



# UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN **SUSTAINABILITY** AND THE **SDGS 2024**





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Cover: The UCT Graduate School of Business Solution Space at Philippi Village brings the university's resources directly to the communities of Philippi, Nyanga, Gugulethu, Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha. The painted towers, originally part of a cement factory, and the configuration of the Solution Space are designed to reimagine the area as a hub of innovation and entrepreneurship. Photo: Lerato Maduna





# Africa's leadership in shaping a sustainable tomorrow

## Professor Mosa Moshabela Vice-Chancellor

At the University of Cape Town (UCT), sustainability is not an auxiliary pursuit. It defines how we teach, research, innovate and engage with our communities. Our commitment to sustainability has become a moral, intellectual and institutional imperative: one that binds our purpose to the future we must collectively secure.

Universities are uniquely placed to model and accelerate the transitions our world urgently needs – social, economic, environmental and technological. Our position of influence enables us to be knowledge-producers, employers, innovators and neighbours embedded in communities that mirror our context.

Yet, as a university in Africa, UCT's mandate carries a unique responsibility. The global sustainability agenda cannot succeed without Africa's participation and leadership. This is why aligning with Africa's development priorities and the African Union's Agenda 2063 is crucial.

From climate change and biodiversity loss to inequality, unemployment and public health crises, our continent sits at the intersection of the world's significant threats – and its greatest possibilities. As we seek to model a university of the future, we rely on our sustainability strategy foundational not

only in greening our campuses and operations or aligning with global goals. But in ensuring that the continent's knowledge, experience and innovation shape the solutions the world requires.

Our students are the heartbeat of this vision and we must invest in their leadership which the world desperately needs. They are the conscience of our campus and the architects of the future we aspire to build. Through their activism, research and empathy they continuously challenge us to live up to our values and to act with courage and kindness. They remind us that sustainability is not only about preserving the planet but also about protecting dignity, advancing equity and ensuring that no one is left behind. It is about doing more and doing better – building the world we want to live in.

Partnership and collaboration remain the foundation of how UCT pursues sustainability – within our institution, across sectors and beyond borders. Whether through local alliances with our peer universities or global collaborations across disciplines and sectors, we know that no institution can achieve sustainability in isolation. Our networks across South Africa and the continent reflect a shared purpose: to amplify Africa's intellectual footprint and strengthen its voice on the global



stage. These partnerships embody ubuntu: shared humanity and shared responsibility. The more we partner, the more we unlock the potential for African science, innovation and policy to contribute innovative and ethical solutions of global relevance. Nowhere is this more urgent than in the age of artificial intelligence. As AI reshapes the way knowledge is produced, shared and governed, the continent must not be a consumer of technology developed elsewhere – we must be co-creators of its ethical and social architecture. UCT is committed to ensuring that African perspectives and values

inform the evolution of AI, data governance and the innovation systems that shape our collective future.

This sustainability report reflects the collective effort of our staff, students and partners. At UCT we are committed to the aspiration that sustainability be both a vision and a practice: an ongoing commitment to balance excellence with empathy, growth with responsibility, and innovation with justice. In this, every member of our community has a role to play – as scholar, citizen, and custodian of tomorrow.



# Leading research for sustainable impact in Africa

## Professor Jeff Murugan, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation

At UCT, we're continuously exploring innovative ways to weave sustainability into the fabric of our collaborations, research, teaching and learning. As Africa's leading university, we recognise that sustainability is both a scientific and moral imperative, essential to safeguarding the future of our planet, its people and the natural systems that sustain us all.

The world keeps changing in ways that compel universities to grapple with their purpose and location in society if they are to continue driving societal change.

### Connecting global goals to African priorities

With the 2030 horizon for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaching, momentum toward achieving these goals is slowing amid competing global crises. This reality stresses the need for action and draws attention to why the SDGs and the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 are not parallel ambitions but are deeply interconnected blueprints for the same shared future. Sustainability challenges are, at their core, questions of complexity, structure and scale. Addressing them demands nothing less than transdisciplinary research and multilateral

collaboration necessary to secure a sustainable future and the just development Africa and the world need.

UCT's commitment to accelerating the pace and scale of delivering on the AU goals and SDGs is clearly demonstrated by the multi- and transdisciplinary academic enquiry our researchers are engaged in. Doing so in ways that unearth novel academic and institutional tools of knowledge production. Importantly, leveraging the opportunities these bring.

In 2024, UCT's Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM) became the first academic research institution in South Africa and across Africa to pursue the My Green Lab Certification. Considered the international gold standard for laboratory sustainability good practices, this certificate confirms the promotion of responsible research practices and reducing the carbon footprint of labs.

As part of UCT's mission to becoming a resource-efficient campus, the Centre for Bioprocess Engineering Research (CeBER) developed a novel project that breaks down food waste into an energy source. The purpose of this system is to use circular design thinking to produce renewable energy and bio-based products using food waste, and to develop

and implement a campus-wide, integrated sustainable food waste management system. While rankings are a just one of the measures of the impact of our work, UCT's emergence in the top 2.5% of universities worldwide in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Sustainability Rankings 2025 reflects our community's deep and unwavering commitment to tackling the sustainability challenges of our time.

### Collaborations as engines of change

We also recognise that transformative solutions emerge through partnership. Our collaborations across academia, civil society, government, industry and the community in which we are embedded ensure that our research continues to have real-world impact.

Student voices and action are central to this mission. Through initiatives like Khusela Ikamva, a living lab project where sustainability solutions are designed and tested on our campuses, students engaged in shaping the sustainability culture of our university. Initiatives such as the "Flush and go or flush and grow" display promote water and environmental sustainability awareness across our campuses, encouraging students to participate in shaping a water-sensitive campus culture and behaviour.

This edition of the 'UCT Sustainability and the SDGs' report is our way of sharing these efforts while accounting to the university community and to society at large. In the pages that follow, you will find stories that capture how UCT's exceptionally talented researchers, students, academic and professional administrative support staff, and partners are shaping a more sustainable and equitable future.

While this report covers a large swathe of research, innovation and knowledge translation at UCT, we recognise that no single discipline holds the key to solving complex



global problems. It is the precision and rigour of the natural and physical sciences, combined with the social compass and empathy of the humanities and social sciences, that will bring meaningful change.



# Continuing the journey towards a sustainable, net zero campus

## Manfred Braune, Director: Environmental Sustainability

The university continued its efforts in 2024 towards becoming more environmentally sustainable, aligned with its Vision 2030. Guided by the Environmental Sustainability Strategy, this effort ultimately aims to shepherd the university towards becoming a net zero carbon, water and waste-to-landfill campus by 2050. While positive progress has been made in 2024, substantial investments in sustainability initiatives will be required in the next few years to meet these long terms goals.

UCT remains a leader amongst South African universities in terms of public reporting on its carbon footprint, being only one of a handful of universities in the country to measure and report publicly on its annual carbon footprint. The most important finding of the report is the 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions under scope 1 and 2 compared to the 2019 baseline. Substantial further investment in various initiatives over the next 15-to-20 years will be required for UCT to meet its long-term carbon footprint objectives.

UCT experienced much lower levels of load shedding in 2024. Despite this, the university continued to work on some of its large back-up power projects such as installing battery, generator and solar assets at the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), for which a tender was awarded and contractor appointed. This project will see the entire FHS campus backed up by one central battery system, that will also include a diesel generator and solar power to support the battery system.

The university continued with its solar PV rooftop installation project in 2024, which saw the installation nearing completion at the Baxter Theatre, the Graduate School of Business (GSB) and the Meulenhof administration building, totalling close to 300kW.

In December 2024, UCT issued a tender that would see the university wheel most of its energy supply for the main and health sciences campuses from wind and solar energy

farms around the country. The tender was adjudicated in early 2025 but would likely only see such renewable energy being made available in late 2026 or early 2027. Renewable energy wheeling is an important component of UCT's environmental sustainability and financial sustainability strategy, as it will allow the university to purchase electricity from Independent Power Producers (IPPs), that could save the university millions of rands annually and tons of carbon emissions per year.

UCT's Hasso Plattner d-school Afrika (d-school Afrika) achieved a 6-Star Green Star As Built rating from the Green Building Council South Africa (GBCSA) The d-school Afrika is the first academic building in South Africa to achieve this prestigious rating for new buildings, having received a 6-Star Green Star Design rating in 2023, which was another first in the country. While no new buildings were built in 2024, there are several that are in their planning stages, all targeting green building certification, including the Nelson Mandela Memorial Centre & Public School of Governance on upper campus, the Arise Building on the health sciences campus, the refurbished Library and the Green Precinct Water Recycling Facility which is targeting a 4-Star Green Star certification and several net zero ratings from the GBCSA.

UCT students won prizes in the top three places of both streams of the Greenovate competition (Engineering and Property & Construction Management), which is a wonderful demonstration of students leading with their honours research projects on the topic of sustainability.

The vice-chancellor's Khusela Ikamva Sustainable Campus project continued to make positive progress in 2024, with constructive research collaborations continuing with key operational staff on campus, focused on energy,



water, waste and more sustainable behaviours. The project has also had a significant impact on two recently appointed new contractors for Integrated Waste Management and for Integrated Pest Management – which is a first for any academic campus in the country.



1
NO POVERTY


2
ZERO HUNGER


3
GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING


4
QUALITY EDUCATION


1
High standard of living, quality of life & well being for all


2
Well-educated citizens & skills revolution under pinned by science, technology & innovation


3
Healthy & well-nourished citizens


4
Transformed economies & job creation


5
Modern agriculture for increased productivity & production


5
GENDER EQUALITY


6
CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION


7
AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY


8
DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH


6
Blue/ocean economy for accelerated economic growth


7
Environmentally sustainable & climate resilient economies & communities


8
United Africa (Federal or Confederate)


9
Established key continental financial & monetary institutions


10
World-class infrastructure criss-crosses Africa


9
INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE


10
REDUCED INEQUALITIES


11
SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES


12
RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION


11
Democratic values, practices, universal principles of human rights, justice & the rule of law entrenched


12
Capable institutions & transformative leadership in place


13
Peace, security & stability is preserved


14
A stable & peaceful Africa


15
A fully functional & operational African peace & security architecture


13
CLIMATE ACTION


14
LIFE BELOW WATER


15
LIFE ON LAND


16
PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS


17
PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS


16
African cultural renaissance is pre-eminent


17
Full gender equality in all spheres of life


18
Engaged & empowered youth & children


19
Africa as a major partner in global affairs & peaceful co-existence


20
Africa takes full responsibility for financing her development Goals






# SDG 1 NO POVERTY

In a country marked by deep inequality, access to higher education remains one of the strongest paths out of poverty. UCT recognises its role in breaking these barriers by supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and generating knowledge that informs more equitable social policies.

## Institutional initiatives

### Removing financial barriers to accessing higher education

For many South African students, the greatest obstacle to higher education is financial. UCT is committed to breaking down these barriers through a range of funding and support mechanisms that ensure deserving students are not excluded for lack of financial means.

The Department of Student Affairs (DSA) provides comprehensive guidance through its Student Financial Aid Office, helping students navigate bursary and loan opportunities, including the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). UCT offers Gap Funding for those who do not meet NSFAS eligibility criteria but still require assistance, as well as monthly subsistence vouchers for postgraduates affected by reductions in state support.

The UCT Postgraduate Funding Office disbursed R371.3 million in 2024 to 2 786 of this cohort through more than 4 300 scholarships, including 762 international and refugee students. These funds, which covered tuition, accommodation, meals and travel, represent a 3.4% increase from 2023, reflecting UCT's ongoing commitment to widening access and promoting success.

Through these initiatives, UCT continues to create pathways for students from all backgrounds to achieve their academic goals and become economically empowered graduates who can help drive South Africa's development.

## Community engagement

### UCT physios pay it forward to Hanover Park community

Staff and students from the Division of Physiotherapy donated their time and expertise, as well as several pots of nutritious food in an initiative to promote wellness and reduce health inequities. This was to the community of Hanover Park, an area in Cape Town known for its high rates of violence and poverty. The participation of the UCT team, led by the department's senior clinical educator, Fahmida Harris, aligned with the university's commitment to prioritising social responsibility activities to help address South Africa's development challenges.

### Building capacity and mobilising partnerships for social impact

The Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship is a specialised academic initiative housed at UCT's Graduate School of Business. It focuses explicitly on advancing social innovation and entrepreneurship.

“ The aim is to share knowledge that will benefit society by fostering civic literacy in students, while providing them with further learning and skills. ”

— Fahmida Harris, senior clinical educator, Department of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences.



Physiotherapy team highlighting the benefits of social responsiveness. From left: Naa-ielah Pandey, Mariam Maged, Rukshaar Samodien, Fahmida Harris, Lindokuhle Mashinini, Olwethu Gumede and Connor Davids.

