

What is an indicator?

*Sustainable development is ...
“meeting the needs of the current
generation without compromising
the ability of future generations
to meet their own needs”*



The dictionary defines the word indicator as a “needle” or “gauge”, something that points out what is happening. SOE reports use indicators to tell us what is happening in the environment, we call them environmental indicators. Environmental indicators tell us specific pieces of information about our environment and the human activities that affect our environment.

What is the environment? The environment is our surroundings. It includes the biophysical environment (living things and their life support systems) as well as the social (people, cultures, our cities), political (legislation, policy, regulations) and economic environments (trade, employment, finances). This report focuses mainly on the biophysical environment, but it does give lots of information that relates to the political, economic and social environments in Mpumalanga. This information will help us understand if Mpumalanga province is reaching sustainable development.

There are many common examples of indicators that you will be familiar with... you may not even realise they are indicators!

- The petrol gauge in your car
- The weather report
- Your blood pressure measurement
- Your child’s school report card
- The inflation rate

We wanted the indicators we selected for this report to be relevant to Mpumalanga province so we used some criteria when we selected the indicators. The criteria were as follows:

- The indicator had to be relevant to environmental issues identified in Mpumalanga province;
- The indicator had to be based on good quality, credible data that were cost effective to collect;
- The indicator had to be presented in a way that is easily understood; and
- The indicator had to show changes through time if sufficient data were available.

