Possibilities for Unemployed Youth in the Green Economy: An Ecological Social Work Perspective

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Abstract

This article considers the question: What are the existing guidelines for community-based strategies to empower youth to participate in a green economy? South African youth is a particularly vulnerable group due to sociopolitical and economic reasons including systemic marginalisation, high unemployment rates, insufficient opportunities, and environmental degradation that threaten their and future generations' well-being. Currently, most South African youth are faced with high levels of early school dropout, unemployment, substance use and abuse, crime and violence, high-risk behaviours, and socioeconomic challenges that limit their development. This is true for youth in both urban and rural areas, who have been challenged by, among other factors, a long-standing lack of access to resources and support services that have resulted in self-destructive behaviours. Drawing a link between social and environmental justice, social work places value on the empowerment of marginalised youth, as well as on the importance of participatory environmental initiatives through collaborative action for sustainable change with youth as change agents. Social work practice guidelines to effectively facilitate youth participation in environmental initiatives are, however, lacking. This includes various skills and enterprise development programmes focused on schools, youth, and the community at large. Using a scoping review, evidence of existing international and local guidelines for a community-based strategy aimed at youth participation in the green economy

are presented and recommendations made for ecological social work practice and education.

Keywords: community participation; ecological social work; environmental justice; green economy; youth

Introduction

South African youth are viewed as a marginalised and vulnerable group due to reasons including high unemployment rates, a lack of access to opportunities, and environmental degradation that threaten their and future generations' well-being (Van der Westhuizen 2021). Consequently, South African youth are challenged with high levels of early school dropout, unemployment, substance use and abuse, crime and violence, high-risk behaviours, and socioeconomic challenges that limit their development (Khuzwayo et al. 2020).

Currently, the majority of South African citizens live below the poverty line, characterised by unprecedented levels of youth unemployment (Patel and Graham 2021), which are regarded as the highest in the world (Dawson 2021). Youth who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) are the most at risk of enduring poverty, especially racially categorised "Black" youth who emanate from poor households with no post-school education. Although they may attempt to find employment, they face an onslaught of a multitude of obstacles. The consequences are that they eventually give up, become unmotivated, experience feelings of hopelessness, and suffer poor mental health outcomes (Patel and Graham 2021; StatsSA 2022). StatsSA (2022) confirms that in South Africa, 64% of youth are unemployed. The unemployment rate of youth and the poor graduate employment levels are national concerns needing urgent intervention (Marwala 2022; StatsSA 2022; Zwane 2021).

Marwala (2022) argues that productivity levels are very low in South Africa due to the limitations and gaps in important skills, particularly technical skills, as a result of inadequate training and a poor work ethic. This demonstrates that schools, colleges, and universities must be better managed, and a culture of learning must be inculcated (Marwala 2022). Cloete (2015) contends that unemployment in South Africa is undeniably systemic or structural and the economy is unable to stimulate and provide employment for its workers. Structural unemployment is the most difficult to address because of the multifaceted causative factors and in addition to being an economic problem it is also a human dignity concern (Cloete 2015). Therefore, Cloete (2015) argues that a focus on youth unemployment was needed because they represent a substantial number of new job applicants and are the most at risk of poverty.

Rationale and Problem Statement

A green economy is defined as one that facilitates human and social well-being and justice while securing and protecting resources against risk and scarcity (UNESCO and

UNEP 2016). In the preamble of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it states that there will be a planned focus on people, planet, and prosperity (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015). This sustainability plan highlights how to improve and develop the people, planet, and prosperity to eradicate poverty, increase environmental justice and ensure future well-being. It is a joint collaboration by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). These goals can be achieved by a heightened focus on providing alternative options for youth, and one alternative can be a focus on increasing green skills as a way that youth can use these skills to support themselves economically and by reducing an over-reliance on formalised job creation.

Social work values the empowerment of marginalised youth and should aspire to develop collaborative action for sustainable change led by youth. Green social work is a field of practice that explores how social workers can promote sustained well-being of and between people (and animals) and the environment in a reciprocal manner (Boetto 2017; Dominelli 2018). As a holistic and transdisciplinary approach to environmental crises, social work is compelled to incorporate green social work principles, values, and concerns about environmental challenges by incorporating these into mainstream practice and education. By doing so, social workers traverse diverse roles in their response to crises and disasters.

Green social work offers a theoretical framework and value-base for practice, at the policy (macro) level, especially in relation to poverty alleviation and equitable distribution of resources (Dominelli 2018). The focus of green social work is on "reform of the socio-political and economic forces that have a deleterious impact upon the quality of life of poor and marginalised populations, secure the policy changes and social transformations necessary for enhancing the well-being of people and the planet today and in the future and advance the duty to care for others and the right to be cared by others" (Dominelli 2012, 25). Thus, from a green or ecological social work perspective, the interrelationship between humans and nature is placed equally at the centre. This perspective prioritises inclusive decision-making about the planet and its ecological systems to ensure the sustainability of natural resources (Boetto 2017). It also focuses on environmental justice, which relies on the equitable sharing of the gains and constraints in maintaining healthy and sustainable environments for all living in it.

