



## **Synthesized Report – Report III**



**25 Year Review - UNDP Programme of Support to the Government of South Africa in Attaining its Development Objectives**

**22 May 2020**

# Introduction

The year 2019 marked a quarter century of South Africa's young democracy, a key milestone since the end of apartheid in 1994. These 25 years of hard-fought freedom have seen the country take giant strides towards dignity and equality, inclusive growth, sustainable development, and saw it chart a course towards prosperity and self-actualization for all.

The year 2019 also marked the twenty-fifth year of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) journey in South Africa. As South Africa unshackled itself from apartheid and took its place as a forward-looking, just, modern nation, UNDP was amongst the many international institutions that embraced the new chapter in the country's story.

This moment in time allows all major actors involved in South Africa's post-apartheid journey to take stock, recognize accomplishments that can be consolidated, and acknowledge issues on which the country has lagged – to identify lessons that will hold the nation in good stead as it forges ahead. Since those new beginnings, both South Africa and UNDP have grown from strength to strength and crossed major milestones.

**As a partner that shares and internalizes South Africa's development vision and priorities, UNDP has moved in lock-step with the country.**

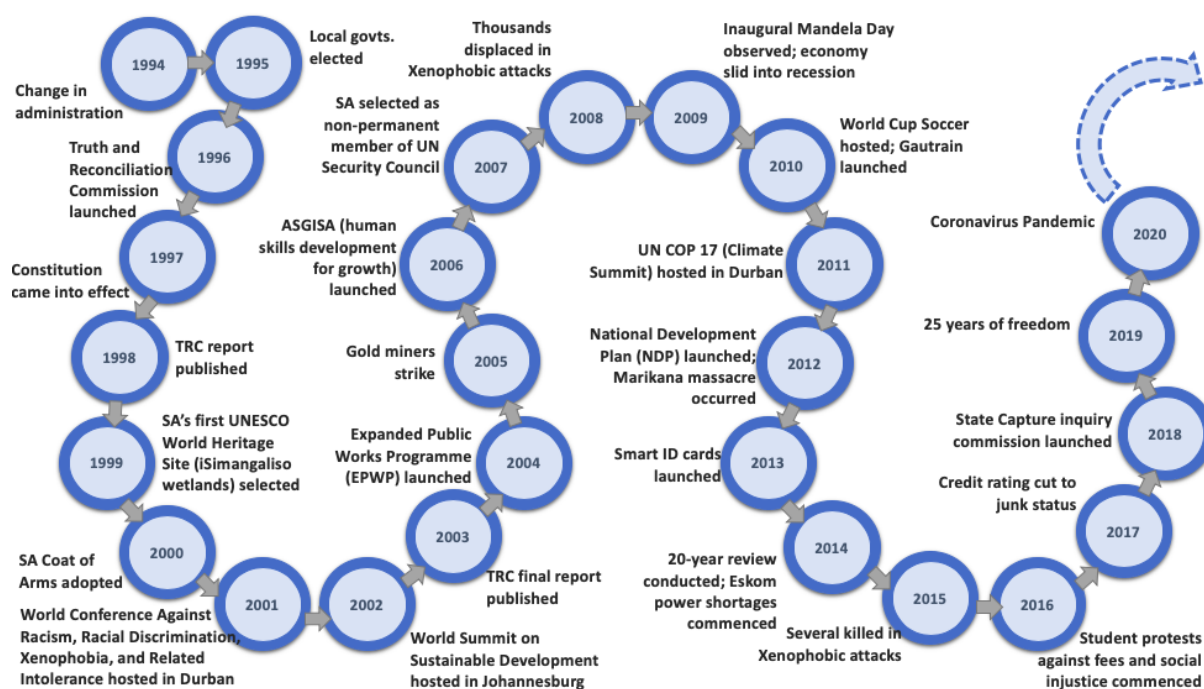


Figure 1 - Timeline of select events marking 25 years of South African freedom

Today, as South grapples with the impact of the Coronavirus and forges a path to economic recovery and the restoration of livelihoods of millions, partners such as the UNDP can support the country with 'build back better' approaches. UNDP can help the government focus stimulus packages and catalytic economic programmes on environmental and social co-benefits, and can similarly support the government design sustainability-oriented interventions that generate jobs.

