



Games for the SDGs

Lessons from a year of using
simulation games and tools to
create awareness and mobilisation
on the Sustainable Development Goals
among young people in Namibia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those participants who have joined us on their Friday afternoons to discuss and learn about the Sustainable Development Goals. Without interest and enthusiasm in these events, these Games would never have taken place. The Hanns Seidel Foundation (through the Climate Project), Progress Namibia TAS cc, the Namibian Chamber of Environment, and the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust provided assistance in various games in the form of sponsorship, professional photography, snacks and drinks, and games printing and technical support. We would also like to extend our gratitude to all the interns, volunteers and participants who helped administratively and with logistics at each event. We thank 17goals.org for the use of their slides as an introduction to each SDG game.

We also thank the following institutions and book authors for the use of games:

Climate Interactive (<https://www.climateinteractive.org/>)

Games for Sustainability (<https://games4sustainability.org/>)

Meadows D, Booth Sweeney L and Martin Mehers G. 2016. The Climate Change Playbook: 22 System Thinking Games for More Effective Communication about Climate Change. Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont, USA.

Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust

BACKGROUND

In November 2016, a small team comprising Progress Namibia, Hanns Seidel Foundation, the National Youth Council of Namibia and the Namibian Youth Coalition on Climate Change got together to run World Climate. World Climate is a simulation game developed by MIT and Climate Interactive that helps young people to understand the climate negotiation process at the UN World Climate Summit. The World Climate Summit (COP-22) was about to commence in Marrakesh, Morocco. As a way to better understand the complexities involved, as well as the consequences of decisions made at this summit by our world leaders, the World Climate game is a good tool to run for this purpose. The game was run successfully, and the team decided to develop a series of games for 2018. This series would be a way for Namibians to learn and engage with the Sustainable Development Goals.

INTRODUCTION

Why Games for the SDGs?

There is a lot of research that shows that simple, interactive games can help people to more easily understand complex challenges and think 'outside the box' to come up with possible solutions and self-action. The Sustainable Development Goals, through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which Namibia has committed to, are complex and interlinked, and require systems and critical thinking to fully understand and act upon. The Games for the SDGs use simulation, gaming and other interactive tools and methods for (mostly young) Namibians to learn about and discuss the Sustainable Development Goals freely and informally. For this, especially systems thinking is a crucial ability. The games aim to promote the following ways of thinking:

1. 'See the whole picture
2. Change perspectives to see new leverage points in complex systems
3. Look for interdependencies
4. Consider how mental models (a person's beliefs, ideas, assumptions about the world) create our futures
5. Pay attention to and give voice to the long term
6. Use peripheral vision to see complex cause-and-effect relationships
7. Find where unanticipated consequences emerge
8. Focus on structure (the interrelationships within a system), not blame
9. Hold the question of paradox and controversy without trying to resolve it quickly
10. Watch for win/lose mindsets, knowing they usually make matters worse in situations of high interdependence
11. See themselves as part of, not outside of, the system'

How did we run these games?

From November 2016 until October 2017, we ran eight games, usually the last Friday of every month. Each game was usually focused on a set of goals (although the systemic nature of the SDGs meant that each of them would be covered in one way or another). Each game opened with a short presentation on the SDGs. Then the group of participants would be facilitated through a game. Afterwards, the most important session, the group would sit in a circle and the moderator would facilitate a deep dialogue, creating a safe space to speak freely and debrief the game.

The following section will outline each game played.