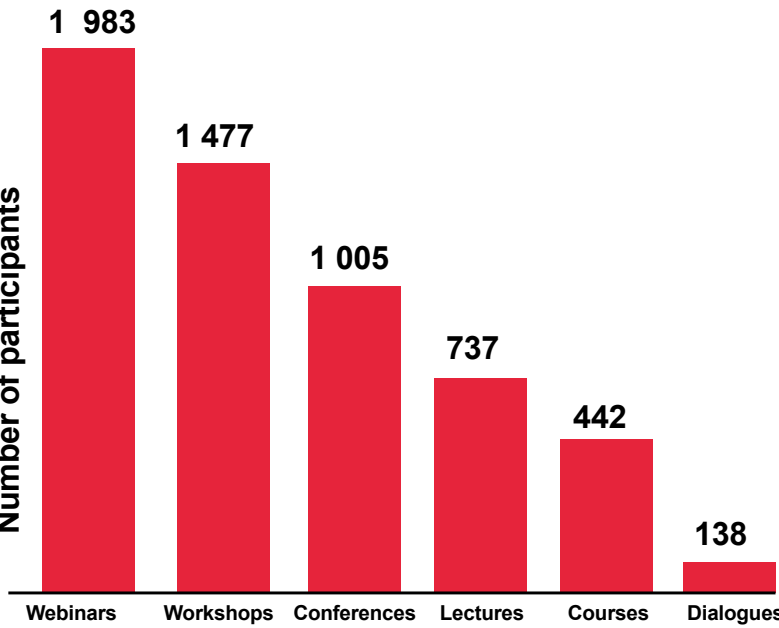




Part of Bertha Centre’s Youth Innovation portfolio is the Changemakers programme. This youth development programme is working to capacitate young people with an entrepreneurial mindset to tackle complex social challenges and drive systemic impact.

Between 2022 and 2024 the Bertha Centre supported 5 782 changemakers through six types of capacity-building interventions.

### Capacity-Building Interventions (2022-2024)



“ By providing the tools and opportunities needed to drive systemic impact, we continue to empower both emerging and established changemakers to create lasting social change. ”

— Dr Solange Rosa, Bertha Centre director.

### Research and Innovation

#### Funding elder care in South Africa

The country’s elderly people are one of the most vulnerable groups, with limited financial means and inadequate access to basic services to meet their often-high needs. The Department of Sociology at UCT undertook a research project, the Family Caregiving of Older Persons in Southern Africa, to understand how funding for elder care is structured and the related experiences of older persons, caregivers and care workers. The work found that spending by the national Department of Social Development is not sufficient to meet the needs of this population.

This research was conducted as part of a trans-disciplinary team which included members from government, civil society and non-profit organisations that serve older people and academia. This allowed broad reaching and impactful research able to guide policymakers on what is required to address the challenges and minimise funding gaps in service provision for South Africa’s vulnerable elderly population.

#### Advocating for increased child support grant to eliminate child poverty

UCT’s Children’s Institute (CI) was commissioned by South Africa’s national Department of Social Development to understand the state of child poverty in the country. The report, *Reducing Child Poverty: A review of child poverty and the value of the child support grant (2024)*, found around eight million young children in the country are not accessing enough nutritious food to aid their development due to living in economically disadvantaged homes.

The report highlights how many families rely on the child support grant to survive. It argues that increasing this grant to meet the current food poverty line would mean a boost from R530 to R760, at a minimum. This would go a long way towards combatting food poverty for South Africa’s children.

Recognising the financial strain on the government, the CI recommended a phased approach to raising the grant with a focus on pre-school aged children as a start. The adjustment will substantially reduce child poverty within the next five years, yielding positive impacts on many other areas of child wellbeing including nutrition, health and education.

“ This reform is a key mechanism to reduce child poverty, advance the realisation of children’s rights and will contribute to long-term human development outcomes and economic growth. ”

— Paula Proudlock, senior researcher at the CI.







# SDG 2 ZERO HUNGER

Food insecurity remains one of the most pressing challenges in South Africa, affecting not only households across the country but also thousands of university students striving to complete their studies. At UCT, food relief is recognised as essential to student success and social justice.



“ At UCT we understand the multidimensional nature of poverty and inequality in our society. So, we work very hard to remove the barriers students face during their journey towards becoming successful graduates who will in time become economically productive members of our society. ”

— Vhugala Nthakheni, DSA deputy director for Student Life and Student Governance.

## Institutional initiatives

### Ending hunger on campus

Thousands of students in South Africa go to bed hungry. Buying food and toiletries is a less critical priority when held against the high costs of tuition and accommodation. As part of its commitment to tackle student food insecurity and hunger, UCT’s Department of Student Affairs (DSA) established the Food and Sovereignty Programme to assist students with one meal a day in 2018.

Over the years, the programme has expanded its scope and today provides monthly grocery packs, which contain non-perishable food items, as well as toiletry packs every second month. The programme assists both unfunded and underfunded students, and in 2024, distributed close to 10 000 grocery packs.



## Community engagement

### Strengthening agroecology and food security in Southern Africa

The Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI), co-founded by UCT’s DSI/NRF SARCHI Chair in Environmental and Social Dimensions of the Bio-economy, Professor Rachel Wynberg, is a regional partnership of 15 organisations dedicated to securing food sovereignty across Southern Africa.

Since 2019, SKI has reached more than 80 000 smallholder farmers in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. This work supports farmer-led seed systems and agroecological practices that enhance food security and biodiversity in the face of climate challenges such as droughts and floods.

UCT research underpins SKI’s work by documenting community seedbanks, local seed systems, changing foodways and the social dimensions of agricultural innovation. This evidence base informs the initiative’s, advocacy and training, ensuring that farmer knowledge and experience drive sustainable agricultural transformation.

Building on this foundation, UCT has taken the lead in forming the South African Agroecology Network (SA-AEKN) – an interdisciplinary alliance of educators, researchers, farmers and civil society groups working to embed agroecology into agricultural learning, research and practice. The network has a sister initiative in Zimbabwe, with expansion to Malawi and Zambia underway. Collectively, these country networks are evolving into a robust regional platform to share lessons, influence agricultural curricula, and advocate for policies that recognise and scale agroecological farming.





These initiatives also link to the European Union-funded Research for Agroecology Network Southern Africa (RAENS), coordinated by UCT and the SADC [Southern African Development Community] Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development. Together, they are building a regional movement for regenerative, equitable and climate-resilient food systems.



## Research and Innovation

### Understanding urban food systems

Around a quarter of a million households in Cape Town face hunger and limited dietary diversity, relying heavily on informal traders and convenience foods instead of fresh produce. This according to a 2024 study by UCT’s African Centre for Cities’ (ACC) Urban Food System Research Cluster, in their *State of the City Food System Report*.

The report showed that while nutritious food is widely available in Cape Town, many residents struggle to access it due to high transport costs, poor infrastructure and spatial inequality. The findings also noted a need for local governments to become more actively engaged in supporting urban food systems in the areas they govern.

This work forms part of a broader effort to understand how cities in Africa can better govern food systems to ensure equitable access for all. By highlighting the link between urban planning, poverty, and food security, this research provides crucial evidence to guide policy and promote sustainable, inclusive urban food systems across South Africa.

### Working to develop drought-resistant crops

As climate patterns become more erratic and extreme drought events more frequent, conventional crops face increasing failure, threatening food systems worldwide. Professor Jill Farrant, of UCT’s Department of Molecular and Cell Biology, is working to decipher the unique molecular mechanisms that allow resurrection plants to survive near-complete dehydration and recover fully.

The end goal is to provide a critical biological blueprint. By translating these insights into staple crops, her work aims to

engineer plants that can withstand prolonged water scarcity, safeguarding agricultural productivity. This scientific pursuit is a vital strategy to ensure a stable food supply for a growing global population confronting a hotter, drier future.

Prof Jill Farrant has studied how resurrection plants can survive in the face of extreme water loss, aiming to introduce these characteristics into smart crops that will feed Africa in the face of climate change and increasing and extended drought. Image by Michael Hammond





# SDG 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

As a leading institution on the African continent, UCT plays a pivotal role in advancing health and wellbeing – both within its community and across the region. UCT is recognised globally for its excellence in health sciences research, particularly in infectious diseases and environmental health. Through extensive partnerships and clinical exchange programmes spanning Africa and the world, the university contributes to medical breakthroughs and trains the next generation of healthcare leaders equipping them to meet global health challenges.

## Institutional initiatives

### Supporting holistic staff health and wellness

UCT’s commitment to staff wellbeing is reflected in its Organisational Health framework, which integrates Employee Assistance Services (EAS), counselling support

and occupational health services through the Human Resources (HR) Remuneration & Benefits division. The university partners with external providers – such as Lyra Wellbeing and the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) – to offer confidential, around-the-clock counselling access for employees and immediate family

members. HR continuously works to strengthen access to these services, especially under challenging circumstances (e.g. during the COVID-19 pandemic) by facilitating remote counselling, extending capacity and publicising options via the HR portal. Staff are also encouraged to use wellness resources through medical aid benefits,

health screenings and referrals supported by occupational health. This integrated approach ensures that UCT staff are not only supported when facing personal or mental health challenges, but also benefit from preventative and occupational health practices.

### Supporting student health and wellness

UCT’s Student Wellness Service (SWS), managed by the Department of Student Affairs, provides comprehensive, student-centred primary healthcare across all campuses through its main clinic and satellite facilities. SWS delivers integrated medical and counselling services aimed at promoting holistic wellbeing and supporting students to thrive academically and personally. Its multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals offers prevention, early detection, and treatment of both physical and mental health conditions while promoting healthy lifestyles and wellbeing awareness.

### Mental health support

In 2024, SWS expanded its counselling services, appointing additional counsellors to meet growing demand. The counselling team includes psychologists, social workers, and a wellness coach, ensuring a holistic approach to psychosocial support. Complementing this, the Wellness Buddy Programme – a peer-led mental health initiative – provides early intervention, referral and community-based support to students who may be hesitant to seek professional help.







Dedicated medical service

The Medical Service offers accessible clinical care through both in-person and virtual consultations, including strong emphasis on sexual and reproductive health. An on-campus pharmacy enhances access to prescribed medicines, supports chronic condition management and ensures continuity of care through close integration with the psychiatric service.

Health promotion and wellness education

SWSalso drives health promotion and wellness education, running

digital campaigns and outreach activities to build awareness around mental health, nutrition and disease prevention.

Indigenous health advisory service

In a pioneering step toward culturally inclusive healthcare, SWS has introduced an Indigenous Health Advisory Service, which incorporates traditional healing practices and psychospiritual counselling in collaboration with a registered traditional health practitioner. This pilot reflects UCT’s commitment to culturally responsive, equitable and student-centred health services.

Through these comprehensive initiatives, SWS plays a central role in advancing UCT’s vision of a healthy, resilient and inclusive university community.

Demand for Counselling Services (2018 - 2024)

Academic Year	Counselling Sessions
2024	11 654
2023	10 575
2022	12 234
2021	13 200
2020	10 877
2019	8 200
2018	5 200

Community engagement

Student outreach for health and wellbeing

As part of UCT’s ethos to instil a sense of community and civic responsibility in its students, the university is home to a student-led, non-profit organisation, Students’ Health and Welfare Centres Organisation (SHAWCO).

SHAWCO is a long-standing branch of the organisation, comprised of a dedicated team of volunteer students and

1 816
The number of students reached by the nine face-to-face wellness events hosted by SWS.

3 195
Clinician-conducted health screenings.

5 574
Students reached by the 32 sessions delivered by the Health Promotion Talks and Workshops Initiative in 2024.

481
The number of students vaccinated through the Hepatitis B vaccination campaign.

7 168
Medical consultations conducted through satellite medical clinics.

1 117
Sexual and reproductive health consultations conducted.

3 370
Prescriptions dispensed by the SWS pharmacy.

25
Students supported through the Indigenous Health Advisory Service Pilot Project.







professionals committed to making quality healthcare accessible to communities in Cape Town that are facing economic hardships. They operate a range of initiatives and programmes including mobile clinics which offer free healthcare services, including general medical consultations, health promotion and maternal and child health support.