UNDP South Africa's track record since 1994 is testament to its alignment with South Africa's national goals and aspirations. As the country redoubles its efforts on job creation, youth employment, income-generation, enhancing transparency and accountability in government, curbing crime, and resolving the complex issue of land rights and distribution, **UNDP must remain just as responsive to the country's needs and tailor its programmes towards such critical matters.** This report presents a synthesised summary of a comprehensive review carried out on UNDP's programme of support to the Government of South Africa over the past 25 years.

## Building the New South Africa – UNDP's Approach

UNDP is considered a partner of choice for the public sector and non-profit sector, supporting the government and civil society to refine and progressively achieve their mandate. Its work is, by design, completely aligned with the country's development priorities, strategies, and plans.

**One of UNDP South Africa's greatest strengths is its ability to be an effective convenor. The respect that the UN system commands worldwide, combined with the relationships UNDP South Africa has nurtured in the country, equips the country office to bring the right people into the room each time deliberation or a decision is needed.** It is these institutional as well as individual relationships that are at the heart of UNDP South Africa's social capital, and it is important for the organization to continue investing in them consistently.

**As South Africa's development landscape has evolved, so has UNDP role transitioned from guide to facilitator, i.e. from being the locus of knowledge to being a conduit for knowledge.** This shift is manifested in the 'Word Cloud' of UNDP South Africa's perceived value-addition (Figure 2, a representation of the frequency with which positive descriptors were used in interviews, by UNDP staff past and present as well as external stakeholders, to characterise UNDP South Africa).



Figure 2 - Positive descriptors used by interview respondents to characterize UNDP South Africa

This review revealed that in years past, partners used to turn to UNDP South Africa for both funding support and technical assistance. South Africa's status as a middle-income country and budgetary streamlining within the UN system have, over time, limited the scale of financial resources that UNDP South Africa can provide. Concurrently, partners' experiences suggest that UNDP South Africa's capacity to provide subject-matter expertise and for its staff to offer technical advice in various domains and disciplines has also diminished. While several institutions in SA have become more capacitated internally over this time period – needing to rely less on UNDP's staff expertise and becoming more self-reliant – several partners affirmed that they would still wish to draw on technical capacity from UNDP, if available.

One of UNDP South Africa's key features is its multi-sectorality and the number of diverse initiatives running at once. **UNDP is the UN's hub for development. Development by its nature is cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary. Given that development interventions are often designed to be holistic and integrated across several sectors and disciplines, UNDP South Africa finds itself simultaneously working on a multiplicity of programmes and activities.** While this enables the organization to identify and strengthen

synergies across fields, a negative consequence is that UNDP's already limited staff cohort is "spread too thin" and unable to deliver the technical guidance sought from them in a timely and rigorous manner.



Figure 3 - Negative descriptors used by interview respondents to characterize UNDP South Africa

This predicament of trying to accomplish too many things and consequently falling short on expectations – rather than having strong focus on a limited number of priorities – has been a recurring concern, elevated in all major reviews of UNDP South Africa since 1994. Interviews conducted for this review (internal within UNDP and external with partners) again brought this into sharp relief, as depicted in the 'Word Cloud' (Figure 3).

These challenges require UNDP South Africa to recalibrate and balance its focus areas.

