

12-31-2014

## Incorporating Global Sustainability in the Business Language Curriculum

Steven J. Sacco

*San Diego State University*, [loughrin@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:loughrin@mail.sdsu.edu)

Altina M. Jones

*San Diego State University*, [tinajones6412@yahoo.com](mailto:tinajones6412@yahoo.com)

Richard L. Sacco

*University of California, Los Angeles*, [rsacco02@gmail.com](mailto:rsacco02@gmail.com)

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### Recommended Citation

Sacco, Steven J.; Jones, Altina M.; and Sacco, Richard L. (2014) "Incorporating Global Sustainability in the Business Language Curriculum," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 19 , Article 3.

Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol19/iss1/3>

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# Incorporating Global Sustainability in the Business Language Curriculum

## **Cover Page Footnote**

We would like to thank Dakota E. Senne for her contributions to the case study project.

Steven J. Sacco  
Altina M. Jones  
*San Diego State University*

Richard L. Sacco  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

## INCORPORATING GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE BUSINESS LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

### ABSTRACT

“Providing food, water, energy and other human needs to the world’s entire population without harming the environment is a formidable task,” according to Purdue University’s Global Sustainability Institute (2014). Global sustainability, as an academic discipline, has made inroads in all levels of education. Inherently interdisciplinary in nature, global sustainability involves nearly all colleges of any university. International business and its academic twin, foreign languages for business and economics, can play a critical role in the teaching of this important and timely subject. In this article, the co-authors describe the teaching of global sustainability in foreign language classrooms through the use of case studies. The co-authors specifically created case studies with Africa as the continental canvas. Embedded within the case study collection are case studies on the empowerment of women via entrepreneurship, a critical branch of global sustainability. The case studies in the collection entitled *Global Problem Solving: Africa* are designed for use in Business English, Business French, and Business Arabic courses. All cases feature a student-centered approach through the main activity entitled Taking the Role of the Decision Maker, in which students must analyze problems and propose solutions to these globally oriented problems.

**KEYWORDS:** Global Sustainability, Business French, Business English, Business Arabic, Africa, case studies, international business

### INTRODUCTION

In a 2013 *Global Business Languages* article, Sacco and Senne describe a class project that culminated in the publication of a case study book entitled *Global Problem Solving: Intercultural Business Case Studies from the Francophone World* (2014). Composed by 22 students in French and English, the case studies touched on various themes, such as global sustainability, renewable energy,

entrepreneurship, banking, micro-finance, and micro-entrepreneurship. The student consulting teams, five in all, were free to select the companies or intercultural business phenomenon that would serve as the keel of the case study. Adding to the keel, they then conducted research and composed the case study problem. The current project, *Global Problem Solving: Africa* (2015, forthcoming), is an extension of the first case study collection with a precise focus on global sustainability.

The paucity of materials focusing on global sustainability or Africa in business language courses was the impetus for embarking on the design and publication of a second volume of global case studies. This project includes Steven J. Sacco (the senior author of the first volume), Altina M. Jones, an International Business major from San Diego State University (a native South African) and Gilman International scholar, and Richard L. Sacco, an undergraduate Arabic Studies major from UCLA.

The project focused on three African regions: (1) the Maghreb (the Arabic-speaking countries in North Africa), (2) Sub-Saharan Africa (primarily French-speaking countries), and (3) southern Africa (where English is the *lingua franca* for business and economics). The authors framed the project by including the three pillars of global sustainability: (1) economic development, (2) social development, and (3) environmental protection (M. Robertson, 2014). Under the rubric of the three pillars, the authors included case studies focusing on renewable energy, women and entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, literacy and education, micro-finance, biofuels, and waste-to-energy projects. The finished product comprised 25 case studies using the same structure and methodology as the first volume (Sacco & Senne, 2014). Like the first volume, the second volume is designed not only for business language students, but also for high school business and economics students as well as for MBA students.

#### RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability relates to “forms of human economic activity and culture that do not lead to environmental degradation” (M. Robertson, 2014, p. 5). Sustainability has emerged as a critical subject matter throughout all levels of formal education because most scientists worldwide concur that time is running out for the planet (Birkeland, 2000; Blockstein & Wiegman, 2010; Braasch, 2009; Edwards, 2005). “Climate change” is only one factor impacting the planet’s future. Margaret Robertson (2014) also includes “poverty,

health, overpopulation, resource depletion, food and water scarcity, political instability, and the destruction of the life support systems we all depend on” (p. 5). All are interconnected. Becoming a successful global citizen requires knowledge of sustainability, critical-thinking skills, and the ability to educate and inspire others (M. Robertson, 2014; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). Educating and inspiring others inherently requires multilingual abilities, the hallmark of foreign language professionals.

The combination of a background in sustainability, international business, and foreign languages is creating a new set of employment opportunities for our students, providing a strong rationale for studying global sustainability. Employment is possible in all sectors: private businesses or corporations, NGOs, nonprofit organizations, the government, and the military (M. Robertson, 2014). Specific jobs include “recycling coordinator, waste reduction analyst, pollution prevention specialist, energy analyst, or green building advisor” (p. 59). Sustainability professionals combine the task of providing a vision for the future with assessing the current reality of the firm or organization in which they work. Sustainability professionals are agents of change. The second volume features agents of change in each case study.

The availability of grant funding is the third rationale for inserting global sustainability in our curriculum. To illustrate, San Diego Mesa College, a pioneer in global sustainability education, recently won a four-year USDA-NIFA-HSI (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Hispanic Serving Institution) grant of \$300,000 for a project titled STEM Engagement for the Enrichment of Diverse Students (SEEDS) Scholars Program (L. López, personal conversation, 2014). SEEDS is designed to specifically increase the number of Hispanic students pursuing future graduate degrees in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) by providing them with a firm foundation of advanced knowledge and skills beginning with their first two years in college. Approximately 450 K–12 students will benefit from SEEDS, and SEEDS will graduate 60 associate degree students who progress to become bachelor degree students.

The academic program is innovative in that the following will be offered: nine Mesa College courses in Anthropology, Nutrition, Spanish, Biology, Geology, and Personal Growth with content emphasis on food security, hunger, and sustainable agriculture (FSHSA). The SEEDS Program Principal Investigators are Professor Donald Barrie (Physical Sciences) and Professor Leticia P. López (Spanish). The US Department of Education’s Title VI programs are also fonts of grant funding.

### RATIONALE FOR THE FOCUS ON AFRICA

The BRIC countries of Brazil, Russia, India, and China dominate press coverage when it comes to emerging markets. Yet, Africa is THE emerging market in the first half of the twenty-first century (Banks et al., 2013; Nile Capital Management, 2014). As a continent, Africa boasts the fastest growing economy in the world as well as the youngest population (Berman, 2013). According to economist Charles Robertson (2013), Africa's current \$2 trillion economy will expand to \$29 trillion by 2050. Africa, in 2050, will surpass both Europe and America combined (Griswold, 2014). Despite these projections, US businesses lag far behind their Chinese and Brazilian counterparts in doing business in Africa. At the recent US-Africa Summit in Washington, DC, Mo Ibrahim, the Sudanese billionaire, was highly critical of US business leaders and their lack of pro-active strategic planning:

“I’m actually a little bit amazed that all those Africans I met on the plane ... are coming all the way here to America to tell the very smart, well-informed American business-people that ‘guys, you know what, there is a good opportunity in Africa.’ They should do some homework. Everywhere in Africa there are Chinese business people, there are Brazilian business people. None of us went to Brazil, or to Asia or to China to tell them, look, come and invest in Africa. They found out themselves and they come and invest. That’s how basic business people behave. Why do we need to come and inform these misinformed American businesses? You know, you guys invented Google. Use it please.” (Quoted in Griswold, 2014)

In French studies, Francophone Africa is less studied than other regions of the Francophone world. The current case study collection is designed to boost the study of Africa in business language classes and to help prepare students for potential careers involving Africa.

### CASE STUDY THEMES

*Renewable Energy and Green Solutions* constitutes the major theme of the second volume. The authors have introduced a variety of green solution successes juxtaposed with current environmentally unfriendly practices. All of these case studies serve as potential solutions for resolving energy problems worldwide. From a macro perspective, *Solaris* is a case study describing a promising biofuel for the airline industry. The case study on Morocco demonstrates the benefits of a strong national policy for reaching energy

independence. From an urban perspective, Cape Town's unique renewable energy policy is designed to provide each household with a solar-powered water heater, reducing energy use by almost 40%. *Cotton made in Africa* is a continent-wide initiative designed to provide garment manufacturers with sustainable cotton planted and harvested by farmers making a sustainable wage.

