Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
SOUTH AFRICA

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INDEPENDENT UNDP PROGRAMME EVALUATION: SOUTH AFRICA

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Other stakeholders and partners: The Government of South Africa, representatives of the United Nations agencies, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and bilateral and multilateral development partners.

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

BIOFIN	Biodiversity Finance Initiative
CPD	Country Programme Document
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DALRRD	Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment
DMRE	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
GCS	Government cost sharing
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa
ILO	International Labour Organization
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
SANBI	South African National Biodiversity Institute
SANEDI	South African National Energy Development Institute
SAWEP	South Africa Wind Energy Project
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UMIC	Upper middle-income country

Evaluation Brief: South Africa

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted an Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) of UNDP in South Africa in 2024. The evaluation covers the programming period of 2020–2025. This is the second country programme evaluation conducted by the IEO in South Africa, the last being in 2009. The purpose of the evaluation was to strengthen accountability to national stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board, promote organizational learning, and inform the development of the next UNDP country programme.

With a population of approximately 62 million, South Africa is the largest, most diversified, and industrialized economy in Africa and the only African permanent member of the G20. Despite progress in socio-economic transformation since apartheid, including a 12.8 percent increase in its Human Development Index between 1990 and 2021, the country faces persistent economic challenges such as low growth, declining per capita GDP, and an unemployment rate exceeding 33 percent, with youth unemployment over 45 percent in 2024. Inequality remains among the highest globally, with a Gini coefficient of 0.67 in 2018, and poverty affecting 62.6 percent of the population in 2022, particularly in rural areas and high-density settlements. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these disparities, causing a decline in exports and investment, business closures, and heightened public dissatisfaction with governance, reflected in declining voter turnout and persistent corruption. Key public services, including electricity, transport, and water infrastructure, have deteriorated, leading to a national disaster declaration in 2023 due to prolonged electricity shortages. Although renewable energy is expanding, coal remains dominant, making South Africa the highest greenhouse gas emitter of all African nations. Environmental vulnerabilities are significant, as the country is among the most water-scarce in sub-Saharan Africa and increasingly prone to climate-related disasters, including severe floods in 2022–2023. While women's political representation has improved, ranking 9th globally in 2022, gender-based violence remains widespread, with high levels of physical and sexual violence, including nearly 1,000 women killed in incidents of gender-based violence between 2020 and 2022, underscoring the need for stronger protections and reforms.

The UNDP country programme in South Africa (2020–2025) aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework, focusing on economic transformation, social development, governance, and regional cooperation. Centred on youth and women's empowerment, the programme aims to reduce poverty and inequality through three key outcomes: inclusive economic growth, governance, and environmental sustainability. Between 2020 and 2024 total programmatic expenditures reached $34 million, with 61 percent going towards environmental projects, 34.7 percent to inclusive economic growth, and 5.3 percent to governance. Key interventions include business development support, skills training, social protection, public service reform, election support, and climate resilience initiatives. Approximately 63 percent of expenditure was driven by engagement in large programmes in the areas of the Orange-Senqu River Basin, JSB COVID-19 Response, Management Effectiveness, Securing Multiple Ecosystems, Mainstreaming Biodiversity, South African Wind Energy, and Low-cost Internet Phase II.

Findings and conclusions

UNDP's strategic positioning in South Africa is significantly defined by its long-standing partnership with the South African Government, which has solidified its reputation as a credible and trusted development partner. Over the past three decades, UNDP has effectively utilized its expertise in capacity strengthening, procurement, and access to global knowledge to provide essential support that aligns with national priorities. This positioning has enabled UNDP to play a pivotal role in facilitating technical assistance and policy reforms across various sectors, including biodiversity conservation and energy development. However, the organization's perceived value has been challenged by a constrained funding environment, limiting its ability to fully meet the diverse demands of stakeholders.

The UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) for 2020–2024 focuses on addressing critical development challenges in South Africa, particularly in areas such as inclusive growth and social protection. UNDP has made notable contributions through initiatives aimed at youth employment, skills training, and entrepreneurship, specifically targeting high unemployment rates among youth and women. While these interventions have shown potential as demonstration projects, scalability remains a significant challenge due to insufficient monitoring and alignment with broader national strategies. The programme's emphasis on integrating local contexts into global solutions has been positively received, yet a cohesive strategy for transitioning from pilot projects to larger-scale implementations is lacking.

Despite UNDP's recognized capabilities in fostering collaboration and facilitating dialogue among various stakeholders, operational challenges have hindered the depth and efficiency of its interventions. The organization's dependence on external funding sources, particularly from the Global Environment Facility, has created financial instability, thereby limiting the sustainability of its programmatic engagement. Furthermore, the fragmented nature of UNDP's interventions, which often lack synergy across thematic areas, has resulted in missed opportunities to enhance the impact of its programmes. This fragmentation can dilute the effectiveness of its initiatives and reduce their overall reach.

Stakeholders have consistently acknowledged UNDP's strong convening role, which allows it to advance upstream support and policy reforms. However, the decreasing delegation of authority to an expanding field presence has created gaps in stakeholder engagement, making it challenging for UNDP to meet provincial-level expectations. The implementation of the country programme has become marked by a highly projectized structure that does not catalyse opportunities for synergy within and across thematic programme areas. If these operational gaps remain unaddressed, they could pose significant reputational risks for UNDP, potentially undermining its effectiveness as a development partner.

Overall, while UNDP's contributions to South Africa's development landscape are noteworthy, it faces ongoing challenges that could jeopardize its long-term impact and stakeholder trust. Enhancing the coherence and integration of its interventions, alongside optimizing resource mobilization strategies and stakeholder engagement, will be crucial for UNDP to realize its full potential in supporting South Africa's development trajectory. Addressing these issues will not only strengthen UNDP's standing as a reliable partner but also ensure that its efforts align more closely with the evolving needs of the communities it serves.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The next CPD should be underpinned by a detailed Theory of Change, cascading at the portfolio level, to help guide strategic direction and focus, promote internal coherence in UNDP interventions, and identify synergies to be operationalized in the implementation of the next country programme. Process to develop this Theory of Change should build on iterative internal and external consultations to define realistic objectives for UNDP support and ensure continued anchoring of UNDP interventions in national policy initiatives.

Recommendation 2. UNDP should seek to systematically mainstream key aspects of its demonstrated comparative advantages into its interventions and engagement, placing emphasis on its human centred perspective, multi-stakeholder convening, global knowledge, and experience sharing.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should engage with UNDP Regional Bureaux and UNDP Global Policy Network to proactively map and identify opportunities for knowledge exchanges aligned with South Africa policy aspirations and context, with a view to accelerate learning and uptake of experience, while increasing interactions and participation of UNDP's network in the UNDP programme in South Africa.

Recommendation 4. UNDP should seek to strengthen its capacity to generate compelling evidence of the success or failure of its demonstration projects with the view of informing replication and potential scaling up of its successful intervention model. Given limited internal capacities, UNDP should consider leveraging existing partnerships to augment its monitoring and evaluation capacities.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should actively engage in strategic consultations with the National Treasury and other key governmental stakeholders to jointly identify the appropriate working modalities, reporting, and oversight arrangements to enable government cost sharing.

CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the aim, objectives, and scope of the evaluation and methodology used. It presents South Africa's development context before presenting the UNDP country programme.

1.1 Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to collect and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP's strategy in facilitating and mobilizing national efforts to achieve development results. The evaluation also aims to identify factors affecting UNDP's performance. ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the framework of the general provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy.[1]

This ICPE covers the current UNDP programme in South Africa for the period 2020–2025, assessing the three outcome areas described in the country programme document (CPD) for this period.[2] The current ICPE was conducted in 2024, the penultimate year of UNDP's current programme cycle, with a view to contributing to the preparation of the next programme. In accordance with the Terms of Reference (Annex 1), the scope of the ICPE includes all UNDP activities in the country regardless of their source of funding, and therefore includes those funded by UNDP regular resources, bilateral donors, and the government. The ICPE also covers all projects and activities from the previous programming cycle that have continued or ended in the current cycle (see Annex 2 for the list of projects).

BOX 1. Evaluation questions

1. What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
2. To what extent is UNDP fit-for-purpose and strategically positioned to respond to national needs?
3. To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives and has contributed to broader development results?
4. What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP's performance and, eventually, the sustainability of results?

The ICPE was guided by four main evaluation questions (Box 1). An evaluation matrix (Annex 2) – structured around the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, questions, sub-questions, indicators, and specifying the data sources to be used – was designed to guide the evaluation process.[3] This matrix was used to organize the available evidence by evaluation question, to assign a performance score to the country office for each indicator in the matrix, and to help the evaluation team draw well-supported conclusions and recommendations.

The effectiveness of the UNDP country programme was analysed through an assessment of progress towards expected outputs and the extent to which these outputs contributed to the expected results of the CPD. To better understand UNDP performance and the sustainability of results in the country, the ICPE examined the specific factors that influenced – positively or negatively – the performance of the country programme. The capacity of UNDP to adapt to the changing context and respond to national development needs and priorities was examined.

[1] DP/2019/29.
[2] DP/DCP/ZAF/3.
[3] See https://web-archive.oecd.org/2020-09-04/540455-revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The ICPE was conducted according to the approved IEO process.[4] The evaluation methodology adhered to the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group;[5] and it collected, analysed, and triangulated qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources to ensure the validity of its findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

A review of UNDP strategic and programme documents, project and monitoring documents, evaluation reports/documents/publications, research papers, and other country-related publications was conducted. An analysis of the programme portfolio was carried out and extended to the previous programme cycle (2013–2020[6]) to understand the evolution of implemented projects and UNDP strategic directions contained in the CPD.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of the preparation and data collection mission to South Africa from 2 to 12 April 2024.[7] In addition to interviews with key stakeholders in the capital, field visits were conducted as part of the data collection mission to two of the nine provinces (KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape) where UNDP implemented its programmes.[8] This enabled the evaluation team to carry out in situ observations, and in some instances to consult final beneficiaries of interventions carried out at the community level. Overall, a total of 150 individuals involved in UNDP programmes were consulted in this evaluation, including government representatives (46 percent), UN personnel (17 percent), civil society organizations (12 percent), development partners (5 percent), the private sector (11 percent), and final beneficiaries (9 percent). Women accounted for more than half of stakeholders (52 percent) across all groups.

The draft ICPE report underwent a quality assurance procedure, including an external peer review and an internal review by the IEO evaluators. The report was then submitted to the country office and Regional Bureau for Africa to identify factual errors and finally shared with the government and other national partners.

The conduct of the independent country programme faced several constraints. The first limitation related to the shortened timeframe for the preparation and conduct of the evaluation. As per the country office request, data collection for this evaluation took place prior to the general elections on 29 May 2024. While conducting this evaluation after the elections would have further constrained this evaluation, the need to conduct the ICPE early in April meant that preparations ahead of the mission had to be fast tracked. The second limitation related to the overall availability of programme documents. While efforts were made by the country office, the evaluation had limited documentation available for its preparation. Inconsistency in the available documentation and only limited details when available meant that in some cases the evaluation had to rely on feedback from key informants. Thirdly, while the timing of the data collection mission was set by the country office, major delays affected the availability of key stakeholders and the ability of the evaluation team to meet with them during the data collection mission. In some cases, the short-term and ad-hoc nature of CO interventions did not incentivize stakeholder engagement in this evaluation. Finally, due to the electoral context as well as to gaps in engagement with partners following the end of interventions, several key stakeholders could not be met. The evaluation team was able to partially mitigate these limitations by extending data collection interviews virtually after the mission for a period by six weeks. While this enabled the team to increase the number of interviews, it resulted in

[4] See http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/documents/ADR/communication/ICPE%20English%20Brochure.pdf.
[5] See https://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1914.
[6] DP/DCP/ZAF/3.
[7] Interviews were used to collect data and assess stakeholders' perceptions of the reach and effectiveness of programme interventions, determine factors affecting performance, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the UNDP programme. The full list of interviewees is available in Annex 4.
[8] The targeted provinces for the field visits were selected taking into account the concentration of UNDP interventions and the representation of its different portfolios of interventions implemented at the local level.

missed opportunities to deepen assessment and for the triangulation of evidence. Notably, this meant that despite site visits some key stakeholder groups, including final beneficiaries of UNDP downstream activities, were among the least consulted when compared with government representatives and UN staff (including UNDP).