Nevertheless, the agency has consistently elicited the highest respect from partner institutions and beneficiaries. The overwhelming response from all quarters, including government departments and civil society, is that UNDP South Africa's contributions to key development solutions in South Africa have been invaluable and helped set the country on a stronger, more stable, more strategic, and more inclusive path. **Diverse development milestones such as the Reya Vaya bus rapid transit system in Johannesburg, Gauteng, or the expansion of wind power generation capacity across the country, or the inception and maturation of leading institutions like SANBI (to name but a few examples) would not have been possible without UNDP South Africa.**

Given the breadth of UNDP South Africa's work over the last 25 years and the multi-sectoral nature of its contributions to South African development, it is difficult to point to a few select thematic areas where the organization has left its mark. Nevertheless, UNDP South Africa's work over this period does display discernible trends. Broadly, UNDP South Africa's efforts between 1994 and 2020 can be grouped into four areas, or the "4 Gs:"

- (1) **G**reening and Low-Carbon Development;
- (2) **G**overnance, Institutional Strengthening, and Capacity Building;
- (3) **G**rowth, Employment, and Entrepreneurship; and
- (4) **G**ender, Health, and Inclusivity.

The "4 Gs" represent a critical mass of UNDP South Africa's activities and partnerships between 1994 and 2020, and are the essence of UNDP South Africa's identity and character during its journey to the present. This summary report briefly captures accomplishments and lessons in the four categories. A more detailed discussion is available in a companion report, the UNDP 25-year review narrative report.

# Greening and Low-Carbon Development

*UNDP South Africa has been a major driving force in South Africa's stewardship of its natural resources, biodiversity, and unique landscapes. With UNDP South Africa's assistance (and GEF funding), South Africa launched and successfully implemented several pioneering conservation interventions that have been pivotal to the protection of the country's natural capital. Furthermore, UNDP South Africa provided impetus to impactful initiatives on clean and efficient energy, sustainable transport, climate change adaptation, transboundary water management, and disaster risk reduction and disaster management. UNDP South Africa also played a crucial role in the capacitation and maturation of strong and effective national and regional institutions in this space.*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF 25 YEARS

A few illustrative highlights of UNDP's contributions to South African development in these fields include: the SABONET project (1996-2004); development and implementation of the South African National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2005); market transformation for energy efficient appliances through standards and labelling (2011-2016); the South African Wind Energy Programme (phases 1 and 2); support to the Reya Vaya BRT system in advance of the 2010 soccer world cup; and support to ORASECOM on joint transboundary water resources management.

**UNDP's efforts in developing and delivering GEF projects led to the country having "one of the most comprehensive GEF portfolios in Africa."**

This is also matched in innovation and dynamism by South Africa's GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP), aimed at communities and local livelihoods. Amongst the strengths of the GEF SGP is the ability to link up small-scale projects with other synergistic projects or programmes, thereby leveraging additional resources and benefiting from a wider array of partners.

The enormous success of UNDP South Africa's GEF portfolio validates UNDP's country programme and demonstrates how UNDP can be a catalyst for large-scale, high impact, sustainable development initiatives, even if its own **role is to be a magnet for funding and a springboard for other implementing entities to grow and mainstream the projects.**

## REFLECTIONS ON LESSONS LEARNT

**UNDP South Africa's GEF projects were central to the business case, and the political case, for conservation, natural resources management, environmental protection, biodiversity management, sustainability, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and management of international waters.** A key lesson from this is that if the UN system is committed to priorities that member-countries may not organically put front and centre in their development agenda, the most effective way to help government internalise such priorities is to bring to bear resources, design and operationalise interventions, and demonstrate through proof-of-concept efforts that such priorities bring tangible benefits. In South Africa, GEF projects entrenched the sustainable development agenda and encouraged the government to go farther than it otherwise would have, demonstrating clearly socio-economic as well as environmental advantages.

UNDP South Africa's GEF work was the catalyst for high-performing and highly capacitated institutions that now lead and dominate the sustainable development agenda in the country. Due to their architecture and compliance requirements, GEF projects had to develop institutional frameworks, social and environmental



safeguards, monitoring and evaluation systems, and other institutional measures to aid effectiveness. This **capacitated institutions through a learning-by-doing process**. As institutions like SANBI and SANPARKS have matured and gained technical expertise, they have had to rely less on UNDP's technical guidance. In SANBI's case, it is now accredited with the GEF and with the Green Climate Fund (GCF), so that it can access funds directly. A measure of UNDP South Africa's success is that the institutions it once supported and guided no longer depend on its capacity and are equipped to drive such efforts on their own.

