



## Environmental Education in South African Schools: The Role of Civil Society Organizations

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### ABSTRACT

Environmental education (EE) is an integrated component of the South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document. Pro-EE civil society organisations are actively involved in the implementation of EE policies in schools. The roles played by civil society organisations contribute to the trajectory of practical environmental programmes. This study adopted an interpretive paradigm, a qualitative approach, and a phenomenological design anchored on Bronfenbrenner's philosophical view of human development. One Pro-EE civil society organisation and two respondents were purposefully sampled. Semi-structured interviews and documents were tools employed to collect qualitative data and results were analysed thematically. The study revealed that Pro-EE civil society organisations play a pivotal role which includes; equipping learners to live sustainably, teachers' professional development, and policy formulation. The study recommended that the South School Act be amended to make EE policy mandatory. The department of basic education (DBE) should provide sufficient resources to Pro-EE civil society organisations to expand Eco-Schools project-based initiatives in schools regardless of the geographical location.

### KEYWORDS

Civil society organisation; environmental education; Eco-Schools programme; teachers' professional development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Rapid climate change and its socio-economic consequences have recently dominated world debate. The COP26 meeting in Glasgow, Scotland, gathered world leaders to take a hard stance on climate challenges. Resolutions from this world-stage conference include, among other things, the phase-out of coal use, deforestation, and the protection and restoration of ecosystems. By the close of COP26, 151 countries had submitted their nationally determined contributions to curtail emissions by 2030 (Mountford et al., 2021).

Environmental education (EE) actively contributes to environmental preservation by instilling a sense of commitment and responsibility for the environment. Additionally, EE emphasises the importance of lifelong learning and the enhancement of appropriate behaviour for environmental stewardship. The school curriculum should be revised regularly to reflect contemporary EE practices and provide students with skills necessary for environmental problem solving (Risiro, 2014).

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have been involved in every development aspect. Their participation in development programmes, notably EE, has been critical to accomplishing development goals. They have consultative status, research, publish policy papers, and organise collective social actions such as protests and boycotts. They promote awareness and assist the public and policymakers in their educational efforts (Strange & Bayley, 2008). CSOs are key stakeholders in fostering sustainable development, particularly in emerging nations that are generally democratic.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference and the 1992 Rio Earth Summit were significant in ushering in a new era of CSO participation in setting agendas and influencing practices. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the body responsible for Agenda 21, specifically urged governments to recognise that CSOs have established experience, expertise, and capacity in various cardinal fields for implementing and reviewing environmental and sustainable development policy initiatives (UNCED, 1992).

The CSOs ecosystem is a diverse range of organisations and individuals engaged in several activities, including human rights, development, education, women's problems, and religious activities. Cooperation between all stakeholders, including CSOs, is vital for the long-term success of the implementation of environmental education school policy (IEESP), and this initiative will require the adoption of proactive, mutually beneficial, environmentally friendly, and sustainable conservation strategies (Burgess, 2017).

Saab (2019) argued that stakeholders, individuals, and communities are becoming increasingly aware of environmental challenges. This increase in understanding and awareness has resulted chiefly from campaigns and educational programmes conducted by prominent environmental public interest groups. These CSOs include international, regional, and national non-governmental organisations dedicated to advancing the interests of education for sustainable development (ESD).

In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) is instrumental in the transitional trajectory in the sub-evolution regions from natural studies to EE, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and its numerous manifestations, such as the green economy. The EEASA draws inspiration from other CSOs such as the Kalahari Conservation Society in Botswana, the Wilderness Leadership School, the Mlilwane Trust in Swaziland, the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA), World Wide Fund (WWF-SA), Birdlife South Africa, and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), which pioneered the practice of EE (Downsborough & Lotz-Sisitka, 2010). These groups have facilitated the development of grassroots initiatives for environmental conservation and preservation.

CSOs play a critical role in EE by serving as a vital source of information. They could assist the government in this quest by serving as advisory bodies to the government. In effect, they act as the government's eyes and ears and educate the public to foster a climate of conservation awareness. They play a critical role in disseminating environmental knowledge and providing various instructional and motivational tools to the general population (Saab, 2019).