From a micro perspective, the case studies describe best practices at the rural level. *Barefoot Power Uganda* supplies rural Ugandans, 80% of whom are not connected to the country's electric grid, with inexpensive renewable solar lighting and charging systems. *Three Avocados* sells Ugandan coffee and uses its profits to dig water wells in rural areas. Juxtaposed with these enlightened programs is *Eskom*, South Africa's primary electrical utility company, which relies on coal-powered electricity plans despite the bountiful availability of solar energy.

*Empowering Women* is the other major theme of the second volume. *Three Avocados's* water wells, built purposely within villages, protect women from physical attacks while transporting water miles back to their homes. *Women and Beekeeping* describes a program to develop micro entrepreneurs in Gabon. *Genemark* features Gisèle Étamé, a PhD mother of four, whose firm is manufacturing generic drugs to sell to impoverished Cameroonians. Angela Adeke's success story following the carnage left behind throughout Uganda by guerrilla group leader Joseph Kony "reads like a Hollywood movie." *Worldreader* is working to end poverty one electronic page at a time through the distribution of Amazon Kindle e-books. *Women at the Helm* describes female entrepreneurs dominating the hospitality industry in Liberia. *Cairo Angels* is a unique venture capital firm that provides women with seed funding for their businesses. Juxtaposed with these programs is *Boko Haram*, a brutal victimizer of women in western Africa and an example of anti-sustainability.

## SAMPLE CASE STUDIES

Below are some sample case studies found in the new volume.

### *Striving for Energy Independence:*

#### *The Renewable Energy Push in Morocco*

This case describes Morocco's efforts to attain energy independence. Morocco will soon become the first African country to be totally energy independent—and energy clean (Zebboudj, 2012). In fact, Morocco will meet those goals decades before the US. Their strategy: employing a combination of renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, thermal, and biomass.

*Genemark and the Pharmaceutical Industry in Sub-Saharan Africa*

A young pharmaceutical firm in Cameroon has been focusing on the production and distribution of generic drugs. Responding to the immense need for low-cost medication, Genemark has successfully developed 20 generics that are 30%–50% cheaper than their licensed counterparts. Gisèle Étamé founded Genemark “to bring down the selling price of quality generic drugs on local markets and ensure that they were immediately available” (Genemark, 2010).

*Solaris: Transforming Tobacco into Airline Biofuel*

Can airlines use genetically modified tobacco (called Solaris) as a clean jet fuel? Boeing and South African Airways think so. As *Jeune Afrique Business* reports, “the use of Solaris can ‘reduce by eighty percent CO2 emissions as compared to current fossil fuel alternatives’” (Jeune Afrique, 2014; my translation). If financially feasible, Solaris, an “energy tobacco,” could significantly reduce airline pollution, “currently responsible for an estimated five percent of global climate pollution” (Jeune Afrique, 2014; my translation).

*Eskom: The Worst Company in Africa?*

What is the worst company in Africa in terms of corporate social responsibility and global sustainability? Eskom, South Africa’s primary electrical utility company, is a leading candidate for the Public Eye Award. The Public Eye tracks greed-oriented globalization and identifies poor corporate social responsibility citizens. Shell won the 2013 award, honored by voters as the worst company in the world. In 2014 Eskom earned nominations from Earth-life Africa Johannesburg and Greenpeace Africa (Eskom, 2013).

*Worldreader: Helping to End Poverty One Electronic Page at a Time*

Educating children from developing nations is a daunting task. Even if millions of books were made available in Africa, it would still require children to hike 10 to 15 miles to school and back with 20 pounds of books loaded in their backpacks. Worldreader, a nonprofit headquartered in San Francisco, has solved that problem. Why not provide e-books to learners worldwide? Worldreader has provided almost two million e-readers to over 350,000 readers in 37 countries.

*Econet: The Making of Africa’s First Cashless Society*

Who would ever guess that a country, where as late as 1998, 70% of its people had never heard a telephone ring, will soon be home to Africa’s first cashless society. The hard-fought five-year legal battle that Zimbabwe’s Econet Wire-

less waged with the government of Zimbabwe to provide this basic public service was hailed a great breakthrough. It would eventually open the door to banking services for as much as 75% of the unbankable in Zimbabwe ... on a mobile phone (Leach, 2014).

