

WHITEPAPER

SUSTAINABILITY SHOWCASE

UNLOCKING THE POWER OF MISSION-DRIVEN BUSINESSES

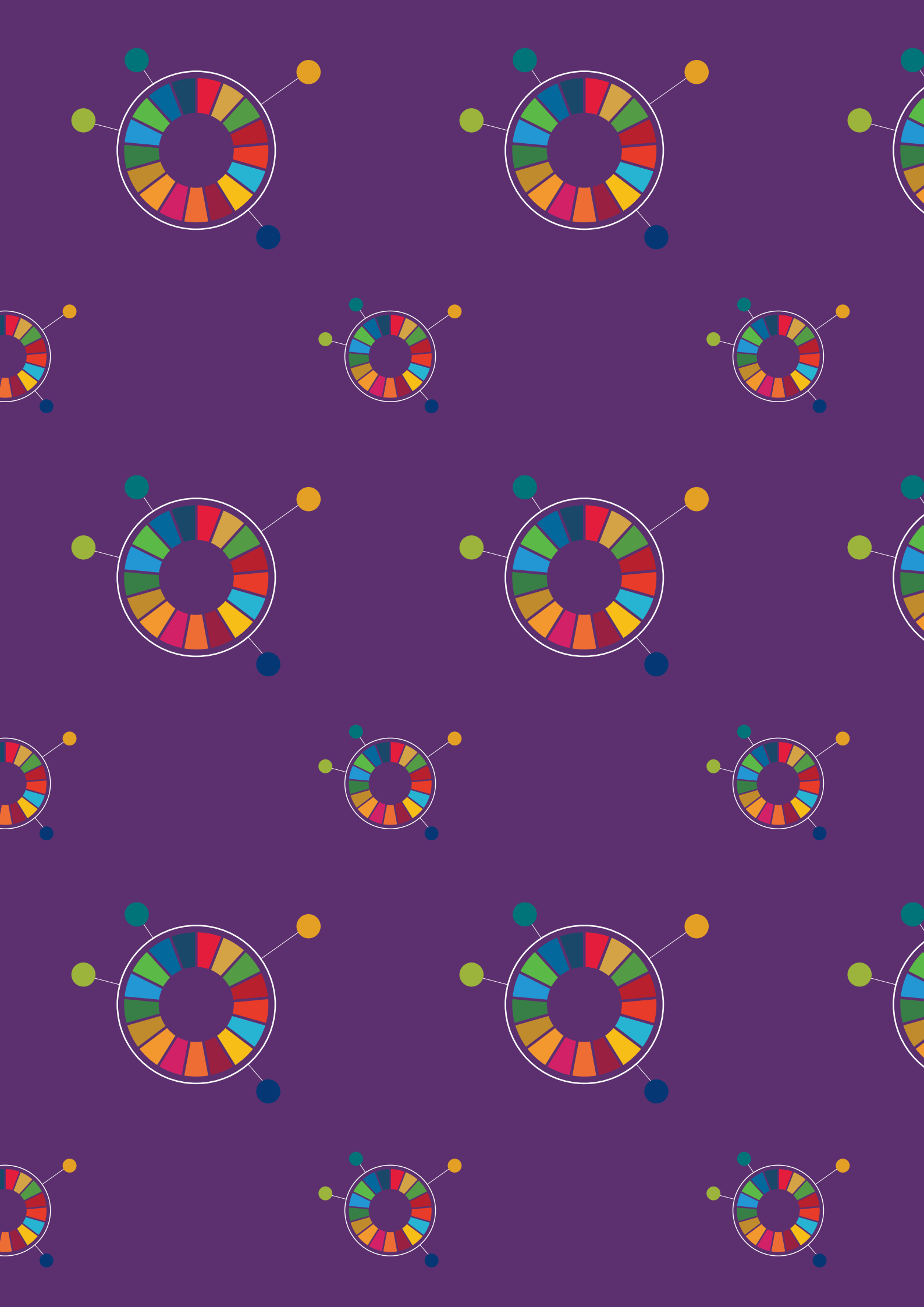
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A special thank you to Vicki van der Westhuizen [MBA (UCT), Master of Advanced Management (Yale School of Management)]. Your passion for impactful outcomes for both business and society, and your focus on curiosity, collaboration and operational excellence is clear in your detailed review and comprehensive feedback! Your international perspective on sustainability really helped to strengthen this whitepaper.

The achievements of a diverse array of mission-driven organisations demonstrate that businesses have the potential to amplify their impact and drive meaningful societal change. Together, they show that transformative progress is not just possible - it's within our grasp.

Abstract

This whitepaper showcases four organisations, Airothene, Ballast Nedam International Projects, Goby, and River Cleanup, that are successfully integrating sustainability into their operations. These organisations provide examples that can be adapted and scaled by businesses, inspiring you to take more ambitious steps towards sustainability and demonstrate that a meaningful societal shift towards a more sustainable future is achievable. The whitepaper highlights key lessons learned from each organisation, focusing on practical strategies and approaches that businesses can adopt to enhance their own sustainability practices.

In essence, this is a 'state of sustainability' overview – the whitepaper presents diverse organisations that have engaged in sustainability, with a view to showcasing the range of options for organisations in pursuing SDGs. Furthermore, the whitepaper provides some practical tips to develop innovative solutions within teams and organisations, to embed sustainability into existing businesses.

Keywords:



Sustainability

SDG

Mission
Driven Business

Dual Mission

Social Value

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There are many moving parts that came together in this whitepaper.

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1. Introduction

The business context has changed dramatically in the past few months. Changing geo-political conditions have meant that a focus on sustainability in business has increasingly come into question. For some organisations this has resulted in a dramatic and devastating reversal of climate, social impact and sustainability commitments, with implications for business and society.

Yet many of us value longer term horizons, and view businesses and organisations as having a unique role and responsibility to play in our societies. Planning for a sustainable future and the

role of business as a key stakeholder in society and communities, this whitepaper serves as a source of inspiration and - hopefully - delight, at the range of options available for organisations to focus on sustainability.

The whitepaper begins with a brief toolkit, inspired by theory, to allow business leaders to think about sustainability in your organisations, before turning to four unique cases of businesses driving sustainability in different ways – at home and abroad.

SDGs covered in this whitepaper are:



2.

A sustainability toolkit



“Making meaningful, sustainable changes can ... be difficult”

(Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018:752).



Introducing change in organisations.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals have provided a call for businesses to act differently, to respond to a changing environment, and to become increasingly sustainable. The old ways of working were increasingly questioned, while innovation and sustainable activities have been prioritised. Sustainability, broadly defined, refers to conducting business and organisational activity in a way that is respectful of environmental and social constraints, and balances these with economic success. The aim of sustainable practices is to deliver long-term positive impact for all stakeholders (social, environmental and economic).

Ultimately, for businesses to effectively respond to the SDGs and to re-orient to focus on, or integrate, sustainability into the business, they need to change or adapt. Yet change is not easy, and organisations are designed to bring stability to organising

and action. According to Worley & Lawler (2006: N.P.) it “is not surprising, then, that most large-scale change efforts fail to meet their expectations.” Most existing businesses are not designed for change.

But the operating environment today demands flexibility and a rethink of the traditional role of business in society. With change as a growing imperative, it is important to think of some ways in which to introduce sustainability, and to do so in a way that can ultimately lead to success. Below I present an overview of why change is needed, a summary of some design thinking principles which can be used in teams, as well as a unique way of thinking about change projects that can be used to introduce or reinforce sustainability practices into organisations.



Sustainability and SDGs

“It’s easy to understand why most models of organisational design tend to stress stability — they were born in an age when environments were relatively stable or at least predictable”

(Worley & Lawler, 2006)

Predictable operating environments are largely a thing of the past. Consequently, regulation, pressure from consumers, common sense, and a changing business environment are all leading organisations to shift to integrate social and environmental priorities into their daily practices. In conjunction with the economic mission of the organisation, this is often referred to as a ‘dual mission’, where an additional focus (social or environmental) exists in parallel to profit seeking activities (Smith & Besharov, 2019).

For organisations seeking to make a difference, that have not been founded to deliver on a dual mission – the imperative to change and ‘innovate’ can be very difficult. Organisations are built and structured around particular goals and integrating new goals can cause tension within an organisation.

However, for Smith & Besharov (2019:3), the tensions between the dual goals can spur a productive tension that leads to innovation and “creative solutions”. This, of course, can come in handy as companies seek to meet sustainable development goals and think differently about driving meaningful change in society.

For Satell (2017) new or different problems require unique organisational responses, and open innovation can play a role in achieving these solutions. Open innovation stems from sharing a problem with a group of people with diverse skills (Satell, 2017). It follows that these diverse skills would be more common in ‘dual mission’ organisations.

But - in a practical sense - how do organisations drive innovation, introduce dual missions, and begin to test new ideas as they think about sustainability? One way is to use design thinking principles.



Design thinking tools and innovation

Smith & Besharov (2019) highlight how there are various levels of resistance to *adaptation and change*, but that experimentation within organisations can allow for some of this resistance to be overcome, and to pilot or test ideas – in a similar way as we would expect in the start-up phase of business. Identifying an opportunity for pursuing a sustainable impact, or developing the mission orientation of the business can leverage an emergent

pathway - namely by foregoing forecasting, and chasing opportunities “through small, calculated steps - experiments - observing what happens with each step” (Fixson, & Rao, 2014:48). In this way, hurdles and potential new pathways and solutions are identified as the strategy is implemented, but this allows for the plan to change as the team attempts to achieve their goal.

