



*Figure: Skills Development and Possible Future Scenarios (Green Skills Round Table, 21 April 2016)*

There are a number of reasons that countries are focusing on sustainable development as opposed to business as usual. Key reasons include a moral commitment to meet our current development needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. There is a very pressing global need to address climate change for both current and future generations. And increasingly countries are realizing that they are eroding or destroying the natural capital and ecosystem services upon which their economies and people's livelihoods depend.

At a business level there are also a range of drivers for incorporating sustainability principles into business operations. These include: compliance with legislation, risk reduction related to shortages of key business inputs such as water, reputation management amongst a wide variety of stakeholders, opportunities offered for cost reduction through clean technologies, and new business opportunities meeting social and environmental needs.

These emerging pressures for sustainability at global, national and business level suggest that in order to maintain a licence to operate (at the very least) or open up new competitive advantages countries and businesses are going to need to incorporate sustainability thinking into their strategies and activities. This will require new skills at all levels in government and business.

The process by which a country or business sector build the green skills required to create a sustainable economy will have a significant impact on national and business competitiveness. If green skills are built in response to global and national pressures such as an energy crisis or the resultant need to develop renewable energy then it is likely that that other countries and businesses will have a competitive advantage and it will be cheaper to import the new technologies and skills than develop them locally. This option is represented by the lower arrow on the diagram above.

If South Africa and South African businesses proactively identify the kinds of changes that are likely to occur in the next 5-10 years and start planning skills development pathways for these changes then the skills required for an emerging green economy are created in time to stimulate and create a more sustainable and competitive country and businesses.

Some countries and businesses are moving one step further and are identifying principles and strategies that will drive sustainability innovation into the future. These countries and businesses are becoming leaders in their fields through innovation and the skills development needed to drive this innovation.