Thus, Dominelli (2021, 9) argues that "a green social work perspective adopts a holistic, environment-friendly, transdisciplinary, relational and political power relations slant to the 'person-in-environment' to encompass both environmental and socio-economic, political contexts within which humans live and act." Van der Westhuizen (2021) echoes these sentiments and concludes that there is a significant opportunity for collaboration, partnerships, and interdisciplinary approaches to work towards environmental justice, sustainability, and youth participation, not only for their own sake but for the sake of future generations. Practice guidelines to effectively facilitate

youth participation in environmental initiatives are, however, lacking (Van der Westhuizen 2021).

A study by Rocha (2018) in Portugal that focused on urban regeneration projects found that an eco-social approach would be useful for the social worker in the context of social vulnerabilities and increasing environmental pressures. The study did not focus on youth unemployment in particular but did substantiate the value of eco(logical) social work. Matthies et al. (2020), in their five European country qualitative study on grassroots social innovations and alternative economies, recommend that social work considers these eco-social innovations as vital opportunities to work with people who are on the margins of the economy. Similarly, a qualitative study by Chang et al. (2022), focused on eco-social work in youth empowerment in a municipality in Sweden, confirmed the need for a focus on youth empowerment and increased knowledge in eco-social work for social workers and also for focused attention on structural and collaborative partnerships.

In her Master's dissertation on green social work and environmental justice, Nel (2019) found that although social workers are trained and thus aware of the links between people and their environments, the challenge is that social workers do not always factor in the environment in their interventions. Importantly, the participants recognised the need for green social work. Social work education has not always emphasised and included the link between human beings and the natural environment (Papadimitriou 2022). Ecological/environmental/green social work is thus an emerging field in social work. The support for including this orientation in every aspect of social work practice is increasing as the degradation of the environment, the unconscionable abuse of natural resources, and the severe impact on communities is hard for social work to continue to ignore.

The aim of this scoping review, therefore, is to contribute to the continued discussion of the inclusion of ecological social work in its practice, education, and the role in including youth in the labour market through green employment initiatives.

Scoping Review as Literature Review Methodology

A scoping review is a method to integrate diverse pieces of information (knowledge synthesis) (Colquhoun et al. 2014; Munn et al. 2018). Through knowledge synthesis, researchers arrange and match information (evidence) in accordance with the central scoping review question and purpose using a rigorous and transparent process (Pham et al. 2014). Scoping reviews have also been referred to as mapping, surveying, or scouting (Khalil et al. 2016; Munn et al. 2018; Pham et al. 2014), because they use exploratory-type questions with the purpose of charting the main concepts, information, and the limitations or disparities in existing research through a systematic or structured process earmarking the theoretical confines of the topic or question (Colquhoun et al. 2014; Khalil et al. 2016; Ross et al. 2022; Sargeant and O'Connor 2020). Munn et al. (2018)

confirm that the scoping review is a fitting methodology to establish the extent or depth of a topic and the published literature that exists. According to Ross et al. (2022), the aim of scoping reviews is to elucidate the topography of the topic and give a synopsis of the topic as gleaned from the published literature. Scoping reviews are thus considered a popular methodological choice because they are suitable for both new and developed disciplines and when the study is relatively unknown (Colquhoun et al. 2014; Khalil et al. 2016; Munn et al. 2018; Ross et al. 2022). As previously stated, there is little known about the link between green economic development and youth employment; therefore, it is suitable for this topic under study.

Methodological Framework and Process Followed

Arksey and O'Malley were the first researchers to publish the methodological process (framework) for scoping reviews in 2005 and their framework has been used ever since (Colquhoun et al. 2014; Khalil et al. 2016; Munn et al. 2018).

Although the above framework has been widely used, it has been criticised because it did not provide ways to conduct the steps and how to do the analysis of the evidence (Khalil et al. 2016). A subsequent scoping review framework was developed by Levac et al. (2010), who introduced thematic analysis for synthesising and presenting the evidence as well as including considering the impact on policy and practice. In their studies, Khalil et al. (2016) and Pham et al. (2014) followed Arksey and O'Malley's framework and combined it with the methodologies of Levac et al. (2010).

Identification of the Research Question

The research question for the scoping review is: What are the existing guidelines for community-based strategies to empower youth to participate in a green economy?