WESSA, a pro-EE CSO, manages the programme EE extracurricular programmes in schools. The organisation is a vital member of the international environmental community dedicated to EE and ESD. Pro-EE CSOs act as a catalyst for the implementation of EE policies in schools. The Fundisa for Change Development Network (FCDN) collaborates with environmental sector partners, including WESSA. They respond to the need to strengthen teacher education and practice, particularly concerning environmental content and concepts in the curriculum. EE school policy should be effectively coordinated and communicated in the school curriculum to ensure a consistent structure for attaining the CAPS document's aims and objectives (Tiana & Lentsoane, 2016).

Through South Africa's political transformation, CSOs have been critical to the country's development. They provide essential services such as education to the country's less privileged majority, policies, laws, and holding the government accountable for developmental responsibilities. They had a significant antagonistic and active role throughout the apartheid years, aided in their efforts by significant international development funds. As a result of the democratic transition following 1994, their functions and strategy shifted. Democratic participatory systems eliminated the need for a confrontational stance. The period was marked by approach and economic shifts that saw many CSOs assume a delivery role while their advocacy and strategic ability deteriorated (Volmink & van der Elst, 2017).

South Africa's adoption of the National Development Plan (NDP) has changed the political landscape in recent years. The NDP lays out a new strategic path for CSOs in general. It is planned to engage with the government and share responsibility for accomplishing the Plan's social contract with businesses (Burgess, 2017). In the current dispensation, Pro-EE CSOs have made their voices heard in the implementation of EE policies in schools through the exposure of learners to project-based environmental co-curricular activities.

## Research Questions

To acquire a better understanding of the issue under consideration, the researcher breaks down the primary research question as follows:

- Why is there a need for civil society organisations (CSOs) to be involved in school EE policy implementation?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

To objectively assess the role of CSOs in the development of environmental education, the study is theoretically grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological human development. The theory is centred on the individual (referred to as the learner). It emphasises the child's biological makeup critical microenvironment that fuels development. The theory examine various environmental components and multiple individuals engaged in diverse interactions, roles, actions, and processes (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The idea emphasises the developing individual and the learning environment created and the individuals who inhabit it, with their intricate web of human relationships, roles, actions, and processes (Härkönen, 2007, Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's theory is influenced by five systemic concentric factors; microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystem. The microsystem is the immediate environment, institutions, individuals, and groups interacting and influencing child development. These interactive systemic factors include home, school, friends, parents, teachers and other stakeholders (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Morrison, 2018; Filander, 2015). The mesosystem involves the interrelationship between the factors that support the microsystem, such as interconnections between individuals' homes and schools and learners. These systems work in harmony to support children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Learners establish links between their school principals, teachers, and parents (Gray & MacBlain, 2015). The microsystem demonstrates how effective and relevant EE policies may be implemented by CSOs through learners' engagement in environmental awareness activities in the classroom, extramural activities, and in their communities.

Volmink and van der Elst (2017) argued that, in recent years, the political landscape has shifted even again as a result of South Africa's adoption of Africa's Development Plan (NDP). The NDP lays out a new strategic route for CSOs more broadly. Together with businesses, it is envisioned as collaborating with the government and sharing responsibility for achieving the Plan's social compact. In response to this backdrop, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) sponsored a national education NGO leadership summit in 2016 in response to this backdrop. It gathered together education-related CSOs to reflect on their respective roles in assisting with the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) and their operational readiness and sustainability to do so. The summit acknowledged the critical role of CSOs in furthering the national education goal, assessed progress toward implementing the NDP and emphasised the critical role of collaboration among all stakeholders. The 1998 NEMA

encourages public participation. CSOs provide scientific expertise and knowledge to policymakers, as well as in promoting general environmental literacy (Burgess, 2017).

### **The roles of CSOs in the Development of Environmental Education**

The study reviewed different roles played by CSOs.