Design thinking, typically used as a tool for entrepreneurs, can also be a useful approach to integrating sustainability into existing organisations. In design thinking, the five steps are; Empathy, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test.

For organisations investigating sustainability, ‘**empathy**’ is about understanding the needs, the problems and gain insight into challenges

In the ‘**define**’ stage, teams and organisations articulate the problem clearly.

Ideate is the process of generating a diverse array of potential solutions.

In the **prototype** phase, organisations and teams begin to test their ideas.

Testing, as the name suggests, means bringing the idea to life with real-world clients and partners

Each of these is discussed at the end of the whitepaper, highlighting how the cases in the study can be analysed through this framework.

3. Methodology

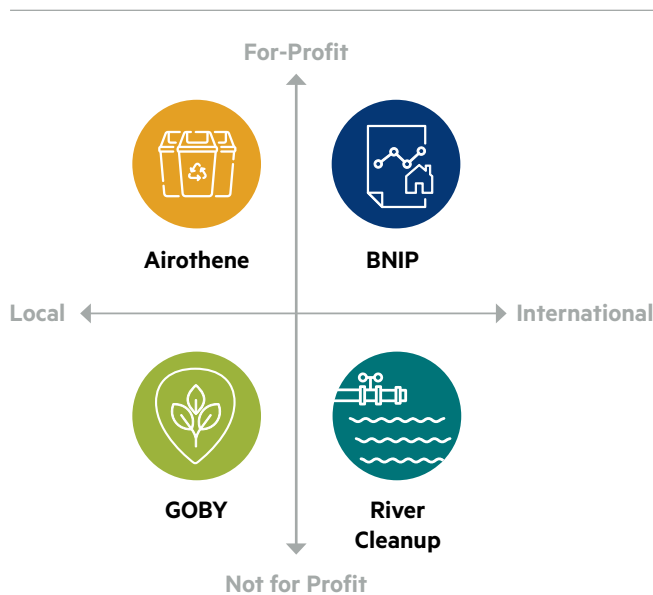


The research follows a qualitative, multiple-case study approach to examine the diversity of sustainability practices adopted by organisations. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of the strategic and operational variations between different types of organisations, providing insights into how distinct organisational profiles address environmental and social responsibilities.

There are certain similarities in how the following cases are presented, for example the SDGs that are addressed and the advice for managers and leaders. However, each case has a unique focus and footprint. The ‘personality’ of each organisation comes to the fore, in the way each case is presented.

Case Selection

The cases were selected based on a purposive sampling strategy informed by a typology that captures two primary dimensions: ‘Organisational Scope’ and ‘Profit Orientation’ (See Figure 1: Typology of organisations).



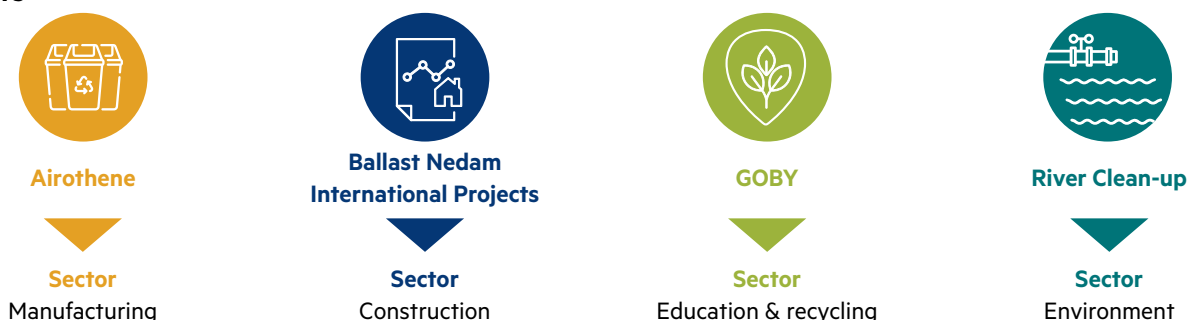
- 1 ORGANISATIONAL SCOPE:** Organisations were classified as either ‘local’ or ‘international’ based on their operational reach and target markets. This distinction allows for an exploration of how geographical scope influences environmental and social strategies.
- 2 PROFIT ORIENTATION:** Organisations were categorised as either ‘for-profit’ or ‘not-for-profit’, which highlights potential differences in mission, resource allocation, and accountability frameworks. This distinction sheds light on how profit motives and organisational goals shape sustainability practices and stakeholder engagement.

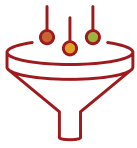
The cases are presented in alphabetical order in the paper.

Figure 1: Typology of organisations

Source: Author's own, made using Napkin AI

Sectors





Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in each organisation, including senior management, founders and managers involved in sustainability efforts. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of organisational practices, values, and challenges. The semi-

structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling follow-up questions tailored to each organisation's unique context. Field observations in the case of Airothene and GOBY, and former work with Ballast Nedam International Projects, complemented interview data by providing insights into day-to-day practices and on-the-ground sustainability initiatives.

Data collection & respondents



Airothene



Approach

Interview with Founder, site visit and informal discussions with employees, document and email exchanges



Ballast Nedam International Projects



Approach

Interview with member of the Board of Directors of Ballast Nedam NV and CEO of BNIP & with a Product development Manager

Review and written comments from Board Member Ballast Nedam NV & Director CSR and Digital Innovation



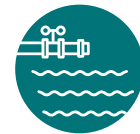
GOBY



Approach

Interview with Founder, fieldwork – spent a day with the GOBY team to shadow their work in the schools in Benoni, Ekurhuleni. Document and email exchanges

Interview with Hitachi representative (and GOBY funder).



River Clean-up



Approach

Interview with senior manager & review of annual report. Written correspondence with Founder & CEO of River Cleanup.

Additionally, organisational documents, such as sustainability reports, policy manuals, and marketing materials, were analysed to provide further context and corroborate information obtained from interviews and fieldwork. These documents helped

triangulate findings and offered insights into the public-facing commitments and internal policies that guide each organisation's approach to sustainability.



Researcher Experience and Reflexivity

The researcher's prior experience working with one of the organisations offers an insider perspective, enriching the analysis with contextual knowledge and understanding of industry-

specific challenges. The use of multiple cases from diverse organisational profiles also mitigates potential bias by allowing for comparative analysis across different contexts



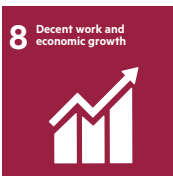
Case 1: Airothene

“There is a never-ending source of scrap,
we have the capacity to bring it back to life”

Steven Levitt



1.1 SDGs addressed



UN SDG 8
Decent Work
and Economic
Growth



UN SDG 11
Sustainable
cities and
communities



UN SDG 12
Responsible
consumption
and production.



1.2 Overview

Airothene is a Johannesburg based company. Ostensibly it has a focus on recycling plastic waste in the manufacturing of pool noodles – but the organisation does so much more. Steven Levitt, the founder, has as his mission and purpose to create jobs and seek opportunities to make use of the local skills and talents of the residents of the inner city – which Levitt describes as “a fast-deteriorating wasteland”. He is also committed to breathing new life into the neglected and unsafe inner-city area, and to “turn the inner city back into a light industrial manufacturing zone” (Personal correspondence, 6 June 2024). The business thus serves multiple purposes and strives to achieve impact across multiple touchpoints – always aiming high, adding value and avoiding shortcuts.

Steven highlights that “the city has a pumping heart”. He continues to say;

“one only need drive along Bree at 19.00 hrs to find hairdressers doing brisk trade, school children out and about, hawkers, convenience stores open, taverns, families on their balconies and bustling traffic. And yet there are an enormous number of job seekers. You sense it, by walking along our road or getting out of the car. They are genuine. If you were to say: ‘come see me tomorrow at 08.00’ they will be there”.

Located on Gwigwi Mrwebi Street in Newtown, Johannesburg, Steven explains that, “in essence, we are a plastics scrap business that reworks products back into retail products, and for agricultural and industrial packaging use” (See Figure 2).

“One of the most important things for us is to *add* value – to take the waste and turn it into something that has a greater value than before, not to misdiagnose its content by devaluing the plastic waste to its lowest form (the production of black bin liners)”.



Figure 2: Airothere’s production process

1.2.1 An import-substitution industrialisation logic to development

The Witwatersrand industrial complex (WIC), where he grew up, is a vast area stretching as far east of Johannesburg as Springs and south to the Vaal Triangle, and west almost to Randfontein. Only the northern corridor has developed from Johannesburg almost to Pretoria. For Levitt, what this area (the WIC) has suffered from, is the same issue evident across many developing countries – “globalisation and cheaper imports from the East” (Personal

correspondence, 6 June 2024). He continues to note that this “has left abandoned factories and warehouses in its wake. ... These were factories that produced goods for consumption before. No wonder there are not enough jobs to go around!”.

Levitt (2024) notes several areas that he views as opportunities in this context:

- 1 South Africans are good at discarding plastic waste, and labour is readily available.
- 2 South Africa’s weakening currency in conjunction with a noble cause - such as avoiding blue ocean sea freight - are compelling ingredients (economically and otherwise) to substitute imports with locally produced product.
- 3 The chance to engage in import-substitution competitively and without the protection of artificial and politically inspired trade barriers¹.