To address the research question, our approach involved searching 12 databases in August 2023. The article search comprised three phases: 1) an initial title search based on the key words; 2) screening of abstracts based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria; and 3) a full review of selected articles that met the inclusion criteria. The search for relevant studies excluded theses, books, conference proceedings, and presentations. The methods of review presented next.
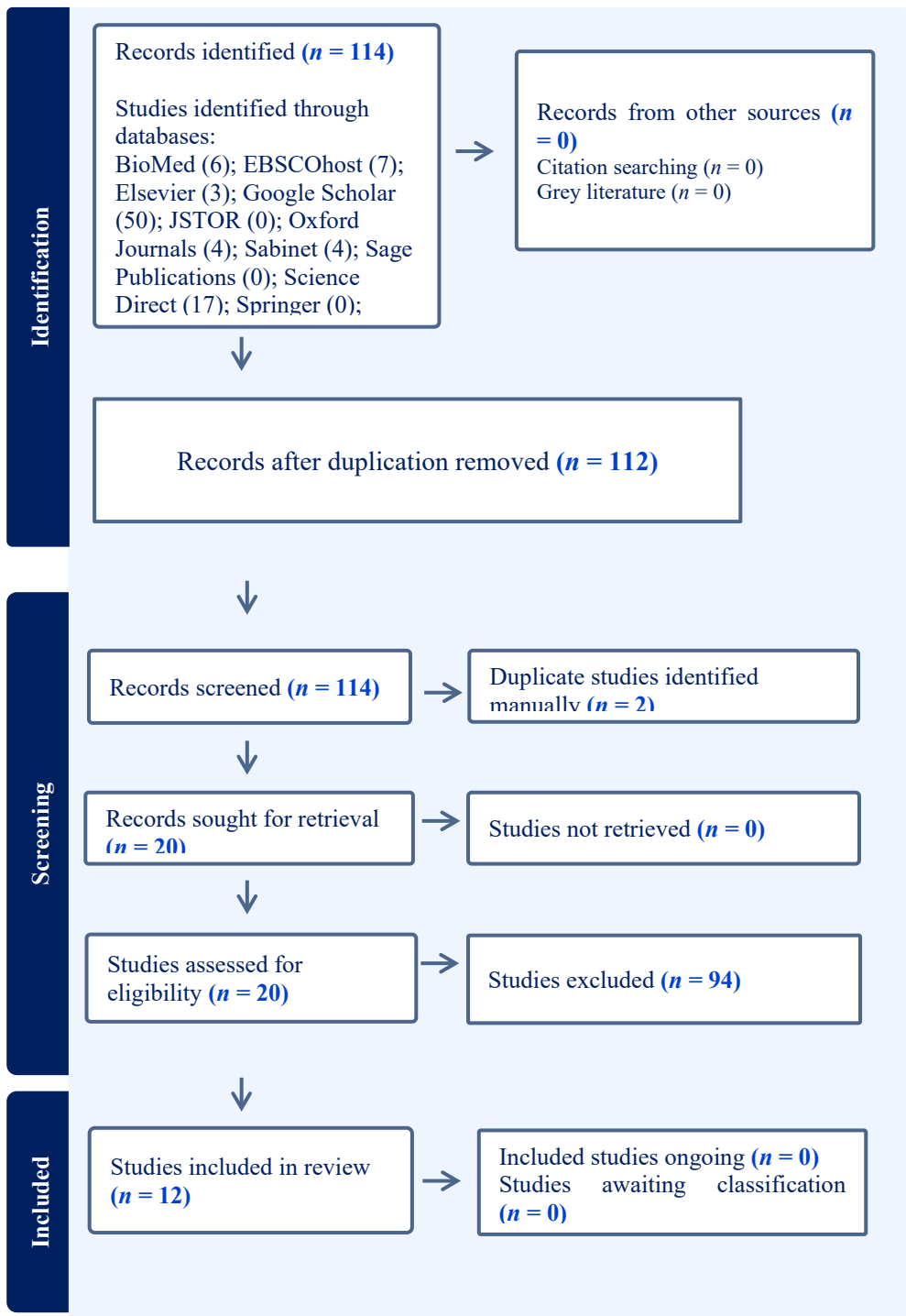
Identification

Records identified (*n* = 114)

Studies identified through databases:
BioMed (6); EBSCOhost (7); Elsevier (3); Google Scholar (50); JSTOR (0); Oxford Journals (4); Sabinet (4); Sage Publications (0); Science Direct (17); Springer (0);

Records from other sources (*n* = 0)
Citation searching (*n* = 0)
Grey literature (*n* = 0)

Records after duplication removed (*n* = 112)

Screening

Records screened (*n* = 114)

Duplicate studies identified manually (*n* = 2)

Records sought for retrieval (*n* = 20)

Studies not retrieved (*n* = 0)

Studies assessed for eligibility (*n* = 20)

Studies excluded (*n* = 94)

Included

Studies included in review (*n* = 12)

Included studies ongoing (*n* = 0)
Studies awaiting classification (*n* = 0)

Figure 1: The methods of review (using the PRISMA Flowchart)

Methods of the Review

The inclusion criteria were: Full text, peer review studies written in English between 2016 and 2022 on community-based strategies to empower youth to participate in the green economy. Peters et al.'s (2020) proposed data extraction sheet/tool was used to record studies searched for on data bases. The following databases were used: BioMed, EBSCOhost, Elsevier, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Oxford Journals, Sabinet, Sage, Publications, Science Direct, Springer, Taylor & Francis Online, and Wiley Online. The article search process consisted of three stages: 1) an initial title search using key terms; 2) abstract screening; and 3) a comprehensive review of the articles that met the inclusion criteria.

The following keywords were used to search the literature: environmental justice; community-based strategies for a green economy; youth empowerment; green economy; and youth participation. This review yielded a total of 114 studies, of which two were duplicates and removed, and a further 94 studies were identified as irrelevant; thus, with the initial extraction, 20 studies were found to meet the criteria of the research question (figure 1). Complete articles, with abstracts of those studies that appeared to meet the research criteria were retrieved and stored. The next step involved reading through the retrieved studies as the abstracts may not capture the full scope of the studies (Badger et al. 2000).