1.3 Country context

With a population of approximately 62 million, South Africa was in 2024 the largest, most diversified, and most industrialized economy on the African continent. It is one of six upper middle-income countries on the African continent and the only African permanent member of the G20. The post-apartheid era has witnessed efforts by successive governments to bring about socio-economic transformation, such that between 1990 and 2021 the country's Human Development Index value increased from 0.632 to 0.713, a change of 12.8 percent.[9]

However, the nation has grappled with a prolonged period of low economic growth, and it continues to struggle to overcome historical inequalities and foster sustained economic development.[10] The per capita GDP growth rate has steadily declined since 2010, reaching negative between 2014 and 2021[11] and thus limiting the prospects for growth induced employment. Unemployment at over 33 percent is among the world's highest, and youth unemployment exceeded 45 percent as of the first quarter of 2024.[12] Inequality in the country remains among the highest in the world, with a consumption per capita Gini coefficient of 0.67 in 2018.[13] Inequality is manifested in several forms, including skewed income distribution, unequal access to opportunities, and regional disparities.[14]

Poverty was estimated at 62.6 percent in 2022 based on the upper middle-income-country poverty line.[15] Large segments of the poor majority lack access to decent housing and adequate infrastructure services (e.g., electricity and water), especially in rural areas and in the vast, high-density settlements surrounding most cities. Inequality in assets is even greater than inequality in income or consumption. The top 10 percent of South Africans own 86 percent of the country's aggregate wealth, and the top 0.1 percent close to a third.[16] While racial disparities have gradually declined, most black South Africans live in poverty and their average per capita incomes are roughly one fifth those of the historically privileged white minority.[17]

The global COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on South Africa, affecting various sections of society and the economy. The country experienced a significant downturn in exports (by 25 percent) and investment (by 12 percent), with the latter not yet rebounding to pre-pandemic levels.[18] While private and public consumption have continued to grow since, the pace has slowed compared to the pre-COVID-19 era. Like global trends, social indicators worsened during the pandemic, exacerbating existing inequalities. The most affected were individuals facing poverty, unemployment, engagement in the informal sector, and women, who disproportionately bear the brunt of the pandemic's impact.[19] Overall, the economic fallout

[9] UNDP Human Development Report 2022.
[10] Congressional Research Service, "South Africa: Current Issues, Economy, and U.S. Relations," https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R45687.pdf.
[11] UNDP Human Development Report 2022.
[12] Statistics South Africa 2024, Youth in South Africa 2024, Report No. 03-00-21.
[13] World Bank, "Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: An Assessment of Drivers, Constraints and Opportunities," March 2018.
[14] International Monetary Fund, https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/01/29/na012820six-charts-on-south-africas-persistent-and-multi-faceted-inequality.
[15] World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/overview.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Congressional Research Service, "South Africa: Current Issues, Economy, and U.S. Relations."
[18] Ibid.
[19] World Bank South Africa Country Profile, https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/country-profiles/15932-WB_South%20Africa%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf.

of the pandemic has led to the closure of 8 percent of South African micro and informal businesses.[20] Amid the economic downturn and unemployment fuelled by COVID-19 restrictions, many foreign nationals in South Africa faced xenophobic violence.[21]

Despite often large investments and concerted policy efforts to improve housing, public services, infrastructure, and state technical capacities, the delivery of public goods and services remains inadequate and unequally distributed. While South Africa scores 43 (above the regional average of 32) and is ranked 72 out of 180 countries in terms of the Corruption Perception Index, public sector corruption is a serious problem in the country, underscored by a series of cases involving top public officials.[22] Public discontent has increasingly translated into weak political participation. Results from the 2019 elections were marked by a decline in voter turnout of 8 percent compared to the previous elections, despite a record number of registered eligible voters. In particular, the youth (age 18–29) turnout was low in 2019, at less than 40 percent.

Critical network industries, including electricity, transport infrastructure and services, security, and water and sanitation, have experienced major deteriorations over the last 15 years. The economy has been forced to cope with increasing electricity rationing, leading to a declaration of a national disaster in February 2023 after more than 15 years of load shedding.[23] Despite incorporating renewable energy into its energy mix, the country relies heavily on coal, which constitutes 70 percent of its energy demand. Consequently, the country is among the top 20 emitters of greenhouse gases and the top emitter in Africa.[24]

South Africa is located within what is considered a 'drought belt' and is the fifth most water scarce country in sub-Saharan Africa. As such, it faces a heightened risk of natural hazards and disasters, including droughts, floods, and storm-related events, all exacerbated by climate change. In April and May 2022 many areas of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and some parts of the Eastern Cape provinces experienced severe flooding, followed by the Western Cape province in mid-June and July of 2023. The impacts of these floods were disproportionately felt by marginalized communities, particularly in informal settlements.[25]

South Africa has demonstrated a positive trend in women's representation in the national parliament and provincial legislatures, ranked as 9th globally in the percentage of women in national parliaments as of December 2022. Gender-based violence has been a major topical issue due to the significant level of recorded cases. Statistics reveal that in 2016 some 7.7 percent of all women in South Africa aged 18 years and older experienced physical violence, and 2.3 percent experienced sexual violence by a partner. Similarly in 2018, 13.1 percent of women aged 15–49 years reported that they had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner during the previous 12 months.[26] According to the South African Police Service cited by Genocide Watch, 988 women were killed between April 2020 and September 2022 in incidents of gender-based violence.[27]

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20 Department of Small Business Development, Republic of South Africa, 2021.

21 Human Rights Watch, https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2085495.html; and Zama Mthombeni, "Xenophobia in South Africa: Problematising Ubuntu as an Ethical Response," https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2309/95ead2832d5a39e7a0207113539da9b28e9d.pdf.

22 Transparency International, https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/zaf.

23 South Africa SDG Country Report, 2023; the Growth Lab at Harvard University, https://growthlab.hks.harvard.edu/sites/projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/growthlab/files/2023-11-cid-wp-434-south-africa-growth-through-inclusion.pdf; World Bank South Africa Country Profile.

24 See https://www.iea.org/countries/south-africa/emissions.

25 South Africa SDG Country Report, 2023.

26 UN Women Data Hub, https://data.unwomen.org/country/south-africa.

27 Genocide Watch 2023, "South Africa: 50,000 domestic violence cases, 988 Femicides," https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/south-africa-50-000-cases-of-gbv-and-femicide-annually.

1.4 UNDP programme under review

UNDP and the UN system began its operations in South Africa in 1994 after the end of the apartheid regime;[28] and UNDP was the first UN entity to sign a development cooperation framework agreement at the country level.[29] In the initial phase of this cooperation, UNDP's support was concentrated on governance, institutional strengthening, and capacity-building through support for policy development, which cascaded to downstream work at district and local levels. Through initiatives such as the Provincial Management Capacity-Building Project (1998–2001), Sustainable Human Development Facility for Programme Development and Management in South Africa (2001–2004), the Southern Africa Capacity Initiative (2004–2007), and UNDP Capacity Development Partnership in South Africa (2007–2010), UNDP South Africa played a pivotal role in revitalizing public institutions by introducing them to advanced tools, frameworks, and best practices. This effort brought about enhanced planning, innovation, and ethical leadership within public service.[30] Notably, a 25-year review of UNDP programmes in South Africa found that Global Environment Facility programming enabled by UNDP stewardship played a central role in building the business and political case and in developing capacities for conservation and natural resource management in the country.[31]

UNDP is among 22 UN entities of the United Nations Country Team, including 13 regional and/or subregional representations. UN country level activities are guided and framed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020–2025 aligned with the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2020–2025 of the South African Government, and focuses on four of its seven priorities: transform the economy to serve the people; advance social transformation; strengthen governance and public institutions; and South Africa for a better Africa and world. The country programme (2020–2025) was therefore aligned to three of the nine UNSDCF goals and addressed three of the strategic priorities of the Medium-Term Strategic Framework on equitable social and economic opportunities, participation in decision-making and access to justice, and resilience to climate change.

The anchor of the UNDP country programme 2020–2025 was youth and women's empowerment and employment, as the bedrock for reducing poverty and inequality in South Africa.[32] In line with these objectives, the CPD included 10 output level results aimed at contributing to the three outcomes of the UNSDCF, with estimated resources for its implementation amounting to $69.2 million between 2020 and 2025. UNDP South Africa recorded a total of $34 million of programmatic expenditures between 2020 and September 2024, representing 65 percent of fund execution based on cumulated annual budgets, and 49 percent of the overall CPD estimated budget. The level of programmatic budget and expenditure saw a decreasing trend, with 2023 annual budgets and expenditures decreasing to half of expenditures recorded in 2020 or 2023 (-53 percent). Between 2020 and 2024 the allocation of UNDP regular (core) resources in South Africa was $5.0 million, which is about 15 percent of total expenditure. The remaining 85 percent, or $29.0 million, came from non-core funding sources, through vertical fund mechanism, and bilateral funding.

[28] During the apartheid regime South Africa was excluded from the UN system and was reintegrated into the system following the adoption of a democratic constitution in 1994.
[29] Evaluation Report: Joint Evaluation of the Role and Contribution of the United Nations System in the Republic of South Africa.
[30] Ibid.
[31] 25 Year Review of the UNDP Programme of Support to the Government of South Africa, https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/16824.
[32] UNDP South Africa, Country programme document, 2020–2025.

FIGURE 1. Country programme expenditure by outcomes (2020-2024)

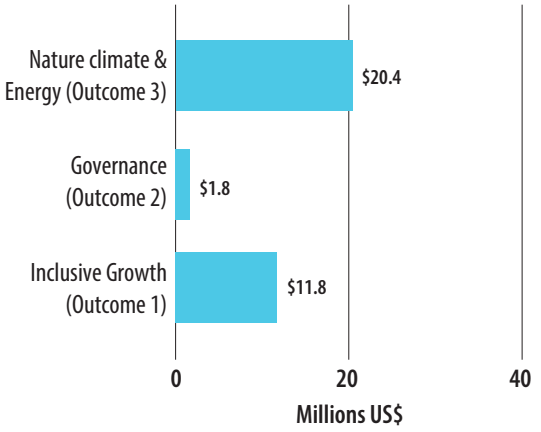
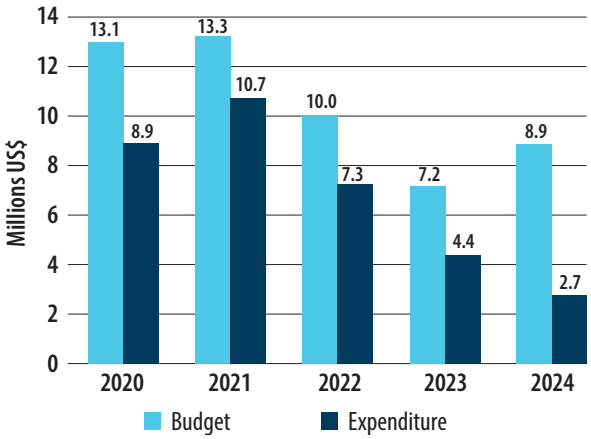


FIGURE 2. Annual budget & expenditure (2020-2024)