## INSIGHTS ON STRENGTHENING FUTURE EFFORTS

Across programmatic areas, there is a **need for more internal operational support**. Increasing operational support would allow programmatic staff to step back from coordinating certain process issues and have an opportunity to **consider the big picture and engage in more strategic thinking and planning**.

UNDP's work in this space has suffered from staff turnover and differing levels of technical capacity that have led to inconsistency. While partners affirm the value of UNDP South Africa's role in the environmental and climate change space in South Africa, and reiterate clearly and unequivocally that UNDP South Africa has made immensely critical contributions, there is a **growing dissatisfaction with the transaction costs associated with UNDP's bureaucracy as well as with the decreased technical input and domain expertise UNDP South Africa is able to provide** on matters related to natural resources management, biodiversity, conservation, and green growth.

From UNDP's side, there must be an expectation that partners remain committed to agreed workplans, timeframes, and associated budgets – because donors have to seek accountability – but, to the extent that some adaptive management and flexibility can be built into programming (in recognition of the development context and implementation realities) would be welcomed by partners.

## Governance, Institutional Strengthening, and Capacity Building

*UNDP South Africa's work in directly supporting governance in South Africa positions it apart from most other development partners. This is a unique space in which UNDP South Africa has distinguished itself as a trusted ally of the government by bringing stronger planning, innovation, and ethical leadership into public service. This is in keeping with UNDP being the leading UN agency on governance. UNDP South Africa has helped rebuild public institutions in the country by exposing them to new tools, frameworks, and best practice, in a manner that has proven sustainable over the long term. Programmes in this space have had a tangible impact in professionalizing public service and supplementing state capacity both at the national and provincial spheres.*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF 25 YEARS

A few illustrative highlights of UNDP's initiatives in the governance space include: the 'Leading Like Mandela' programme; public service capacity development in Kwa-Zulu Natal, including support to the M&E nerve centre; collaboration with Stats SA on domestication of the MGDs; the O.R. Tambo debate series in partnership with DPME; and a role in formulating South Africa's national SGD indicators, amongst others.

A critical mass of UNDP South Africa's work under its governance programme relates to the establishment of M&E systems and the provision of assistance with tracking and reporting.

Central to UNDP's work on governance are the trusted partnerships it has built with government departments including Stats SA, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME), Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE), National Treasury, the Election Commission, and the Offices of the Premiers in the provinces of Limpopo and Kwa-Zulu Natal.

## REFLECTIONS ON LESSONS LEARNT

A key driver of success of UNDP South Africa's governance work has been that the **activities are directly embedded in the environment they are intended to benefit**. This allows the interventions to be tested through practice and refinement. Instead of developing reports, briefings and guidelines that serve as knowledge products directed at state agencies, initiatives under the governance programme have been undertaken within targeted departments, with department officials being active participants in co-creating and co-implementing the tools and frameworks developed. **This allows government departments to institutionalise such efforts in their own space and context, resulting in greater traction and sustainability.**

An initiative that is **attuned to a changing governance landscape and to adapt and evolve programmes to respond to such changes** is one that will succeed. UNDP's governance work has changed with the times and been nimble in understanding shifts in operating contexts, but often at the initiative of partner institutions that articulate changing needs. There is room, therefore, for some of this dynamism to be driven from within UNDP itself. UNDP South Africa can be more proactive in adapting to changing social, cultural, and economic contexts, and could thereby help the government do the same.

Similar to other domains, even in the governance space **a key characteristic of UNDP that partners regard as a value-addition is its convening capacity**. UNDP's role as a convenor allows government decision-makers to engage with non-governmental actors, broadening the development dialogue. Some partners have remarked that UNDP even has the ability to bring more government departments into a single space than government departments themselves do. This influence is important to retain.