#### ***Adversarial Role***

CSOs press the government to make policy changes and to remain accountable to the public. In this capacity they educate the public; mobilise and organise citizens; and pressure the government through protests, the media, petitions, and PR stunts. Additionally, they use official civic actions to ensure that regulations are followed. CSOs use these functions to oppose and hold governments responsible for implementing EE school policies (Burgess, 2017).

#### ***Advocacy***

CSOs and other movements can advocate for their constituents and struggle for change. While criticising activities and programs that are unfriendly to the environment, civil society has tirelessly pushed for the necessity of environmental sustainability (Mwije, 2021). CSOs may advocate for environmental protection and climate change mitigation policies by expressing and pursuing their goals through various methods, including public advocacy, voter education, lobbying lawmakers, research, and public demonstrations. They work to support and promote local and international populations to change policies and practices that damage their ecosystems. CSO activism has aided environmental management in most of the world's areas (Burgess, 2017)

#### ***Lobbying***

Mwije (2021) argued that CSOs enable citizens' concerns about environmental management and natural resource conservation to be 'pushed' forward. In most industrialised countries, CSOs were initially formed to oppose big lobbies and evolved into a counter-power because citizens are educated enough to articulate their issues and defend their interests. Saab (2019) asserted that CSOs have a role in advocating for increased government transparency, specifically in the decision-making processes around natural resource distribution. By advocating for community involvement in agenda formulation and public decision-making, they establish a political space for everyone to advocate for their environmental objectives and needs.

#### ***Empowerment and Capacity Building***

CSOs empower and strengthen local communities to manage their environment sustainably through local conservation programmes that are sometimes aligned with government strategies. CSOs employ specialists with specialised knowledge and experience to help develop policies and procedures and discover and implement solutions. They also serve as capacity builders by providing education and training which contributes to creating awareness about the importance of environmental sustainability (Saab, 2019).

### ***Awareness & Dissemination of Environmental Education***

The environment may be managed effectively through increasing public awareness and understanding of sustainable development principles, leveraging the media and civil society's comparative assets (Uganda National Commission for UNESCO, 2010). Without environmental knowledge, the populace lacks both the motive to act and the ability to spur government action. EE, through sensitisation, should be encouraged to influence indigenous people's perceptions and people's about protected areas. The more easily understandable environmental information civil society organisations broadcast, the more likely their message will be received, and their activities will produce fruit. Access to information on environmental management can catalyse residents to adopt more environmentally-conscious behaviours. They can shift their focus away from destroying the environment and toward conservation (Mwije, 2021).

### ***Influencing Participation of Communities in Environmental Education***

CSOs act as a voice for communities and empowers indigenous people to participate in development initiatives such as sustainable environmental management that incorporate both indigenous and formal knowledge (Mwije, 2021). CSOs' EE programmes are mainly community-based. These activities influence and create environmental awareness. Many people are inspired and motivated to participate in environmental activities due to the involvement of CSOs.

### ***Resources Mobilisation***

CSO is growingly involved in implementing government EE policies, and their primary benefit is their ability to reach out to the community. CSOs can quickly mobilise resources such as human and financial resources to implement environmental management programmes promptly and efficiently, whether for the government or locally initiated programmes in communities and schools, as a result of their networking and partnerships with the government, communities, market sectors, and donors (UNESCO, 2010).

## **METHOD**

The researcher discussed the research paradigm, research approach, research design, sampling strategies, data collection instruments, data analysis technique, and research ethics, relevant and applicable to the phenomena under study.

### **Research Approach and Paradigm**

A qualitative technique was used in this research. The research method includes formulating questions and procedures, gathering data in the participant's natural environment, inductively analysing the data by advancing from specifics to general themes, and the researcher forming conclusions about the data's meaning (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

According to O'Leary (2017), the qualitative approach is a method for conducting research that relies significantly on unquantified material such as words, images, experiences, and observations. The adopted qualitative approach is in order to understand the lived

experiences of the respondents in their natural setting. The study used a phenomenology design to make sense of respondents' actual experiences' and complement the research approach chosen. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology design is a philosophical and psychological investigation in which the researcher explains the participants' lived experiences of phenomena. This design assisted the researcher to shed light on the existing phenomena pertaining to the roles played by CSOs in the development of EE in schools.