Source: Data from Atlas and Quantum, September 2024

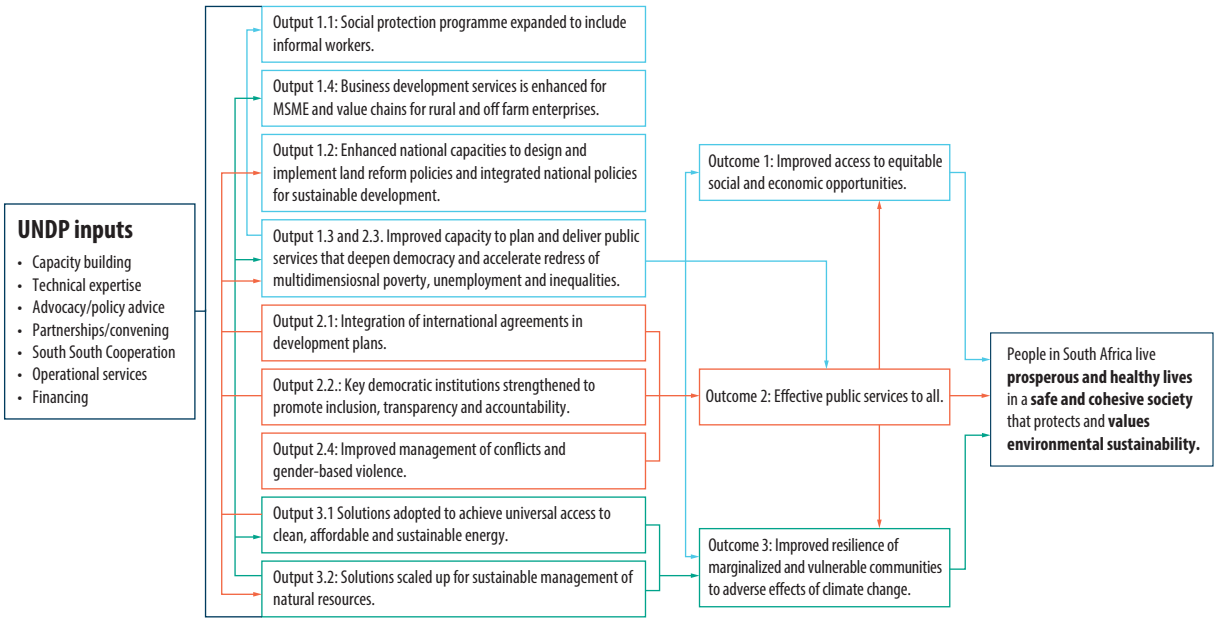
The inclusive economic growth portfolio (Outcome 1) registered the second largest expenditure ($11.8 million), which represented 34.7 percent of the total programme expenditure. UNDP aimed to promote equitable access to social and economic opportunities for all, with particular focus on addressing challenges of unemployment and inequality, which underpinned all the interventions that were implemented under this portfolio. With a baseline of 29 percent unemployment at the national level in 2015, the CPD aimed to contribute to the reduction of key socio-economic indicators such as the unemployment rate, persons living below poverty lines, the Multidimensional Poverty Index, the Human Development Index, and the transfer of land to the landless. Through various programmatic interventions UNDP operationalized support for this objective through different entry points, including through the promotion of social entrepreneurship, support for business development services, skills training and employability, and inclusion in the digital economy. These interventions represented about 70 percent of programme expenditure under this outcome. Other areas of intervention included support for reforms of land policies (6 percent of expenditure), and for the expansion of social protection for informal workers (2 percent of expenditure). Mainly funded through bilateral and UNDP core resources, 56 percent of the total resources under the Inclusive Growth Portfolio came from financing mobilized in the context of UNDP's response/recovery to the COVID pandemic.

The Governance Portfolio (Outcome 2) had an expenditure of $1.8 million, representing 5.3 percent of total programme expenditures. It aimed at strengthening conditions to address South African development challenges by improving service delivery, citizen participation, and transparency and accountability of institutions. The CPD envisaged to contribute to increased population satisfaction with public services and improved participation in decision-making, as well as increased voter turnout and seats held by women in parliament and local government. In addition, the CPD aimed to support national and subnational responses for the peaceful management of emerging and recurring conflicts arising from the social unrest and discontent recently experienced in the country, and to the rising level of gender-based violence. Programmatic expenditure between 2020 and 2023 heavily focused on social cohesion, which constituted 47 percent of total expenditure resources. Service delivery is the second most significant focus, with 25 percent allocated to improving public service efficiency, followed by support for elections (23 percent). Disability inclusion received 5 percent of this portfolio.

The Environment Portfolio Outcome 3 has been the largest in terms of expenditures ($20.8 million), representing 61 percent of total programme expenditure between 2020 and 2024. This outcome aimed at supporting South Africa's transition to a low-carbon economy and the resilience of vulnerable and marginalized communities to the adverse effects of climate change. The CPD aimed to contribute towards the government's objectives of achieving universal access to energy as set out in its Sustainable Development Goals report 2019. With a baseline of 26.2 percent in 2015,[33] the CPD considered that this share would be increased to 35 percent by 2025 while also increasing the share of protected terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. Programmatic expenditures have predominantly focused on ecosystem management and biodiversity/conservation, which together constitute 86 percent of the portfolio. Energy-related projects receive a moderate share of 10 percent, while initiatives directly addressing climate change and disaster risk reduction are minimally represented, each accounting for just 2 percent of the portfolio. About 80 percent of expenditures were driven by the implementation of seven projects funded through the Global Environment Facility.

Based on the CPD, the evaluation team reconstituted a summary Theory of Change to present the overall programme focus and logic, and to map UNDP outputs as defined in the country programme results framework (see Figure 3). The 10 outputs defined under the three outcomes of the country programme emphasise institutional capacity-development through improved planning and service delivery, with a view to strengthening the enabling environment for inclusive and sustainable development. In line with the National Development Plan (NDP), and in view of the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, increasing access to equitable social and economic opportunities was envisaged through the extension of business development opportunities for micro, small, and medium enterprises and for the development of a value chain in rural areas, as well as through the expansion of social protection to informal workers. These expected changes depend on improved institutional performance in the delivery of public services and, notably, emphasis on strengthening transparency and accountability of key democratic institutions and public service delivery in the areas of conflict management and gender-based violence. Finally, the sustainability of the economic transformation envisaged depends on the adoption of sustainable natural resource management practices and solutions to advance access to clean energy.

FIGURE 3. Summarized country programme Theory of Change



[33] Statistics of South Africa (2019), "Sustainable Development Goals: Country report 2019," https://www.statssa.gov.za/MDG/SDGs_Country_Report_2019_South_Africa.pdf.

CHAPTER 2
FINDINGS

2.1 Strategic positioning and comparative advantage

Finding 1. Strategic positioning and added value: UNDP South Africa's strategic positioning was anchored in its longstanding partnership with the South African Government and for its expertise in capacity strengthening, procurement, convening role, and access to global knowledge, experience, and expertise. However, UNDP's contribution was constrained by a challenging funding context, hindering its ability to fully meet demands of stakeholders, and weakening overtime the perception of its positioning and added value.

UNDP South Africa has benefited from a longstanding relationship with the South African Government, spanning over three decades. Its ability to facilitate the linking and adapting of its global experiences and knowledge to the South African context stood out as UNDP's primary value proposition, given the country's high-capacity context and demand for sophisticated technical assistance to support advancing its national priorities. In this regard, UNDP's global reputation and footprint in 170 programme countries, including high and middle-income countries, has represented an important asset, and a driver for collaboration with the South African Government overtime.

In this regard, UNDP has had a long-standing relationship with the South African Biodiversity Institute and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment in accessing financing from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). While the capacity development achieved over time has enabled national authorities to become directly accredited to the GEF, UNDP has continued to extend support, ensuring due diligence and efficient procurement processes. Another example in the area of biodiversity conservation is UNDP's support in introducing the Biodiversity Finance Initiative approach to South Africa, aligning well with objectives of the national biodiversity economy strategy (Finding 10). In the area of energy, UNDP has played a key role in aiding authorities to assess the feasibility of, and to foster an enabling environment for, the development of wind energy in South Africa (Finding 12).

UNDP's position as a reputed international institution has also enabled it to be a partner of choice in supporting national authorities in advancing sensitive agendas where impartiality is deemed critical to ensure the confidence and credibility of actions. In this regard, UNDP has demonstrated a comparative advantage in accessing international experts and experience to support advancing critical policy reforms to address the issues of inequality and unemployment in rural areas, a significant and sensitive agenda in South Africa (Finding 4). Similarly, during this cycle, UNDP was able to extend support to the Independent Electoral Commission in non-core electoral activities (Finding 8).

UNDP is considered an important actor that can foster greater collaboration both between different parts of government and between local and national levels, and also in establishing bridges between civil society, the private sector, and various levels of government. UNDP's convening and facilitation in setting up platforms for knowledge exchange, dialogue, and consensus building, such as in the context of the Just Energy Transition (Finding 13), has thus also constituted an important aspect of its perceived comparative advantage and added value in South Africa. Owing to its reputation and perceived better access to government, many CSOs and private actors interviewed viewed partnerships with UNDP as adding credibility to their work and enhancing their profile. Here again, the ability of UNDP to connect global solutions/challenges with localized development challenges is highly valued. In this regard, the Accelerator Lab, established within the CO in 2019, has played an instrumental role in engaging CSOs, including grassroots organizations, in advancing and fostering the participation of youth-led start-ups and in collaboration with universities.

At the same time, limited resource mobilization opportunities have somewhat limited the scope of UNDP interventions, and gradually weaken its perceived comparative advantage in the South African context. The UNDP business model in a middle-income country implies that the country office in South Africa has limited core funding at its disposal to engage in programmatic partnerships.[34] Given that ODA related third-party resource mobilization opportunities are usually limited in an upper middle-income country, UNDP programmes have tended to rely heavily on climate financing (GEF and/or GCF) and on government cost sharing. Programme expenditures in South Africa show a sustained reliance on GEF financing and a declining trend of government cost sharing over the last decade (see Finding 2).

This poses significant challenges for the overall financial sustainability of the country office and for its ability to sustain its programmatic engagement outside of project funding. The volume of programme expenditures has varied between CPD periods, but also between years. As the UNDP overall business model is reliant on country level resource mobilization and disbursements for revenue generation, the funding context has at times challenged the country office to sustain the depth and quality of its support and to tailor it to demands of stakeholders outside of project engagement. In some instances, this has manifested in the inability to follow on all aspects of signed multi-year agreements or in some activities. At the portfolio level, this is illustrated in the country office staff capacity, where, for instance, programme associate positions to support team leaders in the area of inclusive growth and governance were vacant at the time of evaluation. Similarly, the office strategy and policy unit was not staffed with a national economist as in other country offices; and the gender specialist position was being re-profiled in favour of a communication specialist position. While stakeholders interviewed generally recognized the quality of technical expertise of consultants accessed through UNDP interventions, they often noted the ad-hoc and short-term nature of the support, and in some cases the absence of dedicated project resources at the level of UNDP to accompany and follow up on interventions. This challenge of sustaining internal capacities is a recurrent one, notably highlighted in a 25-year review of UNDP in South Africa, noting that limited staffing has been spread thin, and unable to deliver the technical guidance sought from the country office in a timely and rigorous manner.[35]

Finally, UNDP procedures and modality of engagement do not distinguish between country contexts, and provide little scope for adaptation in a middle-income country context. UNDP operations in South Africa are subject to similar administrative procedures that are applied in other country contexts. In this regard, some stakeholders deplored the short budgetary timeframes of UNDP financing when available, noting the misalignment of the government fiscal calendar (April to March) with UNDP's alignment with the calendar year. Furthermore, delays in disbursements have sometimes shortened the available timeframe, putting pressure on project teams and implementing partners to accelerate work unnaturally in subsequent phases, and also forcing them to spend hastily towards the fiscal year-end to meet budget utilization targets. This practice, driven by the 'use it or lose it' funding policy, can lead to suboptimal decisions, where the focus shifts from quality and strategic spending to merely exhausting the budget. All these have contributed to an increased perception among stakeholders of UNDP being more administrative, focusing more on procedural aspects rather than on substantive, subject-specific support. In this regard, views expressed by stakeholders regarding capacity development have been mixed.

Finding 2. Resource mobilization and finance: UNDP was able to mobilize exceptional core and non-core resources in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the reliance of the country programme on GEF funding has left core areas of UNDP's mandate unfunded. Government cost sharing, while an essential financing modality in an upper middle-income-country context, has not been mobilized due to a difficult fiscal context and communication gaps with the National Treasury.

[34] UNDP core fund allocation at the global level has remained based on income level threshold. South Africa as an upper middle-income country receives minimal core funding, with the expectation that UNDP presence and activities ought to be funded by the host government and external sources of funding, though these remain limited in middle-income country contexts.

[35] UNDP (2020), 25 Year Review.

Drawing from funding trends over the last decade, the current programming cycle can be viewed as successful in terms of resource mobilization. Indeed, in 2020 and 2021 the country office recorded its highest levels of annual expenditure over the past decade, with an increased share of expenditures mobilized from third-party cost sharing and regular resources. [36] Most notably, the country office was successful in mobilizing third-party financing during this cycle, as total expenditures from this funding source increased almost eight-fold during this cycle when compared with the period 2013–2019 (from $1.1 million for the period 2013–2019 to $8.2 million for 2020–2024), 65 percent of which came from the Government of Japan. The level of UNDP regular resources has also increased in the overall funding of the CO during this CPD cycle compared with the period 2013–2019, and recorded its highest share in annual expenditure over the past decade in 2022. Overall, financing related to the COVID-19 response and recovery, from core and non-core sources, represented 21 percent of total programme expenditure between 2020 and 2024. In this regard, COVID-19 seems to have provided a context for exceptional resource mobilization of UNDP core resources, which the CO was able to sustain during this cycle. Recently, 2024 saw the highest share of third-party financing in UNDP annual expenditure in about a decade, though expenditure volumes have seen a steady decline between 2021 and 2024.