Levitt says, South African businesses need to “stand up to China and compete!” But the realities on the ground make this very difficult – for example production around load shedding, cable theft, the perceived lack of safety by comparison with secure industrial parks, and increasingly the threat of water shortages. (See Figure 3)

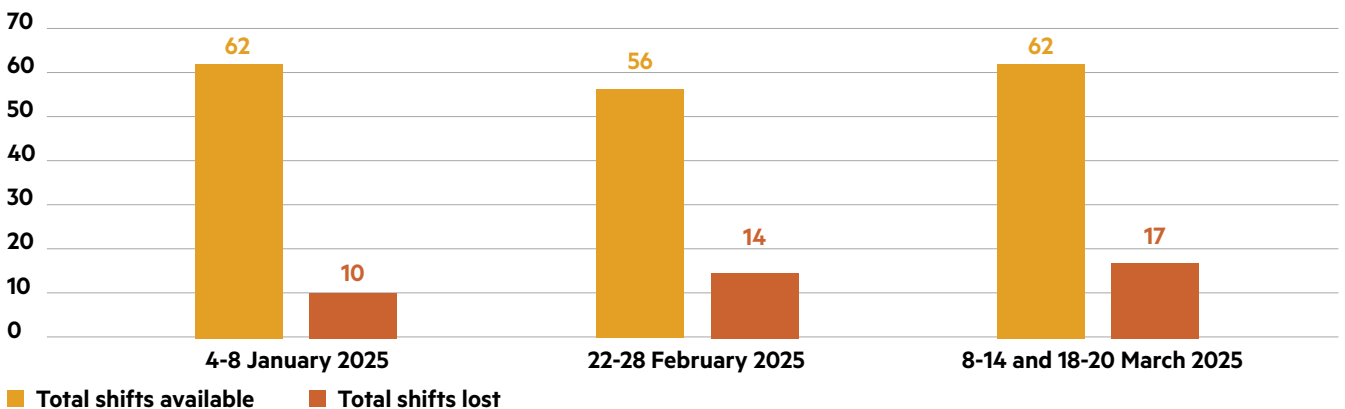


Figure 3: Power outages, lost shifts

1. This interview took place before Trump was elected and the flurry of trade barriers came into effect.

1.2.2 One business builds on the next

Levitt provides an example of the types of synergies that exist as a result of his business being in the inner city.

Levitt has an opportunity mindset and is continuously scanning the environment for opportunity and impact. He takes action where these two intersect. For example, he is involved in vermiculture – with a worm farm that generates organic compost from food waste, or in the development of food gardens and vertical gardens in vacant land and on the walls of his factory (see Figure 4). Another project is “scrap car bumpers extruded into polyprop pellets and pressed into garden rakes”.



Figure 4: Vertical food gardens

People like to be in positions where they have ownership and responsibility – Levitt understands this in the way he empowers his workers and gives them full transparency. “And it doesn’t stop there” Levitt says. Airothere has two forklifts. And Steven explains,

“last year sometime - it was winter because I was getting into my car and it was dark already and the street lights were not working - when a car pulled up at some speed and two burly men jumped out. They asked me if my name was Steven and then enquired about hiring our forklift for two days. It turned out that they scour the countryside for written-off tractors, which they then stuff into a 40’ container in an abandoned plot not far from the Bree Street taxi rank. For our forklift driver, each occasion nets him a handsome sum for a weekend’s work, and we get the equivalent in cash of one month’s rental. And the container leaves by sea to Nigeria where these tractors are overhauled and made fit for purpose”

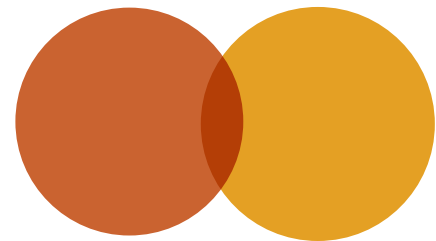


Figure 5: Opportunity and Value intersection

For Levitt, the common theme and question he seems to be asking is “how is Airothere able to leverage on this chance meeting?” - a question many people don’t seem to be asking. This opportunity mindset has led to Levitt branching out into several different areas. Each of these areas is evidence of a unique stream of impact, with implications for revenue generation, job creation and a positive social and environmental impact.

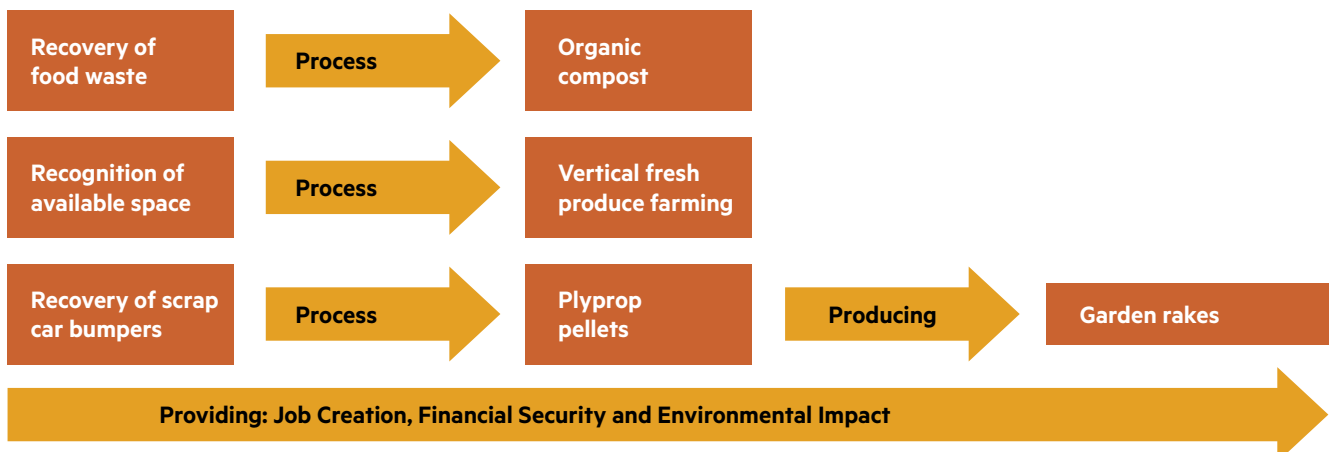


Figure 6: Levitt’s opportunity mindset opening diverse impact streams

1.2.3 Defining sustainability

Steven reflects on the state of the economy, and the hopelessness for many people who are unable to find work.

“My thoughts were of how appropriate our business model is as a response to the problem. We contribute to the regeneration of waste plastic into desirable products, we provide training and work opportunities for young people so that they can also become part of the economic chain”.

Steven has a vision and can “envisage 3 km of urban fresh produce farms owned by young farmers growing spinach up the walls of derelict buildings, an insatiable market with distribution channels on nearly every street corner”. He believes that the economic model that Airothene has developed, is replicable in other urban centres in South Africa and across the region. “What I am convinced of is that the solution is staring us in the face”, says Steven.



1.3 Biggest hurdles

The biggest hurdle for Airothene is, “Access to cheap capital, and working capital finance”. Levitt notes that this is: “capital with which to experiment, make mistakes, build a proper facility with modern equipment, employ smarter managers including safety officers, environmental controls, training and adherence to processes”.

The second hurdle is that “our people are starved for opportunity and skills transfer” and that any initiative to provide skills and training to people in the inner city is not only welcome, but desperately needed.



1.4 Advice for managers & business leaders

Levitt has the following advice for managers and business leaders, when it comes to driving sustainability and impact



Fight the fight and never give up

Levitt notes, “When you visited for the first time, we were not producing, we had run aground. We were in discussions with customers to save us, take us over. They were scared. In the end I my family and I made sacrifices to go it alone. We all hear it time and again - back yourself”.



Don't give up and import from China; stand up to imports and compete!

I have sussed out the real issue here, it's that life is far simpler to import container loads than suffer the relentless pressures that are passed on in the form of the price when goods are manufactured (loadshedding; efficiencies; cable theft and lack of safety in industrial areas). Its competitive for chain stores to stuff 40' container loads whilst they pay lip service to sustainability and job creation and inclusiveness.



Adopt an opportunity mindset

In the inner-city precinct “there are so many opportunities for the taking, the ideas will flow; we just need capital.”



Explore all channels for market access:

I am flabbergasted by our success with our flirtation with the Takealot site. We are suddenly consumed by what we can place onto their catalogues. Its early days still, but my feeling is that we have discovered a huge opportunity to market and distribute our products, improving our margins by offering the market our products for a price that competes favourably with what the consumer needs to pay from distributors.



Turn the inner city back into a light industrial manufacturing zone

Don't run away from this area, but invest in it and be rewarded by rentals that are a fraction of what you pay in secure industrial parks.



Training, training, training!

People are hungry to learn and improve.



1.5 Key takeaways

This case is 100% about leadership and vision, and about a tenacity to bring about change.



The Airothene case highlights the phenomenal results that stem from a determined individual who is able to withstand setbacks.



Levitt has a ruthless determination and focus on impact and sustainability, and a will to drive change and development in a community.



Rather than 'pay lip service', Levitt is focused on tangible change.



Setting a clear goal and pursuing it with complete focus is a critical component of success.

While Airothene highlights the challenges in the ability of impact driven businesses to simultaneously generate profit and have an impact, it is also an exemplary case of how those two critical aspects are core to the business.



It is clear that Airothene would not change or modernise its manufacturing process, or move to a different location, if this meant that the positive impact on the inner city in Johannesburg was being compromised.



The company is true to its values and mission, and its' emphasis on doing things to perfection in spite of not being in a glamorous industry.

There is a psychological, or socio-psychological effect in evidence with Airothene. The opposite of the broken window effect.



Levitt is single-handedly transforming a corner of the city, and is tackling several wicked problems at once.



