

CALL FOR INTEREST

Sustainability Symposium 2026

Theme: *Youth Leadership and Sustainability for a Resilient Future: Biodiversity, Food Security, and Education*

Date: 6 July 2026

Venue: University of Mpumalanga

1. Introduction

We are now living in the *Anthropocene*, a period defined by the profound and accelerating impact of human activities on the Earth's systems. These environmental pressures compromise present living conditions and threaten the well-being of young people and future generations. In response to these challenges, the University of Mpumalanga will host a one-day Sustainability Symposium centred on *Youth Leadership and Sustainability for a Resilient Future: Biodiversity, Food Security, and Education* as a catalyst for transforming today's global crises into tomorrow's sustainable solutions.

The symposium brings together the expertise of Mr. Kamagano Sethono, Dr. Stanley Ntakumba, Professor Kowiyou Yessoufou, Professor Oladopo A. Aremu, Professor Samukelisiwe Khumalo, and university students from diverse disciplines and backgrounds. Acknowledging that youths are not only future leaders but also essential change-makers in the current research sphere. Though young people are often not the architects of today's environmental challenges, they hold the creativity, innovation, and agency to shape the solutions.

2. Symposium Overview

The Sustainability Symposium will provide a dynamic and interdisciplinary platform for emerging leaders to engage with experts in sustainability science. Delegates will gain insights into key sustainability pillars, such as biodiversity conservation, food security, and education, as well as explore their interconnected roles in building resilient communities.

By integrating knowledge systems and adopting a holistic, systems-thinking approach, the symposium aims to:

- Empower youth to take action and assume leadership roles in sustainability.
- Demonstrate how biodiversity conservation underpins long-term food security.
- Highlight education as a crucial driver of knowledge creation, awareness, and behavioural change.
- Promote collaborative problem-solving, innovation, and teamwork.

The symposium serves as a bridge between scientific knowledge and real-world environmental challenges, equipping young leaders with the tools to actively shape a sustainable future.

3. Keynote Address

Keynote Speaker: Mr. Kamagano Sethono – Manager, SDSN South Africa.

Keynote Theme: *Youth Leadership in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

The distinguished keynote speaker will address the critical role of youth in advancing the global SDGs. The keynote will explore:

- The global sustainability landscape and urgent areas for youth-driven action.
- Innovations and leadership models emerging from young people worldwide.
- How youth can mobilize communities, influence policy, and lead transformative change.
- Practical pathways for embedding sustainability within universities, communities, and professional sectors.

This address will set the stage for deeper engagement and collective reflection throughout the symposium.

4. Panel Discussion

Following the keynote, a multidisciplinary panel of experts will respond to the issues raised. The panel discussion will:

- Debate current barriers to achieving sustainability at local, national, and global scales.
- Explore the intersection of biodiversity, food security, and education within a South African context.
- Offer practical guidance, lived experience, and insights to support youth-led sustainability initiatives.
- Create an interactive space where delegates can pose questions, challenge ideas, and contribute perspectives.

The panel will serve as a critical dialogue forum, inspiring delegates to reflect on their roles as emerging leaders.

Panellists:

1. **Dr Stanley Ntakumba** (Programme lead MPhil MDP at ALI, UP)- Specialist in Leadership and SDGs.
2. **Prof. Kowiyou Yessoufou** (Professor of Botany, UJ) – Specialist in Ecology and Sustainability.
3. **Prof Oladapo A. Aremu** (SARCHI Chair IKS, NWU) – Specialist in IKS and Food Systems.
4. **Prof Samukelisiwe Khumalo** (Dean FED, UMP) – Specialist in Sustainability, through education focused on curriculum development and teaching training.

5. Call for Abstracts

Delegates are invited to submit abstracts showcasing their work, research projects, community initiatives, or sustainability innovations. Submissions will be considered for:

- Oral Presentations, or
- Poster Presentations.

Contributions may address, though are not limited to, the following themes:

- Biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience.
- Sustainable agriculture and food security and water security.
- Environmental education and community engagement.
- Youth activism, leadership models, and SDG-focused initiatives.

Abstract submission guidelines, deadlines, and presentation formats will be communicated in the official call for submissions.

- Closing date for expression of interest and abstract submission is the 30th April 2026.

6. Expected Outcomes

By the end of the symposium, participants can expect to:

- Gain an enriched understanding of sustainability challenges and opportunities.
- Build networks with peers, academics, and practitioners in sustainability fields.
- Strengthen leadership capacities and develop actionable ideas for community impact.
- Engage in collaborative discussions that inspire innovation and long-term thinking.
- Showcase their research and contribute to knowledge-sharing on sustainability.

Ultimately, the symposium strives to inspire a new generation of proactive leaders committed to building a resilient and sustainable future.

7. Registration

- A registration fee of R 300.00 per person is required.
 - This caters for all refreshments and administration costs.
- Deadline for registration is 31st May 2026