The Interpretivist paradigm underpins the study. The interpretive paradigm of research aims to comprehend the respondents' lived experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) and Creswell and Creswell (2018), this paradigm requires the researcher to rely on the respondent's perspectives on their roles in the play development of EE. Creswell and Poth (2017) argued that interpretive researchers strive to uncover respondents' perspectives, views, opinions, understanding, and meanings of social phenomena. The interpretive paradigm focuses on understanding the individual's perception of the world. Thus, the Interpretivist paradigm's fundamental assumption is that reality is socially produced. This is why the constructivist paradigm has been referred to at times (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The paradigm is relevant as the study aims to investigate the roles played by CSOs. The researcher sought the views of CSOs on the phenomena as espoused by Creswell and Poth (2017). This paradigm helped the study unpack the perceptions, views, and understanding of respondents on the investigated phenomenon.

### Participants and Sampling Strategy

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), purposeful sampling is a technique in which the researcher selects certain parts of the population that will be valuable in data collection and a representative of the study of interest. A single pro-EE CSO was specifically chosen for the study. WESSA was purposefully selected because they have contributed immensely to the development with their footprints in over 4500 schools in all nine provinces and 1 036 000 students and 41 400 educators as registered members. Two Eco-Schools project coordinators were sampled purposefully to get the relevant data for the study.

**Table 1.** *Civil Society Organisation Respondents' Characteristics*

Gender	No.	code	Age	Experience	position	CSO	Qualification
Female	1	P1	40- 45	12	ECO School facilitator	WESSA	B.Ed.
Male	1	P2	35- 40	8	Project facilitator	WESSA	B.Sc.

Table 1 illustrates CSO respondents' characteristics based on categories such as gender and age, among others. Two personnel from one CSO participated in the interview. Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, semi-structured interviews were conducted telephonically.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews and documents were used to gather qualitative data. The qualitative data collected from one CSO was analysed using a thematic analysis technique. A set of text from interview transcripts is used (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Thematic analysis is usually regarded as the most basic method for analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The purpose of this instrument was to elicit thoughts from CSOs on their involvement in the development of EE in schools. The interviews aided the researcher's capacity to investigate and clarify unclear responses. Furthermore, in-depth Semi-structured allowed respondents to speak freely without being restricted by the interview guide (Kabir, 2018).

### **Ethical Consideration**

Researchers must follow ethics in order to establish trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness (Resnik, 2020). Before starting the study, an ethical clearance certificate (REC-270710-028-RA level 01) was obtained from the University of Fort Hare. The respondents have to sign consent forms. The study followed the principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity.

## **RESULTS**

The study's question concerns the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in implementing EE policies in schools. The purpose of this question was to find out what CSOs and principals thought about the role of CSOs in the development and implementation of EE policy in schools. Semi-structured interview questions were used to elicit qualitative responses from one CSO to learn more about their involvement in implementing EE policy. The study presented and analysed qualitative data that had been obtained concurrently.

The study analysed qualitative data obtained from CSOs on the central theme of the need for their involvement in implementing EE policies in schools. Other sub-themes were generated from the central theme. The researcher analysed and interpreted data gathered during a one-on-one telephone interview with two respondents. To facilitate clear and succinct analysis, data are presented in themes and sub-themes from an interview to address the research questions.

**Table 2. A Summary of Findings**

Theme	Sub-theme	Issues raised
The need for CSOs to be involved in school EE policy implementation	Policy formulation and implementation in the promotion of EE.	Liaison with state institutions in making environmentally friendly policies in schools aim at shaping the green and blue economy.
	Training, skills development & network for teachers.	Provide national accredited training and education for teachers. Establish of network for continuous professional development.
	Eco-Schools programme	Creating environmental awareness, equip learners to live sustainably. Preparation of Portfolios for provincial and national awards.

