

Echoes of eco-discourses: Conversations on sustainable living and development



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How to cite this article:

Bentley, W., 2026, 'Echoes of eco-discourses: Conversations on sustainable living and development', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 47(1), a3893. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v47i1.3893>

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The South African Science and Religion Forum (SASRF) has a rich history of conducting research across various disciplines, publishing papers from its seminars and conferences either in book form or as special collections in accredited journals. This special collection in *Verbum et Ecclesia* adds to this legacy. In 2025, SASRF, under the auspices of the Research Institute for Theology and Religion (RITR – University of South Africa), held an international seminar with the theme: 'Echoes of eco-discourses'.

Besides the more recent foci in the Science and Religion dialogue, like the emergence of artificial intelligence technologies, the importance of building sustainable futures for our planet remains of utmost concern. The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2026) adopted in 2015 are probably the most inclusive transdisciplinary strategy that is in place to achieve this. Nevertheless, one still finds that discourses tend to happen in discipline-specific silos. This seminar aimed to create a platform where scholars addressed transdisciplinary strategies from religious, theological, and/or spiritual vantage points.

To this end, the University of South Africa invited Prof. Sophia Chirongoma and Prof. Knut-Willy Sæther, two renowned international scholars, to set the scene for the three-day deliberations. They focused on African womanist and/or feminist and eco-spirituality perspectives. The importance of context, space, gender justice, geopolitical dynamics, economics and aesthetics were highlighted, which gave a platform for further discussions. The conference enjoyed tremendous international support, with scholars across the continent of Africa participating either in person or online. Many of these contributors are academic associates of the RITR and have been actively involved in participating in the Institute's research focus areas.

The collection of articles in this special collection is not the sum total of the papers presented, but is a collection of those who chose to submit their papers for publication. It is a pity that not all papers could be included in this special collection as the deliberations were innovative, informative and broadened the horizons of the participants. This does not mean that the contributions captured are of lesser value. On the contrary! As the reader will find, these contributions offer a wide range of perspectives and clearly give volume to the voice of Africa on the global stage, a voice that needs to be listened to if we were to make any headway in understanding what it means to be human and to live in such a way that is environmentally sustainable, and dignifying to every living being on this planet, our home.

References

United Nations, 2026, *THE 17 GOALS*, viewed 07 April 2026, from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

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Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Echoes of eco-discourses' under the expert guidance of guest editor Prof. Wessel Bentley.