This is a call to organisations, and a reminder that they can have a big impact in their small corners of the world.

This case is an example of unrelenting determination to drive impact and bring about change, despite all the obstacles. Airothene at its very core, at its heart, is a business that is aware of its responsibilities, its stakeholders, and its place in the world.



Case 2: Ballast Nedam International Projects

Ballast Nedam International Projects (BNIP) is a Dutch construction company, headquartered in Nieuwegein, the Netherlands, with a strong track record of projects across the African continent and beyond. The company has years of

experience with large-scale and complex assignments providing a strong portfolio, including, but not limited to, ports, bridges, hospitals and waterworks. This is the foundation for a solid reputation.



2.1 SDGs addressed



UN SDG 7
Affordable and Clean Energy



UN SDG 9
Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure



UN SDG 12
Responsible consumption and production.



UN SDG 13
Climate Action



UN SDG 15
Life on Land

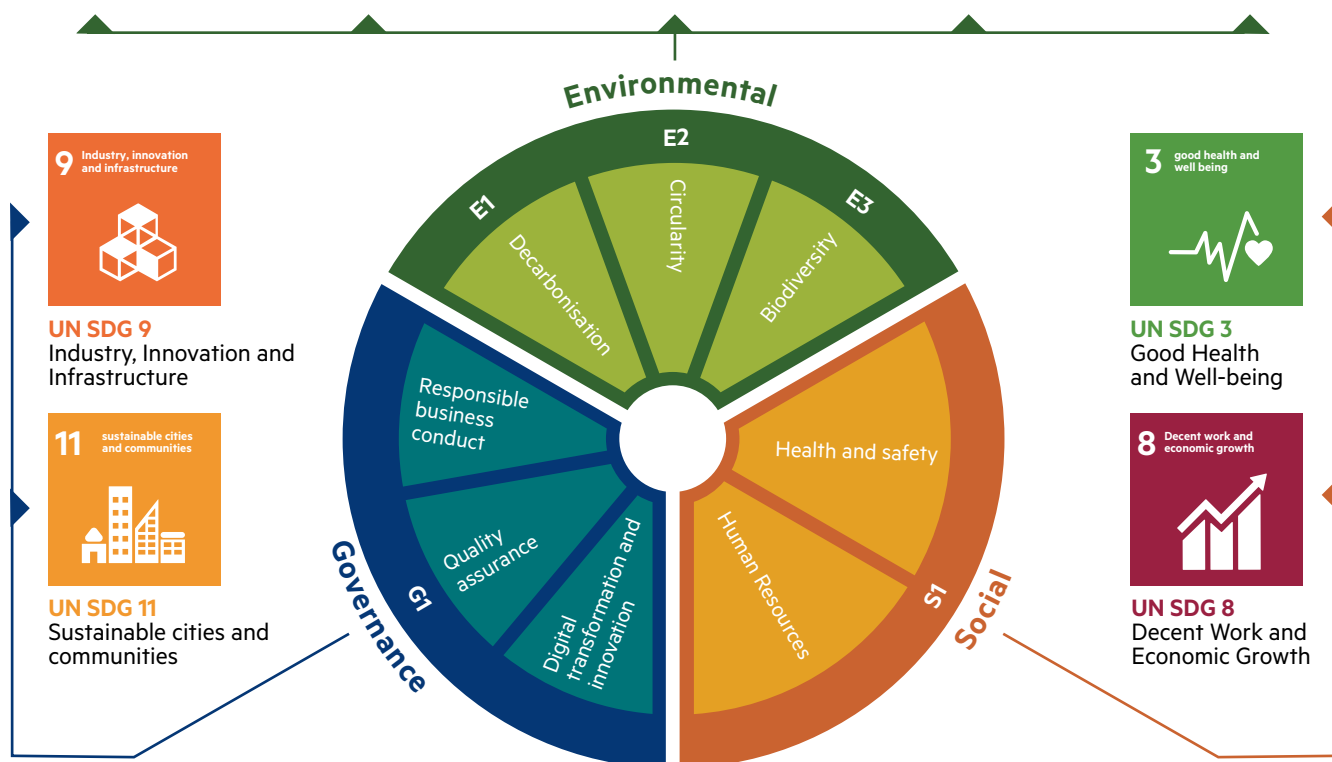


Figure 9: SDGS addressed by BNIP



2.2 Overview

Almost by definition, work in the construction sector has the potential for a large social and environmental impact – both positive and negative. For BNIP, this is heightened as they work across several markets, particularly in Africa. This leads to increasing complexity in the projects and requires a unique perspective on sustainability.

“The built environment has a significant impact on our planet’s natural resources. Construction materials and products represent about 50% of all raw materials extracted from the earth’s crust. Furthermore, construction activities represent 38% of all waste generated in the European Union”

(BNIP Annual report, 2024:47).

BNIP has developed this unique perspective regarding sustainability, with a clear-eyed comment in their Annual Report noting;

“With an imminent urgency to reduce our global footprint and preserve our planet, we need to

take responsibility as a business to protect and improve our living environment. Building a sustainable living environment is our ultimate goal and it is what we literally do every day”

(BNIP 2023 Annual report, p21).

And it’s not just talk, the BNIP Annual report (2024:38) notes that “From 2019 to 2024, we achieved a 51.5% reduction of scope 1 and 2 emissions in our Dutch activities.”

BNIP works on projects spanning energy, water, infrastructure, urban development, healthcare and others. The size of the projects completed by BNIP also means that there is a fine balance and tension between economic viability and both environmental and social responsibility. This increases the importance of adapting sustainability practices to local contexts. The need for a holistic approach involving all stakeholders is an essential component of their work. Managing all this, while competing on price and technical specifications with other construction companies, is no easy feat. For this reason, the inherent complexities and contradictions for the organisation are clear, and present a compelling case for understanding their view of sustainability.



Defining Sustainability:

Eric van Zuthem (member of the Board of Directors of Ballast Nedam NV, and CEO of BNIP) and Rens de Rijke (Project Development Manager) both emphasise that sustainability is not a ‘one size fits all’ concept but is context dependent. Van Zuthem notes, “you have to look at every place that you can make a like a mark where you leave your footprint.” There is a clear understanding that needs and priorities vary significantly between developed and developing markets. For example, Van Zuthem states that “if it’s the international [project team] we’re much more focused on people development...if we’re looking in highly developed markets... we’re looking more at you know, how can we realise a complete circular building.”

A set of morals and values seem to be embedded in the corporate culture of BNIP. Van Zuthem says, “I think that we can help, and that’s my mission to - to really *do* things for people”, while De Rijke notes, “and of course there is also some common sense. There’s also your own ethics”. Van Zuthem believes in spending time in the places where BNIP operates, “and I talk to the people so that I can get a sense of, you know, are we doing the right things here?” He believes that local stakeholders should “tell him” what their needs are. This broad approach to consultation is unique, for a multi-national corporation (MNC) – particularly when it’s led by those at the top. BNIP consult beyond the stakeholders “with the money, but with everybody”, to understand their needs and goals, says Van Zuthem.

For De Rijke, sustainability is “doing things durably, in a way that there is a weighted average on cost and lifetime.” In the world of construction, this makes sense – the durability of a project is a key sustainability metric, and the more durable it is, the better. De Rijke shares examples of several projects which are a source of personal pride. In Ghana, he was involved in the construction of a hospital, and a canalisation project that prevented flooding, and in Ethiopia, they constructed a water project that provided access to clean water for an entire region. The lasting and shared positive social impact that these types of projects can have, is significant.

The company acknowledges the contradictions in their portfolio, as they take on projects for oil companies while also striving for sustainability. Van Zuthem says: “You know, we also have a portfolio where we work for oil majors ... there you can say ‘okay from a sustainability point of view maybe not so good’”. However, Van Zuthem continues to note that if they didn’t do the work for oil companies, others would, and at least BNIP does it “in the best possible way”, with sustainability and best practice at the centre of what they do.

Is it better to work on carbon intensive projects in a responsible and sustainable way, or to leave these to be done by companies who focus only on the bottom line and neglect social and environmental concerns?

BNIP's approach to sustainability is characterised by a nuanced, practical, and ethically driven mindset. They recognise the complexity of the challenges they face and prioritise action and incremental progress over grand gestures. While acknowledging the tension between profit and purpose, they strive to make conscious choices and work with stakeholders to create positive impacts within the context of their specific projects. This commitment, along with strong internal values, positions BNIP well to navigate the evolving landscape of sustainability in the construction industry. Van Beijma, Director Corporate Social Responsibility and Digital Innovation at Ballast Nedam, adds that at a governance level, each quarter at BNIP,

“We monitor our ESG data - like CO2, waste, HR, HSE and quality of our international projects - and discuss this with ESG related colleagues and with the Board of Ballast Nedam. During these meetings we monitor the progress on our internal CSR / sustainability key performance indicators (KPIs) and we discuss where we could improve”.

This governance structure is something that Van Beijma says is appreciated by banks and insurance companies, who value BNIPs rigour and transparency in relation to sustainability.



2.3 Biggest hurdles

For BNIP, Regulatory disconnects, Skills and the Competitive landscape are the three areas where they face the biggest barriers.

1

CONTEXT: BNIP have experienced challenges where policy ideals and on-the-ground realities are not aligned.

For example, in one project they were required to engage in waste separation, yet the country where the project was located, did not have the same waste management processes.

As a result, the separated waste would either be mixed and likely burnt once the project was over, or there was the question of shipping the waste back to the Netherlands.