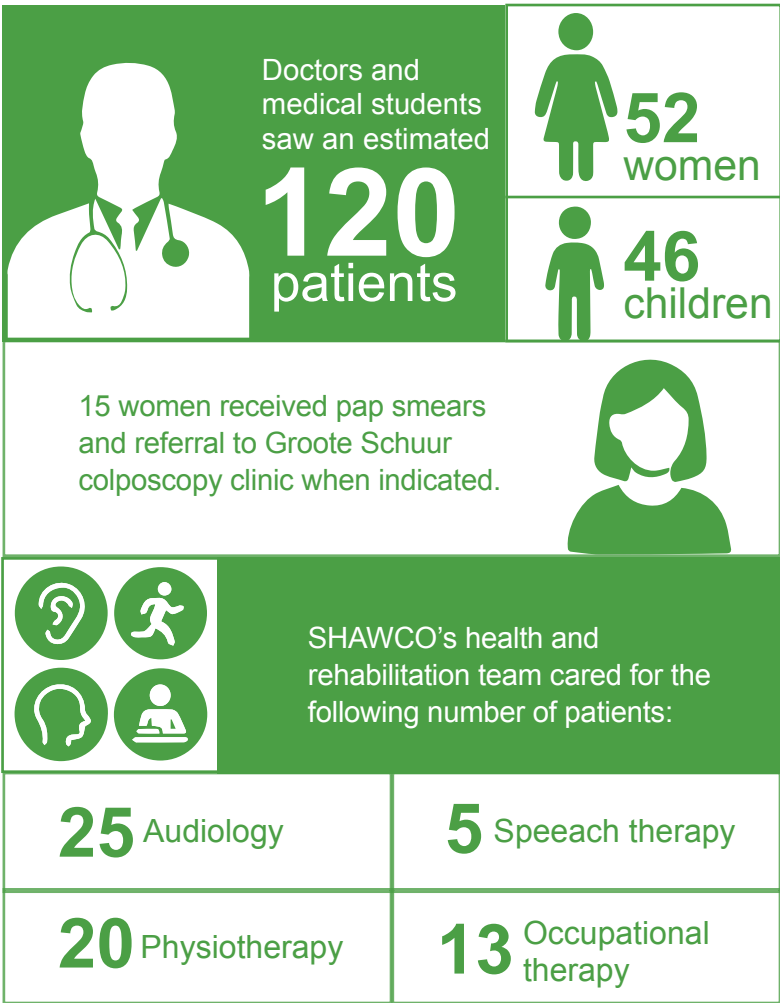
SHAWCO hosts annual Family Health Days in collaboration with Rotary Hout Bay, striving to improve healthcare access to communities of Imizamo Yethu and Hangberg, who live in extreme poverty. In 2024, this day was hosted at the Hangberg Sentinel Primary School in Hout Bay and was held in collaboration with the University of the Western Cape’s Dentistry Department, Department of Health TB/HIV carers and Vida E Caffé.

## Research and Innovation

### Large scale HIV trial to tackle high mortality rate in Africa

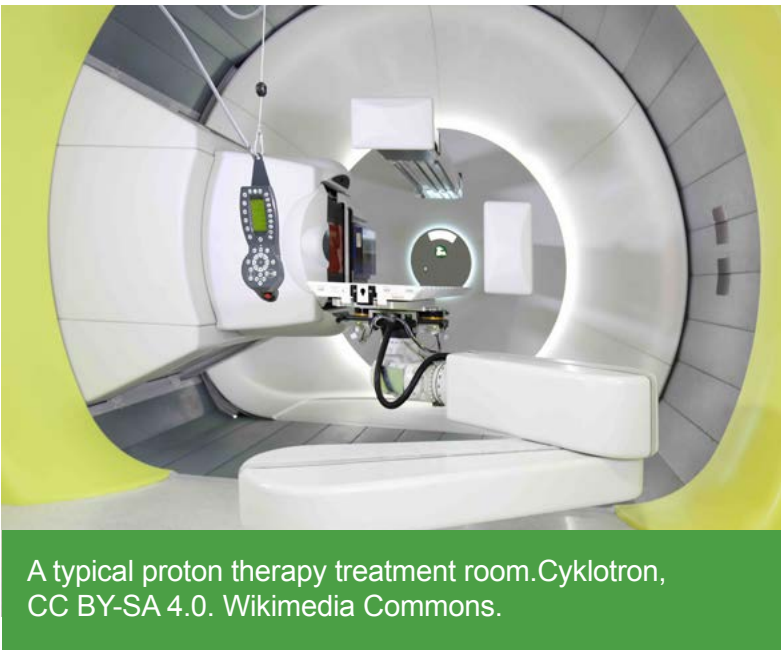
The introduction of anti-retroviral treatment (ART) for HIV infections in Africa has reduced the mortality rate from HIV by about 50% on the continent. Despite this incredible positive

#### Family Health Day 2024 in numbers



impact, HIV remains among the top five causes of mortality in Africa, with an estimated 460 000 deaths annually. The high mortality is due to the number of people who only access treatment when the virus has reached an advanced stage, or whose treatment regimen is interrupted. The Reducing Mortality in Adults with Advanced HIV Disease (REVIVE) trial, led by UCT and the Population Health Research Institute (PHRI) in Canada, is a large randomised controlled trial aimed at testing whether a cost-effective antibiotic intervention can increase survival in patients with advanced HIV.

The REVIVE trial seeks to reduce death in patients with advanced HIV by pre-emptively treating them for serious bacterial infections with a broad-spectrum antibiotic called azithromycin.



A typical proton therapy treatment room.Cyklotron, CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

#### UCT Proton Therapy Initiative launched

In 2024 UCT established the first proton therapy centre on the continent to provide world-class treatment for children with cancer and contribute to ground-breaking research in radiation oncology.

Proton therapy is a highly advanced form of radiation therapy that uses a beam of energetic protons to precisely target tumours while minimising damage to surrounding healthy tissue. This approach is particularly effective for paediatric cancer patients, significantly reducing long-term side effects and the risk of secondary malignancies.

Currently, all 136 operational proton therapy centres worldwide are in the northern hemisphere, with only two under construction in the southern hemisphere; in Argentina and Australia. The planned centre in Cape Town will be the first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa and will serve as a vital resource for both treatment and research on the continent.

“ What makes the REVIVE trial significant is the size of it. With 8 000 participants across 14 African countries, we will be able to definitively answer the question of whether the provision of the antibiotic can reduce mortality rates. ”

— Associate Professor Sean Wasserman, scientific lead of REVIVE, based at the Division of Infectious Diseases and HIV Medicine in the Department of Medicine.



# SDG 4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Education has the power to transform lives and societies. UCT is deeply committed to advancing equitable, inclusive and high-quality education, both on campus and across South Africa’s wider learning landscape. Ranked in the top 100 universities worldwide for Education Studies in the 2024 Times Higher Education Subject Rankings, UCT continues to lead innovation in teaching, curriculum renewal and education research.

## Institutional initiatives

### Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching

CILT is committed to building a higher education environment that fosters transformative and reflexive practices in teaching and learning. Their role is to respond to challenges in this space at UCT and the and the broader higher education environment through learner-centred pedagogic practices. CILT hosts an annual teaching and learning conference which provides an opportunity for interested members of the UCT community to come together to focus exclusively on this field.

### Curriculum Renewal and Teaching Innovation at UCT

Themed “*Curriculum: New Visions and Future Directions*”, CILT’s 2024 conference highlighted UCT’s commitment to reimagining teaching and assessment practices to advance

UCT’s Education Studies field ranked 91st in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings by subject.

equity, inclusion and social justice in higher education. Across faculties, curriculum renewal initiatives reshape how students engage with knowledge, embedding decolonial and indigenous perspectives and exploring the educational potential of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

## Community engagement

### Improving university access and success

The 100UP programme, launched in 2011 by UCT’s Schools Development Unit (SDU), aims to address demographic under-representation in higher education. It targets academically promising learners from disadvantaged backgrounds – primarily from Khayelitsha, a region of Cape Town marked by poverty and violence – and prepares them over three years for university access. Each year, five learners from 20 Khayelitsha high schools are selected and supported through academic coaching and personal development by UCT staff and students. Over time, the programme expanded to include learners from other underserved communities.

Despite some challenges due to funding restraints, the programme achieved outstanding results in 2024:

- 149 All learners enrolled in the programme passed the 2024 National Senior Certificate exams.
- 148 Achieved Bachelor passes –qualifying for university.
- 129 The number of students who had secured placements in tertiary institutions across South Africa by February 2025.
- 47 Students enrolled at UCT, with the rest placed nationwide.
- 9 Learners were honoured by the Western Cape Education Department.

The initiative is built on the principle that access to opportunity must be made more equitable. It offers a holistic approach, focusing not only on academic readiness but also on building learners’ intellectual, social and cultural capital. The 100UP+ programme provides ongoing support to first-year students at UCT, helping them adjust both academically and personally. It includes regular check-ins, counselling, referrals and peer mentoring. In 2024, activities included an orientation session, two career workshops and expanded psychosocial and mentoring support. Together, 100UP and 100UP+ foster a supportive and empowering environment that improves access to and success in higher education for disadvantaged students.



### Growing the next tier of researchers to impact health and education outcomes

The South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative (SATVI) based at the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular





## 100UP Project objective

**Broadening access to Higher Education for learners from underserved communities in the Western Cape**



**PROJECT IMPACT**  
Total learners reached:  
**4 125**



**MATRIC COMPLETION**  
Total Matriculants:  
**2 137**



**UNIVERSITY PLACEMENT**  
UCT (46%)    OTHER HEIs (54%)  
**839            995**



**GENDER BREAKDOWN**  
Males:            Females:  
**1 718            2 407**



**BACHELOR PASSES**  
Total:            Success rate:  
**1 939            91%**



**HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS**  
Entered HEIs:    Access rate:  
**1 834            86%**

Medicine (IDM) established a Youth Research Advisory Group in Worcester. This aims to introduce young people to science, consult with them on adolescent-focused research, and support them to identify, develop and conduct research to participate in the ESCOM Expo for Young Scientists and other youth research initiatives.

Projects included experiments to test various homemade mask filtration systems and mentoring a student on AI-based TB diagnosis from X-rays. Primary school learners conducted research comparing water quality across three schools and tested drying rates of different T-shirt colours.

In July 2024, two youth delegates presented at the International Children's Advisory Network's Advocacy and Research Summit, held in Bari, Italy.

## Research and Innovation

### Tackling the education challenges of a multilingual society

As a country with 12 official languages, South Africa's multilingualism is at the core of the multiculturalism the nation prides itself on. But multilingualism is a significant challenge for the many children who cannot complete their schooling in their mother tongue.

When they reach Grade 4, African language-speaking learners are forced to switch from learning in their mother tongue to learning in English – an abrupt and traumatic shift that often results in learning difficulties and poor in-school performance.

Two groundbreaking, collaborative projects – bringing together academia, primary and high schools and non-profit organisations to advocate for bilingual in-class learning – are on a mission to change the learning experience for

African-language speakers. Both projects are innovative, involve teaching and learning in English and isiXhosa, and demonstrate the power of bilingual learning and the benefits for the learner.

**The iSayensi Yethu project**, a multidisciplinary project in which UCT is a partner, aims to make natural science content accessible to learners, especially African-language speakers. Through this project, teachers conducted lessons in both English and isiXhosa, using bilingual learning material. They also encouraged learners to respond in the language they felt most comfortable using.

**The Language for Learning project**, also carried out in partnership with several South African universities, is aimed at high school teachers and learners. The main goal of the project is to equip teachers with the necessary literacy skills, in both isiXhosa and English, to help them engage with the curriculum and teach and assess learners bilingually.

Enabling inclusive learning for visually impaired students  
The LEGO Braille Bricks project, in partnership with UCT's Including Disability Education in Africa (IDEA), BlindSA and four special schools, introduces a playful, tactile learning tool for learners who are blind or visually impaired.

At Athlone School for the Blind, Grades 3 and higher use colourful LEGO bricks moulded with braille characters and



matching printed symbols to read, spell and experiment through play. Through this approach, literacy lessons are transformed into interactive, multisensory experiences, while simultaneously developing fine motor and spatial skills.