Primary studies were collated by two reviewers. For quality assurance, the primary studies collated by two of the reviewers were sent to the rest of the reviewers for further review and rigorous vetting. Through this process, the number of studies was reduced to 12, as indicated in table 1, for inclusion in the final review.

Peters et al.'s (2020) data extraction tool was used to record the information pertaining to each of the selected studies. The following key information was included on the extraction sheet, shown in table 1: 1) author(s) name, year, and country of the published study; 2) aims and purpose; 3) population and sample size; 4) research approach and design; 5) existing guidelines and interventions; 6) underlying processes and policies; 7) key challengers and gaps; and 8) importance of the study.

Table 1: Data extraction sheet

#	References	Context and overview of study	Sampling and data collection	Outcomes and findings	Challenges, gaps, and recommendations
1	Ekka et al. (2022)	This study presents a structured view of the many ways in which youth can become involved in sustainable development. The authors used a systematic literature review as methodology from an Indian perspective.	Researchers used a full systematic literature review (SLR) to determine the relationship between youth and sustainable development. The study used an interpretive structural model (ISM) to assess the emergence of a wide range of variables to link youth and sustainability. The factors that influenced the ability of youth to meaningfully engage in sustainable development were identified and placed in the ISM model.	According to the ISM hierarchy (order), sustainability and youth have a high level of interdependence. Elements that influence young people's contributions to sustainable development include youth activism, social responsibility and involvement, education and training for youth, young people in leadership positions, and ability to pursue entrepreneurship.	The authors state that the study must be viewed from an economic perspective. The ISM-based model is hierarchical in nature, but it does not reveal the relative value attached to the variables for its significance relative to other variables. The study did ascribe the roles attached to each variable. The ISM-based model can also be viewed as guidelines to develop sustainable strategies that are easy to follow and practical. Future research should focus on youth governance and its contribution to long-term sustainability.
2	Ensor et al. (2018)	The study focused on community-based approaches to explore how environmental change and risks are treated within communities in the Solomon Islands. Fieldwork concentrated on six locally recognised, major environmental and resource systems relevant to the livelihoods of coastal communities in the western Solomon Islands.	A total of 231 semi-structured interviews were conducted across the nine villages in 2011. Interviews (50 per village with interviewees 25–60 years old and not from the same household) were conducted. It was not specifically focused on youth, but youth were included in the sample.	The study found that important environmental change is underreported in communities, while variations in perception are not always easily related to commonly assumed fault lines of vulnerability.	The findings suggest that there is an urgent need for methods that engage with the drivers of perceptions as part of community-based approaches.

3	McKay and Tantoh (2021)	The study used a qualitative research approach for their study on the establishment and development of effective urban green infrastructure such as parks in Johannesburg, South Africa. The study included addressing issues of planning, design, management, and governance.	A series of stakeholder dialogues were held in three locations in Johannesburg with different participants. A total of 44 males and 34 females from the different targeted groups participated in the dialogue. The target audience included local community leaders, councillors, community-based organisations, youth and youth organisations, people with disabilities, and the media.	The findings of the study show that the City of Johannesburg officials wanted to add food gardens to the park, even though the participants did not all share the same viewpoints in terms of food gardens. Rather, the community wanted better safety, security, and ablutions in the park, in contrast to the officials, who focused on other propositions.	The gaps in the study were that the community's voice was not as prominent as that of the facilitators, and that male participants dominated the voices of female participants. As a result, equal participation was not always achieved.
4	Mudombi (2017)	This article explored the inclusion of youth in the green economy for sustainable development in South Africa and the rest of the African content.	The article explored existing guidelines in South Africa to ensure youth participation in the green economy which were: youth as change agents; youth engagement in improved governance; livelihoods/career building; and knowledge and skills building.	The outcome of the policy analysis was that policy should have a holistic quintuple-focused approach targeting the development of green conscious or green-minded consumers, workers, entrepreneurs, innovators, and custodians. In all these instances, the youth should be central. The crucial ingredients for this to happen are empowering people with the necessary information (awareness), skills development (empowerment), and stimulating behaviour change (transformation).	The author recommended five strategies to promote the development of green jobs and reduce youth unemployment: 1. Developing educational programmes 2. Supporting youth entrepreneurship in the green economy 3. Reducing taxation of green activities 4. Facilitating youth access to finance, particularly for green activities 5. Developing a legislative framework 6. Developing joint projects between universities, vocational schools, and businesses