FIGURE 4. Annual budget & expenditure (2013-2024)

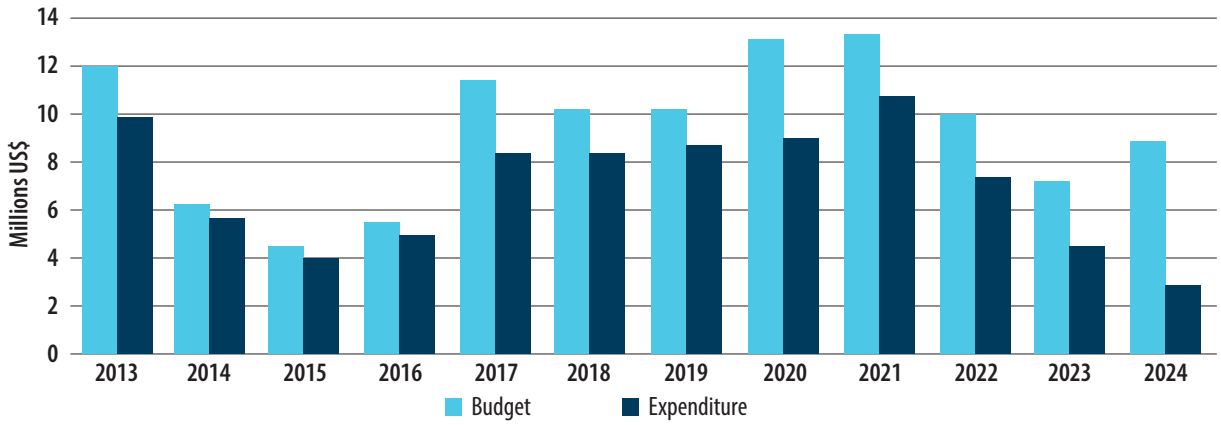
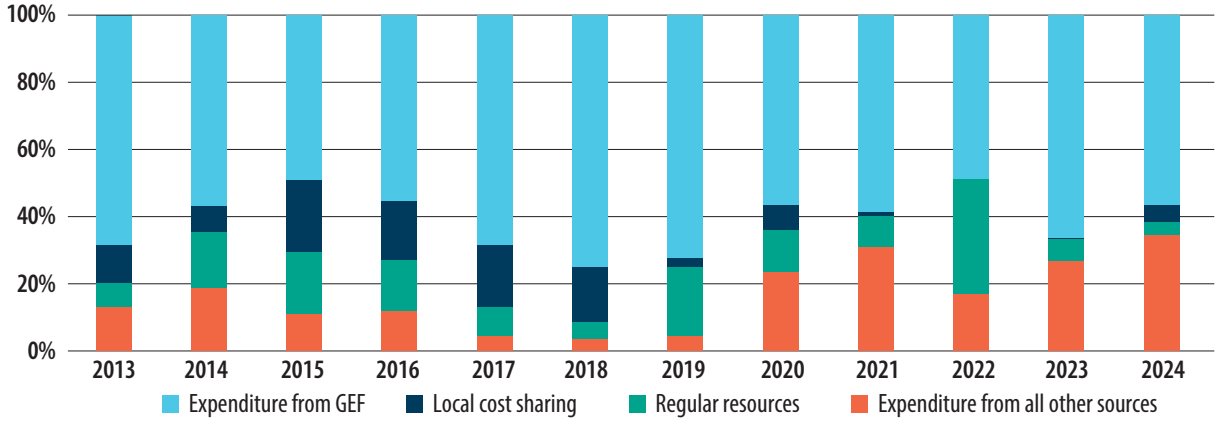


FIGURE 5. Share of annual expenditure by fund category (2013-2024)



Data Source: Data from Atlas and Quantum as of September 2024

[36] The country office was able to mobilize additional and unexpected resources in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including from the UNDP COVID-19 Rapid Response Facility and the UN Flagship Appeal in Response to COVID-19, and from the regional bureau for Africa and Crisis Bureau. UNDP was able to mobilize funds from the UK's commonwealth and development office to support electoral activities related to voter and civic education, from the GIZ in the area of digital skilling, and other ad-hoc funding from the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) such as through the Migration MPTF and joint SDG fund.

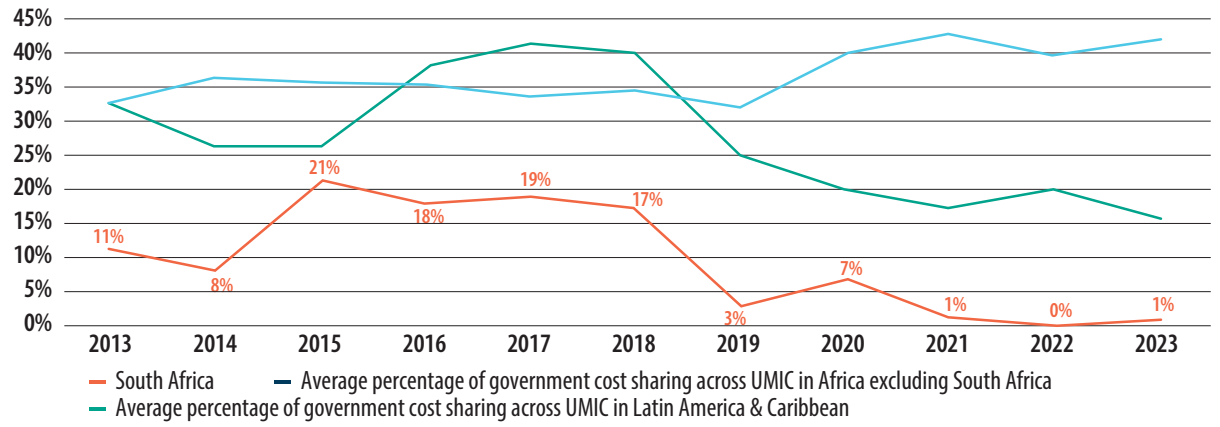
Outside of exceptional resource mobilization opportunities, programme expenditure trends over the last 10 years highlight a strong reliance on GEF financing. Depending on the level of execution, GEF replenishment periods, and other resources mobilized, GEF funding has varied from representing between 82 percent to 49 percent of total annual expenditure between 2013 and 2024. At the level of the current CPD, funding from GEF has represented 57 percent of expenditure between 2020 and 2024.

This poses significant challenges for the overall financial sustainability of the country office and for its ability to sustain its programmatic engagement. While GEF financing has provided for multi-year funding, the lack of flexible financing has left some core areas of UNDP mandates unfunded, notably in the areas of inclusive growth and governance. These areas have had to rely on ad-hoc funding opportunities and/or limited core resources from UNDP. In this regard, 58 percent of expenditures recorded between 2020 and 2023 under inclusive growth (Outcome 1) came from COVID-19-related funding sources (core and non-core resources). In the area of governance (Outcome2), 73 percent of programme expenditure came from external funding sources (approx. $1 million) – specifically from four sources (two pooled funds and two bilateral donors), thus highlighting both the fragmented nature and small scale of funding available, and the associated transaction cost for their management.

While this highlighted a successful momentum for the country office resource mobilization, the short timeframe of UNDP core resources and in some cases third-party financing place an extra burden and transaction costs on the limited staff capacity of the country to administer and substantively accompany interventions. Reflecting this, during this cycle 90 percent of third-party financing and 76 percent of regular resources were implemented through the Direct Implementation Modality (DIM), placing full accountability on UNDP for the administration of funds and implementation of interventions. Overall, since 2021, UNDP South Africa has presented a low share of national implementation in its programme expenditure, falling below the average of other upper middle-income countries (UMICs) in Africa and Latin America. This presents a risk of fragmenting UNDP support while at the same stretching already limited country office capacities.

The lack and absence of government cost sharing (GCS) underpins the challenge of predictable and stable funding in UNDP funding mix. GCS has, over the last 10 years, constituted a small share of overall programmatic expenditure, and has seen a declining trend between 2019 and 2021, dropping from 17 percent to 2 percent of annual programme expenditures. In 2022 and 2023, UNDP programmes did not receive any GCS. UNDP has pursued cost sharing with the Government of South Africa as part of its fundraising strategy, albeit with limited success. Looking at trends in South Africa and other UMICs, it is found that GCS levels of UNDP programmes in South Africa have remained below the average of other African and Latin American UMICs[37] for the past 10-year period.

FIGURE 6. Share of government cost sharing in annual expenditure for South Africa compared with average value in African and Latin American and Caribbean UMIC between 2013 and 2023



[37] Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

During interviews, challenges in attracting GCS was often placed in the context of significant fiscal constraint faced by the South African Government over recent years, with some interlocutors, within and outside UNDP, noting the unlikelihood for cost sharing agreements to materialize in the current context. At the same time, UNDP was successful in attracting GCS in the previous cycle, for example, with its engagement with the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development (DALRRD) on research and policy work related to land reform, which were completed during this cycle. Also during this cycle, through its Accelerator Lab, the CO was successful in mobilizing funding from the Department of Science and Innovation in 2024. In addition, several institutions (national and provincial government) had signed similar cost-sharing agreements with UNDP, but these were overturned by the National Treasury. The final evaluation of the previous CPD cycle, commissioned by the country office, highlighted general difficulties in defining the relationship, management, and accountability systems necessary for effective collaboration between UNDP and national counterparts regarding cost-sharing arrangements.[38] While these experiences led many stakeholders to think that the country's Public Finance Management Act could not enable GCS, the National Treasury clarified its stance during a recent UNDP board meeting, suggesting that the lack of early engagement and dialogue with the treasury was an important reason why signed GCS agreements were not approved. This issue was well documented in a previous CPD evaluation conducted in 2017. However, there appeared to have been no progress on this issue to date despite its criticality for the sustainability of UNDP programmes in South Africa.

2.2 Access to equitable social and economic opportunities (linked to Outcome 1)

Finding 3. Employment: UNDP's efforts in South Africa to foster inclusive growth mainly focused on youth employment through skills training and entrepreneurship. These interventions, despite being small scale, have shown potential to address gaps on unemployment and their scale-up. Effective monitoring and alignment with broad national strategies were needed for scaling up.

UNDP has supported the Government of South Africa in addressing the triple development challenge of unemployment, poverty, and inequality since the previous CPD cycle (2013–2017).[39] In the current CPD cycle, UNDP's main focus was to address youth unemployment, which could contribute to addressing poverty and inequality concurrently. UNDP's focus was on youth and women in terms of skills and enterprise development to reinvigorate economic transformation growth and make it more inclusive.[40] The strategies used by UNDP to address youth unemployment included skills training and capacity-building, as well as entrepreneurship competition and networking among micro, small, and medium enterprises as well as among individuals.

Generally, UNDP interventions for addressing youth unemployment have been small-scale initiatives meant to serve as a demonstration or to prove a concept for government scale-up. For instance, UNDP South Africa, in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), implemented a pilot project titled "Automotive Training and Re-Skilling for Vulnerable Youth and Women in South Africa," with funding support from the Government of Japan and Toyota. The intervention included the provision of upgraded and new automotive training equipment aligned with industry needs; ICT equipment and digital software to enhance digital teaching and learning; upskilling training for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) college students to increase employability; capacity development of lecturers in blended

[38] Evaluation Report of the UNDP South Africa Country Programme, 2013–2017, https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/6019.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Minutes of UNDP Programme Board Meeting, 2021.

teaching methods; and fostering industry partnerships.[41] The pilot project was implemented in three colleges: Coastal KZN TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal (Swinton campus), Northlink College in the Western Cape (Bellville and Wingfield campuses), and Tshwane South TVET College in Gauteng (Centurion campus).

Based on information provided by the DHET and the colleges, the employment outcomes of graduates from the pilot project have surpassed those of graduates from other programmes within the colleges. For instance, at Coastal KZN TVET College graduates were directly absorbed by Toyota South Africa. Similarly, Tshwane South TVET College achieved a 44 percent employment rate, while Northlink College achieved a 100 percent employment rate. Widely regarded as a ground-breaking intervention, stakeholders view it as a pivotal demonstration of the reforms necessary within the TVET sector, setting a precedent for governmental action. Despite its success, limited efforts have been made to leverage the project's insights for advocating and scaling up similar initiatives. While the project was meant to serve as a demonstration, there was no concrete strategy on how it will be moved from the pilot phase to a possible scale-up.