*Angela Adeke's Uniforms: Successful Ugandan Tailor  
Helps Mend the Fabric of Her Torn Country*

Angela Adeke was determined not to be a victim in the aftermath of the atrocities that spread darkness over her beloved country of Uganda during the reign of terror by Joseph Kony. Eager to enroll her children in school, she was scoffed at and turned away because she could not afford uniforms for them. Adeke turned this moment of shame into a business opportunity. She began by sewing uniforms for her children and soon thereafter produced uniforms for 4,000 other children.

PUTTING FUTURE STUDENTS IN  
THE ROLE OF THE DECISION MAKER

In a 2013 *Global Business Languages* article, Sacco and Senne (2013) described a problem-solving method known as Taking the Role of the Decision Maker. Placed at the end of each case study, the Decision Maker (DM) segment is designed to transform students into decision makers as they work in groups to solve the problem, challenge, or dilemma posed in each study. Problem-solving case studies dovetail well within the Project-Based Learning movement that is successfully infiltrating US primary and secondary education.

Each DM section, based on the model proposed by Mauffette-Leenders, Erskine, and Leenders (2001), compels students to solve problems through three learning dimensions: analysis, conceptualization, and presentation. The case studies in volumes one and two also adhere to many of the principles espoused in Project-Based Learning (Buck Institute for Education, 2014). For example, the cases include “significant content” (global sustainability). They promote “21<sup>st</sup> century competencies” (problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and innovation). The cases involve “in-depth inquiry” (analysis, conceptualization, presentation) and pose a compelling open-ended “driving question.” Finally, the cases encourage “voice and choice” (problem resolution and the path to resolution).

CONCLUSION

Sustainability, as an academic field, is still in its formative stage and will continue to proliferate as climate change and other sustainable issues become

more acute. Its inclusion in international business and Languages for Specific Purposes will increase job opportunities, as more businesses move toward establishing sustainability programs within their firms (M. Robertson, 2014). More importantly, the inclusion of global sustainability in our curricula will prepare future business practitioners to address the major concerns identified by experts.

Foreign language and international business programs should at least add an interdisciplinary minor or certificate program in global sustainability. The US Department of Education's Title VI Programs such as the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Program and the Business and International Education Program (when reinstated) are ideal vehicles for curriculum creation. The Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program is an ideal program to take students and K–12 teachers to Africa, Asia, or Latin America to study and experience global sustainability first hand. The International Research and Studies Program will provide projects that create global educational materials.

The use of case studies will provide students with practice at solving global sustainability problems, especially if designed to place them in a leadership role. Not all case studies do this. Our cases purposely provide incomplete information, compelling students to conduct additional research to solve real-life global business problems. Seldom in the business world are business practitioners equipped with complete information about any problem or challenge. Finding additional information is a problem-solving activity of its own. Since students are often better researchers using Internet-based sources than are professional case writers, their information is often more poignant and relevant as fuel to solve problems. Placing students in teams echoes how business is conducted in most multinational firms. To repeat what we emphasized in our 2013 *Global Business Languages* article, firms desperately seek “critical thinkers, tacklers of non-routine complex tasks and collaborators who thrive on working in global teams” (quoted from Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011, pp. 376–378). Finally, most problems in the business world have no one correct solution and no one path to problem resolution. Our instructional strategies and materials need to reflect this reality. Case studies can lead the way.

## APPENDIX 1 SAMPLE CASE STUDY

### Women and Beekeeping in Gabon

When we think of entrepreneurship, we think of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, and the Silicon Valley. However, an astronomical percentage of entrepreneurship is conducted by micro-entrepreneurs who live a much less glamorous life as they struggle for survival.<sup>1</sup> According to the London Business School, “vast armies of micro-entrepreneurs populate the poor parts of the world.”<sup>2</sup> In less-developed countries, the percentage of entrepreneurs is three times higher than in the US.<sup>3</sup> Beekeeping is a micro-enterprise that is growing in popularity in less-developed countries worldwide.