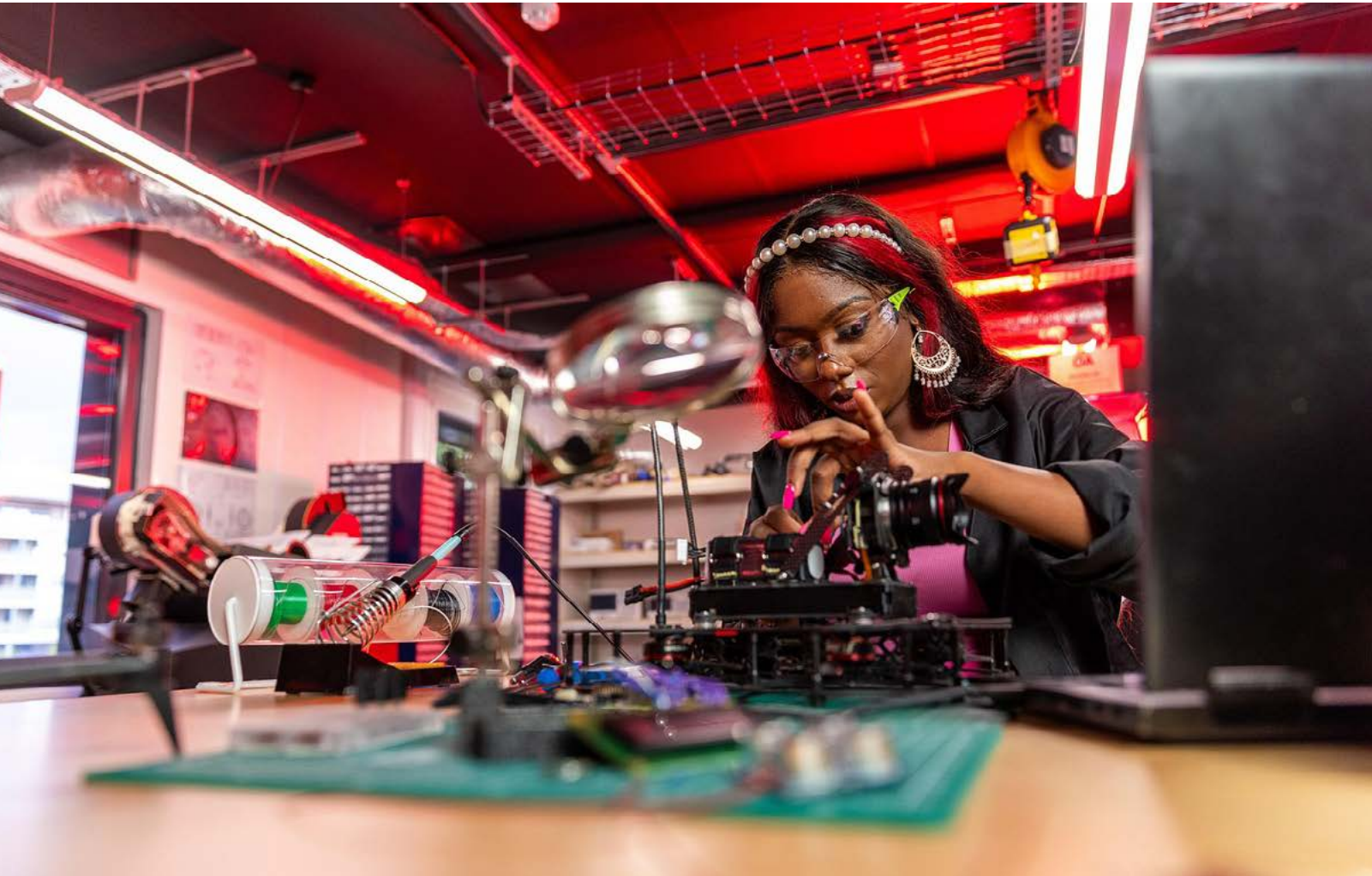
The project is now in its second phase and is being put to the test among teachers and learners at special-needs schools across the country. The priority for IDEA has been to train teachers to use the bricks effectively and to monitor and evaluate the rollout, as well as the pros and cons through ongoing research such as observations, focus group discussions and surveys. The primary goal is to understand whether the project is contextually relevant in South Africa and how it can support the development of an inclusive education system in the country.





# SDG 5 GENDER EQUALITY

Advancing gender equality is central to UCT’s Vision 2030 and its commitment to fostering an inclusive, equitable and diverse university community. UCT strives to ensure that it provides the space and structure to allow women to thrive academically and professionally, supported by policies, programmes and a campus culture that promote equity, safety and opportunity.



## Institutional initiatives

### On-campus childcare to support working mothers

Despite women being a part of the workforce for several decades, in most societies the primary responsibility for childcare still usually rests on the mother and South Africa is no different. One of the most significant barriers women in higher education face is balancing the demanding roles of caregiving and professional responsibilities.

Accessible, on-campus, childcare enables parents, especially mothers, to continue studying, teaching and conducting research without having to step back from their careers.

Recognising this, UCT has been the proud home of an early childhood development centre, UCT Educare, for over 40 years. The centre provides a safe, loving and stimulating environment to babies aged from three months to children of five years. UCT’s Educare Centre contributes to a supportive work environment for parents and signals institutional recognition that caregiving is a shared social responsibility rather than a private burden.

## Community engagement

### Engineering and Built Environment scholarships

Only 11% of engineers globally are women, demonstrating a gross imbalance in the field of Engineering and the Built Environment. To remedy this, UCT, through the Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment offers entrance scholarships to women applying for degrees in the faculty.

The scholarships are awarded in the form of Entrance Merit Scholarships, with 60% reserved for women to encourage gender diversity. In 2024, 24 scholarships were awarded

### Empowering African women leaders in global health

The Women in Global Health Leadership Fellowship (WGHLF), a part of the Healthy Futures South Africa project within UCT’s Faculty of Health Sciences, kicked off its inaugural in-person training in 2024.

This training is part of a hybrid year-long fellowship for 12 remarkable fellows from Kenya and South Africa who hail from diverse backgrounds in academia, government and health practice.







The fellowship was specially designed to elevate the leadership skills of talented African women who are public health professionals and passionate about promoting gender equity in global health systems.

**Strengthening guidelines for perinatal mental health**

UCT's Perinatal Mental Health Project (PMHP) played a pivotal role in shaping South Africa's updated National Integrated Maternal and Perinatal Care Guidelines (NIMPCG). Released in October 2024, the guidelines were hailed as a "watershed moment for women's health."

As a key contributor, PMHP successfully advocated for the inclusion of three new chapters – covering mental health, intimate partner violence and other social determinants – into the national guidelines. The revisions acknowledge that one in three South African women experience mental health challenges during pregnancy or postpartum. A rate double that of high-income countries, this positions mental health interventions as essential to reducing maternal mortality.

**Research and Innovation**

**Shining a light on the burden of invisible labour**

The Motherload Project, spearheaded through UCT's School of Management Studies, investigates the hidden burden of

unpaid care borne by low-income mothers. Phase one of the project took place in 2023 and, using photovoice as a research method, had mothers from under-resourced Cape Town communities share visual narratives and reflections on how "mothering work" impacts their economic security, well-being and daily survival. The exhibition and qualitative insights revealed the invisibility and undervaluation of care work. Phase two of the project took place in 2024 and includes the voices of fathers, enabling men to reflect on their own upbringing, recognise the emotional, mental and physical labour mothers carry, and generate ideas to share care responsibilities. The project seeks to shift gender norms, foster equitable care partnerships and influence policies that acknowledge care work as a collective responsibility.

**Supporting adolescent mothers and their children through research and policy innovation**

UCT researchers within the Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR) are working to advance gender equality through a suite of interlinked studies that centre the experiences and needs of adolescent mothers and their children. Collectively, these projects address barriers to education, healthcare and social inclusion faced by young women navigating early parenthood in South Africa.

The HEY BABY study is collaborative research which explores pathways to promote resilience among adolescent partners and their children. The study has followed over 1 100 young mothers and 1 500 children in the Eastern Cape for more than a decade, generating critical evidence on sexual and reproductive health, parenting and child development.

Also based at the CSSR is the Masana Young Moms Project focused on responding to barriers in HIV and sexual reproductive health services for adolescent mothers and



their children. In 2024, among other things, the group hosted workshops which brought young mothers, traditional healers and community stakeholders to identify solutions for stigma and service integration.

The Khanyisa Ngemfundo (Be the Light through Education) project aims to explore and understand mechanisms of support for school continuation and return among pregnant and mothering adolescents. In 2024, this project collaborated

with the Eastern Cape Department of Education to design and launch a training toolkit that equips teachers to support pregnant and mothering learners in schools.

Collectively, these initiatives are strengthening national capacity for gender-responsive health and education systems, fostering inclusion for adolescent mothers and promoting the rights and wellbeing of young women and their children.



SDG 6

CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Water scarcity and inequitable access are among South Africa’s most urgent environmental and social challenges. UCT recognises its responsibility to model sustainable water stewardship both operationally on campus and through research and innovation.

Institutional initiatives

Towards a water-wise university

UCT’s Water Management Strategy sets out a long-term vision to become a net-zero, water-sensitive campus by 2050. Recognising water as a finite and shared resource, the strategy integrates conservation, resilience and education to ensure sustainable management of water across all campuses.

The strategy rests on five key commitments:

- to understand and measure water use through improved data and digital metering;
- to safeguard operations during droughts or disruptions;
- to foster a water-wise community through awareness and behaviour change;
- to achieve water neutrality through rainwater harvesting, greywater reuse and efficient infrastructure; and
- to embed water sensitivity in planning, design and research.

Supported by an initial R80 million investment from UCT and the national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the 30-year plan includes infrastructure upgrades, smart systems and educational initiatives that link water stewardship to UCT’s broader sustainability goals.

2024 saw steady progress toward the goals set out in this strategy. Significant work has gone into designing an on-site sewage water recycling facility on lower campus, next to one of UCT’s student residences, Kopano. The facility will include a learning centre managed by UCT’s Future Water Institute, set within a green precinct consisting of a landscaped area designed for student wellbeing, cultural activities and quiet spaces to unwind. This will be the first facility of its kind at any South African university – and a leading global example of how sustainable water management can be integrated with education and everyday campus life. The “green precinct” is scheduled for completion by the end of 2025.





## Community engagement

### Building an environmentally sustainable campus together

UCT is working towards building an environmentally sustainable campus with students and staff who are eco-conscious. This entails outreach and engagement activities with students and staff to get them to reflect on what it means to live sustainably, what a sustainable campus looks like and what they need to change in their own everyday behaviours.

#### Two outreach campaigns took place in 2024:

- “Flush and go or flush and grow, which one are you?” conceptualised and led by students and staff in the Future Water Institute;
- the Sustainable Campus Guided Walking Tour, initiated by the African Climate and Development Initiative (ACDI).

Both projects were designed to encourage reflection and ultimately get participants to adopt more sustainable behavioural practices long-term. The initiatives form part of Khusela Ikamva (Secure the Future) – a R10 million five-year long campus project, created to support the environmental sustainability ambitions of UCT’s Vision 2030. The initiative includes leading research, feasibility studies and proof-of-concept living labs on campus.

The initiative also aimed to drive home the importance of developing sustainable water practices – a priority for the university. It sought to gather students’ experiences around water use and their views on UCT’s water-related initiatives. As part of the project, several co-creation and engagement

activities were held with residents, including the painting of a large mural to tell the story of stormwater management and the design and planting of an indigenous knowledge garden to support local plant biodiversity on the site.

#### Flush and go or flush and grow?

As part of the outreach campaign, designed to get students and staff thinking, a toilet was placed in the middle of a student plaza. The display aimed to encourage a different level of thinking regarding everyone’s daily water practices. Image by Lerato Maduna



The living laboratory, which forms part of the PaWS project, is situated in a stormwater pond in Fulham Road, Mitchells Plain.

## Research and Innovation

### Co-creating water-resilient cities

The Pathways to Water-Resilient South African Cities (PaWS) project, led by UCT’s Future Water Institute in partnership with international collaborators, operated a six-year “living laboratory” in a stormwater detention pond in Mitchells Plain, part of a socially and environmentally vulnerable area in Cape Town known as the Cape Flats. The project takes place in an area situated above a key groundwater aquifer and often underserved by conventional urban infrastructure.

Launched in 2019 and due for completion in 2025, the initiative transformed a neglected stormwater pond into a blue-green infrastructure testbed: retrofitting it to improve infiltration, enhance water-quality, engage nearby communities and develop multifunctional urban water systems.

The research focused on hydrology, water-quality pathways, biodiversity co-benefits, and governance models that can be scaled across cities. As it wraps its final phase, PaWS will provide critical evidence and design approaches toward water-sensitive, equitable urban water systems in South Africa.



# SDG 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Access to reliable electricity remains one of Africa's greatest development challenges, with more than 600 million people across the continent still living without it. Yet this challenge also offers an opportunity for innovation, to leapfrog traditional, carbon-intensive energy systems and move directly towards clean, renewable and equitable power solutions.

## Institutional initiatives

### Towards clean energy

UCT is deeply committed to becoming an environmentally sustainable campus, as evidenced by the Environmental Sustainability Strategy which aims to guide the university towards becoming a net-zero carbon campus by 2050.

At present, around 50-60% of the university's carbon footprint is attributable to building energy consumption, much of which relies on coal-based electricity. In response, UCT is systematically replacing older, inefficient lighting and equipment with energy-efficient alternatives as components

reach end-of-life, while encouraging students and staff to switch off systems when not in use. In 2024, UCT advanced its on-site renewable energy capability through work on a solar photovoltaic rooftop installation totalling approximately 300 kW-peak across the Baxter Theatre, the Graduate School of Business and the Meulenhof administration building. Design work also commenced for a large rooftop solar system at the health sciences campus.

The university also issued a tender to procure significantly higher volumes of electricity from off-site solar and wind farms, enabling UCT to purchase clean energy directly from independent power producers. This strategy forms a critical pillar of UCT's dual aim: reducing operational energy costs while cutting its carbon emissions substantially when on-site renewables cannot meet total demand.

## Community engagement

### Building capacity for Africa's energy transition

The Power Futures Lab (PFL), based at UCT's Graduate School of Business, works to advance equitable access to clean and affordable energy across Africa. Through its executive education programmes, professional training and policy advisory work, the lab equips energy leaders from government, power utilities and the private sector with tools to manage power-sector reform and renewable-energy transition.

This work represents a form of community engagement through capacity building, extending UCT's expertise far beyond the university to strengthen public institutions and empower decision-makers who serve millions of energy users. By convening these decision-makers from across

the continent, the lab fosters collaboration, knowledge exchange and evidence-based solutions to improve energy access, reliability and sustainability.

## Research and Innovation

### Taking Africa from biomass to green gas

One-third of the world's population lacks access to clean household energy. Nearly one billion of these people live in sub-Saharan Africa and are forced to rely on fuels such as biomass (e.g., wood), coal and kerosene to cook and to heat their homes.