5	Nhamo and Mukonza (2019)	This study aimed to determine the gender opportunities and development needs that exist for women in the green economy and environmental sectors in South Africa. Targeted respondents included students, policymakers, academics, and those working in community-based organisations and non-profit organisations in South Africa.	A mixed method research design approach was used with simple random sampling. The respondents included students, policymakers, academics, and those working in community-based organisations and non-profit organisations in and around South Africa. The Google survey link was emailed to 509 respondents, and the data were collected over a period of three months between July and September 2016.	Various initiatives do exist in tertiary institutions and the government that encourage societal involvement in green economy issues. The South African government has created policies that especially focus on women's involvement related to environmental and green economy issues, both at national and global levels.	Sixty-one of the 96 respondents (63.54%) concurred that the environment enabled improved participation for women in decision-making processes as well as negotiations related to environmental and green economy issues. The challenge is the persistent need to increase participation and capacity in project design and management.
6	Prasetiyo (2019)	The study focused on the involvement of communities in efforts to protect their environment through environmental awareness programmes. The aim was to design an environmental protection programme so that it can be replicated in other cities in Indonesia.	The research was conducted in eastern Indonesia. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method. Purposive sampling was used since the information related to civic engagement. Participants included 14 informants (five males and nine females). The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, observations, and literature (document) studies.	The programme established waste management in an aerobic composter in each house managed by the community. It also produced green fertilisers that can be sold and become passive income for residents. A waste bank was also built and directly managed by the residents.	The programme is considered to be a model of sustainable development through citizen participation to help maintain the cleanliness and beauty of the environment. The programme used 36 environmental cadres to be responsible for ten cleaning points in the Kampung Margorukun area.

| 7 | Redmond and Dolan (2016) | The authors produced a model for developing youth leadership. Foróige is a national youth organisation with a presence in all 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland. The Leadership for Life programme was developed by Foróige in 2009, where annually about 750 youth are involved. This article was included in the sample in terms of guidelines for skills development for the empowerment of youth. | The authors used a literature review methodology to examine empirical research done in relation to both adult and youth leadership to inform their evidence base to inform the renewal of the Leadership for Life programme and resulting evaluation. | The conceptual model integrated previous studies on youth leadership to inform the model of youth leadership that included the focus on skills, environmental context, and social action. | The programme ensured a strong connection between a theoretical foundation and the programme content and outcomes. It endorses the appropriate mixture of information that supports the work done with youth to maximise their potential and future possibilities. |
| 8 | Schusler et al. (2019) | This study reports on findings from the Where I Stand Youth Summit—a retreat held in 2018 in Chicago, Illinois. The study explored the perspectives of youth who are active in environmental and social justice. The focus was on expanding the role and empowerment of youth within eco-social work practice, as important to building young people's mastery levels. | The study used a participatory research process as design and implementation. A memorandum of understanding between the team members outlined all the research tasks. The research team used participant observation as a data collection method and data analysis included field notes, memos, and the summit event documents. Twenty-three youth participated with eight adults involved in the event's organisation. | The findings can inform eco-social work practice as it showed the ability of youth to critically engage with issues of justice, power, resource distribution, and social change. These findings encourage partnerships with youth in positively impacting their environment. | The summit findings revealed how youth understand, construe, and decode society's dominant narratives and that the participants did have power to advocate for having their voice in decisions affecting them. |

| 9 | To and Liu (2021) | To and Liu (2021) focused on the results of a community-based youth empowerment programme in Hong Kong informed by social innovation design thinking. | This quantitative study used a nonrandomised control group pre-test and post-test assessment. A total of 553 youth living in Hong Kong were recruited to participate in this study; 213 youth volunteered to join the experimental group and 340 youth joined the two control groups. | Youth empowerment programmes informed by design thinking may reinforce self-efficacy beliefs by encouraging youth to bring about innovations in their community. This result indicates that incorporating design thinking may help increase youth's confidence for out-of-the-box thinking for novel solutions, together with interdisciplinary teamwork and collaboration, and the socio-emotional contexts of the community. | There are still areas for improvement in how practitioners use design thinking in youth services. Therefore, more evidence-based practices should be researched to formulate the use of design thinking in community-based youth empowerment practices. |
| 10 | Turreira-García (2018) | This study was a systematic review of participatory environmental monitoring (PEM) projects to explore key ways in which benefits and functions of participation are played out. | The study used a systematic review consisting of 146 peer-reviewed journals. | Communities were mainly involved in PEM projects through data collection, while professionals were prominent in the design thinking and evaluation stages. The findings mean that community participation is mostly functional in that their participation is used to gather information but that their involvement is limited and their potential ignored. | Some studies identified compelling evidence of empowerment effects of PEM programmes. Gaps are in terms of insufficient reporting of the extent of community participation or in fact the projects purposefully did not involve community other than for data collection. |

11	Van der Jagta et al. (2019)	The authors explored different types of collaborative approaches to reconnect youth with nature. A case study of a project in a community in Ljubljana (Slovenia) served to illustrate a framework of adaptive co-management.	Local researchers in Ljubljana engaged different stakeholders in a co-learning programme that resulted in in the development of neglected land into an urban garden under full management of a young adult group.	The programme improved the adaptive (flexibility and resilience) ability at the community level by capacitating previously disengaged young people, and at the municipal level by building partnerships resulting in a participatory governance policy.	A gap is that it is uncertain of the sustainability of the adaptive co-management of green spaces in reality. Therefore, more studies are needed on the environmental, social, and economic outputs and outcomes of real-world research.
12	Van Der Westhuizen (2021)	The authors aimed to determine how environmental social work can be done in partnership with faith-based organisations to empower youth and contribute to environmental justice.	This study used a literature review. A search of literature from 2010 onwards was conducted, focusing on the terms "sustainable development," "marginalised youth," "environmental and/or green social work," and "faith-based organisations."	The study findings revealed a suggested framework: A framework for a holistic interdisciplinary approach towards environmental justice and youth empowerment. In terms of environmental justice and youth empowerment, the study provided four central components: environmental responsibility, attitude, knowledge, and concern.	The potential of an interdisciplinary environmental approach may be based on collaboration, transparency, and willingness to work together across professional boundaries in multiple spaces. The framework for collaborative initiatives may serve as a guide to include and empower disengaged youth.