### Policy Formulation and Implementation

Pro-EE CSO like WESSA works jointly with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Education to strengthen the development of EE in schools. This collaboration supports EE policy formulation and implementation in the school curriculum. The significance of this partnership with stakeholders in education is immeasurable, as discovered in the study. Some of the responses obtained, among others, include:

Yeah! We are an environmentally-based CSO with a national character. We operate in all nine provinces, in over 4500 schools, with a clear mandate and support from the Department of Education. Hmmm! Our partnership aligns with the government's commitment to developing environmental education in compliance with the national development plan. We are instrumental in shaping the government's environmental policies in schools and other sectors. This aims to achieve a green and blue economy (P1).

This response implies that CSOs have developed good working relationships with the education and environmental affairs department to create environmental awareness in schools. The partnership between state institutions and CSOs has shaped school EE policy implementation.

### Training and Skill Development for Teachers

Civil society organisations interested in EE play an essential role in providing practical training and skill development programmes to the Department of Education and other government sectors. CSOs offer a range of accredited professional qualifications designed to address the critical scarcity of the required skills to drive environmental consciousness and awareness. The

study revealed that besides WESSA's partnership with the government, the CSO also provides training to individuals, in this case, teachers. The responses obtained, among others, include:

Yes, indeed! Our collaboration with schools and teachers within the borders of South Africa is to improve and support school curricula about environmental learning. To achieve this goal, we have well-structured, accredited professional training programmes open to everyone with a passion for conserving nature and other environmental educators' short courses. Seriously, we have some excellent programmes and qualifications: environmental training development practises courses, environmental practises short skills courses, environmental educators in-service training courses, etc. I hope you will take advantage of the opportunity to enrol in one of our programmes in the future...hahaha (laughing out loud). (P1)

Respondent further added that:

Yeah! in several provinces, we have also established a teacher network and our formal skill development and qualification programmes. Fundisa for Change is the name of the teacher-networking group. It was started in 2014, if my memory serves me well, in partnership with the Departments of Education and Environmental Affairs. This is a forum or platform for building communities where Eco-Schools instructors can meet frequently and receive support from one another and Eco-Schools organisers. Yes, the Fundisa network assists teachers in exchanging ideas and refreshing their environmental education skills. (P2)

CSOs are engaging with state institutions to increase environmental literacy in schools through their skill development programmes, according to the responses supplied. According to respondents, they provide approved professional training for capacity growth. An appropriate teacher network has been established to aid in teaching and learning environmental education.

### **Eco-Schools Programme**

CSOs were interviewed to determine their involvement in the Eco-Schools programme in schools. Among the responses obtained were as follows:

In South Africa, we implement an Eco-Schools programme in supported and unsupported schools. The Eco-Schools programme is open to anyone who wishes to participate. Yeah! Schools can register and submit an evidence portfolio anytime during the year. (P2)

Respondent further added that:

I am a big fan of the Eco-Schools concept because we work with schools and teachers all around South Africa to promote and improve environmental learning curricula, preparing children to live sustainably in the future. Yes, indeed! is a game-changing initiative that provides project-based learning in schools and is revolutionary and unique. (P2)

On how Eco-Schools programmes are implemented in schools, respondents had this to say:

Hmmm! The Eco-Schools, as previously said, is a project-based learning programme that is integrated into the school curriculum. It is pretty straightforward. The selection and development of eco themes involve seven processes. Schools organise an eco-committee, conduct an environmental audit, monitor and assess, relate the chosen theme to the curriculum, and inform and include teachers and students in the Eco-club. Finally, every member school is required to draught an eco-code. The most exciting aspect of this programme is that schools create and present a portfolio of evidence for an award within eight to twelve months of registering. Around March, we have provincial awards presentations. (P2)

The interview responses and extracts from the Eco-Schools portfolio are undeniable proof that pro-EE CSOs are making a significant contribution to the development and growth of EE through their hands-on Eco-Schools project-based learning linked to school curricula.