WORLD CLIMATE

About	Simulation of the UN climate change negotiations for groups. Players take decisions on climate change issues that have direct impacts. A computer model is used to rapidly analyze the results of the negotiations.
Which SDGs?	Goal 13 (Climate action), Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth)
Benefits	Build climate change awareness Experience political dynamics that emerge in UN climate negotiations Understand trade-offs between certain types of economic growth and climate change impacts Understand the consequences (through finding out how their proposed policies impact the global system in real time - using the climate model tool)
Created by	MIT and Climate Interactive
Type	Role playing exercise with an easily usable climate model
Materials needed	Materials and tools available (climate model, facilitator notes, country notes, etc) link in footnote 2
Basic instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each group is responsible for a negotiating party (e.g. EU, Unites States, Other developed nations, China, Developing Nations, etc) Each group needs to negotiate for best possible outcome for its group Each decision per group is tested on the C-roads model (computer model)
Open source?	Yes, a complete set of facilitation and games materials, as well as the download for the computer model, can be found here for free.
Date played	06 November 2016 (in run-up to COP22)
Key lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Game successful and recommend it as a strong awareness tool More impact is made when (as the facilitation guide suggests) there is a role-play of privilege between the groups (e.g. like giving the developed nations better snacks, water, operating space - as is the reality with differing budget and negotiating abilities at the real UN negotiations)



Photo Credit: Think Namibia



THE PRIVILEGE WALK

About	Participants role-play an individual and are asked to take a step forward based on a yes or no question asked by the facilitator. The game gets participants to understand the ways in which society privileges some individuals over others
Which SDGs?	Goal 1 (End poverty), Goal 3 (Good health), Goal 4 (Quality education), Goal 5 (Gender equality), Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth), Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities)
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen participants' empathy and raise awareness of privileges and inequalities • Trigger discussions around economic inequalities and the way forward to inclusive economies
Created by	Unknown (many sources)
Type	Role-play individual
Materials needed	Role cards per participant adapted to country or society context (we designed ones specifically for Namibia)
Basic instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each player receives a card with their identity for the game, this is confidential until after the walk is completed • Players are then asked to stand in a line side by side and hold hands • The facilitator reads out a question, and every time the player can answer yes, the player takes a step forward
Open source?	Yes, and there are many variations how you can play. We adapted ours with our own questions
Date played	24 February 2017
Key lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This game can be extremely powerful and forces deep reflection, especially if the debrief and overall facilitation is done properly • Facilitator needs to be well-trained and sensitive to group dynamics - particularly because the game can push some people to an edge of their comfort zone (an edge in facilitator language means an uncomfortable space that can either change someone's mental model/world view or make them shut off emotionally)



Photo Credit: Think Namibia

HARVEST

About	Harvest allows participants to see the long-term consequences of using a limited common resource (like fish) to maximise their own short-term benefits
Which SDGs?	Goal 14 (Life below water)
Benefits	Participants understand the importance of managing human use of a common resource in a sustainable way
Created by	Dennis Meadows, Linda Booth-Sweeney and Gillian Martin-Mehers
Type	Group role-play and simulation
Materials needed	Large container to represent the ocean 300 coins or bottle tops One small container per team to represent the fishing vessel
Basic instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each team has the role of a fishing company• Each team's goal is to maximise the number of fish for itself• The ocean can support a maximum of fifty fish
Open source?	No. The game, along with a series of great systems-thinking games can be found in the book 'The Climate Change Playbook: 22 systems thinking games for more effective communication about climate change' Book can be bought here.
Date played	31 March 2017
Key lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The game is a fun way to learn about limited resources and co-planning• An engaging and interactive facilitator is key



Photo Credit: Le Roux van Schalkwyk



4. See footnote 1.

5. <https://www.amazon.com/Climate-Change-Playbook-Effective-Communication/dp/1603586768>

DEBATE ON POACHING

About	Two teams go head to head in a debate based on the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on CITES (CoP17). Motion: " This house believes the Namibian stock piles of ivory should be burned"
Which SDGs?	Goal 5 (Halting biodiversity loss)
Benefits	Promote the importance of halting biodiversity loss through fighting wildlife crimes
Created by	The SDG team
Type	Debate
Materials needed	Notepads and pens for debating team
Basic instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two professional debating teams are selected (one proposition and one opposition)• The motion is Introduced to both teams• Teams defend their statements
Open source?	Yes, and there are a wide range of complex topics that could be covered
Date played	28 April 2017
Key lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The debate is a powerful tool for unpacking and discussing complex issues facing us• Debate is a learning tool for both debaters and participants• The debaters need to be professional and well informed, to avoid destructive arguments and misleading information into the audience