Charting the Data

The next stage involved charting the key information obtained from the full articles reviewed on the extraction sheet. Sargeant and O'Connor (2020) reiterate that scoping reviews use a descriptive approach by illustrating the process of the search and synergy of data by charting the data surrounding the chosen topic and directed by the specified scoping review question. Two of the reviewers conducted a thematic analysis of the findings according to Tesch (in Creswell 2014). The researchers used a combined inductive and deductive approach. Firstly, the inductive approach was used due to the lack of studies done on the topic and to see what emerged from the findings. Secondly, in the deductive approach, the researchers used keywords as a tentative framework to base the initial findings on. The researchers subsequently settled on three main themes in the final analysis.

Collating, Summarising, and Reporting the Results

The proposed theme identified by the two reviewers was shared with all four researchers. Once consensus was reached, themes were agreed upon that related to implications for existing social work guidelines for community-based strategies to empower youth to participate in a green economy.

Main Themes

Three main themes emerged from the 12 articles perused, namely: community-based strategies for income generating; existing policies supporting the green economy and youth; and foci of training and skills development of youth. These will be outlined and discussed below.

Community-Based Strategies for Income Generating

Ensor et al. (2018) focused on community-based strategies to explore how environmental change and risks are treated within communities in the Solomon Islands. Their study reported on local opinions and experiences of environmental challenges in small coastal communities dependent on the environment for livelihoods. The study underlined the importance of community involvement in gauging environmental changes taking place in their communities which could impact on their resources and livelihoods and lead to levels of vulnerability and risk. The authors also pointed to differences in perceptions of experiences between different communities and that these perceptions should not be viewed as consistent across communities.

In Indonesia, Prasetiyo et al. (2019) reported on community-based strategies involving community members to protect their environment. The authors created a model for sustainable development through waste management strategies, green fertilisers to be sold for income, using vacant land to grow fruit and vegetables for the community, and a waste bank managed by the community. This study found the community members' involvement in forming environmental groups, environmental awareness and education,

recycling, waste management, and ecotourism development are all strategies that aid implementation and operationalisation for environmental protection and sustainable development from an ecological citizenship perspective.

The literature review study by Ekka et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between sustainable development and youth participation. Key influences on youth involvement and input include youth activism, social responsibility, youth education and training, and entrepreneurship. The authors contend that youths' entrepreneurial abilities are distinct from those of their elders. Examples of these differences are in the availability of resources and capacities, as well as youths' reactions to environmental, cultural, and normative challenges. Ekka et al. (2022) assert that there is a significant link between environmental activism and entrepreneurialism among young people.

In South Africa, McKay and Tantoh (2021) undertook a qualitative study to explore the creation and/or improvement and effectiveness of urban green spaces. Although the study was focused on the planning and management around the green infrastructure in Johannesburg, the municipality initially wanted to discuss adding food gardens to parks, but this idea was not generally supported by participants. This study shows that community engagement involving stakeholder dialogue is crucial in managing urban parks; their concerns should be carefully considered to ensure the sustainability and fit for purpose of urban green recreational spaces in local communities.

Another study in South Africa by Mudombi (2017) investigated the participation of youth in the green economy focusing on sustainable development. What was found to be vital was the approach to youth as change agents, youth involvement in governance, foregrounding livelihoods, career building, and space for knowledge and skills development. The author contends that youth will form part of a critical mass of green citizens necessary to sustain and grow the green economy, achieving sustainable development for South Africa and beyond. These could be facilitated by means of skills development through work and essential community improvement projects and work integrated learning (Ramsay et al. 2023; Willet and Kvam 2019).

Also in South Africa, Van der Westhuizen (2021) proposes that working with youth to facilitate environmental awareness and sustainable development would necessitate an eco-centric vision and transformation agenda. Collaboration is key, the author says, in order to achieve broad-based environmental awareness by all in the community in order to work towards preserving but also improving their natural environment and their linkages with their surrounding ecology. The author emphasises social and environmental justice goals and interdisciplinarity and multiple spaces to support green initiatives for youth, especially unemployed youth, for their current and future well-being and setting a positive platform for future generations.

The study by Van der Jagta et al. (2019) in Ljubljana (Slovenia) also points to the importance of collaboration. These authors investigated various collaborative strategies

in a specific community focused on linking youth with the environment. The study underscores the use of the adaptive co-management framework by using co-learning programmes that resulted in the development of a vacant allotment into an urban garden under complete control of a youth group.