This of course raised big and complex questions around the carbon footprint of this activity, the risk the waste would be dumped at sea.

Overall, this raises a question about designing projects that work in a context with a vastly different regulatory framework. Ultimately, the educational component of the waste separation is valuable, but it needs to be fit for the

country context of the project. The BNIP Annual report (2024:51) notes that, “Together with our Dutch waste partners, we diverted 98% of our non-hazardous waste from disposal”. This shows the significant difference in context.

2

HUMAN CAPITAL: A challenge that may become increasingly relevant is that prospective employees are concerned that the company's sustainability commitments are not strong enough, especially in relation to working with oil companies.

This perception is difficult to manage, and yet BNIP is hesitant to loudly proclaim their sustainability actions just to build a reputation via marketing.

Rather Van Zuthem believes that with time, it will become clear that BNIP is a leader in sustainability and that the organic reputation built on tangible results - and not marketing, is the best way forward.

3

COMPETING ON AN UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD. There is a significant challenge to operate competitively on the international stage, when other organisations do not hold themselves to the same high sustainability standards.

This means that BNIP may come in as more expensive than other bidders for projects.

However, the upside is that their sustainability credentials have also been the cause for them being invited to tender in the past – given they can be trusted to comply.

But this does lead to greater complexity – for example De Rijke notes that all equipment used by suppliers must also comply with certain emissions criteria – an indication that BNIP ensure best practice along the value chain.



2.4 Advice for managers & business leaders

The BNIP team have several pieces of advice for other organisations that are pursuing sustainability goals.



“Just Do Something”:

Van Zutthem advises organisations to start with concrete actions, emphasising that “you should start where you can actually do something tangible”.



This may be as small as the simple act like not throwing garbage on the ground as a basic starting point, especially in places where that is not the norm.



Bite-Sized Approaches:

The company favours a phased approach, breaking down sustainability goals into “small bite-sized things” to build momentum and success.



Van Zutthem also notes that by doing so, “people feel good...we’ve made this, we’re doing something that’s better than before. And then you can take a next step and a next step.”



Understand the context:

it is critical to understand that while broad sustainability goals are shared, different contexts require different approaches.



The importance of understanding the context, and acting in way that is relevant for that context is critical.



Living by Standards:

De Rijke emphasises the importance of truly “living by your own standards,” and not just treating sustainability as a “paper exercise.”



This includes small everyday actions like choosing reusable cups over paper.



2.5 Key takeaways

Building an organisational culture that attracts sustainability-oriented employees, and having sustainability at the core of the organisation’s values and internal culture is key. Both Van Zutthem and De Rijke believe that people working for BNIP are motivated by a desire to do good in the world.

“I think people that choose to work in Africa or with Africa, I think usually from themselves they have a certain calling, like you know I want to do something good over there”, says De Rijke.

De Rijke attributes some of the company’s commitment to sustainability to Dutch ethics, noting that those in the Netherlands are “quite well aware of what is right and wrong”. While businesses across the world may not be able to claim ‘Dutch ethics’, the idea of an ethical approach to business, rooted in the organisation is critical.

In addition, organisations can tap into what is important culturally in their locations, and leverage that to drive sustainable practices. For example, De Rijke takes great pride in empowering his workers on-site through training and mentorship, particularly those he described as “hungry” to learn. This was something

mentioned with much enthusiasm. De Rijke shared an example of meeting someone on a project who could eventually surpass him in skills, and he found that rewarding. Similarly, the company are pleased when they can help to empower women, and create opportunities for them to find work and gain skills.

BNIP prioritise genuine sustainability over self-promotion, focusing on real impact rather than just messaging. They critique approaches that emphasize appearance over substance. Van Zutthem concludes, “On paper, you can look shiny and fantastic, but then what are your core values and how do you actually, you know, what does it actually mean?”. Living the values of sustainability, quietly and consistently is more important than the need to trumpet successes.

The BNIP case highlights that for large, multinational corporations, leadership is critical. Establishing the right corporate culture, embedding humility and curiosity into the organisation is critical for success in sustainability. The BNIP approach is not one of arrogance and power – they work closely in partnership with people in the communities where their projects are, and try to be fit for context. For BNIP, getting sustainability right in practice, in the foundations of their work is what is most important. They are less concerned with the sound bites, and media fuss that may distract from the fundamentals of building a sustainable future.



Case 3: GOBY



“The next thing is just obviously the funding. Without funding we’re like a fish out of water. Excuse the pun”

Vaughn Bishop



3.1 SDGs addressed



UN SDG 4:
Quality
Education



UN SDG 6
Clean Water
and Sanitation
including
Personal
Hygiene



UN SDG 12
Responsible
consumption
and production.



UN SDG 13
Climate Action



UN SDG 14
Life Below
Water



UN SDG 15
Life on Land



3.2 Overview

Charities have long been the backbone of South Africa, playing a crucial role in uplifting communities and fostering positive change. Amid numerous challenges, the efforts of dedicated organisations often ignite hope, drive progress, and promote sustainability.

Goby - Global Organisation 4 Brighter Youth (GOBY) is one such grassroots initiative making significant waves - both figuratively and literally - toward a healthier and more sustainable environment. GOBY aims to incentivise recycling and reuse of plastic waste - in addition to using ‘Purposeful Play’ to encourage learning and movement in children in South Africa.

A Goby is a fish - a bottom dweller - and is just one of the many species adversely affected by the widespread challenge of microplastics. The GOBY fish is also the mascot for the foundation of the same name, and a 5m steel structure that is taken to schools and beaches across South Africa (See figure 7). People on the beach, or children in schools collect plastic waste and fill the GOBY fish.



Figure 7: GOBY fish, filled with plastic

At the school level, GOBY goes beyond traditional environmental education and delivers a climate change curriculum using ‘Purposeful Play,’ an approach that blends education with sport. The foundation also contributes to infrastructure development by converting plastic waste into recycled school desks (see Figure 8). In this way children see the waste that they once collected and ‘fed’ to the GOBY fish, being transformed into school desks. Bishop notes that,

“research indicates that an engaged learning environment increases learner’s attention and focus, promotes meaningful learning experiences, encourages higher levels of learner performance, and motivates the practice of higher-level critical thinking skills”.



Figure 8: Desks made from recycled plastic

In essence, GOBY drives sustainability through waste reduction, environmental education, and plastic recycling, aligning its work with key environmental SDGs. Its social impact is delivered through sport-based interventions, teacher training, child protection workshops, and community engagement—all aimed at shifting attitudes and behaviours for lasting change.



3.2.1 GOBY activities

According to Bishop (2024, personal communication), GOBY has developed the learning environmental and educational curriculum that addresses key messages and targets, and aims to make fundamental change in attitude and behaviour amongst the youth from the following:



GOBY COMMUNITY: leads the charge in environmental stewardship by partnering with organisations to conduct impactful beach and community clean-up operations, fostering civic pride and sustainable practices.



GOBY RECYCLING: creatively educates primary school learners about the importance of recycling, combining hands-on learning with impactful demonstrations using the iconic GOBY fish structure.



GOBY SOLUTIONS: By turning plastic waste into simplistic sports equipment, the foundation not only cleans up communities but also provides children with the tools they need to engage in physical activity, fostering health and development. Plastic waste is also upcycled into environmentally friendly products, for example school desks.



GOBY ACTIVE: champions the physical well-being of learners, introducing a platform that enhances fitness, reduces health disparities, and encourages inclusivity—all while supporting long-term academic and social achievement.



GOBY EDUCATE: equips educators with SACE-accredited training and methodologies, ensuring they can deliver high-quality physical education while prioritising child protection and safeguarding.

GOBYs secret to success is the HUGE amount of energy and excitement that they bring to schools during the roadshow. Students have often prepared short presentations referring to the importance of recycling, care for the environment, and the perils of plastic waste.



The GOBY team then gets the students moving and dancing, and they are taught to think outside the box, to innovate and think of alternative uses for many everyday plastic products. Finally,

a selection of sporting equipment and useful items made from these everyday products is shown to the students, so that they learn that they can make their own.



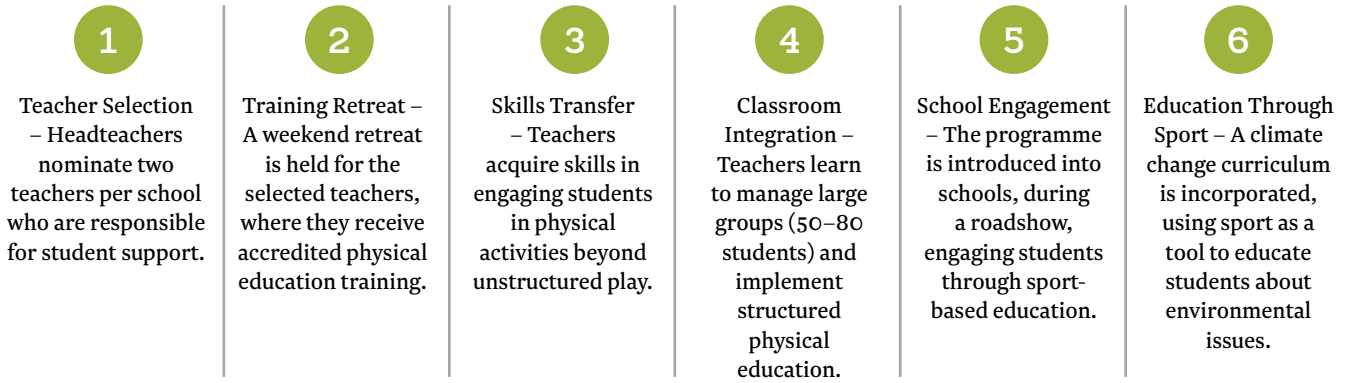
3.2.2 Education

The Goby foundation also provides Amaven physical education online training programme for 3 months post the roadshow, for all Grade 4 or Grade 5 learners in target primary schools in selected communities. The Amaven programme is then provided to the schools to use after the training period.

