead

This initiative marks a significant step toward embedding participatory research into the core operations of SADC universities, reinforcing their role as agents of social transformation across the region.

Request from René:
Please upload final deliverable documents into
MSTEAMS folder
[\(See link\)](#)



Stay Connected

EngageSDG continues to build bridges across continents, fostering inclusive, transformative education models. Let's continue to reimagine higher education for a just, sustainable future!

Visit <https://engagesdg.sarua.africa/> for updates

Follow #EngageSDG

Work Package Members

WP1: René Pellissier, Elizabeth Colucci, Kibrome Mekonnen, Sisipho Zweni

WP2: Beatrix Bouwman, Lesley Wood, Maribe Mamabolo, Sanjeev Chandradeo Bokhoree, Wilma S Nchito, Ackim Zulu, Liberty Mweemba, Jackson Phiri, Nuria Lorenzo, Maria Assumpta Aneas, Alejandra Montane Lopez, Leo Van Audenhove

WP3: José Frantz, Althea George, Pearl Erasmus, Lumka Magidigidi-Mathiso, Leo Van Audenhove, Franz-Ferdinand Rothe, Toshima Makoondlall-Chadee, Leo Van Audenhove

WP4: Abri Hoffman, Jackson Phiri, Ackim Zulu, Ramasamy Coolen, Preeya Vijayalakshmee Ramasamy Coolen, Liberty Mweemba

WP5: Alessandra Bonoli, Sara Pennellini, Filippo Sartor, Krishnee Adnarian Appadoo, Dayawantee Goburdhun, Mahendra Gooroochurn, Toshima Makoondlall-Chadee, Preeya Vijaya Ramasamy Coolen, Saviour Chibeti, Chipampe Lombe, Bowa Kasonde, Ackim Zulu, Liberty Mweemba

WP6: Sarah Thelen, Cliona Maher, Dean Venables, Vijaya Ramasamy Coolen, Toshima Makoondlall-Chadee, Sanjeev Bokhoree, Nuria Lorenzo, Maria Assumpta Aneas, Wilma S Nchito, Lesley Wood

WP7: René Pellissier, Preeya Vijayalakshmee Ramasamy Coolen, Toshima Makoondlall-Chadee

Thank you to everyone for your hard work and contributions to the project. Let's continue to collaborate effectively and achieve our goals together.

Disclaimer: Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union (EU) or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the EACEA can be held responsible for them.