## **DISCUSSION**

The study analysed qualitative data obtained from CSOs on the central theme of the need for their involvement in implementing EE policies in schools. Other sub-themes were generated from the central theme. The researcher analysed and interpreted data gathered during a one-on-one telephone interview with one CSO and documents.

The Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa is a pro-environmental civil society organisation. WESSA's mission in South Africa is to develop high-impact environmental and conservation programmes that encourage public involvement in Earth care by adopting EE school policies. WESSA, like other pro-CSOs, conducts environmental research, advocates for environmentally sustainable management strategies, supports and encourages participatory environmental management through the involvement of local communities and schools, and provides resources, particularly financial resources, to support environmental management programmes at all levels. Additionally, they build capacity and knowledge within local communities, persuading the public to embrace more effective natural resource management approaches. Civil society organisations, movements, and groups act as watchdogs, monitoring and evaluating environmental management's efficacy and efficiency; they also encourage the public to demand government openness and accountability. Environmental management policies are crucial for guaranteeing the long-term viability of a country. This is why the CSO is highly involved in environmental policy processes to address environmental concerns and set the agenda for policy discussions, which it does through structured forums as a voice of the people. According to the findings, CSOs play critical roles in the implementation of EE policies in schools.

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### **Equipping Learners to Live Sustainably**

WESSA works with schools and teachers across South Africa to promote and develop EE curricula, ensuring that children are prepared for a sustainable future. The Eco-Schools Programme aims to increase environmental sustainability knowledge and action in schools and their communities and augment the national curriculum with Education for ESD. Since 2003, approximately 4500 schools in all nine provinces have participated in the project, reaching 1 036 000 students and 41 400 educators each year. A total of 1,563 environmental change projects were started, 1112 trees were planted, and 393 EE workshops were held. The initiative honours schools dedicated to improving their environmental performance over time. Eco-Schools is a programme that works in both sponsored and underserved schools. Schools can register at any time during the year and submit a portfolio of evidence for an award between eight and twelve months after registering, with the Provincial Awards Ceremonies conducted in March each year. WESSA works with schools and teachers across South Africa to promote and develop EE curricula, ensuring that children are prepared for a sustainable future (Dzerefos, 2020).

The Eco-Schools Programme aims to increase environmental sustainability knowledge and action in schools and their communities and complement the national curriculum with Education for Sustainable Development (Dzerefos, 2020). WESSA is in charge of the South African Eco-Schools initiative. CSOs cooperated with schools and educators to promote environmental curricula in schools, according to the study. The curriculum provided project-based learning to educate learners with the requisite environmental knowledge. Schools select EE themes and eco-code that guide environmental activities in schools and link them to the curriculum.

### **Teacher Professional Development**

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has highlighted teacher assistance at the local level as a critical component of achieving educational quality. One-time educator training is ineffective, and teacher education programmes should be continuous throughout the teacher's professional life. With its network of coordinators that support schools long-term, Eco-Schools is well-positioned to meet this need. WESSA has organised some 393 workshops for teachers nationwide. These workshops are geared toward training and equipping teachers to implement EE policies in schools (Dzerefos, 2020).

### **Environmental Education Teachers Network**

In March 2014, the Fundisa for Change Development Network (FCDN) was officially inaugurated at a teacher conference. The network catalyses EE improvement and promotes the Eco-Schools programme. The FCDN is regarded as one of the most significant professional learning communities in South Africa. The FCDN is a collaboration of environmental sector partners, including WESSA. Teachers who complete Fundisa for Change training receive continuing support for experimenting with new teaching approaches and increasing their teacher knowledge and access to materials such as the WESSA EnviroKids magazine. Eco-Schools'

collaboration with the Fundisa for Change network enables the programme to distribute materials that have been endorsed by the Department of Basic Education and partner higher education institutions (Dzerefos, 2020).

### **Policy Formulation and Implementation**

Civil society organisations contribute immensely to EE policy. Environmental policies can thrive if there are a proper engagement of civil society, local communities, and indigenous peoples by allowing them to have a say in choices that affect their livelihoods (NEMA, 2010). CSOs' involvement in pulling climate change mitigation policies is critical since they may do so by filling gaps and providing policy services such as policy research, policy guidance, and, in some situations, actual policy formation (Saab, 2019).