Amaven provides everything for quality Physical Education (PE) in schools, including

- | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <p>1</p> <p>Standardised PE curriculum</p> <p>Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) lessons included.</p> | <p>2</p> <p>Upskill teachers to assess and deliver PE lessons</p> | <p>3</p> <p>Resources, video and lesson plans</p> | <p>4</p> <p>Personalised home activity plans for each learner</p> | <p>5</p> <p>Reports for parents and the Department of Basic Education</p> |
|---|--|--|--|--|

To ensure the success of the initiative, GOBY have developed a comprehensive stakeholder approach, and a detailed process for engaging with schools.



3.2.3 Partnerships for impact

Bishop explains that GOBY has a broad partnership network which helps it to deliver on its mission. He notes that GOBY “caught the interest of UNICEF and various other partners we have an endorsement from the Department of Basic Education and a MOU with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) and they provide us with actual trees that we plant in the school”. In addition, GOBY receives support from Hitachi Construction Machinery Southern Africa. In an

interview with Alicia Persad (Head of Human Capital at Hitachi Construction Machinery Southern Africa), she mentioned plans to develop a mobile library, in support of the work of GOBY. It is evident that the GOBY platform provides the potential to deepen the impact in schools, by expanding the offering. In addition, Persad highlighted that the work that GOBY does is an important part of the global Hitachi strategy around corporate social responsibility and engagement.



3.3 Biggest hurdles

GOBY faces four main challenges

1

> FUNDING CHALLENGES:

One of the challenges is that GOBY is not able to generate profits and thus is reliant on grants and donations. The foundation also suffers from periods of downtime, when schools are on holiday – and this means that the GOBY fish stands in an urban residential area and is not fully utilised in generating awareness.

> This underutilised capacity could be leveraged to deliver greater impact, yet Bishop has not managed to solve quite how to achieve this.

> For example, Bishop tried placing the GOBY fish at shopping centres or the beach to collect plastic has been tested, but did not generate the engagement expected.

2

> **Reliance on others:**

This is compounded when suppliers or partners experience challenges – such as a breakdown in the truck that should collect the plastic – Bishop will make sure that the work is still done, and that the plastic isn't left sitting at the schools.

> In one case, GOBY had to hire a truck privately and ultimately “collected 3 1/2 tons of plastic from schools in the space of two weeks”! A mammoth effort, and a testament to their commitment, but it was a strain on the resources of the organisation.

3

> **The educational environment and post-Covid-19 challenges:**

A second hurdle is that the majority of children go “to school generally for food, not for their education process, and I'm sure you can appreciate, and obviously the effect of the pandemic on the kids was massive” says Bishop. In addition, children who experienced two years of lockdown

are experiencing significant challenges in learning. As Bishop explains, for a 10-year-old now “back at school and they missed out and two years of education and they missed out on having their peers, their teachers as their support, you know it's actually crazy”

4

> **Bureaucracy:**

The pace of change compared to the need for change is frustratingly slow. “Whenever I plan to engage with schools in a new district, it can take up to three months of gaining permissions from

Regional and District Education officials, before I can get into a school, which is very frustrating and very challenging”, says Bishop.



3.4 Advice for managers & business leaders

Bishop has the following advice for business leaders, based on the GOBY experience.



Adopt a holistic approach:

Address interconnected social and environmental issues through a multi-faceted program.

↳ GOBY is able to address multiple issues in a fun and engaging way. Almost without realising it, the children become eco-warriors, learn about innovation and creative thinking, as well as get moving and active.



Invest in skills development:

Equip teachers and community members with the necessary skills to sustain and lead programs. Teach, empower, repeat.

↳ The focus is not only on the children. By ensuring that the teachers are trained and receive accreditation, there is additional value created and buy-in is secured.



Empower youth and communities:

Engage young people and residents in initiatives that promote environmental awareness, physical health, and community development.

↳ By teaching children in schools about the environment and importance of recycling, they are then able to carry the message on to their homes and communities, advocating for change.

↳ This is the path to systems change, where all actors involved gain value in the process of engaging with the project.



Foster partnerships and collaboration:

Work with schools, businesses, and other organisations to leverage resources and expertise.



By building a network of partners with varied expertise, the resilience of the programme is boosted. If one party is unavailable, the rest of the network can support the continuation of the project delivery.



Focus on the funding model and extracting as much value as possible



Designing impact programmes to limit downtime and periods where resources are not utilised to their fullest capacity.



Think outside the box, and be aware of downtime in the earliest stages of planning, to maximise efficiency.



3.5 Key takeaways

GOBY have a focused approach, and everything that they do is centred on learning, skills and improved education outcomes. With limited resources, the organisation has focused on sports and movement, and from this base is able to educate children about plastic waste and pollution. By taking time to establish a broad set of partners the programme is able to target learners and teachers – who also receive certified training. In addition, ‘youth leads’ – or otherwise unemployed students who can work as a broader resource in the schools – engaging with parents, teachers and learners.

GOBY is an excellent example of not taking short-cuts, not shying away from a challenge, and facing challenges head-on. The organisation has sprung into existence, with limited resources and only a wellspring of determination. Bishop has a focus on delivering impact, and an awareness that the youth of today will drive change needed in future. Bishop is undaunted by the length of time needed to invest in relationships to develop the right partnerships to ensure that he delivers impact. GOBY spreads a message of hope and possibility for children who may not otherwise be top of mind for organisations.

The work of Bishop - thinking beyond limitations, and to find ways to effectively partner with a network of engaged and driven people and organisations - is critical to the success that they have achieved. The creative way in which

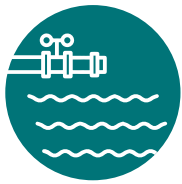
GOBY ensures that there is value and impact for *all* parties involved – from the government departments, to the teachers who give up their time for additional training, to the students who learn a basket of new skills and ways of thinking, and ultimately the parents and broader community who will learn of the initiative. GOBY have mastered the art of systems thinking.

In the interest of sustainability, Bishop concludes;

“Education, especially when focused on children and young people, is a key factor in helping to curb climate change. It is highly important to integrate into the curriculum, themes related to understanding the climate and ecological crisis to allow young people to be informed and empowered to address the urgency of the crisis in their futures”.

True to the Margaret Mead quote, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has,” GOBY shows that it only takes a very small team to have an outsized impact.

GOBY ALL YOU CAN BE!



Case 4: River cleanup

Sustainability is about finding the balance between nature and human consumption. And that also means that I think the measuring your sustainability performance can only be done within the context of nature or society.

Tames Rietdijk



4.1 SDGs addressed



UN SDG 5
Gender equality



UN SDG 12
Responsible consumption and production.



UN SDG 14
Life Below Water



UN SDG 15
Life on Land



4.2 Overview

River Cleanup is an organisation “on a mission to make rivers plastic free”, and is dedicated to tackling the global issue of plastic pollution in rivers. River cleanup is a non-profit organisation based in Belgium, founded in 2019. Tames Rietdijk, Program Advisor at River Cleanup, emphasises their mission of restoring rivers to their natural state, free from the detrimental effects of plastic waste.

For founder and CEO of River Cleanup, Thomas de Groote, the size of the challenge is massive, “but every piece of plastic we keep out of nature matters. It can no longer harm people or the environment.” River Cleanup adopts a unique market-based approach to addressing plastic pollution. They view a

polluted river as a *market* with both demand and supply sides. The demand side consists of stakeholders and River Cleanup first secures commitments from these stakeholders, ensuring a demand for their services.

Rietdijk notes that the selection strategy is critical in deciding to “tackle that river and the work”. He notes that a crucial aspect is ‘desirability’. Thinking of the river through a business lens, he notes that “any business plan is drawn up out of desirability, feasibility and financial viability”. He continues to say that “desirability is all about stakeholder management and their interests. So, once you’ve mapped the stakeholder landscape, the second part ... is to apply the concepts of market mechanism”.



Understanding sustainability:

De Grootte states that “sustainability isn’t a choice - it’s a necessity.” He notes that “we only have one planet, which we’ve borrowed from our children, and it’s our responsibility to return it in good condition”. For Rietdijk, sustainability is something that requires a contextual understanding. As with all performance management tools, knowing the baseline is critical. Therefore, Rietdijk notes that sustainable performance is relative to “the society that you are using resources from”.