## INSIGHTS ON STRENGTHENING FUTURE EFFORTS

At an institutional level, **one of the factors that is viewed as impeding proactive and impactful programmatic work is the volume of administrative processes involved** – echoing the aforementioned bureaucratic concerns.

Another constraint is funding. UNDP South Africa used to be both a *knowledge partner*, i.e. provider of technical expertise on policy and planning, as well as a *funding partner*, i.e. a contributor of resources. **As funding envelopes have reduced, this has also limited UNDP's influence and reach. Without bringing more funds to the table UNDP South Africa is limited in what it can accomplish in partnership with government.** If UNDP South Africa is no longer able to participate in the governance space in South Africa as a funder, and instead has to position itself as a service provider that should be selected to run large development programmes on behalf of the government (with external donor funding), it would be well-advised to **develop a stronger case that differentiates it from other service providers. According to partners in government, UNDP South Africa has sometimes not been able to motivate compellingly about its value-add as a service provider**, relative to other entities that can perform similar programme management and coordination functions. The government will be pleased to work with UNDP South Africa as a service

provider, but only if it is able to demonstrate high levels of accountability, responsiveness and technical capability.

Thematically, it is important for the governance work to **pivot more strongly towards issues of youth employment, poverty reduction, and economic equality**. The government's focus over the next decade will be on these issues, and if UNDP can design, drive, or even fund, catalytic interventions that unlock economic opportunities this would make it a highly valued contributor to SA's growth story.

Another thematic area of focus for governance in South Africa moving forward is to **strengthen democratic governance and reverse the slippages that have happened on development gains**. This needs to be done, keeping women and youth in mind, so as to increase their participation in democratic processes and institution building in the country.

## Growth, Employment, and Entrepreneurship

*Unlocking economic growth, creating jobs, and boosting business opportunities for entrepreneurs are fundamental concerns for South Africa. In fact, the country's future hinges on it being able to provide its citizens, especially its youth, with gainful employment, and restoring the economic growth rate. UNDP South Africa has made steady and valuable contributions to the country's growth, particularly through support to small businesses, value-chain development, and catalytic initiatives for cross-border and intra-regional trade. Given the imperative to reinvigorate the economy, UNDP's efforts in this area could be scaled up, including through strategic partnerships and private sector collaboration.*

### HIGHLIGHTS OF 25 YEARS

UNDP South Africa's work in the area of economic growth and employment has focused on business development support to small and medium enterprises, value-chain enhancement, and trade facilitation. UNDP's efforts have provided useful models for replication and scale-up, and have also yielded knowledge products that allow others operating in this sphere to benefit from lessons.

A few illustrative highlights of UNDP's contributions on growth, employment, and entrepreneurship include: assistance to the National Treasury on Public Finance Management (PFM); establishment of the Centre for Trade and Regional Industrialisation; a study on factors that hinder women entrepreneurs from accessing finance; analysis of youth employment databases in South Africa together with a series of knowledge products on youth employment; and the South African Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge Fund. These initiatives generated a wealth of knowledge for the government and civil society to leverage.

As these themes become increasingly important in South Africa, UNDP's country office is investing greater resources and programmatic efforts on economic growth, poverty reduction, job creation, employment support to entrepreneurs, and social protection. It launched a host of social protection-oriented activities in 2019, which are expected to pick up momentum.

### REFLECTIONS ON LESSONS LEARNT

**UNDP South Africa's work on growth, employment, and entrepreneurship has generated valuable knowledge for the government and civil society to leverage.** By sharing the knowledge products widely



and encouraging research uptake amongst practitioners and public sector decision-makers, UNDP can give its funded research a multiplier effect. Collaborations with universities, think tanks, and research institutes have yielded rich returns, and such partnerships may be important to foster more.

The challenges of limited financial resources and scale remain ever-present, but by enhancing relationships with the private sector, which has a stake in supporting economic growth, employment, and entrepreneurship in South Africa, some of the resource constraints could be overcome.