In another example, UNDP, in partnership with the German Agency for International Development (GIZ), implemented the "Youth Employment & Development" project, aimed at addressing youth unemployment by promoting digital innovation and entrepreneurship, placing unemployed youths from the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal into digital or digitally enabled jobs, while promoting employment through upskilling. As of the time of the evaluation, the actual number of project beneficiaries was unknown, and there were still unresolved issues about the inaccuracies in the number of beneficiaries reported to GIZ. The project had several layers of outsourcing and subcontracting through implementing partners that tended to weakened UNDP oversight and its ability to hold parties accountable. Additionally, the project faced challenges in ensuring continuity and scaling due to the annual budget cycle of UNDP, making it difficult to provide long-term support to partners and beneficiaries.

While these interventions address some of the underlying causes of youth unemployment in South Africa, such as the inadequate support for young entrepreneurs and skills mismatch between colleges and industry, they lacked the effective results-based monitoring and communication needed to support evidence on the effectiveness of these projects and for the unpacking of lessons learned that are necessary for making a good case for scale-up. UNDP efforts in this regard were not complemented by the upstream intervention needed to support broader reforms in TVET. There was limited or no clear connection between the projects and national-level initiatives, such as the Presidential Employment Stimulus and the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, which could have allowed for uptake of the lessons learned from the UNDP demonstration projects.

Finding 4. Land Reform and Rural Development: UNDP has worked with South Africa's Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development (DALRRD) to develop equitable land access and rural development policies. While this partnership has produced several strategic policies, progress in their adoption and implementation has been hampered by political shifts and departmental restructuring. The full impact of these interventions is therefore yet to be observed.

Since 2011, UNDP has collaborated with the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development (DALRRD), (formerly the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform – DRDLR)[42] to facilitate the development of policies and legislations aimed at fostering equitable access to land and promoting rural development. Rural development and land reform stand out as an area where UNDP has showcased its

[41] UNDP South Africa (2022), Annual Report.

[42] The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development (DALRRD) was established in June 2019 by the merger of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (DAFF) and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR).

distinct strengths under the inclusive growth portfolio, offering technical and financial support to the DALRRD on upstream interventions. Leveraging its extensive knowledge base and global networks, UNDP has played a pivotal role in providing knowledge support and facilitating access to experts to provide advice on the development of land reform policies and legislations. UNDP conducted socio-economic impact assessments, which informed ongoing policy discussions and helped to expose South African policy makers and implementers to international best practices through capacity-building training and workshops.[43]

The longstanding partnership between the UNDP and DALRRD led to the development, drafting, or revision of approximately 20 policies, bills, and acts related to land reform.[44] Progress varies across different policies, with some reaching the level of cabinet approval while others remain at the ministerial level. Policies and legislation supported by UNDP, such as the Green Paper on Land Reform (2011), the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act (2014), the Land Tenure Security for Commercial Farming Areas Policy, and the Extension of Security of Tenure Amendment Act (ESTA Amendment), have been successfully enacted or adopted, demonstrating tangible progress. However, many others such as the Land Tenure Reform Policy (2017) are still under consideration by the Cabinet; whereas the Electronic Deeds Registration Systems Amendment Bill, which was started in 2017, was only gazetted for public comment on 24 April 2024.

The delays in enacting some of these legislations have been attributed to the complexities and historical legacies of land tenure and ownership in South Africa. Changes in policy emphasis and priorities have also been a key reason for the delays and setbacks. For instance, expropriation without compensation (EWC), which emerged as a major political issue following the African National Congress policy conference in 2017, caused a reorientation of priorities within the land reform agenda, with significant political energy being directed towards EWC, thereby diverting focus and resources from other land reform policies that were under development at the time. Additionally, the 2019 restructuring of the DRDLR to include agriculture and thus become DALRRD also introduced some uncertainty and delayed the adoption and implementation of various policies. This restructuring created an overlap between land reform and agricultural development, which required recalibrating strategies and policies to reflect this integration.[45] At the same time, the final project evaluation highlighted instances where some policy processes, initially stalled, later resurfaced as inputs into other policies, reflecting both the fluid and slow nature of policy processes[46] and the need for long-term and continuous support in upstream interventions to ensure sustained progress and implementation in South Africa.

The aforementioned factors coupled with policy implementation challenges have hampered the impact of the land reform interventions. While fruitful, the partnership between DALRRD and UNDP has experienced a recent slowdown during this programming cycle. As of the time of the evaluation, a fully drafted project that was developed in 2022 between DALRRD and UNDP remained unsigned for implementation due to funding constraints from both parties as well as a consequence of the internal reshuffling within the departments. DALRRD expressed appreciation of UNDP support and highlighted its interest in pursuing the collaboration to follow up on the past work and support new areas of policy development with high-level expertise, notably on the sensitive topic of compensation related to land acquisitions and redistributions. Access to land in South Africa has remained a significant development issue, with the decline in agricultural communities with secured property rights since 2015 underscoring the struggle to ensure land tenure

[43] Evaluation Report: Final Evaluation of the Land Reform and Rural Development Project in South Africa.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid. In the last reshuffle, the former rural development and land reform department integrated agriculture in its mandate, which led to important internal restructuring within the department, and thus slowing the pace of policy development and adoption.

[46] Evaluation Report. For example, the Communal Property Associations Amendment Bill, which stalled in 2014, was passed by both the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces in 2018, but has been awaiting the Presidential signature for over a year. Similarly, a project on land administration initiated in 2014 remained inactive until 2017–2018, when it became critically needed.

security. Furthermore, despite efforts to promote productive and sustainable agriculture, the amount of such land has stagnated at around 12 million hectares, indicating a lack of progress in increasing the availability of productive agricultural land.[47]

Finding 5. Social Protection: Since the previous programming cycle, UNDP has focused on expanding social protection for informal workers in South Africa through several initiatives, including policy dialogues and collaborations with other UN agencies. UNDP's support has contributed to increased awareness and expanded outreach of social grants in the context of COVID. Progress on the development of social insurance schemes for the informal sector have been limited due to lack of funding and buy-in for non-conditional grants schemes.

UNDP's efforts on social protection have spanned both the current and previous CPD cycles. These efforts have primarily focused on exploring policy options to broaden social protection coverage for informal workers. During the previous CPD cycle, UNDP led national policy dialogues and roundtable discussions on social protection, aiming to introduce policy changes that would enhance coverage. The first national policy dialogue on social protection was successfully convened, followed by a roundtable discussion involving key stakeholders such as the Department of Social Development, UNICEF, and UNFPA to discuss funding strategies.[48] These dialogues helped to raise awareness about the necessity of extending social protection to informal workers, resulting in recommendations for a pilot intervention between UNDP and the Department of Social Development. Despite efforts, the planned pilot scheme with the Department of Social Development (DSD) could not materialize due to lack of support from the National Treasury even after cost sharing agreement had been signed between the DSD and the UNDP.[49]

Under the current CPD, UNDP continued to find opportunities to advocate for the consideration of informal workers in social protection schemes. Given that the majority of vulnerable groups, especially women in rural areas, have limited access to electronic transfer payment methods, the government had challenges in reaching its targets for social protection coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic. In collaboration with the United Nations Capital Development Fund, UNDP supported the government, including the National Treasury, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), and the Department of Social Development, to implement the project "Deepening the Social Development of SASSA Grant Recipients," which in part aimed to improve the efficiency of social grants and to increase returns derived from the grant's payments. As part of this support three reports were produced, including the Out of Poverty Pathways Framework, Improving the Financial Capability of Grant Recipients, and Raising Returns and Efficiency from Social Protection.

UNDP, in collaboration with UN Women, UNICEF, OHCHR, and ILO, as the Lead Implementing Agency implemented the Social Protection and Sustainable Access Joint Programme (SPSA-JP). Through the SPSA-JP, and financed through the SDG Fund, UNDP collaborated with the aforementioned UN agencies to support the Department of Social Development in exploring options for social insurance schemes targeting the informal sector in South Africa. The intervention aimed to address the exclusion of informal workers from existing social protection programmes, advocating for a comprehensive and inclusive system. UNDP conducted a study on service delivery models with the aim of helping women in the informal economy to integrate into social insurance, building upon existing solutions. As noted in the final evaluation of the Joint Project, UNDP has made visible contributions to knowledge and capacity-building in this thematic area, including critical advocacy for social security for the informal sector and formulating options to address the exclusion of women from social insurance. The work has also strengthened the capacity of representative

[47] Republic of South Africa SDG Country Report 2023, https://www.statssa.gov.za/MDG/SDG_Country_report.pdf.
[48] Evaluation Report of the UNDP South Africa Country Programme, 2013–2017.
[49] Ibid.

bodies of excluded groups to demand access to social protection. The continuity of these efforts, however, depends on mobilizing new resources. While outside of UNDP control, the final project evaluation also noted the missed opportunity to sustainably strengthen UN coordination and collaborative engagement on the subject.

As a follow up to the SPSA-JP, UNDP prepared a pilot project document to roll out social protection in selected District Development Model districts and developed a policy brief titled "Developing Social Insurance Schemes for the Informal Sector in South Africa." The proposal for social insurance aligns with the National Treasury's preference for social protection schemes linked to public works or productive safety nets. However, the planned pilot for social insurance targeting informal sector workers has faced delays since 2022. While the country office attributes the delay to complexities within representative frameworks at both subnational and national tiers of the informal sector, the stakeholder engagements also identified funding constraints and insufficient buy-in from the National Treasury on options for extending non-conditional social protection measures to the informal sector.

2.3 Access to effective public services

Finding 6. Development planning: UNDP has supported national authorities in strengthening planning, implementation, and reporting framework by mainstreaming the SDGs and other global agendas into national and local level planning processes.

During this programming cycle, UNDP provided several supports to actors of the national planning architecture to ensure the mainstreaming of the SDGs, but also in supporting their effective implementation. As noted in various reports, South Africa builds on a strong legacy of development planning processes and has been an active contributor in the adoption of the Agenda 2030 and the Africa Union's 2063 Agenda. At the same time, interviews and documentary evidence highlight challenges to ensure the effective alignment among international, regional, national, and local development plans.[50]

In this regard, several analytical outputs were produced to strengthen the alignment among these various frameworks. This has notably included, in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the production of a report "Mapping the National Development Plan to the United Nations and African Union Sustainable Development Agendas,"[51] highlighting convergence and gaps among the SDG targets, Agenda 2063, and the National Development Plan. This mapping exercise enabled confirmation of the high level of convergence between the NDP and the two agendas (94.8 percent for Agenda 2063 and 74 percent for the SDG targets). The compilation of the national SDG report in 2023[52] provided an update of the last country-level SDG report conducted in 2019, and served as an important statistical basis for the drafting of the country's second Voluntary National Review, which was also supported by UNDP in 2023 and 2024 ahead of the 2024 High-Level Political Forum. The report was also complemented by the second CSO People's Report on Sustainable Development Goals implementation in South Africa as part of the Voluntary National Review process.[53] At the time of the evaluation, UNDP was also engaged in

[50] See https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/za/Mapping_the_National_Development_Plan_to_the_United_Nations_and_African_Union_Sustainable_Development_Agendas_17_June_2021.pdf

[51] See https://www.undp.org/south-africa/publications/mapping-national-development-plan-united-nations-and-african-union-sustainable-development-agendas.

[52] See https://www.statssa.gov.za/MDG/SDG_Country_report.pdf.

[53] See https://genderjustice.org.za/publication/the-south-african-cso-working-group-voluntary-national-review-report/. However, due to insufficient time for the newly appointed Government of National Unity installed after the 2024 general election to approve the final report, its presentation was deferred to the 2025 High-Level Political Forum.

several reporting activities under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change with UNEP funding, including the compilation of South Africa's 5th Biennial Update Report and South Africa's 4th National Communications Report, as well as an independent review of both.

To support the operationalization and acceleration of SDG progress, in 2023 UNDP supported the National Planning Commission in the SDG Push diagnostic process,[54] with the support of the UNDP SDG integration team based in Headquarters. The SDG Push aims to identify pathways that could focus and accelerate the country's development within fiscal constraints based on the use of economic modelling, scenario planning, and innovative data. Through this exercise, South Africa was among the first five countries that piloted the SDG Push framework.[55] Based on the SDG Push methodology, a combination of policy scenarios was modelled and tested to address the country's triple development challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. These scenarios included accelerating skills formation, fostering growth in the services and industry sectors, and implementing poverty-alleviating social grants.