In Hong Kong, To and Lui (2021) argue for cross-disciplinary collaborations to understand the various needs of the community and to involve youth in all the decision-making. According to the authors, there existed a positive correlation between youth involvement and youth problem-solving abilities as well as positive expression and behaviour. To and Lui (2021) further assert that utilising thinking design in youth empowerment programmes could foster beliefs encouraging youth to bring about innovations in their communities. They challenged social workers involved with different youth services to form collaborations with youth, service users, and organisations with different specialisations to join to improve communities.

As a cautionary note, Turreira-García et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review to understand the key ways in which people participated in environmental projects as well as the underlying interests that these projects serve. They concluded that communities were used for data collection purposes and excluded and side-lined in project planning and strategizing. The findings of this study should be of concern for the research community as they are indicative of the nature of many research endeavours that coin participatory studies as collaborative, shared, and equal power. However, in reality, it remains top-down and exclusive (to academics and researchers) in practice.

Existing Policies Supporting the Green Economy and Youth

Nhamo and Mukonza's (2020) mixed methods study in South Africa focused on gender and youth (students). Ostensibly, the research question was geared to ascertain whether the opinions and experiences of women were strongly infused in the green economy and through the existing environmental policies and programmes. Their study concluded that there was still much to be done to raise awareness of the role that women and youth can play in the green economy especially during the time when projects are designed and managed. Although policies did exist that included women and youth, this fact was not always taken into consideration when projects were planned and implemented. The South African study by Mudombi (2017) emphasises that in order for policy to connect with the needs of people to increase participation in the green economy, then youth involvement is firstly vital together with other factors such as awareness raising, knowledge and skills development, and facilitating behaviour change. Overall, Mudombi (2017) argues that there should be a tighter legislative structure for stronger synergy between environmental and employment policies. Van der Jagta et al. (2019) contend that the project that they reported on resulted in environmental policy on participatory governance.

Foci of Training and Skills Development of Youth and Community

Mudombi (2017) recommends the following strategies to facilitate and encourage youth in the green economy and combat youth unemployment: designing educational and training programmes aligned with the green economy; helping and supporting youth entrepreneurs and businesses; and, significantly, establishing collaborative projects between universities (and other training programmes) and green business initiatives.

Redmond and Dolan (2016) constructed a model for youth leadership development so that youth are enabled to contribute meaningfully to their and others' well-being. The model consisted of three components: developing leadership skills, assessing environmental opportunities, and taking action or implementing. Although not specific to the green economy, the authors contributed to what is required in the training of youth to take leadership and to take action.

The study by To and Lui (2021) in Hong Kong used social innovation design thinking to create community-based youth programmes through a social initiative to achieve the five types of youth empowerment (social awareness, meaningful participation, social connections, entrepreneurial skills, power sharing with adults). The authors argue that social innovation and design thinking can provide youth with a unique platform to collaborate with adults which will promote youth self-confidence and competencies to develop community-based creative projects in their communities as youth become more emboldened to think of out-of-the-box solutions.

In Chicago (USA), Schusler et al. (2019) explored the perceptions of youth who were working for environmental and social justice. Their study was based on critical youth empowerment theory and participant observation and found that building youth agency and (personal) power to institute change and transformation in their communities were critical outcomes from youth empowerment programmes. Key components for learning included critical reflection of interpersonal and sociopolitical contexts, redefining what knowledge is, understanding themselves and in relation to others and to other contexts, and authentic conversations and engagements.

Discussion and Conclusion

Three main themes emerged from the 12 articles from the scoping review: community-based strategies; youth involvement and participation; and existing policies and infrastructure for advancing green business initiatives with/for youth.

In terms of community-based strategies, it was important for the authors to distinguish between community-based strategies for involvement and participation especially in green business initiatives in contrast to community-based strategies and approaches in the research methodology. The included scoping review articles proffered community-based strategies that could be further analysed with regard to their applicability to the South African context.

These strategies are outlined as follows:

- A transformative ecological and environmental focus is necessary in order to arrive at appropriate outcomes and objectives for projects and programmes to achieve sustainable development (Van der Westhuizen 2021). Social work education and practice should, therefore, incorporate community-based outcomes and objectives across modules in the different year levels for consistency. This approach will help to develop deep learning regarding what community-based strategies entail and how it can be implemented in their fieldwork internships for future professional practice. In mezzo or macro level intervention, students could, for example, use community-based principles with a focus on ecological and environmental outcomes, which must be mirrored in theory modules.

- Community participation and involvement of youth and other community members emerged as key principles for community-based strategies (Ekka et al. 2022; Ensor et al. 2018; Mudombi 2017; Prasetiyo et al. 2019; To and Lui 2021; Van der Westhuizen 2021). Local and community participation is vital generally but especially with regard to green initiatives to facilitate levels of economic independence. In the long-term, participation forges community empowerment and self-belief. Social work has always promoted community participation and, in this instance, this principle is again highlighted as quintessential for community-based outcomes.

- Collaboration between and among stakeholders is essential for optimal grassroots participation and partnerships, both within and external to communities, in order to achieve social and environmental justice (To and Lui 2021; Van der Jagta et al. 2019; Van der Westhuizen 2021). Collaboration is another principle that social work has upheld especially in macro level intervention. This principle is stressed as underscoring participation and partnerships to achieve community-based outcomes especially partnerships with local government. Collaboration and partnerships are needed for sustainable and enduring community development.