Significant design and planning work has gone into initiatives that stalled earlier than intended (such as the Industrial Development Research Programme), or which have not been green-lit (such as a Supplier Development Programme). However, this valuable intellectual capital can be revived and reinvigorated by UNDP South Africa through the exploration of new partnerships that can build on these efforts.

## INSIGHTS ON STRENGTHENING FUTURE EFFORTS

The challenges faced by UNDP in this thematic area are not exclusive to growth, employment, and entrepreneurship, but are overarching issues. **Unlocking greater funding** would potentially help in ensuring the continuity of initiatives such as the IDRP, given an **initial investment by UNDP in this space has the potential to attract matching or greater funds from large private sector institutions.**

Thematically, this is an area where UNDP South Africa is well-positioned to expand. These issues are of utmost relevance to development in South Africa, and the greater the capacity of UNDP to support the government's priorities on growth, employment, and entrepreneurship, the more salient UNDP South Africa will be as a key partner.

## Gender, Health, and Inclusivity

*Globally, initiatives focused on gender, vulnerable populations (including children, persons with disability, and persons with HIV), and inclusivity are at the heart of UNDP's mission. In South Africa, these programme areas have been important to UNDP South Africa and are the basis for several strategic relationships, but due to a variety of factors (including the multiplicity of actors in these "crowded" spaces) it has not achieved the same scale and reach as efforts in other focus areas. The work done on these issues over 25 years nevertheless represents a robust foundation for UNDP South Africa to enhance and redouble its investments in these sectors, should it choose to.*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF 25 YEARS

A few illustrative highlights of UNDP's efforts on gender, health, and inclusivity are: a study on the role of bystanders in preventing and responding to GBV; support for a national strategic plan on HIV, TB, and STIs; support to the health sector in rural areas in Limpopo province; contributions to South Africa's white paper on disability; and technical support for the drafting of South Africa's green paper on land reform.

A key feature of UNDP's work on these issues is that it provided value to partners by identifying and meeting their most pressing needs. When UNDP South Africa develops a significant response to an unmet need or a gap, its work has considerable impact and is well-received by partners and beneficiaries.

## REFLECTIONS ON LESSONS LEARNT

**In order for UNDP South Africa's work to remain relevant, it must stay attuned to the biggest needs and gaps it can address, and keep adapting its programmatic work to evolving contexts, as the country changes.** When UNDP South Africa has its ears on the ground and is attuned to what the South African government is struggling with the most, its work is more demand-driven and therefore more valuable from the government's perspective.

An example of UNDP meeting pressing needs is visible in the tremendous success of the UN Volunteers programme in Limpopo province, focussed on supporting the health system. This remarkable initiative is testament to the fact that **when UNDP South Africa identifies and develops a significant response to a need, its work has impact.** The key to such value is meeting a pressing need. The project was initially meant to last two years but due to its value to the province it was extended three times.

In relation to UNDP's work on land reform, an important learning has been how protracted such processes can be and how progress is slow and incremental. It is the nature of legislative advisory and policy development that only some of the contributions see light of day. Oftentimes the technical inputs result in bills that advance the dialogue and help move the overall agenda forward, but do not get passed (or get withdrawn). **Support to the SA government on such matters must bear in mind the long-term gains.**

## INSIGHTS FOR STRENGTHENING FUTURE EFFORTS

As with other programmatic areas, some of the challenges to be overcome in these workstreams are institutional hurdles, and not specific to work on gender, inclusivity, and social protection. As already flagged, **one of the biggest constraints is funding.** Another common challenge is **limited staff capacity in terms of the number of experts available to undertake tasks.** Often it is just one or two individuals who shoulder the work of an entire programme, undertaking all tasks from planning and reporting to budgeting and invoicing.

An external constraint that impacts UNDP South Africa's work is the **rapid turnover of staff in government departments.** Change in personnel leads to loss of institutional memory on the partner's side, nullifies some of the investment made by UNDP South Africa in the relationship, and necessitates periodic re-alignment with new officials' priorities and areas of interest.