In partnership with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), UNDP partnered with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) to introduce the process of Voluntary Local Review to support the localization of the SDGs at the municipal level. UNDP and UNDESA engaged SALGA and municipal representatives in awareness-raising and technical support for the mainstreaming of the SDGs and its reporting framework into local development plans. Through the awareness-raising and technical support provided, the intervention enabled 13 municipalities (including metropolitan, urban, peri-urban, coastal, and rural areas across different provinces) to receive support to mainstream the SDGs into their integrated development plan and reporting frameworks. In addition to localizing the SDGs and strengthening linkages between national/local frameworks, municipalities noted that the self-assessments helped highlight gaps and areas of focus for municipal work, while at the same time shedding light on gaps in data extraction and analytical capabilities. Overall, eight municipalities and metropolitan areas have been able to prepare their Voluntary Local Review reports with UNDP support. [56] In addition, UNDP also worked with the Eastern Cape Provincial Government, providing the province with technical expertise to explore socio-economic recovery options through the introduction of scenario-based planning in the office of the premier of the province following the pandemic, leading to the production of two economy-wide scenario-based plans. While UNDP support limited itself to the provision of technical expertise, interviews revealed that strategic advisors of the provincial government, following this introduction, pursued training with Stellenbosch University's Futures Institute.

Overall, UNDP support in advancing the mainstreaming of the SDGs in South Africa has been very well received and appreciated. The organization has responded to clear requests of the South African authorities, and it supported their compliance and leadership efforts at the regional and global level. The contribution and participation of various parts of UNDP, such as the regional bureau and Headquarters, but also other UN entities such as UNDESA and UNECA, were perceived as enhancing the technical expertise and overall quality of engagement. However, stakeholders interviewed expressed the views that in some cases UNDP inputs remained limited and that further input was expected in enhancing the analytical output produced. For instance, it was found that limited opportunities were seized during these various exercises to further enhance capacities in terms of sharing of best and innovative country-level reporting practices, or to facilitate access to private sector data, which are not readily available to the national statistical

[54] See https://sdgpush-insights.undp.org/reports/zaf.

[55] The SDG Push Framework is a tool to enable Member States to plan and deliver SDG breakthroughs in a variety of development contexts. This Framework comprises: scoping, acceleration dialogues, economic modelling, sustainable financing, and acceleration pathways.

[56] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: SDG Localization and the Voluntary Local Reviews, https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews. The eight municipalities/metropolitan areas are Buffalo City, City of Tshwane, Koukamma Local Municipality, Mogale City, Municipality of Mossel Bay, Municipality of Rustenburg, City of uMhlathuze, and City of Cape Town.

offices. Similarly, stakeholders also expressed the need for more opportunities to foster ownership and collaboration across government in the production of these analytical pieces to ensure they make their way into the policy decision-making process.

Finding 7. Social cohesion/disaster management: UNDP has responded to emerging human and natural crises in KwaZulu-Natal by assisting local authorities to enhance their overall preparedness. While these have constituted ad-hoc and short-term engagement, interventions provided responses to immediate needs and helped to identify new areas of needs and potential support, notably in the area of disaster risk management at the provincial level.

Leveraging funding opportunities from the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), and from UNDP Regional Bureaux and Headquarters, UNDP was able to support the national response to the natural and human-made crises that hit the province of KwaZulu-Natal during this cycle. In 2021 the province was hit by social unrest and a rise in xenophobic violence targeting migrant workers. Gender-based violence was also integrated as part of that response in light of the increasing prevalence of reported cases, and the fourth highest female intimate violence death rate in the world.[57] KwaZulu-Natal also witnessed severe flooding and landslides in 2022 caused by heavy rainfall, which resulted in the death of 448 people, displaced over 40,000 people, and completely destroyed over 12,000 houses.[58]

In the area of social cohesion, UNDP led a comprehensive two-year consultation process to review and revise the country's 2012 Social Cohesion Strategy. This involved the engagement of stakeholders from the arts and culture sector, including civil society and various government departments. The revised strategy, presented to and approved by the Cabinet, aims to strengthen coordination and ensure dedicated resources for local implementation. The strategy is currently being translated into 12 local languages and will be presented to all nine provinces to develop provincial strategies for rollout and implementation. The updated strategy also includes propositions for a post-COVID-19 recovery plan given the interlinkages between inequality issues in South Africa and deteriorating social cohesion.

Together with the United Nations Protection Working Group, UNDP supported the development of early warning systems within the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. This initiative focuses on monitoring potential xenophobic attacks through a disaster management framework adopted as early warning signals. Additionally, UNDP developed peacebuilding, mediation, and conflict resolution training manuals based on thorough research and stakeholder mapping, and funded three pre-test trainings on the manual in the provinces. Finally, UNDP also delivered business skills training, targeting an estimated 395 beneficiaries among migrant populations in Gauteng, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal.

In the area of disaster risk reduction, UNDP as part of a UN joint emergency response, provided assistance in the initial aftermath of the flooding in KwaZulu-Natal by conducting needs assessments, and by strengthening the readiness of the provincial disaster management centres (PDMC). Recommendations from the needs assessments were shared with relevant authorities to facilitate integrated planning for disaster management. To support the implementation of these recommendations, UNDP deployed five technical experts through the UN Volunteer programme to the PDMC offices in KwaZulu-Natal. The experts helped augment the capacity of the PDMC and supported the development of risk profiles, disaster evaluations, and assess alignment and integration of municipal Integrated Development Plans with disaster management frameworks. Despite positive feedback from local PDMCs, their services had to be discontinued owing to lack of funding without completing all initially planned tasks, and notably the expected knowledge transfer. In addition UNDP provided grants to 259 informal traders who were affected

[57] UNDP (2020), project document of "Deepening social cohesion in South Africa."
[58] UNOCHA (2022), https://reliefweb.int/disaster/fl-2022-000201-zaf.

by the flood to restore their businesses,[59] and it collaborated with the International Red Cross to construct three gender-disaggregated accommodations (Wendy houses) for the flood victims.[60] Based on the need for disaster risk reduction intervention as established through a joint mission with the UNDP Resilience Hub for Africa, a new programme has been designed aiming to expand this area of work in the country, pending resource mobilization.

Finding 8. Elections: UNDP augmented the capacity of the electoral commission in non-core electoral activities, such as voter and civic education and the training of local electoral observers. While UNDP's support has been deemed important in enhancing relationship between the commission and youth networks and in channelling funding, efforts fell short of the ambitious objective of improving youth voter turnout during the 2024 general elections.

In 2020, UNDP partnered with the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) and the African Union Commission to organize the first ever continental conference for election management bodies, themed "Safeguarding Electoral integrity in the Digital Age: Strategies for combatting disinformation." The conference brought together various stakeholders to discuss strategies for ensuring free and fair elections in the digital era. It also helped to raise awareness among electoral management bodies, electoral practitioners, and other stakeholders about the benefits and threats of social media to the electoral process and integrity. Recommendations from the conference led the Association of African Electoral Authorities to launch a roadmap for the development and publication of the "Principles and Guidelines for the Use of Digital and Social Media in Elections in Africa."[61]

In partnership with the IEC, UNDP collaborated with the Activate Change Drivers to foster citizen engagement in democratic processes. This partnership led to 21 community workshops, empowering 655 young leaders and establishing a civic education network. The workshop was also used to gather information on the barriers to youth participation in voting. The findings were published in a civic education toolkit, which was subsequently used to facilitate civic education across all nine provinces, specifically targeting youth engagement in voting. Additionally, an online "hashtag voting campaign" was launched to mobilize youth for the 2024 voter registration exercise. The campaign is reported to have reached over 1 million people, contributing to a substantial increase in voter registration among young people aged 20 to 29, who made up 77 percent of new registrations for the 2024 elections.[62]

UNDP's collaboration with the IEC also included the development of a Digital Observers Platform, which serves as a common management platform for observer registration and accreditation processes. This platform enhanced the credibility and transparency of electoral processes by enabling accredited observer groups to conduct real-time monitoring and reporting. In preparation for the 2024 national and provincial elections, UNDP, in collaboration with IEC, organized a knowledge-sharing and study mission to Zimbabwe, involving election observers from civil society organizations in pre-election training. This mission equipped the observers with the necessary skills to serve effectively in the 2024 national and provincial elections. In addition, local citizen observers were also trained on their roles and responsibilities, with a focus on gender balance and addressing gender-related issues during the observation mission.

[59] UNDP, "Republic of South Africa Annual Report, 2022."
[60] "Republic of South Africa, Result-oriented Annual Reporting, 2022."
[61] See https://www.elections.org.za/pw/Elections-And-Results/Principles-and-Guidelines-for-the-use-of-the-Digital-and-Social-Media-in-Elections-in-Africa.
[62] South African Government News Agency, "Over one million new voters added to the voters' roll," https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/over-one-million-new-voters-added-voters-roll.

UNDP's added value in this area of work lies in its perceived reputation and credibility as an impartial partner. While the IEC has extensive capacities and has not required support for core electoral elections, the commission, as it seeks to continue improving the quality and participation of processes, has welcomed both the technical and financial assistance facilitated by UNDP for these non-core electoral activities. UNDP's impartiality and the financing helped to provide the training of electoral observers, while safeguarding the perception of their independence from the IEC. Similarly, UNDP's engagement was considered critical to facilitate working relations between the IEC and youth networks, such as Activate Change Drivers. UNDP facilitation also enabled and facilitated the management of third-party financing. Albeit small amounts, this was appreciated and highlighted as a first "joint resource mobilization effort" with the IEC. However, despite the reported important outreach of the voter registration campaign, the extent of UNDP's role is difficult to track due to the limited documentation and analysis available. In addition, evidence of similar initiatives from other actors in the area of voter and civic education makes it difficult to appreciate the significance of this effort, despite positive feedback form partners. Finally, while UNDP's modest support was in line with the needs of the IEC, the limited funding and scale of interventions suggest that objectives set in the UNSDCF and subsequently in the UNDP CPD, in terms of improving voter turnout, were highly ambitious. In this regard, while youth and women registration saw an increase in advance of the elections, actual voter turnout in the general 2024 elections was characterized by an all-time low of 58.6 percent.

Finding 9. Public service delivery: UNDP has supported efforts to enhance public service delivery at the national and local level by facilitating consensus on the implementation of the revised national competency framework for public service, and on the piloting of the district development model. However, UNDP's role in these areas has remained limited and ad-hoc.

With a view to supporting enhancing public services delivery, UNDP signed a five-year project with the Public Service Commission (PSC), Department of Public Service Administration, National School of Government, and the National Planning Commission to promote public service reforms, with emphasis on the professionalization of the public service sector, strengthening the use of evidence and data in planning and programme implementation, and improved public administration processes. At the time of the evaluation, limited progress was reported against these objectives, and discussions were underway to reshape UNDP support around the national competency framework for the public service developed by the PSC in 2022. While not involved in the design of the framework as envisaged, UNDP was brought in to help with the operationalization of the plan. Introducing the revised framework across the public service sector requires significant coordination and collaboration across various institutions, and clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for its successful implementation.

In this regard, UNDP provided technical expertise and facilitated the convening of all stakeholders to reach consensus on collaborative modalities to implement the professionalization framework and to reach broad agreement on a roadmap and M&E framework. While these outputs were still being finalized at the time of the evaluation, stakeholders praised UNDP's convening and facilitation in bringing stakeholders together, and highlighted it as an important step to chart a way forward. To reinvigorate the public service sector, UNDP also aided the Department of Public Service and Administration in the revision of existing public service graduate programmes, and launched a "Future of Work Ambassadors Programme" aimed at placing unemployed university graduates in public service, while at the same time introducing new skills and perspectives. In this case, UNDP supported a review of existing programmes (internship, in-service training, and graduate programmes) to inform its redesign.

UNDP also engaged with the Department for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) in supporting the District Development Model (DDM) with the perspective of improving service delivery at the local level.[63] To stimulate reflection on the DDM model, UNDP conducted a case study on the DDM's experiences in five pilot districts launched by the government in the Eastern Cape province.[64] This also provided an opportunity to develop a training guideline on strategy development underpinning the design of DDM's 'One plan'. The actual use and contribution of this effort could not be fully clarified by this evaluation, as interviews suggested that COGTA had commissioned a parallel review of the DDM experience, casting doubts about the contribution of UNDP and the level of ownership over UNDP support.[65] UNDP also worked with the Eastern Cape Provincial Government on the Scenario Planning Project, assisting the province in the consideration and development of a planning scenario to support its provincial development and explore socio-economic recovery routes following the pandemic – leading to the production of two economy-wide scenario plans.