According to the study's findings, CSOs engaged with state institutions, such as the education and environment departments, in the planning, formulating, and implementing EE policies. It was discovered that Pro-EE CSOs had built a name for themselves by assisting corporate and government organisations in raising environmental awareness. The collaboration of state agencies and CSOs have influenced the implementation of EE policies in schools.

### **Training & Skill Development for Teachers**

It was established that CSOs contributes to the training and development of teachers. According to the findings, CSOs provided qualified and approved professional qualifications in EE and other relevant courses to train teachers on new methods and approaches for implementing EE policy. The investigation discovered that CSOs, in collaboration with the DBE and environmental affairs, formed the Fundisa for Change Network for Teachers. This network serves as a forum for teachers and pro-EE CSO coordinators to share EE teaching and learning ideas in schools. It was revealed that this network only runs in five provinces. According to the study's findings, the network for teachers was inaccessible to the education district where the research was conducted.

CSOs have been involved in every development element, and their engagement in development programmes, particularly EE initiatives, has been critical to achieving development objectives. They are consultative, conduct research, publish policy papers, and organise collective social actions like protests and boycotts. They raise public awareness and support policymakers in their educational efforts (Strange & Bayley, 2008).

According to Saab (2019), environmental concerns are becoming more visible to stakeholders, individuals, and communities. Campaigns and educational programmes run by notable environmental public interest groups have contributed significantly to this rise in understanding and awareness. CSOs are significant stakeholders in the policy implementation process in schools and communities. They form an integral part of policy formulation and implementation (Fullan, 2015; Burns et al., 2016). CSOs are actively involved in the skill development of teachers and communities. CSOs hire experts with specific skills and experience

to develop policies and strategies and discover and implement solutions. By providing education and training, they also help to increase capability (Saab, 2019).

Eco-Schools is a nationwide EE flagship programme monitored and organised entirely by WESSA. The project aims to increase environmental sustainability knowledge and action in schools and their surrounding communities and promote sustainable development education in the national curriculum (Dzerefos, 2020).

Within the Bronfenbrenner ecological theory, which underpins this study, CSOs have contributed significantly to learners' environmental literacy development. This impact is informal, such as when events in the CSO's activities have a cascade effect at home, affecting learners directly (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This system impacts both the micro and mesosystems (Kauchak & Eggen, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

The study recognised three crucial roles performed by CSOs in the development of EE school policy: policy formulation and implementation, training and skill development for EE teachers, and the Eco-Schools programme. In the planning, formulating, and implementing of EE policies, pro-EE CSOs engage with the Departments of Education and Environmental Affairs. This collaboration aims to shape and raise environmental awareness in schools. CSOs offer training and skill development programmes to teachers and other EE stakeholders. WESSA, for example, is a non-profit organisation that provides authorised and approved qualifications for teachers' capacity building. WESSA administers the Eco-Schools programme in all nine South African provinces. Environmental learning activities relevant to the school curriculum are introduced to teachers and learners. Eco-clubs enable learners to apply their theoretical environmental knowledge in a practical setting. This enhances EE school policy implementation.

## Recommendation

The South African School Act No. 84, 1996 should be amended to make school environmental policy mandatory, which should mirror the national curriculum framework and policy guidelines for EE. All schools should have environmental policies that align with their code of conduct.

The existence of the Eco-Schools initiative has contributed to the implementation of high-impact environmental project-based co-curricular programmes at several schools. This initiative strives to promote and improve the school curriculum in ecological learning, allowing learners to reach their full potential for a sustainable future by taking environmental action in their community. The Departments of Basic Education and Environmental Affairs should provide resources to WESSA and other stakeholders to expand the Eco-Schools and other EE-related programmes to all schools. Regardless of social-economic or geographical location, schools should offer mandatory environmental co-curricular activities and eco-clubs.

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