Thematically, UNDP South Africa could make a valuable contribution by focusing future efforts on emerging issues such as **gender-responsive budgeting**, which is a strategic entry-point and lever for gender mainstreaming. According to those interviewed, UNDP South Africa could also **fill a crucial niche by working more with the private sector on gender mainstreaming.** This could include gender seal certification for private entities that have achieved high gender inclusion and sensitivity, as well as partnering with private companies to implement work on gender equity and mainstreaming.

Given how politically charged the issue of land reform is in South Africa, with its legacy of Apartheid, the **complexities and political sensitivities** involved in areas such as land reform create multiple impediments to achieving faster results, because the issues have to be navigated carefully and cautiously. For instance, UNDP's efforts to develop and implement a multi-year research programme on land ceilings stalled disappointingly. A focus area for the future, under the land reform work, would be to publish more of the research and analysis being undertaken, and to **develop a compendium of knowledge generated so that it can also benefit and inform the wider public.** This would help a wider range of actors understand the nuances of the land reform conundrum in South Africa.

## Key Takeaways from the 25-Year Review

- Consistent with what recent UNDP partnership surveys have indicated, the 25 year-review found that UNDP remains a valued partner to many actors in the South African development space. Recognition of UNDP's value comes from its convening power, and its role as a knowledge broker that can source international knowledge, best practice, and successful models from its global network.
- Partners almost universally feel that UNDP South Africa's capacity to provide technical inputs has diminished over time, and that the value-addition of UNDP's in-house technical expertise is sorely missed. This is partly a function of substantive technical capacity, that was located within the Regional Service Centre in South Africa, moving to Addis Ababa in 2014. This desire to benefit from technical guidance and inputs from UNDP remains strong, and UNDP South Africa can strengthen its relevance to partners by re-invigorating such technical capacity.
- UNDP staff are stretched thin with multiple responsibilities, juggling multiple projects and the accompanying administrative burdens. With insufficient operational support, staff are constrained in their capacity to focus on strategic and technical matters.
- UNDP South Africa's programmatic portfolio as a whole is also spread too thin. It comprises of a number of small-scale initiatives and a broad assortment of support to different parts of the South African government. There may be value in exploring how UNDP South Africa's limited financial resources and staff resources can be consolidated and deployed in one significant thematic area, with focused investment of time, energy, and money delivering scaled-up results on a select number of high-impact issues.
- As is the case with all UN agencies, and national and international development organisations, UNDP faces the same challenges of an ever-changing global development agenda. Such uncertainties are enhanced manifold by global shocks and stressors such as the COVID-19 pandemic that has disrupted development activities the world over. However, UNDP South Africa – as part of the global UNDP network and wider UN system – is strongly positioned to assist governments in responding to such shocks. UNDP South Africa can aid the government in its efforts to support a green and sustainable recovery that is strategically designed to boost job creation and livelihoods whilst simultaneously accelerating a low-carbon transition. Drawing on its global knowledge networks and access to expertise, UNDP South Africa can be an able partner to the government to ensure the country rebounds from the crisis with resilience.
- UNDP South Africa would be well served by re-evaluating and focusing its thematic priorities over the next decade. The organization's work is most relevant when it responds to the most pressing needs of the South African government and fills the most crucial gaps. As the country strives to reboot its economy, create jobs for the unemployed, foster educational and employment opportunities for youth in particular, and stabilize its failing power utility and public transport systems, UNDP South Africa could support the South African government in reviving and sustaining much-needed development, with a lens that ensures environmental co-benefits are embedded within the growth model.

Looking ahead, UNDP South Africa could build on the “4Gs” reflected in this review (**G**reening and low-carbon development; **G**overnance, institutional strengthening, and capacity building; **G**rowth, employment, and entrepreneurship; and **G**ender, health, and inclusivity) and capitalise on its 25 years of work to streamline all its knowledge and lessons from these areas into one unified thematic approach. It could weave these elements into a more focused fifth “**G**” – **Gains in Growth**. Gains in GDP, gains in employment, gains in entrepreneurial ventures, gains in SDG targets, and gains in South Africa's overall prosperity.