Although these fuels are cheap and accessible, they're inefficient and highly polluting, with serious health consequences for those breathing the smoke. Currently



A global green fuel partnership between Germany and South Africa is paving the way for a sustainable world.

the safer alternative is liquified petroleum gas (LPG), but this is still a fossil fuel.

As part of the GreenQUEST project, a multidisciplinary research consortium made up of partners from industry and various scientific disciplines in southern Africa and Germany, and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, UCT's Catalysis Institute is developing a green liquefied fuel gas (gLFG) derived from renewable hydrogen and captured carbon dioxide which can potentially offer households the same convenience as LPG but with a near-zero carbon footprint.

Working in collaboration with German partners and industry, the interdisciplinary team is integrating technology, economics and societal dynamics to make clean fuel viable for low-income communities.

This project has the potential for African communities using biomass to leapfrog fossil fuels for cooking and heating, moving straight to clean energy alternatives.





# SDG 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

South Africa continues to face one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, particularly among young people, alongside sluggish economic growth. This poses a major challenge to achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

## Institutional initiatives

**Ensuring a fair, safe and dignified place of work**  
Recognising that change begins at home UCT is committed to creating a workplace where dignity, fairness and opportunity are central. UCT supports active collective bargaining for both academic and administrative staff through recognised unions, ensuring employees have a voice in decision-making and in shaping their working conditions. The university has strict policies in place to combat discrimination, based on race, gender, disability or orientation, reflecting its core values of equity and inclusion.

In 2015, in response to pressure from students and staff, UCT abolished outsourcing for its critical services. This meant the university absorbed workers from companies providing security, cleaning, catering and groundskeeping. While some ad-hoc services are still outsourced the institution has strict controls in place and does not tolerate unfair labour practices in outsourced services.

UCT also has an independent Ombuds Office and structured appeal mechanisms to ensure that staff and students have access to impartial resolution processes for disputes, unfair treatment or grievances, that tackled by the UCT Ombud in 2024 for instance was the issue of staff grievances around appointments and succession planning. The Ombud found that while UCT demonstrates a fundamental investment in its staff’s learning and development, the practical execution of succession planning remains insufficient. The university must prioritise understanding its needs as an academic institution and develop its employees’ capacities to ensure



UCT Ombud,  
Nashira Adams.

By combining robust employment policy, inclusive labour relations and accessible dispute procedures, UCT aims to foster a work environment that supports staff wellbeing and productivity. These efforts contribute to SDG 8, by promoting decent work for all and supporting sustainable institutional growth.

continuity and stability. The Ombuds Office provided the institution with a list of observations and recommendations to overcome these challenges.

## Community engagement

### Job shadowing programme for underserved learners

In 2024, UCT’s 100UP programme, an initiative that targets learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and coaching them towards university access and to make considered career choices, incorporated a job shadowing initiative. In collaboration with the Western Cape Property Development Forum and the Youth in Property Association, Grade 12 learners spent two days exploring careers in the built environment through on-site and office-based experiences. Workshops entailed introductory presentations by various professionals outlining careers in the built environment, followed by a vibrant and highly interactive Q&A/networking session with the learners.



## Research and Innovation

### Investigating the economic impact of South Africa’s Presidential Employment Stimulus programme

Unemployment and low economic growth have been a consistent challenge in South Africa. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns exacerbated these challenges, and in response, the South African government launched a collection of public employment programmes, including the Presidential Employment Stimulus, which was extended into 2024. By December 2023, these programmes had directly created 1.8 million jobs, though mostly temporary positions in public employment programmes.

UCT’s Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) was commissioned by the South African Presidency to assess how much the programme’s spending stimulates economic activity in local communities and nationally, essentially how effectively it supports job creation and higher incomes beyond the programme itself.

Their findings were positive: the programme likely supports broader economic activity and these effects partly persist after the programme ends. Participants’ spending on locally produced goods propelled value chains that employ local labour, helping the money recirculate within the South African economy.



SDG 9

INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

As a leading research university in Africa, for Africa, UCT is committed to driving innovation, advancing science and developing sustainable infrastructure that supports inclusive economic growth.

Institutional initiatives

Greening our campus buildings

In recognition that at UCT about 50% to 60% of the carbon footprint is from building energy consumption, green buildings on campus are a high priority for the university’s environmental sustainability strategy.

UCT’s Hasso Plattner d-school Afrika (d-school Afrika), one of three in the world, was in 2024 awarded its second 6-Star Green Star rating, this time in the as-built category, from the Green Building Council South Africa (GBCSA).

Last year, the d-school Afrika received top recognition from the GBCSA in the design category. The rating was awarded after the GBCSA’s independent review of the completed project construction documentation, applying the Green Star Public and Education Building v1 standard.

The d-school Afrika remains the first academic building on the African continent to achieve this prestigious rating

for new buildings, with the 6-Star Green Star designation representing world leadership in sustainability, according to the GBCSA.

While no new buildings were built in 2024, there are several that are in their planning stages, all targeting green building certification, including the Nelson Mandela Memorial Centre & Public School of Governance on Upper Campus, the Arise Building on the health sciences campus, the refurbished Library and the Green Precinct Water Recycling Facility, which is targeting a 4-Star Green Star certification and several Zero ratings from the GBCSA.



Supporting innovation and industry

UCT’s Research Contracts and Innovation (RC&I) office plays a central role in advancing innovation, industry partnerships and entrepreneurship. It supports researchers and students to translate their ideas into products, services, and start-ups that drive social and economic impact.

RC&I has helped launch more than 40 spin-off companies, creating hundreds of jobs and fostering new industries in fields ranging from health and biotechnology to renewable energy and education technology. Through initiatives like the Evergreen Fund and University Technology Fund, RC&I nurtures early-stage innovation, ensuring UCT’s discoveries contribute to a more sustainable, knowledge-based economy.



for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, based at UCT’s Graduate School of Business, is helping to bridge this gap through its pioneering work in innovative finance. Through targeted initiatives, strategic partnerships and knowledge-sharing platforms, the centre continues to help shape the landscape of impact investing, outcomes-based financing and financial solutions aligned with with the SDGs.

In 2024, the Bertha Centre continued its expansion of its flagship Impact Investing in Africa course. A significant milestone was the launch of the course in Nairobi, Kenya, marking its first entry in East Africa.

The course attracted participants from Africa and Europe representing various sectors, including senior advisory roles, investment analysis and programme management. Key takeaways from the course highlighted the role of innovative finance instruments in supporting African entrepreneurs and the importance of catalytic capital in driving systemic change.

These offerings will continue to strengthen capacity within the sector and encourage collaboration among impact investment practitioners, reinforcing financial innovation as a driver of sustainable impact.

Community engagement

Mobilising finance for African Innovation

Access to finance remains one of the greatest barriers facing African innovators and entrepreneurs. The Bertha Centre





## Research and Innovation

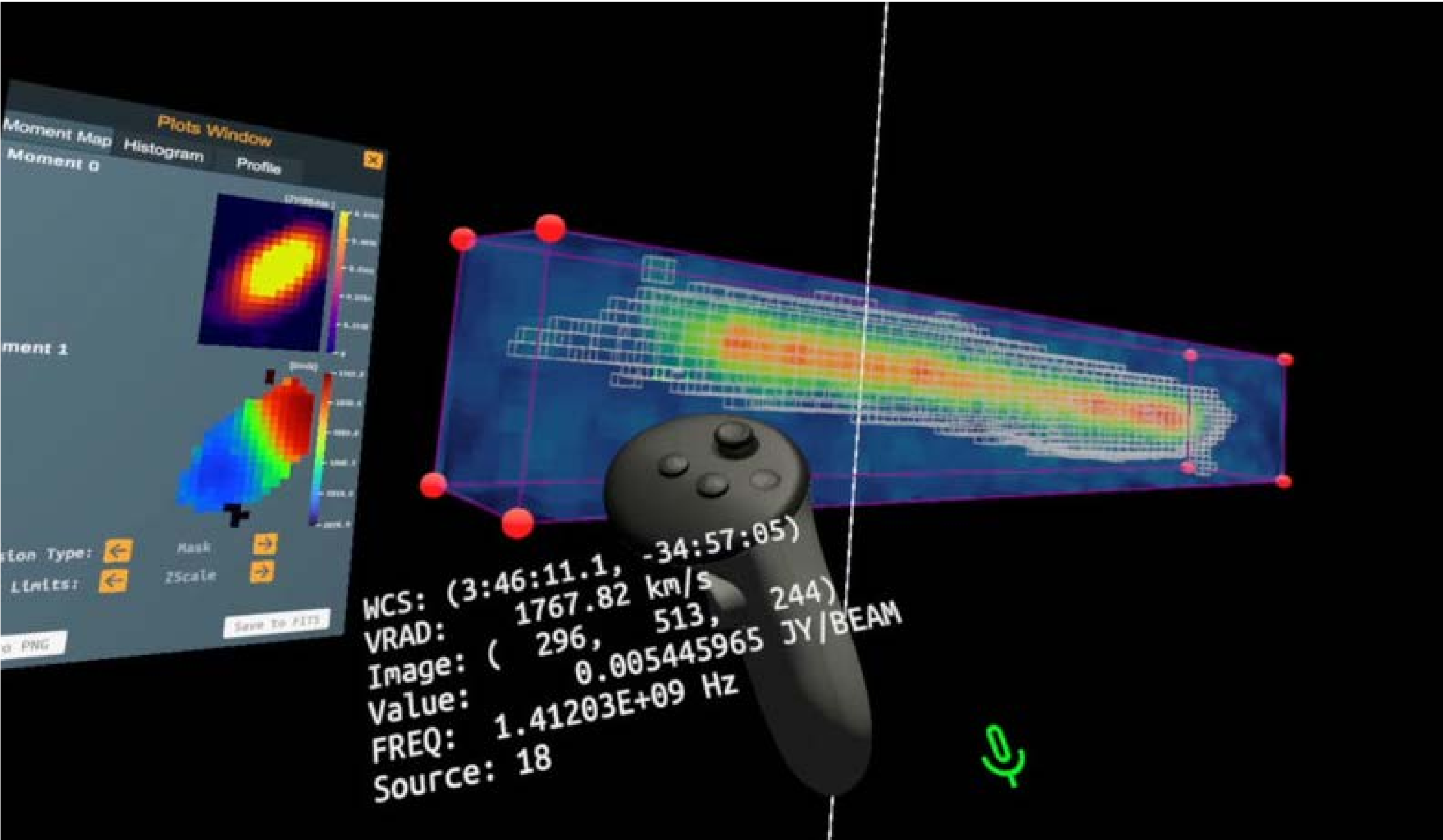
### Virtual reality research unlocks new frontiers for science and industry

The Inter-University Institute for Data Intensive Astronomy (IDIA), of which UCT is a key partner, in 2024 unveiled the immersive Data Visualisation Interactive Explorer (iDaVIE) software, a groundbreaking virtual-reality software that enables immersive visualisation of complex datasets, not only for astronomy but across engineering, medical and industry-relevant fields.

By releasing the code as open-source, UCT and IDIA are fostering innovation ecosystems where local researchers and entrepreneurs can build new applications, partner with industry, and create spin-out opportunities. These kinds of tools help translate scientific research into commercial and economic value, supporting job creation, tech-driven enterprise development and national infrastructure growth.

“ We are thrilled to make iDaVIE available to the public. This software represents years of hard work, and we believe it will be a valuable resource for researchers around the world. ”

— Dr Lucia Marchetti, director of the IDIA Vislab.





# SDG 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

South Africa continues to have some of the highest levels of inequality in the world, with racial disparity deeply rooted in its history, intersecting with other forms of marginalisation. UCT is committed to addressing these challenges, both within the university and in broader society.



## Institutional initiatives

### Working towards equal opportunity for all at UCT

UCT's Office for Inclusivity and Change (OIC) was established to build, develop and foster an environment where everyone feels included and change is respected, encouraged and celebrated. The OIC works through evidence-led inclusivity programmes using a multipronged approach that focuses on curriculum, disability services, institutional cultural change, and sexual and gender-based violence prevention policy and research.

A key part of this mandate is their Disability Service, which supports the full and equal participation of students and staff with disabilities. The service works to remove physical, policy and attitudinal barriers, including improving campus accessibility, coordinating assistive technologies for learning, arranging exam accommodations and facilitating interpreters and note-takers where needed.

By embedding inclusion into university policy, practice and infrastructure, the OIC helps ensure that everyone at UCT can participate fully and thrive. Its work reflects UCT's broader goal: to create a community where diversity is valued, equality is realised and opportunity is open to all.

## Community engagement

### Sparking dialogue for national inclusive employment

In South Africa, disability prevalence is estimated at 16% but only 1.2% of the national workforce comprises persons with disabilities, according to the National Department of

Labour. It is against this stark backdrop that UCT's Inclusive Practices Africa (IPA) held a symposium in 2024 which brought together thought leaders, academics, policymakers and disability advocates. Themed "Let's Talk Work: Towards Inclusive Economies through Intersectoral Collaboration", this inaugural symposium included discourses on dismantling barriers and encouraging inclusive employment systems for persons with disabilities (PWD).