Why beekeeping? Beekeeping is the perfect profession to earn a guaranteed year-round income and it provides financial protection for women in urban or rural areas. Beekeeping is a profession designed for anyone: men, women, children, the disabled, and even the blind. It requires no intensive capital; it is not difficult to master and honey is easy to sell as food or for medical purposes.<sup>4</sup> Bees begin to create their combs within the first month of the hive’s construction; bees reproduce after three months and in six months after colonization Gabonese women beekeepers begin harvesting honey. From the date of the first harvest, honey is then harvested daily. Ideally, beehives are placed under trees to the benefit of both.

The London Business School sees three key challenges for micro-entrepreneurs: (1) the lack of business skills; (2) access to adequate information; and (3) access to capital.<sup>5</sup> As a result, NGOs throughout Africa have targeted beekeeping as a means for training women. They teach overall business skills and beekeeping skills, and provide microloans as start-up capital. NGOs monitor micro-entrepreneurs throughout the early stages of beekeeping and remain accessible after these initial stages of development. Ironically, the London Business School reports that it is easier for “shack-based” micro-entrepreneurs like women beekeepers to gain access to training, monitoring, and capital than it is for “garage-based” businesses in the Silicon Valley.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chandy, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Chandy, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Chandy, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> The beekeeping project, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Chandy, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Chandy, 2013.

The Community Partnership for Youth and Women Development (CPYWD), headquartered in Ghana, is one example of an NGO working to empower women through micro-entrepreneurship.<sup>7</sup> Their women and beekeeping project is one of their flagship programs. The CPYWD is currently training 150 women in northern Ghana as beekeepers. CPYWD's goal is to create a beekeeping school that will train and equip future generations of beekeepers.

More initiatives like CPYWD's are needed as millions of women are still unemployed, dependent upon their spouses or parents, and vulnerable to forces that put them at risk. Collateral-free micro-financing from NGOs such as Women of Africa Fund for Micro Enterprise is also sorely needed for women who normally face usurious rates. Beekeeping enables African women to generate income, send their children to school, and purchase health insurance.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, beekeeping strengthens the lot of bees, who, like women, are threatened worldwide.

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<sup>7</sup> Women, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The beekeeping project, 2011.

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#### TAKING THE ROLE OF THE DECISION MAKER

In order to increase the number of women beekeepers, an NGO has hired you to assist in helping a group of ten women in Gabon set up their own beekeeping business. Before you begin, you must conduct research in order to figure out what is needed to start the business. Focus on what sort of training, capital

requirements, and supplies these women need in order to be successful. Once you know what you need, submit a request to the organization so you can gain access to these materials.

### *Individual preparation*

1. Research beekeeping in Africa. What supplies are needed to get a hive started? What sort of training or knowledge is required prior to starting a hive? What are the dangers of beekeeping, and what sort of protection or preventative measures are required?

2. Research the Community Partnership for Youth and Women Development (CPYWD)'s women and beekeeping program. How do they get the women started with beekeeping? What supplies do they provide? How is the CPYWD able to fund their projects?

3. Research the Women of Africa Fund for Micro Enterprise. What is the mission of the program? What are the benefits they provide to women entrepreneurs, such as beekeepers? What other programs like this exist for female entrepreneurs in Africa?

4. Based on your research, draft a request to the head of the NGO. In it, state all the materials needed to get the women started in beekeeping. Include physical materials for the hives, training materials, and how much it would cost for all ten women to get started. Also include what follow up training or assistance would be needed and how to remain accessible to the women.

### *Small group discussion*

1. In groups, discuss each individual's request for materials. What were the things each group member agreed upon? What were some of the things that not everyone included in their request?

2. Discuss with each other any additional materials that may be needed for the women. Is there anything new that was thought of after reading each request?

3. Combine the ideas to draft a thorough request for the materials. Include any new ideas and considerations. Consider the costs and what is available. Are there alternative materials that could be used? If so, what are they?

### *Large group discussion*

1. Read the requests to the class. What are some of the differences between the groups? What were the costs that each group came up with; are they different? What are some of the alternative materials that were suggested? Do you agree or disagree that those are viable options?

2. Discuss as a class: What impact does beekeeping have on Africa, focusing on both female entrepreneurship and the environment? Are there other countries that could use this model to help underprivileged women? Why is beekeeping so important in today's global environment?

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