UNDP's contribution in the area of Governance (Outcome 2) is the outcome that has recorded the lowest level of expenditures and the implementation of which illustrates the challenge faced by UNDP South Africa in light of limited core resources and external funding opportunities. As previously presented, funding for this outcome has drawn primarily from UNDP core resources, and from ad-hoc funding opportunities through various funding windows such as the MPTF and the UNDP Regional Bureaux and Headquarters. This has significantly limited the ability of UNDP to implement a programmatic approach as initially envisaged in the multi-year agreements signed with some South African departments, such as with the Public Service Commission. This in turn also resulted in the implementation of ad-hoc and/or small-scale interventions, which despite their relevance have limited UNDP's overall contribution to the objectives of the Governance portfolio as set in the CPD.

2.4 Environment, energy, and natural resources management

Finding 10. Biodiversity finance: UNDP has supported institutional capacities to enhancing delivery on the national biodiversity economy strategy through the introduction of biodiversity finance planning. The successful implementation of the Biodiversity Finance Initiative and its on-going uptake by stakeholders illustrate UNDP's added value in leveraging international experience and exposure to promote adaptation, and in establishing bridges between the financial and conservation sectors.

To support delivery of the national biodiversity economic development strategy, UNDP has spearheaded the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) working with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE), the South African Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), South African National Parks, the National Treasury, and Statistics South Africa.[66] The approach is based on the development of Biodiversity Finance Plans (BFP) that aim to support raising and managing capital and incentives to support sustainable

[63] The DDM is a presidential initiative launched in 2019 to strengthen coherence and accelerate service delivery at the district level and to strengthen the concept of a developmental state in provinces and municipalities. The DDM consists of the development of a common planning and implementation framework, 'the One plan', to support breaking the silos and enhancing coordination in socio-economic support delivered at the provincial, district, metro, and municipality levels. The DDM is expected to strengthen alignment, synergies, and collaboration among various levels of government.

[64] See https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/ddm_final_report_11_06_23.pdf.

[65] UNDP country office was unable to facilitate a meeting with COGTA for this evaluation.

[66] The BIOFIN initiative is a global UNDP programme implemented in 40 countries to date, with the aim to demonstrate how tailored investments and incentives in biodiversity not only protect nature but also create jobs, reduce pandemics, and combat climate change.

biodiversity management.[67] The first phase of the programme was launched in 2015, and the South Africa BFP was finalized in 2018, identifying 16 biodiversity solutions around three biodiversity outcomes.[68] This resulted in the spatial planning of essential life-support areas to inform nature-based solutions that intersect with state support, including tax incentives, land ownership, and subsidies, among others. Following the development of the BFP, UNDP assisted authorities in the implementation of two solutions outlined in the BFP.

In 2022 the development of a Biodiversity investment portal[69] within the DFFE to match investors with bankable projects has endowed the country with an innovative tool for resource mobilization and brokerage between investors and biodiversity entrepreneurs as well as small, medium, and micro enterprises.[70] Following its launch, the portal attracted USAID interest, which made the first investment in the projects listed on the portal, resulting in the signing of two agreements for (i) two beneficiary sites to develop management plans, and (ii) to implement a biodiversity credit system. In 2023 the BIOFIN programme also supported the first assessment on the nature-related risk disclosure framework in South Africa, with the publication of the report "Nature Financial Disclosure Readiness: Policy and Institutional Review."[71] The report provides an assessment of the readiness of the financial sector in responding voluntarily or mandatorily to nature related risks.

Such financial models, if successfully integrated into national financial strategies, can provide a robust basis for maintaining conservation and development projects. This integration is crucial for scaling as it ensures that projects align with national priorities and can attract sustained governmental or international support. BIOFIN represents a critical tool for resource mobilization, fostering innovative financial solutions to promote biodiversity. The support provided by UNDP, through BIOFIN, has been praised by all stakeholders involved and interviewed during this evaluation. The technical expertise that was made available and the collaboration facilitated, notably by embedding personnel funded by UNDP within the DFFE, was noted as a strong aspect of initiative.

Finding 11. Biodiversity conservation: UNDP's interventions have contributed to sustainable management of natural resources in South Africa, successfully exceeding initial targets by securing nearly a million hectares of protected areas and enhancing governance and stakeholder participation. These efforts have aligned well with international biodiversity goals, and have shown promise in integrating sustainable practices within local communities and governmental frameworks.

The Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network, South Africa project strengthened governance and multi-stakeholder participation, which improved national capacities and conservation institutions.[72] Enhanced land use controls and management practices in buffer zones through engagements with municipal plans and biodiversity plans led to the declaration of new protected areas and environments. The project supported partnerships and cooperation models both internally and externally in protected area management through partnerships in the Greater Kruger landscape and by improving management

[67] BIOFIN uses detailed country-level assessments to develop a biodiversity finance plan, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, innovative methodologies, and expert input. It provides an innovative, stepwise, and adaptable approach that enables countries to: (i) assess the policy, institutional, and economic context for biodiversity finance and map existing finance solutions; (ii) measure and analyse current biodiversity expenditures, from the public and private sectors, donors, and non-governmental organizations; (iii) make a reliable estimate of the finance needed to achieve a country's biodiversity goals, and compare this to current biodiversity expenditures and other resources available; and (iv) develop a biodiversity finance plan that identifies and mobilizes the resources and policies required to implement the most suitable finance solutions.

[68] Namely protected areas, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable utilization of biodiversity.

[69] See https://www.biodiversityinvestment.co.za/.

[70] UNDP Annual Report, 2021.

[71] See https://www.biofin.org/knowledge-product/nature-financial-disclosure-readiness-policy-and-institutional-review-south.

[72] UNDP (2021), "Evaluation of Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network, South Africa," pp. 43, 47, 65.

effectiveness through regional land use approaches. A total of 969,234 hectares of high biodiversity priority buffer zones were integrated into local municipal planning mechanisms. These lands are mainly held by large-scale farmers with properties often spanning hundreds of hectares. Furthermore, management effectiveness and financial viability were improved through the legal gazette management effectiveness tracking tool (METT), a reformed and web-based performance system successfully embedded within DFFE and implemented across the national protected area network. METT provides evidence of management effectiveness in protected areas, and these are internationally recognized. Going forward, by using METT protected areas will be able to monitor and demonstrate progress, which was not the case before intervention.

In 2022, UNDP improved sustainable land management practices in three landscapes – Karoo, Olifants, and Eastern Cape – through rangeland rehabilitation, bush clearing, alien plants control, etc., placing 345,321 hectares[73] under sustainable land management practices. The project improved coordination and collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations to promote integrated approaches to land management and ecosystem restoration. The project also enhanced technical capacity and management of climate risks among government institutions, leading to better planning and implementation of climate-smart land rehabilitation practices. Further, the project increased awareness and knowledge among local communities regarding climate change, climate-smart land management practices, and rangeland management.[74]

The implementation and enhancement of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing exemplify UNDP's commitment to aligning local environmental management with international standards. This initiative has been particularly effective in establishing legal and commercial frameworks that enable communities to benefit economically from the sustainable use of indigenous biological resources. The project 'Development of Value Chains for Products Derived from Genetic Resources in Compliance with the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing and the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy', aimed at value chain development for native species such as African ginger, not only fosters compliance with the Nagoya Protocol but also drives economic benefits by integrating traditional knowledge for the development of viable commercial products. The project has laid a solid foundation for policy integration and partnership development, which are likely to yield long-term benefits if continued with improved execution.

Clinical trials are underway as the project investigates the medical benefits of African ginger, which is a species that is threatened with extinction from unsustainable extraction and exploitation. Concerted research efforts by the Agricultural Research Council have led to the consolidation of research knowledge on propagation techniques for Devil's claw – another species that is under threat of extinction. The Centre successfully trained local communities on the production of the species and has been able to link market actors who previously exploited and marketed the product illegally to approach producers and secure legally produced materials. This is likely to reduce pressure on the species, halt its extinction, and drive local economic development. Given the high levels of endemism in South Africa, this is considered a highly relevant intervention as it seeks to work in the interface between traditional knowledge/practices and modern science enquiry for positive returns both in terms of livelihoods and biodiversity conservation.

[73] UNDP Annual Report, 2022.

[74] UNDP (2022), "Evaluation of securing multiple ecosystems benefit through SLM in the productive but degraded landscape of South Africa," pp. 10, 33.

UNDP has therefore made solid contributions in expanding and strengthening the management of the protected areas network and sustainable land practices. While this focus on effective management and protection is highly relevant, there does appear to be a 'gap' in the UNDP portfolio in the sense that wildlife poaching and illegal wildlife trafficking in South Africa is recognized as a major issue.[75] However, national or transboundary work to address this challenge has thus far been limited to small initiatives through the small grants programme.[76] There appears to be a strategic opportunity for UNDP to engage with the strong and locally active conservation NGOs as well as their international networks. In some cases, there is still a gap in local institutional capacity, which can limit the ability to scale projects effectively. For instance, the management of protected areas and biodiversity projects requires strong local governance, which is not always sufficiently robust. Projects often have funding secured for only the initial phases, with less emphasis on creating endowments or other long-term funding structures that would ensure continuity.

Another recurrent theme is often a lack of clear transition plans for handing over projects to local management, which can lead to sustainability issues when projects end. The intersection of environmental sustainability with social and economic challenges is particularly evident in areas such as the land-water nexus and wildlife conservation. For instance, while projects such as the Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network have enhanced biodiversity conservation, they are not fully addressing the associated social issues, such as the impact of wildlife poaching on local communities or the equitable distribution of water resources in agricultural sectors. These are critical areas where environmental outcomes directly affect community livelihoods and rights, illustrating the need for a more integrated approach.

Finding 12. Renewable energy: UNDP has successfully helped to strengthening the enabling environment for the expansion of South's Africa wind energy sector. While UNDP's overall contribution during this programming cycle remained modest, it helped to successfully demonstrate the potential of off-grid wind power, and of its scaling up in rural electrification programmes.

Since 2008, UNDP has supported the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) in the strengthening the enabling environment for the expansion of wind energy, under the South African Wind and Energy Project (SAWEP) financed through the GEF. This programming period saw the end of the second phase of SAWEP implemented between 2015 and 2021.

During the second phase of SAWEP, UNDP and DMRE continued to support the development of the sector. At the enabling environment, the programme supported the expansion and update of the Wind Atlas for South Africa. Doing so, four additional wind masts were installed, expanding to a total of 19 operational masts, and thus enhancing the capacity for wind resource assessments. This enabled the expanded coverage of the wind atlas to all provinces of South Africa, and for generalized wind climate and resource maps to cover 200 nautical miles offshore so as to support the assessment of offshore wind potential by operators. The project also facilitated the conduct of an assessment of the impact of the government's Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme on the South African Economic Development. The project sponsored the training of 24 TVET students in wind turbine services at the South African Renewable Energy Technology Centre. After completing their training, all participants were offered internship opportunities, and every student secured employment in the sector upon completing the programme.

[75] Moneron, S., Brock, B., and Newton, D. (2020), "Insights from the Incarcerated: An assessment of the illicit supply chain in wildlife in South Africa," https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/13382/insights-from-the-incarcerated-web_final.pdf.

[76] UNDP Annual Report, 2022.

The project was also able to support the successful pilot of a wind-solar hybrid mini-grid in the Upper Blinkwater community in Fort Beaufort municipality in the Eastern Cape province.[77] The Upper Blinkwater community is an area not connected to the electricity grid and has been supported by GIZ for the introduction of a solar mini-grid system.[78] Through the introduction of wind energy, the project successfully augmented renewable energy production for this community by an estimated additional 0.21MW, benefitting 57 households and further reducing need for wood and paraffin as the main source for energy. UNDP also installed two groundwater-pumping wind turbines in two remote primary schools (Matyantya and Kleinbooi) in the same province, benefitting 551 students; and it constructed an Electricity Data Centre to collect and store electricity data for research and analysis on renewable energy.[79]

Rural electrification in South Africa has often been through conventional grid or low-voltage solar home systems, making it difficult for hard-to-reach communities with low density. While the overall contribution to national wind power targets is minimal, the project successfully demonstrated the feasibility and potential of mini-grids powered by small wind energy infrastructure and their integration into solar mini-grids. This responds to a common challenge of solar mini-grids related to the variability of power generation, which often requires fossil fuel back-ups. Government officials and UNDP teams state that the Blinkwater demonstration project has created stronger evidence of the possibility of developing off-grid wind solutions in South Africa. They opine that this is the most important contribution of UNDP and partners, arguing that this experience has informed the DMRE's national rural electrification programme, including additional focus on promotion of off-grid support mechanisms.