Africa is home to 300 million persons with disabilities, many of whom face challenges of poverty, systemic inequities and limited access to essential services.

IPA seeks to promote quality education, dignified work and active social participation for all. Through research-informed methodologies, IPA collaborates with marginalised communities, organisations and service providers to challenge societal mindsets and develop inclusive practices that reduce the social exacerbated by disability.

“ Our goal is to deliberately move away from focusing on deficits or impairments and instead explore how to change systems to become inherently inclusive, ensuring everyone can thrive – be it in workplace, education or communities. ”

— Professor Harsha Kathard, founder of the IPA.





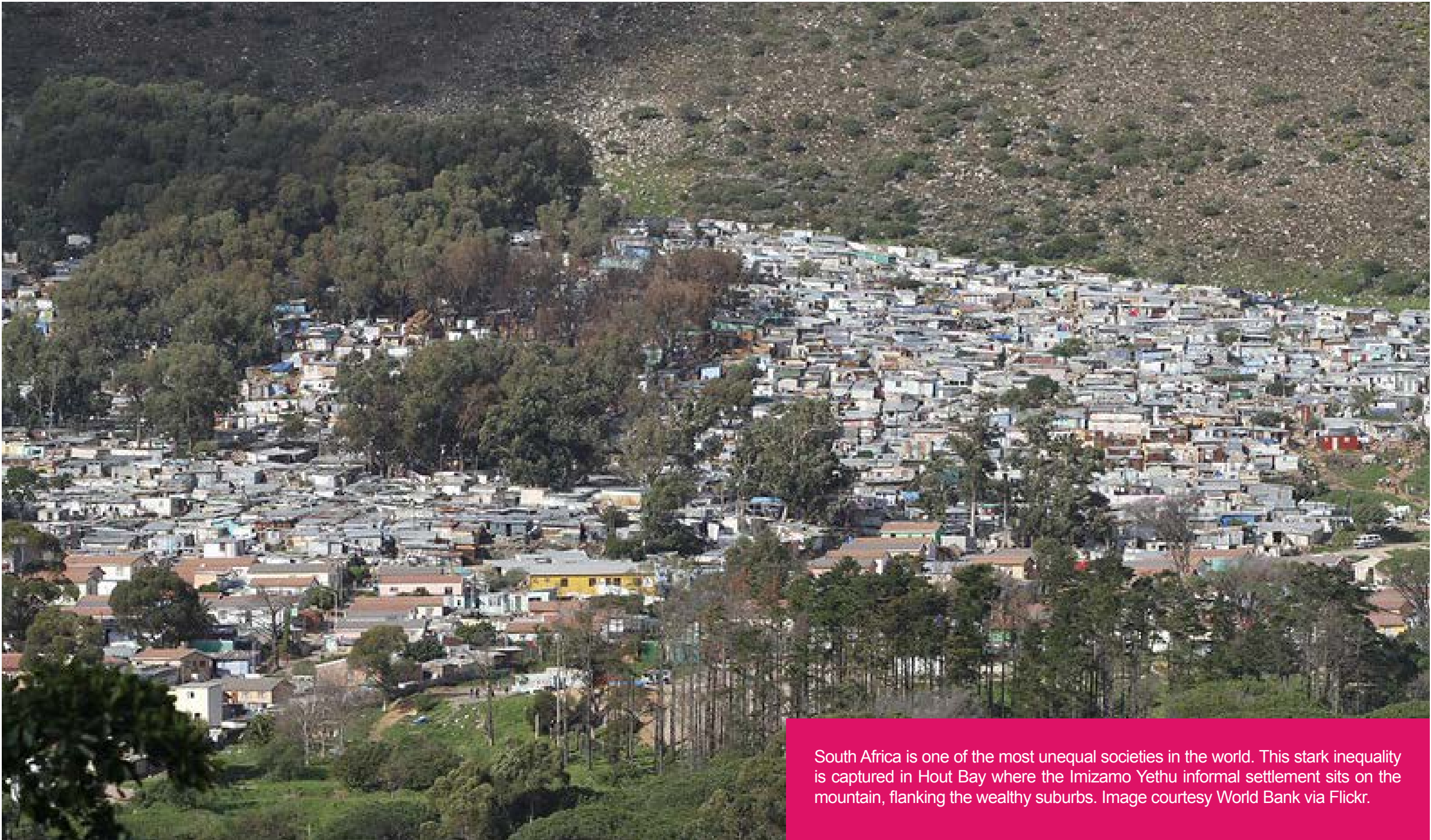
## Research and Innovation

### Nurturing research capacity to better understand and reduce inequalities

Key to driving sustainable development in Africa is tapping into the tremendous human potential the continent offers. Training young researchers for the multidisciplinary approach required to drive sustainable and equitable economic growth on the continent is central to the African Centre of Excellence for Inequality Research (ACEIR) that UCT leads on behalf of the African Research University Alliance (ARUA).

Taking this mandate forward in 2024 were new cross-continental capacity building and learning events for early-career researchers. As part of a global collaboration between African and European researchers to tackle inequality, the Africa-Europe Cluster of Research Excellence in Inequalities, Poverty, and Deprivation (CoRE IPD), together with ACEIR, co-hosted the cluster’s first annual summer school. This was held at the Kenyan node of the ACEIR at the University of Nairobi. This five-day intensive training of nearly 40 early-career researchers offered multidisciplinary grounding in the roots of inequality, poverty and deprivation in Africa.

The ACEIR hub at UCT also co-hosted with the Wealth Data Science Summer/Winter School at Constructor University in Bremen, Germany, a session which brought together, which brought together participants and experts to use data science to tackle the pressing issue of wealth distribution. It emphasised the critical importance of understanding wealth distribution in addressing economic inequality, social polarisation and environmental degradation.



South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world. This stark inequality is captured in Hout Bay where the Imizamo Yethu informal settlement sits on the mountain, flanking the wealthy suburbs. Image courtesy World Bank via Flickr.



# SDG 11

## SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Africa is urbanising faster than any other region in the world, with its city populations expected to double by 2050. This rapid growth brings enormous challenges, including housing shortages, inadequate infrastructure and vulnerability to climate crises, but also an opportunity to build cities that are inclusive, sustainable and resilient from the start.

### Institutional initiatives

#### Securing the future through an on-campus, living lab intervention.

The living laboratory contributes to the facilitation of research on environmental sustainability through the university’s flagship sustainable campus initiative, Khusela Ikamva, meaning secure the future in isiXhosa.

Launched in 2020, it is a five-year it is a five-year research project aimed at catalysing a more sustainable campus through energy, carbon, water, waste and community-based initiatives, which are tested as living labs on campus.

#### The project focuses on five core themes central to UCT’s sustainability journey:

- energy/carbon footprint
- sustainable water
- waste/energy/food nexus
- wildlife/waste/art nexus
- establishing a community of practice/social responsiveness

Each of these themes is led by a dedicated research team based in a UCT institute, bringing expertise to develop context-specific and tangible solutions.

The projects are also carried out through research-led collaboration and inclusive community engagement across campus. The goal of Khusela Ikamva is to build a dynamic community of practice that connects students, academic and administrative staff, and sustainability leaders across the university.

### Community engagement

#### Regenerative housing for resilient communities

ReBuilt, a global initiative led by Bauhaus Earth, with UCT’s



African Centre for Cities (ACC) as its regional partner, seeks to make a shift from extractive, carbon-intensive construction towards a regenerative built environment that restores ecosystems, sequesters carbon, and generates dignified livelihoods.

In Cape Town, ReBuilt’s ambitions are tested through a Demonstrator Project in Langa, an underserved area of Cape Town characterised by primarily informal housing. The site of the project functions as both a transformation laboratory and third space for community-led experimentation linking culture, food and regenerative design.

Innovations include bio-based materials such as cross-laminated timber (CLT), ground-screw foundations that

eliminate concrete, and a digital twin serving as a civic mirror to visualise carbon and cost impacts before construction.

Extending beyond the site, the ReBuilt Roadmap translates lessons into systemic strategies across governance, markets and education. It identifies four leverage points for change: empowering self-builders, mobilising luxury and rental markets, catalysing sustainable materials and equipping the next generation through curriculum reform.

ReBuilt demonstrates how cities like Cape Town can become testing and teaching grounds for regenerative urbanism, where design, policy and community action align to produce ecological repair and socio-spatial justice.





## Research and Innovation

### Unlocking Africa's urban potential

Africa's cities are growing faster than almost anywhere else in the world – by 2050, the continent's urban population is expected to reach 1.3 billion, with a median age of around 19. Yet this rapid urbanisation is unfolding without the infrastructure, financing or policy frameworks needed to harness its full potential. The result: outside of South Africa, more than half of sub-Saharan Africa's urban residents live in informal settlements, excluded from basic services, decent housing and economic opportunity.

“ Through our work we try to underscore that urbanisation is not something to be feared, it is something to be embraced. And that if we plan for it properly, we can simultaneously deal with other crises we face on the continent, including the climate crisis and human development crisis. Most importantly we can anticipate what we need to put in place to create jobs for young people that will make up the majority of our cities. ”

— Edgar Pieterse, director  
of the African Centre for Cities.



To change this trajectory, the ACC established the Urban2063 coalition, a partnership of 13 African and international organisations, including UCT's African Climate and Development Initiative (ACDI), working to place sustainable urbanisation at the heart of Africa's transformation agenda, in alignment with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The coalition's work is grounded in rigorous scientific analysis, peer exchange and narrative development, ensuring that policy advocacy is both evidence-based and inclusive. By producing shared research and policy briefs on critical urban challenges, Urban2063 fosters

collaboration between African and global partners to reimagine cities as drivers of growth, resilience and equity across the continent.

### Lessons from Cape Town's housing realities

Rapid urbanisation and limited land availability have made densification a key policy priority in Cape Town – but new research from the ACC reveals that the reality on the ground is far more complex. The study explores how official densification policies align or clash with the lived experiences of residents in two Cape Town communities. The research

highlights the tensions between state-driven housing agendas and community-level practices and perceptions of high-density living.

The findings show that even within similar socio-economic groups, people experience and understand density in vastly different ways. Effective densification in African cities cannot follow a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, policies must be context-specific, consultative and rooted in local realities. By reframing densification through an inclusive lens, the research offers a path toward more equitable and sustainable urban development across Africa's rapidly growing cities.



# SDG 12

## RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

**Africa bears a heavy share of the world's waste burden – from imported plastics and e-waste clogging landfills to extractive industries that erode fragile ecosystems. These pressures threaten the continent's rich biodiversity and the health of its people. UCT recognises that responsible consumption and production are essential to both environmental sustainability and social justice.**

### Institutional initiatives

#### Creating a sustainable on-campus food waste management system

As part of UCT's Khusela Ikamva sustainable campus initiative, within the waste-energy-food nexus theme, the Centre for Bioprocess Engineering Research (CeBER) has devised a one-of-a-kind project that breaks down waste: to use it as an energy source for cooking or to produce fit-for-purpose water that can later be used to irrigate on-campus vegetable gardens. The project aims to expand the anaerobic digestion (AD) process – a four-stage biological process that uses anaerobic bacteria to breakdown waste – into a multi-product system.

The system will incorporate a range of useful stages, including using biogas – a renewable fuel that's produced when organic matter like food or animal waste is broken down by microorganisms in the absence of oxygen – as an energy source for cooking or alternative applications. The ultimate goal is to integrate this project across UCT's campus.

“ We currently face significant sustainability challenges like climate change, waste management and resource depletion. This project addresses these issues by promoting a closed loop system where resources are efficiently used, where minimal waste is generated, and renewable energy is produced or offset. ”

— Dr Thanos Kotsiopoulos, project lead of Khusela Ikamva's waste-energy-food- nexus project.





## Community engagement

### Building a sustainable on-campus community

UCT recognises that university life is about more than academic learning, it's also a formative period that shapes values, culture and worldview. Through its sustainable campus initiative, UCT aims to instil an ethos of sustainability and environmental stewardship in its students and staff.

As part of this commitment, the university has maintained a colour-coded recycling system for nearly two decades. The system helps the campus community to separate waste correctly: green for recyclables, yellow for non-recyclables, blue for food waste, and white for paper.

Complementing this effort, the Green Campus Initiative promotes sustainable living through practical, everyday actions – encouraging students and staff to burn calories, not petrol, drink from the tap and ditch plastics and single-use items. Together, these initiatives help foster a culture of responsibility and care for the environment across the UCT community.



## Research and Innovation

### Understanding pesticide exposure in children

The Child Health Agriculture Pesticide Study in South Africa (CAPSA), led by UCT's Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) - National Research Foundation (NRF) South Africa/Switzerland Bilateral Research Chair in Global Environmental Health, Professor Aquiel Dalvie, is a landmark multidisciplinary project investigating how agricultural pesticide exposure affects children's health and

development. Established in 2017, the study follows more than 1 000 children in the rural Western Cape of South Africa to understand the impact of current-use pesticides on reproductive development and neurobehaviour.

CAPSA brings together researchers from South Africa, Europe and the United States of America. This collaboration has enabled the use of advanced research technologies and strengthened the country's capacity in environmental health science.