He explains that;

“sometimes sustainable water use is measured in the volume of water that you have reduced in your organisation. But I think you can only truly call that sustainable if you compare it to the total amount of water that the environment in which you operate”



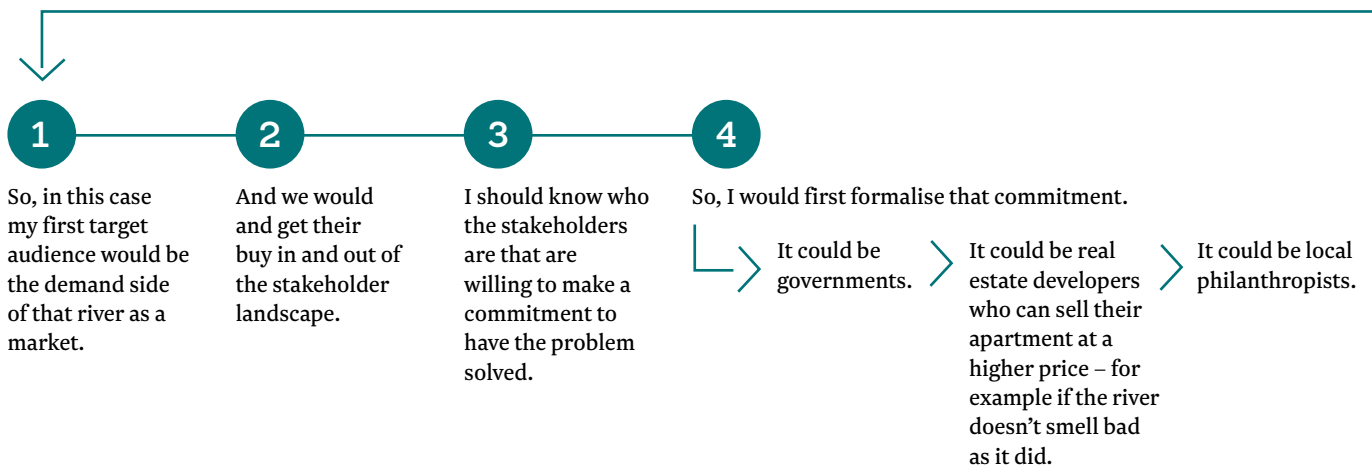
Stakeholder engagement

Engaging with diverse stakeholders is crucial to River Cleanup’s success. De Grootte believes that “sustainability means that people, companies, and governments take action now to ensure a liveable future for the next generations”. They carefully map the stakeholder landscape, identifying those who are willing to commit to solving the problem. This includes securing financial resources, data provision, and policy support. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, River Cleanup creates a collective responsibility for restoring the river. Rietdijk explains that this includes empowering local communities – who are an important stakeholder group.

communities” gives him the energy to keep going and to “realise our ambitious plans”. River Cleanup recognises the importance of empowering local communities. They work closely with residents to understand their needs and perspectives, ensuring that the solutions implemented are appropriate and sustainable. They advocate for giving local communities a voice in decision-making processes, fostering ownership and a sense of responsibility for the river’s well-being. Here too the river becomes a stakeholder!

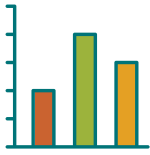
Rietdijk explains:

“I would always approach a river as a market with the problem that needs to be solved. Now any market will have a demand side and a supply side”



As a result of the broad engagement across stakeholder groups, communication to the various groups becomes an important aspect of the organisation’s work. River Cleanup strategically tailors its communication approach to different audiences.

Their narrative emphasises the empowerment of communities, highlighting how local action can drive positive change. They leverage storytelling and impactful visuals to connect with a broader audience, showcasing the tangible benefits of their work.



Sustainable financing

River Cleanup is committed to ensuring the financial sustainability of their projects. They work with companies and organisations to secure funding and support. With Rietdijk's auditing background, it's no wonder that they emphasise the

need for auditable pledges and commitments from their partners, ensuring that their contributions are genuinely impactful and not merely greenwashing.



Preventing greenwashing

The importance of auditing is also a strong driver in preventing greenwashing, and that River Cleanup's brand is used by inauthentic partners. For example, Rietdijk gives the example of Coca-Cola who "pledged to reduce their plastic packaging by so much percent that they would replace it by recycled plastic and that they will take back from nature a certain percentage of plastic that they distributed" He continued to say that,

"they not only pledged it, but they included that in their financial report, which made it subject to be audited by an auditor and subject to the supervision of the of the Stock Exchange on which they are listed. Then it's auditable, and then I think that's a necessity to make sure that you will not become a victim of greenwashing"



4.3 Biggest hurdles

There are four main areas in which the River Cleanup faces challenges.

1

The need for systems change:

Rietdijk notes, "I went from catching criminals to catching plastic and I never thought catching plastic would be more difficult or more complex. But it is a huge problem. Where I could show or prevent financial crime by developing a data-driven analysis tool. Plastic requires system redesign to be to be solved." This is a critical insight! The challenge of plastic waste requires systems change. And that in turn requires extensive partnerships, networks, behavioural change, and so on.

2

Lack of foresight and planning in design:

"Because we also produce stuff that we do not know how to handle yet, or that we invested into stuff, but we did not invest enough in handling the waste that it produces".

3

Developing a business case for waste:

Rietdijk notes, "There's one thing that we haven't solved yet. Nobody in the world has solved this single problem. And that is making the business case for making plastic waste profitable".

(Rietdijk clearly needs an introduction to GOBY and Airothene!)

4

A lack of waste management infrastructure:

Rietdijk states, "that you probably need to turn to the waste management infrastructure in the area, but that but lack of waste management infrastructure was the problem in the 1st place because otherwise it wouldn't have ended up in nature. So, you need to invest in improving the waste management infrastructure and that's probably the longest term part of the project and requires infrastructural investments which are you usually quite expensive".



4.4 Advice for managers & business leaders

Start small

De Grootte highlights how “small actions matter”. The entire organisation “began with a 10-minute cleanup” which has since led to a “global movement and a solid plan to make 1,000 rivers plastic-free by 2050!”. It is not clear at the outset where an

idea will lead. But there is power in starting. De Grootte notes that a “10-minute cleanup has been multiplied over 300,000 times. It’s a powerful reminder that change often starts small.”

Ideation and innovation, think outside the box.



A particularly interesting approach that river clean up adopts is “they don’t call it waste, they call it catch - and catch immediately implies value” (Rietdijk, 2024).



This is a reminder for businesses to re-think and redefine value in their organisations. Is there waste that could be repurposed, where value could be added, or that could be upcycled.



As a next step the organisation applies innovative technology as, “we intercept plastic, we have technology in river technology that takes it out. We immediately use AI to scan what type of waste we collect trying to you know link it back to the producer”.



Here the idea of linking the catch to the producer implies accountability and a feedback loop that may help to educate producers about the impact of their products.



Embedding a stakeholder approach:

River Cleanup embed their stakeholder engagement approach the organisation, at each touchpoint.

For example, with a catch, they “immediately involve waste pickers and any other entrepreneurial startups to look at the materials we collected and see what they can do with it” (Rietdijk, 2024).



This is critical for any organisation, to ensure close contact with stakeholders, and to walk the talk at every stage of the process.



Data, data, and more data!

In the same way that River Cleanup ensure there is an audit trail for those organisations that partner with them, they also focus on data from the river.

By understanding what comes out of the river, in conjunction with the waste management infrastructure, there is the potential to see data driven change.

As Rietdijk notes, “that’s exactly why we collect those data [on the river catch and waste management policy]. To feed into policy improvements, and regulatory changes because the data tells us the exact scope, context and size of the problem”.

Through granular level clarity on what the problem is, having high-quality data allows for solutions to be designed that meet the specific challenge on the ground.

“To date, we’ve activated over 300,000 people in 101 countries and collected more than 3.7 million kg of river waste. ... That’s impact!”, says De Grootte.

Understanding the value chain

Rietdijk says that “you need to have interventions in every part of the value chain”.



By starting at the end of the value chain, “and then slowly work your way up to become not only more effective, but also more efficient, because at the end of the value chain is also the most expensive intervention”.

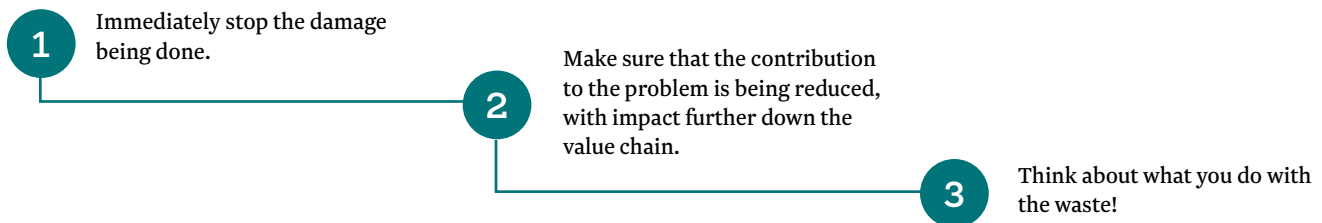


Understand the cost and effectiveness of intervening at each point in the value chain.



This is why the Ocean cleanup began to focus on rivers. “They look at the end of the value chain. Floating plastic in rivers. They need to intercept it there and they use really sophisticated technology that’s expensive”.

Rietdijk proposes a three-step approach to thinking about impact and the value-chain:



4.5 Key takeaways

By leveraging the principles of supply and demand, it becomes possible to design environmental solutions that are not only impactful but also self-sustaining. In applying market mechanisms to environmental challenges, River Cleanup are able to create models that reward positive behaviour, generate local value, and scale in ways that are responsive to both ecological limits and economic realities.

No meaningful change happens in isolation. At the heart of effective environmental and social interventions lies an ability to build bridges - between sectors, communities, and institutions. By actively seeking out diverse stakeholders and securing their buy-in, initiatives are more likely to endure and adapt over time. These collaborations not only help distribute responsibility and resources but also create a sense of shared ownership.

For any programme to have lasting impact, it must be rooted in the context and lived experience of the people it seeks to serve. This means going beyond consultation, and ensuring that local residents are involved in shaping both the problem definition and the solutions. When communities are empowered to make decisions, the interventions that follow are more likely to be appropriate, embraced, and sustained.