Photo Credit: Think Namibia

THE PAPER BAG GAME

About	Participants role-play family groups struggling to survive in the current economic system. Participants make paper bags from newspapers and sell to the shopkeeper to make an income
Which SDGs?	Goal 1(Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere and ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning) & Goal 8 (Promote wellbeing, employment and decent work for all
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants understand the pressures of trying to survive in an economy with massive unemployment and no social security. Trigger discussions around promoting wellbeing and decent work for all
Created by	Christian aid
Type	Group role-play and simulation
Materials needed	A lot old newspapers and paste. The rest of materials and tools available (Paper Bag presentation, how to make the bag, introduction to the game & worksheet) link in footnote 6. (We Contextualised the game to informal settlements in Windhoek, Namibia)
Basic instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each group has the role of a family living in the informal settlements of Windhoek Each team's role is to make as many paper bags as possible to sell to the shopkeeper Teams work out monthly earnings using a provided worksheet
Open source?	Yes, a complete set of facilitation and game materials can be found here for free
Date played	26 May 2017
Key lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The game needs more Newspapers Game is a powerful tool which allows participants to feel the reality facing many people in the current economic system and unequal society. They can only reflect well if the debrief and overall facilitation is done properly. Facilitator needs to be well-trained and sensitive to group dynamics



Photo Credit: Think Namibia



THE COMMUNITY-BASED DECISION GAME

About	Participants play the role of decision makers particularly city councils and make decisions that will impact over 400 000 people living in Windhoek.
Which SDGs?	Goal 8 (Promote inclusive employment and decent work for all) & Goal 6 (Ensure access to water and sanitation)
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants explore the influence of politics and economics on the environment • Trigger discussions around redefining development considering the protection of our environment
Created by	NaDEET
Type	Group role play in a simulation
Materials needed	Role cards per group adapted to country or society context (The ones came designed specifically for Namibia)
Basic instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each group represents various city council • Groups read the introduction to a scenario. At the end of each card, participants are given various choices for how to proceed with the scenario • Groups discuss which choice is best and ask the facilitator for that card • The game ends when each team has worked through the scenario with their team's choices
Open source?	No. The whole concept of the game was given to us by the NaDEET team
Date played	30 June 2017
Key lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The game is a powerful tool that is used to show how many our decisions affects the environment • For effective discussions, there needs to be professionals involved in environmental impact assessments to help steer discussions



Photo Credit: Think Namibia

THE ARABLE LAND GAME (OR FOOD FOR ALL GAME)

About	Vanishing resources, like arable land in this case, are a commonly shared concern globally, although most of us have not internalised this concern. This game can lead a group through a shared experience in which they confront the consequences of over-exploitation of such a resource. It helps illustrate some basic principles governing innovation and opinion change in groups and can provide a metaphor that is relevant to situations that arise when resources become inadequate to support the habitual way of doing business. It can demonstrate to be open to new plans or policies even while current ones seem successful. It also encourages long-term thinking
Which SDGs?	Goal 15 (Life on land)
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding of shared resources, and different management of such ▪ Thinking critically and out of the box ▪ Encourages basic systems thinking ▪ Encourages long-term thinking
Created by	Dennis Meadows, Linda Booth-Sweeney and Gillian Martin-Mehers
Type	Exercise-related game
Materials needed	Rope cut in sections and made into loops, enough space to roam
Basic instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Loops are placed on ground ▪ Each participant needs to find a new space in a different loop every time the facilitator says 'move', every time the participants move a loop is taken away
Open source?	No. The game, along with a series of great systems-thinking games can be found in the book 'The Climate Change Playbook: 22 systems thinking games for more effective communication about climate change' Book can be bought here
Date played	28 July 2017
Key lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need at least 15 people (we only had 10 and it was do-able but more difficult to move loops around) to run game ▪ More than 25 people and the debrief is not as deep - debrief was really important here and it was nice to have a slightly smaller group