The study is helping fill major global data gaps on pesticide exposure and child health. Its findings are shaping new areas of enquiry and providing critical evidence to guide international policy and interventions that reduce exposure risks. Beyond its scientific outputs, the study has resulted in the building of skills and research capacity through postgraduate training, fostered environmental justice for affected communities, and informed national discussions about pesticide regulation and rural health.



### Unearthing a sustainable mining future

A team of UCT researchers has developed innovative tools to support responsible and sustainable mine closure in South Africa. The work, led by Associate Professor Megan Becker from the Centre for Minerals Research in UCT's Department of Chemical Engineering, forms part of a Water Research Commission (WRC)-funded project aimed at improving mine closure planning, management, and policymaking.

#### The study resulted in the creation of three key tools:

- the Mine Closure Risk Rating System for South Africa,
- the Mine Closure Risk and Opportunity Atlas for South Africa, and;
- the Post-closure Opportunities Framework.

Designed for use by government, industry, civil society, academia, and international agencies, these tools offer a structured approach to managing the complex process of mine closure. Importantly, they also support South Africa's efforts towards a just transition, ensuring that the shift away from mining is both equitable and sustainable for affected communities.





# SDG 13 CLIMATE CHANGE

Africa is the continent most vulnerable to climate change, despite contributing the least to global emissions. Droughts, floods and rising temperatures threaten food security, biodiversity and economic stability across the region.

## Institutional initiatives

**Taking climate action through campus leadership**  
In 2024, UCT reinforced its leadership among South African universities by remaining one of only a few to publicly measure and report its annual carbon footprint. UCT recorded a 20% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse-gas emissions compared with 2019 levels – a major milestone on the path to net-zero. These efforts towards positive climate action are driven by UCT’s dedicated Environmental Sustainability directorate and implemented through initiatives such as the Khusela Ikamva project, which uses the university as a living laboratory for carbon, water and waste solutions. Complementing these institutional actions, the Green Campus Initiative empowers students to lead peer-driven activities and events that embed a culture of environmental responsibility across the UCT community.

## Community engagement

### Climate change workshop for teachers in rural schools

In 2024, UCT’s African Climate and Development Initiative (ACDI) collaborated with several partners including the University of the Witwatersrand’s (Wits) Rural Knowledge Hub to present a workshop called “How can we survive the century?” at a Wits Rural Facility in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga, South Africa. Aimed at grade 8-10 geography and natural science teachers from the rural South African provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, the event brought together 26 educators and local officials to engage with leading researchers on climate change, food security, wildlife tracking and carbon-footprint mitigation.

Presentations covered global trends, local rainfall patterns and ways to enhance resilience among small-scale farmers. Participants received classroom-ready resources and certificates of attendance.

Through this initiative, UCT is extending climate education beyond campus, equipping teachers – and by extension their students and communities – with knowledge and tools to understand and act on climate change.



UCT’s ACDI collaborated with several partners to host a workshop for grade 8 to 10 geography and natural science teachers titled: “How can we survive the century”. The event brought together 28 educators and local officials from rural provinces of Mpumalanga and Limpopo.





## Research and Innovation

### Nature-based solutions for planetary health and resilience

In 2024, UCT’s ACDI launched a new initiative, the People in Nature and Climate (PiNC) lab. This innovative lab aims to tackle some of the continent’s most pressing societal and environmental challenges, by exploring how nature can be used to promote both human and ecosystem health while adapting to and mitigating climate risks across Africa.

Nature-based solutions (NbS) are strategies that harness the power of nature and natural processes to address environmental and societal challenges. Through the protection, restoration and management of ecosystems, these solutions help address issues such as climate change, food and water security, and biodiversity loss.

The PiNC lab is dedicated to generating evidence and ideas to support NbS, with a particular emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa. By collaborating with local and international partners, the lab aims to enable equitable and effective nature-based actions that promote local and planetary health.

“As scientists, we need to take risks and make big investments in our research to find solutions for tackling the complex challenges presented by climate change. At the PiNC Lab, we move beyond diagnosing problems to finding, testing and co-creating nature-based solutions that work for people, nature, and the planet.”

— *Dr Petra Holden, People in Nature and Climate lab lead.*

### Bridging science and governance for climate action

UCT’s Climate Systems Analysis Group (CSAG) is a leading partner in the national Climate Research in Collaboration with Society research project. A transdisciplinary research project which brings together scientific expertise and local government officials to build a peer community working towards enhanced climate risk response.

Funded through the National Research Foundation (NRF) Community of Practice Programme, the project is designed to encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration. This project

works across sectors, directly with city officials, to build a community of peers to address the multifaceted challenge of climate change and how it plays out in cities.

Taking place across three major South African Cities, Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, this project is focused particularly on water-related issues. Research ranges from fresh water supply to wastewater management and water infrastructure, and is undertaken in close collaboration with the relevant city officials to ensure the science is aligned with the operational and planning realities of the cities.



Climate change pressures are set to impact the water systems of South Africa’s cities. Scientists are working with South African policymakers in three South African cities to ensure the science is aligned with operational and planning realities of the cities.



SDG 14

LIFE BELOW WATER

The health of earth’s oceans determines the health of our planet, yet marine ecosystems face mounting threats from climate change, pollution, overfishing and unsustainable coastal development. In Africa, where millions depend on the sea for food and livelihoods, protecting marine and freshwater systems is vital for both ecological balance and human wellbeing.

Institutional initiatives

Sustainable water management

UCT finalised its Sustainable Water Management Strategy in 2020 reflecting its recognition that responsible water use on land is essential to protecting life below water.

The strategy has five primary objectives:

- **Know our water:** you can’t manage what you don’t measure, and you can’t measure it if you don’t know where it is.
- **Ensure business continuity:** making sure UCT can operate even during drought or periods of water scarcity.
- **Become water net-zero by 2050:** when the water demand met from municipal supply equals the water demand met from alternative supply options such as rainwater harvesting.

- **Be a water-wise community:** inform, empower and educate visitors, staff and students to better manage water as a finite and vulnerable resource.
- **Become a water-sensitive campus:** UCT strives to become a water-sensitive campus by 2040 in line with the City of Cape Town’s commitment to becoming a water-sensitive city by 2040.

The strategy combines infrastructure renewal, rainwater harvesting, greywater reuse and on-site recycling facilities. In partnership with the Future Water Institute, UCT is also transforming its campus into a living lab for sustainable water systems – linking research, teaching and practice from source to sea.

“

At UCT, going forward, we want our relationship with water to change. We want to treat it as the precious resource that it is, and reorganise ourselves and our infrastructure to do so.

”

— Manfred Braune, director, Environmental Sustainability, Properties & Services Department.



Community engagement

Co-creating fishers’ knowledge to protect our seas

Researchers at UCT’s Department of Environmental and Geographical Science are part of an international collaboration, One Ocean Hub. Through this partnership, they worked with three small-scale fishing communities in St Helena Bay on the West Coast of South Africa. The project aimed to support fishers document their traditional fishing knowledge and co-create the information base needed to participate in marine spatial planning and governance.

By embedding fishers as collaborators in research, the initiative promotes more sustainable fishing practices and strengthens their role in protecting marine resources. This work is critical in a time when small-scale fishers are enjoying a global movement of support for them to become involved in the co-management of the resources they depend on, while the management of these resources grows increasingly more complex. It is hoped that the collaboration with UCT researchers in developing a methodology to help the fisher communities document their knowledge will enable them to defend their rights in marine spatial policy planning and lay a foundation for developing a sustainable local fishers management plan in future.





## Research and Innovation

### Managing the impact of the Benguela current losing breath

Across the world’s oceans, there are places especially abundant in nutrients and life. They cover around 1% of the ocean but produce a disproportionate number of fish: 20% of global marine fish catches. The Benguela Upwelling System is one such place. But it tends to have unpredictable severe low-oxygen conditions, which are life-threatening to sea creatures and livelihood-threatening to local people. Researchers at UCT’s Marine and Antarctic Research Centre for Innovation and Sustainability (UCT-MARiS), and their collaborators, are figuring out what’s causing these conditions and how to manage them.

Located off the southwest coast of Africa, the Benguela Upwelling System is one of the most fertile ocean regions globally and of massive socioeconomic importance to South Africa, Namibia and Angola.

The UCT research team, based in UCT’s Department of Oceanography and UCT-MARiS, is working to observe, understand and model the conditions that lead to low-oxygen events, with the goal of being able to predict them so that those reliant on the southern Benguela for income and sustenance can better prepare for when they happen.

### Seabirds key to measuring plastic pollution at sea

Researchers at UCT’s Fitzpatrick Institute of Africa Ornithology have for decades been tracking plastic pollution in oceans through the study of seabirds, particularly petrels. Seabirds frequently consume these plastic fragments directly or in their food. Among seabirds, the highest ingested plastic



In 2024, this research was further expanded as the research team received funding from Schmidt Sciences to work on a project investigating oxygen and biogeochemical dynamics along the west African margin. This project, which is part of Schmidt’s Ocean Biogeochemistry Virtual Institute (OBVI) and includes substantial observational and modelling efforts, expands the focus to the whole South Atlantic, allowing researchers to also investigate the impact of the warming open ocean on the Benguela ecosystems, and the consequences of what’s happening at the coast – including the loss of oxygen – on the Atlantic basin.

loads typically are found in petrels, which can store plastics in their stomachs for weeks or months.

In 2024, a study by the UCT team showed that the amount of plastic in petrels breeding at Inaccessible Island in the central South Atlantic Ocean has remained constant since the 1980s. Since global plastic production has increased more than four-fold over the decades, the failure to detect an increase in plastic in petrels indicates that efforts to limit waste plastic entering the environment have been at least partly successful, reducing the proportion of plastic leaking into the sea over this period.



# SDG 15 LIFE ON LAND

Africa’s rich terrestrial ecosystems, from fynbos to forests and deserts, are vital for sustaining biodiversity, supporting livelihoods and regulating the climate. Yet these landscapes are increasingly under pressure from urban expansion, deforestation, invasive species and illegal wildlife trade.



## Institutional initiatives

### Reforesting the campus

In April 2021, a devastating fire tore through parts of UCT’s upper campus, destroying buildings but also much of the trees and vegetation that stabilised the slopes and served as a green lung for the campus. Though it left deep scars on the landscape, particularly in the dam precinct and the adjoining forest areas bordering Table Mountain National Park (TNP), it also provided an opportunity for environmental restoration, which included an appropriate tree-planting project.

In 2024, UCT kicked off a significant environmental restoration project in the dam precinct. This is part of a larger multi-year endeavour by UCT’s Properties & Services (P&S) department to mitigate erosion and restore indigenous biodiversity after the fires.

One of the most striking aspects of this greening project is its focus on planting indigenous species, which have a cultural significance and are better suited to the biome.

The project involves a careful plant selection process to ensure that the replanting efforts are sustainable and effective. The goal is not only to restore what was lost, but to create a more resilient ecosystem that can withstand future environmental stresses.

## Community engagement

### Building community through nature renewal at UCT

As part of UCT’s Khusela Ikamva sustainable campus initiative, several departments and units hosted an event called Forest Conversations. This event is related to the

“ We want to create a space for open dialogue, allowing the community to engage with each other and the environment without the constraints of formal procedures. ”

– Dr Britta Rennkamp of UCT’s African Climate and Development Initiative.

ongoing projects to restore not only the the physical forest that was damaged by the fires in April 2021 but also the cultural and spiritual connections the UCT community shares with the natural fauna and flora.

The script for the event did not follow the convention of a formal programme of proceedings and had numerous group discussions and solo reflections.

This event fell under the community of practice/social responsiveness theme of Khusela Ikamva, which has a focus on unlocking the knowledge of different communities to co-create and develop ideas that change pathways towards climate resilience.

### UCT-led research project finds four distinct giraffe species

In a ground-breaking research study published in 2024, a team of scientists, led by UCT researchers uncovered four distinct species of Africa’s much-loved gentle giant: the giraffe, which is quite the opposite to the widely assumed notion that just one specie exists. The collaboration included UCT’s Department of Biological Sciences and the Giraffe Conservation Foundation working with colleagues from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, other European universities, and many African government partners. This distinction was confirmed in an interdisciplinary research study that analysed the skull morphology of giraffes. And with just 117 000 giraffes left in the African wild, these findings demonstrate the importance of shining a spotlight on the silent extinction of these gentle giants.

### Tackling the illegal trade in SA’s rare succulent plants

The world’s only hot arid biodiversity hotspot, South Africa’s Succulent Karoo biome, is home to over 6 000 plant species – around 40% of which are found nowhere else on Earth. However, the illegal trade of these rare succulents, with more than one million plants harvested since 2019, is putting the biome’s integrity and local livelihoods at risk.

Researchers at UCT’s Faculty of Law, working with colleagues at the University of Alabama, investigated the supply chains and people involved in the global succulent trade, to identify solutions to how the trade could be curtailed. They found the sale of succulent plants reflects deep inequalities in the sense that international traders and collectors profit from the illegal trade. But people who have traditionally used succulents in cultural and medicinal practices are largely excluded from these benefits.