- Collaboration with universities and other training institutions is necessary to establish educational and training programmes or include in existing programmes (Mudombi 2017). Mudombi stresses the principle of collaboration not only between practitioners and community but also the expansion of collaboration to include universities and other training institutions. This is a crucial element of collaboration that will cement collaboration as a principle of community-based outcomes.

- Practical green business initiatives also developed out of community participation that could serve as examples of what can be initiated by other projects in the green and environmental space for entrepreneurs (Prasetiyo et al. 2019). Prasetiyo et al.'s (2019) study outlined the many ideas that emerged from what the people in Surabaya (Indonesia) did for their communities in terms of environmental protection and green business ventures. Practical ideas for green business included: cultivating decorative and herbal plants and trees for sale,

especially indigenous and water-wise plants; making and selling handicrafts from waste recycling (as souvenirs in ecotourism); producing green fertilisers and compost to be sold (Surabaya first established waste banks); and urban agricultural projects on unused land as places to cultivate and sell organic vegetables (as a cooperative efforts). Most importantly, the youth participating in skills development training that focuses on green business initiatives and environmental protection awareness and knowledge must gain valuable skills.

The second theme highlighted the distinct gap in the alignment between existing policies and infrastructure for advancing green business initiative in youth as this group is still not involved from the outset with project planning and implementation (Mudombi 2017; Nhamo and Mukonza 2020). However, Van der Jagta et al. (2019) showed that successful projects can influence policy to reflect participatory principles. In their study, the cascading effect produced from the popularity which emerged from green social and business initiatives sparked ecotourism which, in turn, facilitated local government involvement which transformed existing policy.

The third theme reflected the importance of youth involvement and participation by establishing appropriate youth training programmes to facilitate environmental awareness, skills, and knowledge (Mudombi 2017; Redmond and Dolan 2016; Schusler et al. 2019; To and Lui 2021). Training can involve the following:

- Skills development: Youth leadership; developing social connections or networking skills; entrepreneurial or business skills; creative and design thinking.
- Social and environmental awareness: Understanding the contextual issues and challenges and opportunities.
- Soft skills: Collaborations (engagement) with adults; personal power and ability to motivate others especially the community for change and transformation, self-reflection, authentic conversations.
- Implementation and taking action: Decision-making; logistics, solution-focused planning, monitoring, problem-solving, financial planning.
- Youth support: Mentorship, supervision, peer groups.

The recommendations that emerged from the scoping review did not differ substantially from general community development principles but what it did illustrate was how these principles strengthened community participation and partnerships to establish green initiatives.

Recommendations for Community-Based Guidelines for Youth Participation in the Green Economy

The following recommendations are focused on possible ways of encouraging youth to participate in the green economy using community-based strategies.

- Encouraging, enabling, and facilitating youth participation and involvement in green social work is vital. Methods of doing this start with having a transformative environmental agenda and focus that underlines the project as a first step or overall frame. These philosophical and ethical underpinnings will set the tone for inclusion and participation. Indeed, Gilliam (2021) argues that it is vital that any conversations around environmental preservation and social justice goals should include people of colour as an imperative for ensuring a greener future for all.
- Collaboration with the community members and collaboration across disciplines and stakeholder interest is another imperative. Reaching out to others will facilitate another level of inclusion and participation and will ensure that project implementers do not work in silos. Collaboration will also ensure that projects become knitted into community social patterns which in turn underscores the principle of sustainable development. This will add to the breadth of business initiatives that can be established in the community. The scoping review generated examples to consider such as waste management strategies, developing green fertilisers for sale, and using vacant land to grow fruit and vegetables possibly as cooperatives to be sold for income sharing.
- Community-based strategies must include open and transparent meetings and communication with community members to enable such interested members to be full participants and co-creators of the project in the form of working project teams. Empowerment and skills training and sharing are mutually beneficial ensuring that the modus operandi does not become a top-down or one-way-street endeavour. Again, these strategies will ensure sustainable development and leave an environmental and social justice footprint behind.
- The participation and inclusion of youth in green business initiatives through training programmes is another vital component in the guidelines. The scoping review identified skills development, social and environmental awareness, soft skills, implementation and taking action, and youth support as training imperatives.
- Collaboration with universities and other training institutions is important to mainstream environmental awareness and education, especially in social work macro projects for example. This could be facilitated through the inclusion of eco-social work modules with a focus on youth empowerment to effect environmental challenges and shift to socio-ecological sustainability.
- A policy framework aimed at protecting the integrity of green spaces and urban and rural environments, underwritten by sustainable development and social justice outcomes, should be developed in collaboration with youth. Such a framework should prescribe what participation and involvement would entail. Additionally, there should be increased awareness of policies that do exist and to use these strategically.

Conclusion

There are compelling reasons for ecological social work training and practice to include a focus on community-based strategies for income generation and training and skills development of youth in addressing the high youth unemployment rate in South Africa. There is certainly sufficient existing policy support for a green economy. We contend that environmental responsibility in the form of youth participation to identify environmental concerns in communities where they can contribute to change that will support sustainable development. This should lead to environmental problem-solving actions that inform solution-focused initiatives.

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