The way a message is framed can determine whether it inspires action or fades into the background. By tailoring messaging to the values, interests, and language of different audiences, organisations can more effectively generate support, galvanise resources, and drive behaviour change. Done well, communication becomes more than a tool for information-sharing - it becomes a catalyst for belief and momentum.

4.

Design Thinking



The aim of including a focus on design thinking is to answer the question ‘to what end?’ What is the point? And design thinking helps us to understand the beneficiaries and shape the enterprise around that question.

For organisations or entrepreneurs seeking to embed sustainability into their organisations, the four cases provide a menu of actions that can be tested. Below, we see how design thinking principles are applied to each of the four organisations.



For organisations investigating sustainability, ‘empathy’ is about understanding the needs, problems experienced, and gain insight into challenges. An example of each of these is below,



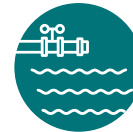
For Airothene, it’s an understanding and empathy that people living and working in the inner city desire a better life and need the opportunities to be able to achieve that.



For BNIP, it is an understanding and reflection that the Dutch context differs vastly from the African countries in which they operate – cultivating an awareness of the need to ‘listen’.



For GOBY, the understanding of why children go to school – for food and social connection - is key to their project’s success.



For River Cleanup this is careful mapping of stakeholders and empathy for the needs of each group. As De Groote notes, “we all have our personal reasons that motivate us to keep doing what we do. For some people, it’s concern for their health, the future of their children, or encountering pollution while enjoying nature”.

In the ‘define’ stage, teams and organisations articulate the problem clearly.



For Airothene, this is the threat of Chinese imports and weakened local manufacturing capacity.



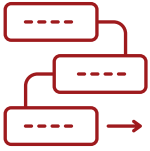
For BNIP, this is the challenge of competitiveness in an uneven playing field, where sustainability and impact are not the consideration of all major actors.



For GOBY, the problem was poor physical education and a lack of resources in schools, coupled with the overwhelming challenge of plastic waste.



For River Cleanup this is a system wide problem, which has ripple effects across the value chain.



Ideate is the process of generating a diverse array of potential solutions.



For Airothere, Levitt's opportunity mindset means that he takes the time to have chance meetings, and these flower into new business and impact opportunities.



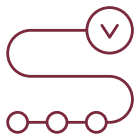
For BNIP, this is reflected in the decision to think of longevity, to ensure training and upskilling, and to let their work speak for itself in the world of sustainability metrics and greenwashing.



For GOBY, user-centred ideation was key to the idea that school children like to be outside in the sun, dancing and having sun, not sitting in classrooms. This is how learning happens.



For River Cleanup this is the redefinition of waste as 'catch', and thinking of the catch ecosystem as a market with supply and demand levers.



In the prototype and testing phases, organisations and teams begin to test their ideas. For all of these organisations, the prototype and testing phases occur jointly, and so they are discussed here together.



For Airothere, this is giving all projects some time to flourish or fail, and to draw in local talent to supervise this process. It refers to having the courage to launch on Takealot, in the midst of loadshedding, to rent out the forklifts and to build plant boxes.



For BNIP, this having the confidence to allow different contextual and cultural settings to shape how they define impact. In one case it may be road safety, in another a strong focus on local livelihoods. Yet across the board, emissions standards are met. It also means taking on projects and problem solving as they unfold, and developing unique solutions to local challenges, in collaboration with partners.



For GOBY, we see this in the broad number of ways that GOBY interacts with children and the public – the fish itself, planting trees, creating sporting equipment from plastic waste, using desks made of plastic waste, and engaging with teaching staff. GOBY is constantly gaining and giving feedback, and seeking ways to find more impact.



For River Cleanup this is evident in how they use technology like AI to attempt to identify the source of the plastic waste in an 'auditable' manner.

5. Conclusion



Sustainability is not for the faint of heart. For new organisations, attempting to ensure that sustainable practices are part of the DNA of a company is a full-time job. Integrating sustainability into existing organisations – with the associated change management required, is an equally challenging task. Yet some common themes and approaches can help to guide organisations through their sustainability journeys.



Adopt a holistic approach:

- Address interconnected social and environmental issues through multi-faceted programmes.
- Mapping all relevant and impacted stakeholders, and working closely with them will increase the likelihood of success for sustainability projects.
- Foster partnerships and collaboration. Work with schools, businesses, and other organisations to leverage resources and expertise. A broader network is more resilient and able to withstand shocks and change.



Youth and communities are key:

- Empowering and engaging young people and residents in initiatives that promote environmental awareness, physical health, and community development is critical.
- Understanding the needs of the local communities and stakeholders is vital to success of sustainability initiatives.



Invest in skills development:

- Equip staff, suppliers, teachers and community members with the necessary skills to sustain and lead programs.
- Highly skilled youth are now looking for places of work that provide them with meaning, and that align with their values for a more sustainable future.
- Organisations can be leaders in quiet ways, providing opportunities for those along the value chain to learn and enhance their sustainability skills.



Quiet determination is more effective than greenwashing

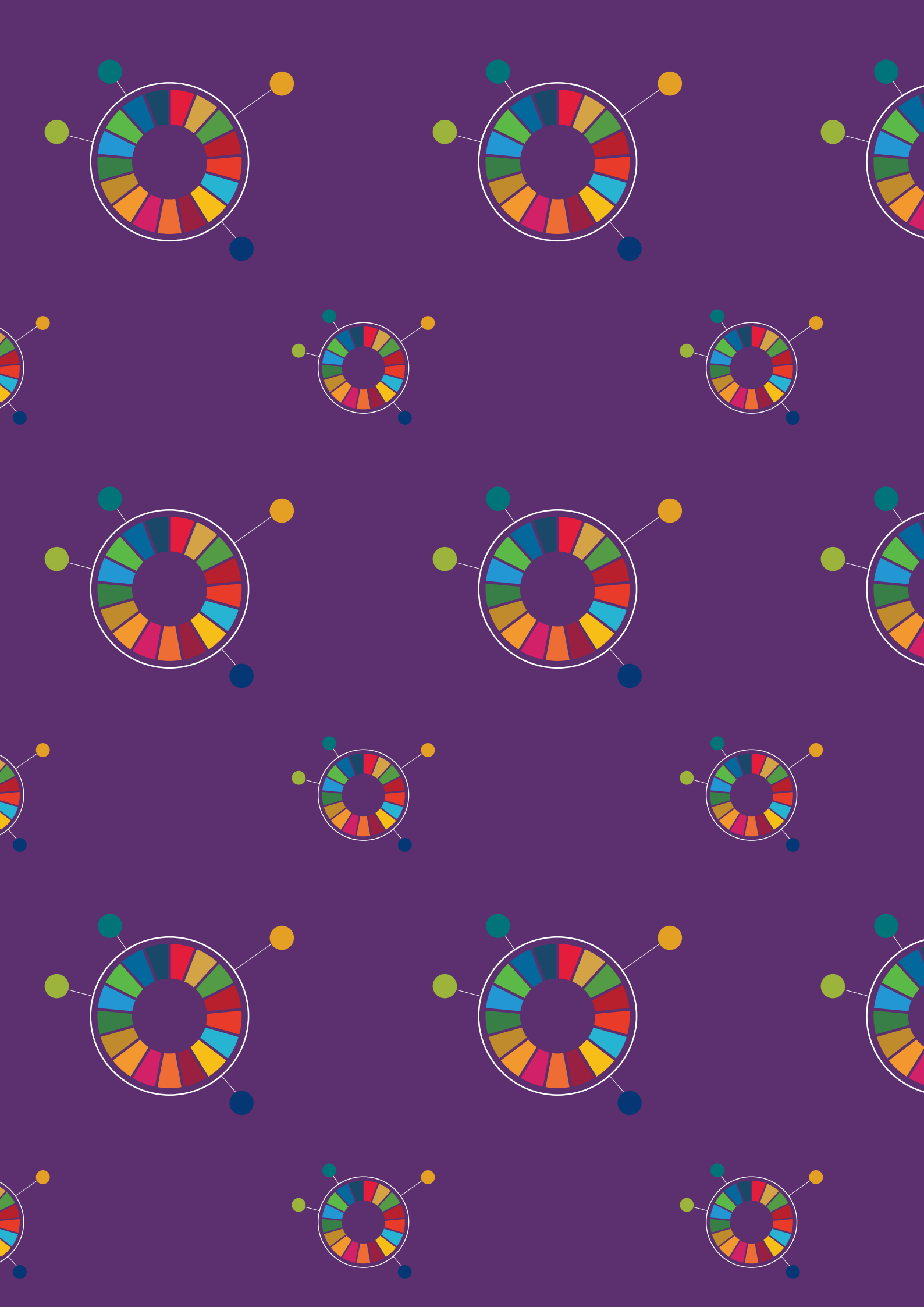
- Organisations need to understand why they are investing in sustainability. The four organisations profiled in this whitepaper are more focused on impact and driving change than on marketing and messaging. This adherence at the core to values of sustainability, working tirelessly to bring about change, is what will ultimately lead to results.

Having a great idea is one thing, but implementing sustainability projects properly is a lot of work and requires the skills, time and investment to see them through. And yet it is clear that there is a lot of freedom of choice for companies in *how* they decide to pursue sustainable goals. Action is being taken in a variety of guises, and this is the bedrock of social and environmental change. All of the cases presented represent a relentless drive

to achieve the sustainability goals set by the organisation, and an unyielding determination to bring about a better world. The work of organisations in sustainability is where the ‘rubber hits the road’. It is through businesses and organisations that policies and communities meet, and where progress is made. The time to act is now, and the potential for impact is unlimited!

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