The research highlights that neither militarised enforcement nor blanket bans are effective. A better alternative would include community-led cultivation, value-chain reforms and regulated legal markets that enable rural communities to benefit while protecting biodiversity.



SDG 16

PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Strong, transparent and accountable institutions are vital for Africa’s progress. In South Africa – where a long struggle for democracy reshaped systems of power – maintaining peace, justice and institutional integrity remains both a legacy and a living responsibility.

Institutional initiatives

Upholding academic freedom

At UCT, the principles of justice, peace and strong institutions are foundational to its role as a leader in African higher education. According the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), science “can only flourish in an open and safe science ecosystem” that permits freedom of association and expression. UCT is committed to ensuring exactly such an environment in its own community through, among other things, the work of the dedicated Academic Freedom Committee (AFC). The AFC

actively engages staff and students through events such as webinars and round-table dialogues on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

This commitment to scientific freedom extends beyond UCT’s internal governance. In 2024, the former interim vice-chancellor, Professor Daya Reddy, led proposals to strengthen scientific freedom across the continent, contributing to a scientific report by UNESCO titled, “African Perspectives on Scientific Freedom: Insights from Policy and Practice in Six Countries.” His concluding chapter to the report identified common trends, challenges and opportunities in the pilot countries, and set out recommendations for strengthening science, technology and innovation (STI) systems, along with scientific freedom.

A vibrant student voice is also central to institutional resilience, with UCT’s Student Representative Council (SRC) offering a democratic platform for learner-led governance and accountability. UCT’s SRC is democratically elected and represents all students at UCT, and their overall interest and social well-being, in university committees. It is highly involved in policy-making and co-operative decision-making on campus.

Community engagement

Access to justice

Even in a democratic country with a strong rule of law, sometimes access to resources can be the defining factor in whose rights are protected and can ensure a life ruled by justice and fairness. As part of an attempt to right this imbalance, UCT’s Law Department runs the UCT Law Clinic which assists those who are unable to afford the services of a law firm.



The central mission of the UCT Law Clinic is to provide students with an excellent clinical legal education whilst promoting access to justice for those who would otherwise not have the means. The law clinic offers on-site and off-site legal advice and support. It is run by a professional staff of experienced

practising attorneys who litigate in the district, regional and high courts on behalf of indigent people who would otherwise not have access to the law. A busy, vibrant, registered legal service, the UCT Law Clinic was started by law students in the early 1970s, and was the first university law clinic to be established in South Africa.





## Research and Innovation

### Understanding the needs of visually impaired people in the voting process

A research study, led by UCT’s Including Disability in Education in Africa (IDEA), set out to understand the experiences of blind and visually impaired people in casting their ballot during South Africa’s 2024 elections.

The work revealed there is much still to be done to adequately accommodate the needs of this group.

The study, titled “Enhancing voter participation for people who are blind or partially sighted in South Africa”, was conducted in partnership with BlindSA, a non-profit organisation committed to equipping blind people with the skills they need to fully and independently participate in society.

The study’s main goal was to understand if blind and visually impaired South Africans were adequately accommodated, as promised, at voting stations throughout the country. The researchers found a significant disconnect between what was promised and the experiences on the ground.

### Addressing corporal punishment in schools

While corporal punishment has been outlawed in schools the practice does still occur. In 2024, UCT’s Children’s Institute (CI) became involved as a friend of the court in a case launched by the Centre for Child Law, the parents of two children who were victims of corporal punishment and the human rights organisation, Section 27.

The CI put forward evidence on the use of corrective measures for teachers and a child-centred approach to teacher discipline. This case resulted in a ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeal in 2024 that UCT’s CI and the Centre for Child Law be consulted on the redrafting of the Mandatory Sanctions Policy of the South African Council of Educators (SACE) that applies to teachers who mete out corporal punishment.

The major changes to the Mandatory Sanctions Policy of SACE that have been gained include:

- A requirement to hear from children and caregivers before deciding on the sanction of the teacher; and
- The inclusion of rehabilitative sanctions, i.e. ordering teachers to undergo retraining before returning to the classroom to control their own anger or manage discipline through nonviolent means.

“ Negative perceptions and biases remain one of the biggest barriers for true inclusion. This research study provides crucial insights into the actual state of accessibility for blind and visually impaired people and should be central to discussions on inclusion. ”

— Benedict Leteane, researcher at IDEA.



# SDG 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

The world's most pressing challenges are complex, interconnected and impossible to solve in isolation. They demand collaboration across disciplines, sectors and borders. UCT recognises that partnerships are central to innovation and impact, bringing together the diverse expertise, perspectives and lived experiences needed to generate meaningful solutions.

## Institutional initiatives

### Knowledge Co-Op

Partnerships across sectors unlock innovation, relevance and impact. In recognition of this, UCT's Knowledge Co-Op was established in 2010 to serve as a vital bridge between the university, local communities and civil society organisations. By aligning academic research with community-led priorities and policy imperatives, the Knowledge Co-Op promotes socially responsive problem-solving that addresses real-world development challenges.

Since its inception, 962 project ideas have been submitted to the co-op by bynon-governmental organisations and non-profits. While 200 projects were completed by postgraduate researchers.

Completed projects include the development of an electronic database for Epilepsy SA by students in UCT's Department of Information Systems, investigating the barriers of HIV patients in adhering to second-line anti-retroviral treatment, a project by Médecins Sans Frontières and the municipality to explore alternative energy sources for pumping water.

### University partnerships

UCT hosts a vibrant hub of research and collaboration driven by its local and international networks, actively collaborating with partners across Africa to address and impact the continent's biggest challenges.

These partnerships extend beyond the continent as UCT also enjoys a strong international network, playing a key role in connecting the global north with the global south to build and share African knowledge and expertise.

### UCT is a member of several international university networks including:

- African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA)
- International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU)
- Worldwide Universities Network (WUN)



## Community engagement

### Building partnerships for people and the planet

The Critical Zones Africa (CZA) project exemplifies how strong partnerships between researchers, communities and institutions can generate knowledge that serves both people and the planet. The collaboration spans six African countries – Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe – and brings together social scientists,

local communities, and environmental thinkers to study how human and ecological systems interact in rapidly changing peri-urban areas.

With its "Muddy Boots" approach, CZA prioritises on-the-ground, transdisciplinary research that addresses what local people identify as their most urgent needs for habitability, health and wellbeing. The project also draws on deep traditions of African environmental thought to re-centre African perspectives in global environmental policy debates.



## Research and Innovation

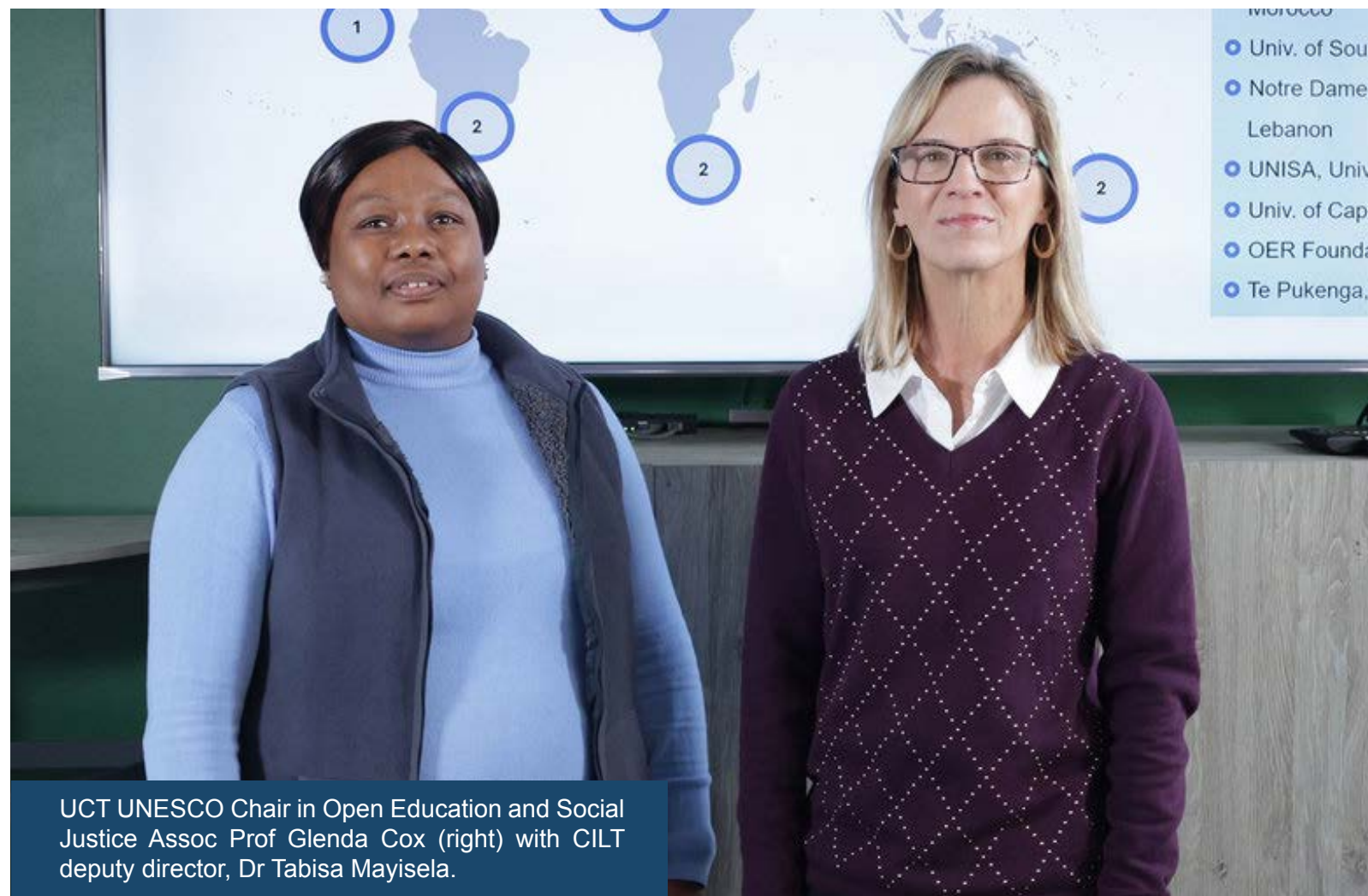
### Collaborating to tackle antimicrobial resistance

Antimicrobials are vital medicines used to prevent and treat many common infections and are heavily relied upon to carry out surgeries. However, they are rapidly losing their effectiveness as the microorganisms responsible for infections learn how to resist them. To tackle this issue, UCT's Holistic Drug Discovery and Development Centre (H3D) in 2024 joined forces with LifeArc, a not-for-profit science organisation, to form the Centre for Translational AMR Research (CTAR) Programme.

The CTAR Programme is aimed at identifying and developing first-in-class therapeutics for infections caused by multidrug-resistant (MDR) Gram-negative bacteria, including *Acinetobacter baumannii*. Beyond the drug development, this partnership also focuses on strengthening local research capacity in Africa. The collaboration will enhance H3D's research capabilities to facilitate efficient AMR drug discovery, which will be achieved through secondments of experienced scientists from LifeArc to UCT, and scientific research visits of H3D scientists to LifeArc to gain exposure to new technologies and techniques available through LifeArc.

“ Our research provides not just a snapshot of current media practices, but a call to action for global media to critically examine their storytelling about Africa and understand its impact. ”

— Associate Professor Wallace Chuma,  
Centre for Film and Media Studies.



UCT UNESCO Chair in Open Education and Social Justice Assoc Prof Glenda Cox (right) with CILT deputy director, Dr Tabisa Mayisela.

### Global partnership to advance open education and social justice

UCT is playing a key role in a major global collaboration to advance equitable access to knowledge through open education. In 2024, the UNESCO University Twinning and Networking Programme network on Open Education was launched, marking a significant step towards advancing open education and social justice globally. This initiative, hosted by

Nantes University, brings together 16 partners from various countries and institutions, including UCT, represented by Associate Professor Glenda Cox - the UCT UNESCO Chair in Open Education and Social Justice. Her work focuses on open education with an emphasis on co-constructing, co-designing and co-creating openly available teaching and learning resources that recognise and represent diverse voices.

“ The network is poised to make significant strides in creating inclusive and equitable educational environments and promises to build robust research partnerships and develop innovative approaches to higher education that prioritise social justice and the common good. ”

— Associate Professor Glenda Cox,  
UCT UNESCO Chair in Open Education  
and Social Justice.

### Global Media Index for Africa

UCT's Centre for Film and Media Studies partnered with Africa No Filter, a non-profit organisation (NPO) that works to challenge and change harmful narratives on Africa and the Africa Centre, New York – a multidisciplinary NPO that provides a gateway for engagement with contemporary Africa to launch the Global Media Index (GMI) for the continent..

This initiative tracks how 20 of the world's most influential news providers report on news related to Africa. It revealed that there is much room for improvement when it comes to covering new, progressive narratives on the continent.





The d-school Afrika is the first academic building in South Africa and the continent to receive a 6-star Green star rating.