Photo Credit: Think Namibia

8. See footnote 1.

9. <https://www.amazon.com/Climate-Change-Playbook-Effective-Communication/dp/1603586768>

THE SHOP TILL YOU DROP GAME

About	Participants see how different levels of income affect their environment and that both poor and rich people affect the environment in one way or another. "It's Friday the 30th all participants just got their monthly income, the mall is open, so they get to go and do their monthly shopping of everything they need for the month
Which SDGs?	Goal 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns)
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote sustainable consumption and production patterns • Demonstrate wealth inequality among people and the potential negative role of consumerism on society
Created by	NaDEET
Type	Role-play individual
Materials needed	Game money, envelopes (wallets), "NaDEET Shopping Complex" sign, 7 shop signs, shopping cards per item to buy, large printed sign of different items available for purchase, 7 half milk cartons for items at shops, pre-stick, signs with economic status and plastic sandwich bags.
Basic instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are given different amounts of money to go shopping • They must first purchase necessities and with any money left over they may then purchase something of luxury • Discussion of inequality will follow the activity
Open source?	No. The whole concept of the game was given to us by the NaDEET
Date played	29 September 2017
Key lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The game is a fun way demonstrating the inequality of wealth among people and to demonstrate the potential negative role of consumerism on society and the environment • Requires a spacious venue for easy mobility



Photo Credit: Think Namibia

KEY LESSONS FROM THE GAMES FOR THE SDGs

After a year of using gaming tools to enhance awareness on the SDGs, we have learnt some valuable lessons. The following are a synthesis of some of the key lessons learnt from our process for the improvement in the future:

1. Partnerships and flexibility is important

We had a group of partners who were willing to contribute and be flexible in arrangements. This made it easy for us to minimize costs and time by sharing resources and technical expertise.

2. Taking a demand-led approach supports strong engagement

While we did have an open-access, open-door once-a-month event, we found that requests for games at various institutions (e.g. University of Namibia, Scientific Society of Namibia, Namibia Museums Association, Namibia University of Science and Technology) meant better numbers and engagement generally. Flexibility to move and re-do some games related to demand can help spread the SDGs awareness further.

3. De-brief session is an essential part of the gaming session, this needs strong facilitation skills

While the introduction to the SDGs, and the game itself, are important and particularly the game is interactive and a fun way to learn, the debrief is essential to have a shift in mental model/world view and self-reflection. The debrief needs a lot of preparation before, and during it needs to be set up in a safe space with specific facilitation techniques (ideally the facilitator should have some experience with Mindell's 'Deep Democracy' Theory)

4. Planning a budget and getting some funding can lessen volunteer burden

We started the series with no funding other than our institutions (the Hanns Seidel Climate Project, Progress Namibia) doing printing, design of flyer and advertising, facilitation and technical expertise time, as well as snacks and games materials, all in-house at own cost. [Some of the team had to take leave from their day jobs on Fridays to run the games when it was their turn to facilitate.] We do not charge participant's entry fees (this would exclude people which is not in the spirit of the series or the SDGs). The team pulled together very effectively to make these all work with very limited resources. However, this was not sustainable in the long-term, and if the games had not received co-financing from the Hanns Seidel Foundation for 2018, we may not have continued.

5. Starting small is worthwhile, grow organically

We started with one game, World Climate. Once that was successful we started the series. Flexibility and adaptation was an important process, and we took small steps so that we could learn and have proper feedback mechanisms in place to improve as we went along. This strategy was effective because we could learn and improve and grow organically.

WAY FORWARD

After a year of playing Games for the SDGs, we have received some co-financing to run the series in 2018. The first game will start at the end of February. A planning meeting will be held to develop a series of games for the. In addition, all games played in 2017 will be available on a demand basis, and the team will be mobile to facilitate games at institutions who request them.

For those who want to lead such games, or replicate the series in your organisations or countries, please feel free to contact us:

Games for the SDGs

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