The evaluation report of the South Africa Wind Energy Project (SAWEP) Phase-II demonstrated strong strategic ownership by the DMRE and the South African National Energy Development Institute (SANEDI). While the DMRE took responsibility for the project, both the DMRE and SANEDI were actively involved in the project implementation. The project established successful partnerships with key stakeholders, including the Council of Scientific Industrial Research, the South African Weather Service, the University of Cape Town, and various government entities. These partnerships facilitated knowledge transfer and institutionalization of wind energy initiatives within South African public entities.[80] Further, the reported influence on the DMRE rural electrification programme holds promise for up-scaling of the pilot initiatives, though there is no documented evidence to demonstrate this commitment. For the SAWEP project as well, the municipality has commissioned a short-term consultancy with a local engineering company to provide facilitation support to the community so as to ensure their continuous access to energy. The municipality is still working on the tariff structure for the community and how much they will be expected to pay going forward, beyond the free allocation provided to them.

Finding 13. Just Energy Transition: UNDP has advanced the government's Just Energy Transition agenda by creating the Just Energy Transition Platform (JET-P) to raise awareness and conduct research that can inform the ongoing efforts. UNDP has facilitated international dialogues and local empowerment programmes, collaborating with partners such as GIZ and USAID to enhance the skills development needed for the JET-P.

The Government of South Africa adopted the Just Energy Transition Framework after extensive research and consultations led by the Presidential Climate Commission with the sitting president as the Chair.[81] The Framework outlines broad strategies and actions to minimize the social and economic impacts of climate change and to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups as the country transitions to low carbon

77 UNDP Annual Report 2022.
78 See https://elib.dlr.de/138351/1/Minigrid_Book.pdf.
79 UNDP, "Annual Report, 2022."
80 UNDP (2021), "Evaluation of South Africa Wind Energy Project (SAWEP) Phase-II," pp. 29, 34, 46.
81 Presidential Climate Commission (2022), https://www.climatecommission.org.za/just-transition-framework.

emission. As part of the strategy, South Africa has established a Just Energy Transition Partnership with key global partners, including Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union, to support its transition to sustainable energy sources.[82]

In line with the above, UNDP has taken steps to advance the Just Energy Transition by sponsoring the Just Energy Transition Platform, aimed at raising awareness and conducting research on the complexities of transitioning to sustainable energy sources. UNDP – together with the Presidential Climate Commission and the universities of Pretoria, Stellenbosch, and Johannesburg – also hosted a research and policy platform to support the JET, providing a forum for dialogue on critical issues surrounding the transition. UNDP played a crucial role on the ground by implementing projects such as the Advancing Inclusive Just Energy Transition project, which focused on training youth in green technology skills. These efforts targeted provinces that are heavily dependent on emissions, such as Mpumalanga and Limpopo. UNDP collaborated with local communities and civil society organizations such as Women Energy Connect and Inspiring Women Africa to facilitate training workshops and grassroots empowerment programmes. These efforts aimed to equip young professionals and women from marginalized communities with skills and knowledge in the energy sector, empowering them to actively participate in the transition process.

As part of a 17-partner coalition, which includes five UN agencies, UNDP hosted the Just Transition Hackathon. This event served as a platform for identifying young entrepreneurs with innovative ideas addressing various challenges related to the energy transition. The hackathon capacitated over 120 youth in concepts related to the just transition and design thinking, guiding them through a process to develop 15 unique solutions. Among these, five innovative ideas were selected and provided with seed funding. These included the creation of a solar-powered Aquaponic Greenhouse, the development of a renewable energy generator utilizing cutting-edge technology such as additive manufacturing/3D printing, and the conversion of organic matter into biogas through upcycling initiatives. As part of the Accelerator Lab's initiatives, UNDP also partnered with the Siriti Institute, conducting surveys to gather collective intelligence from mining communities and to extract valuable insights from those most affected by the transition to a greener economy, particularly individuals involved in the coal value chain, such as coal miners and mining communities.[83] The distributed problem-solving approach deployed for the survey is highly relevant to bring out voices of marginalized groups. The survey report, recently published, seeks to propose solution pathways building on the participation of more than 10,000 coal mining community members, and can potentially provide a blueprint for adaptation and replication in different sectors and/or for targeting other marginalized voices.

Additionally, UNDP South Africa facilitated discussions on the future of energy finance and policy at international forums such as the 77th United Nations General Assembly, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts in achieving a 'Just Energy Transition' for climate action in Africa. UNDP also facilitated intergovernmental dialogues at events such as the African Climate Week and Viet Nam's JET Conference, enabling the exchange of knowledge and experiences in transitioning to sustainable energy systems. By fostering South-South learning, UNDP facilitated the dissemination of insights gained from South Africa's energy transition journey with Bangladesh and Viet Nam, contributing to global efforts to address climate change.[84]

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82 Just Energy Transition Implementation Plan (2023–2027), https://www.stateofthenation.gov.za/assets/downloads/JET%20Implementation%20Plan%202023-2027.pdf#:~:text=We%20have%20sought%20to%20ensure%20that%20there%20is%20broad%20consultation&text=stakeholders%20during%20the%20JET%20IP%20consultations%20conducted%20by%20the%20Presidential%20Climate%20Commission.

83 See https://www.undp.org/south-africa/publications/just-energy-transition-perspectives-south-african-mining-communities.

84 United Nations South Africa, "Annual Results Report 2023," https://southafrica.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/UN%20South%20Africa%20annual%20results%20report%202023_ELECTRONIC2%20copy.pdf.

Partnerships have been instrumental in UNDP's efforts to advance the JET agenda in South Africa. Through collaborations with organizations such as GIZ, UNDP enhanced existing projects on South Africa's just energy transition and youth digital skills initiatives. This partnership resulted in the expansion of research activities under the JET-Platform and the training of youth in digital skills to help build a skilled workforce for the green economy. Furthermore, a Memorandum of Understanding signed with USAID and Toyota South Africa focused on renewable energy skills development in TVET colleges. These collaborations aim to strengthen technical expertise and promote sustainable energy practices among youth, aligning with the goals of South Africa's energy transition agenda, though actual implementation of these planned interventions is yet to start.

UNDP's engagement in the JET has demonstrated its commitment to the 'leave no one behind' principle by focusing on individuals likely to be impacted by transitioning to more sustainable energy alternatives. Given the influx of development partners in this sphere, it is a key focal area where UNDP could forge new alliances. Therefore, it serves as a strategic avenue for UNDP to mobilize resources by synchronizing its efforts with those of other development partners and the government to provide reskilling opportunities to people likely to be affected by the transition.

2.5 Cross-cutting areas of intervention

Finding 14. Innovation: UNDP implemented several interventions aimed at driving innovation and has developed useful collaborations within the South African innovation ecosystem during this cycle. The success of initiatives is hindered by a short-term approach, limited investment in impact measurement, and shortcoming in organizational knowledge management.

During this cycle, UNDP has done well in engaging with the South African innovation ecosystem. The past CPD evaluation recognized the important relationship forged over time with the Centre for Public Service Innovation, notably supporting its linkages in global public service innovation networks such as the United Nations Public Administration Network. During this cycle, and most notably through its Accelerator Lab, UNDP found further entry points to engage and partner with existing innovation. In this regard, through its Accelerator Lab, UNDP launched about 11 innovation competitions (hackathons, innovation challenges) in partnership with government and private sector incubators to foster the development of innovative solution to pressing societal issues, such as waste management, employment, water management, and rural development.[85]

The Accelerator Lab was also able to see some of its piloted intervention scaled up by the country office. In this regard, collaboration with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research resulted in the implementation of a low-cost Internet connectivity project. Leveraging television white space technology,[86] this initiative provided affordable broadband access for as low as ZAR 5/day for unlimited Internet services to 153 small businesses, 1,856 households, and 56 public facilities, with over 18,700 concurrent daily Internet users in the rural and selected township communities across five provinces.[87] Despite the small scale, this

[85] For instance, the Digital X Innovation Challenge and the Just Energy Transition Hackathon facilitated the development of ground-breaking solutions, such as Artificial Intelligence for waste separation and modular aquaponic systems powered by solar panels. Others include Youth Innovation Challenge, Tshwane Innovation Challenge, Water Innovation Challenge, AGTECH Innovation Challenge, Big Think Challenge, Ocean Economy Innovation Challenge, Zero Waste Challenge, and Japan SDGs Innovation Challenge, bringing together multiple stakeholders to generate solutions to such issues as waste management, employment, environmental sustainability, and rural development.

[86] Television White Space (TVWS) technology refers to the use of unused or underutilized portions of the radio spectrum allocated for television broadcasting. These 'white spaces' are the gaps between television channels that can be repurposed to provide wireless broadband Internet access. TVWS technology can deliver Internet services over long distances and through obstacles such as buildings and trees, making it particularly useful for rural and underserved areas.

[87] KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Free State, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo.

intervention is among others that have contributed to a notable advancement in technological infrastructure in South Africa, particularly in the realm of fixed Internet broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants and the progress towards achieving universal digital access in South Africa.[88] More recently, engagement between the Accelerator Lab with the Department of Science and Innovation has seen the launch of a Higher Education Innovation Fund, which aims to empower innovators and tech entrepreneurs emerging from TVET colleges and universities in South Africa. The fund is meant to support entrepreneurship, ideation, design thinking, and various aspects of tech-entrepreneurship, including business model development, validation, commercialization, and protection of intellectual property.

At the programme level, several projects have stood out in fostering the adoption of innovative practices. Building on its long-standing collaboration with the Centre for Public Service Innovation, UNDP promoted the piloting of the 'Let's Talk' digital platform, enabling citizen engagement and real-time interaction between citizens and municipalities. Following successful testing in one district, the platform developed by a local innovator was being expanded to additional districts and local municipalities, demonstrating its scalability and interest from local authorities. UNDP has been playing a key facilitating role through financing, but also in facilitating dialogue and engagement with local authorities. The organization's involvement in BIOFIN is a notable example, illustrating innovative thinking and a focus on practical solutions that can address funding gaps in biodiversity conservation. Initially, the initiative explored a broad spectrum of solutions, but over time lessons learned led to a more focused approach, emphasizing effective strategies such as permits, certification, and stewardship. Another area reflecting UNDP's ability to drive innovation in its programmatic engagement was illustrated in the experimentation of the market potential of African ginger and other threatened species, which were at clinical trial stage at the time of the evaluation.

Despite positive feedback on UNDP support in the area of innovation, some interviewees noted some limitations/constraints in the organization's ability to support innovation. Albeit some exceptions, the evaluation found greater emphasis on supporting innovations in their "early days" as opposed to more mature projects that have reached prototyping stages. While UNDP funding has often been of great help to initiate pilots and activities, many stakeholders noted the limited funding available and short-term emphasis of initiatives supported by UNDP. Another feedback that has been echoed by a large majority of stakeholders is the lack of flexibility and the perception of heavy administrative procedures to access, manage, and implement UNDP funding. Overall, there was broad agreement within stakeholders interviewed that UNDP was constrained in extending support over a more comprehensive share of the innovation value chain (inception-testing-prototyping-scaling/access to market). There was also a perception that UNDP procedures were too rigid to adapt to the dynamic life cycle and uncertainty of innovations, and not adapted to the targeted local innovators. While the work of the Accelerator Lab and GEF projects are better documented, the evaluation found limited evidence of lessons from initial interventions being used to improve the design and implementation of subsequent ones. Limited documentation on interventions also hampers the ability to measure outcomes and share such lessons with stakeholders to facilitate replication and scale-up of the interventions. These shortcomings have resulted in a shared perception by some stakeholders of a fragmented and piecemeal approach to innovation.

Finally, there are strong expectations from South African stakeholders in UNDP's ability to smoothly facilitate the relevant sharing of successful global and regional experiences and its ability to tap into the organization's long-standing regional and global footprint to drive adaptation and uptake of good and innovative practices. While in some cases this was noted by stakeholders as significantly adding value to

[88] South African Government (2024), https://www.gov.za/blog/south-africa-connect.

the engagement, in other instances opportunities and expectations to tap into UNDP's wealth of global and regional experiences remained unmet. Limited funding and weakness in knowledge management have sometimes limited UNDP's ability to meet expectations. In this regard, several stakeholders questioned the ability of the country office to meet these expectations and the overall knowledge management capacity of UNDP at the regional and global levels.

Finding 15. Gender equality: UNDP's contribution to Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) has been modest mostly through the targeting of women among its beneficiaries. While interventions mainly focused on GEWE were found to be ad-hoc and of small scale, the launch of the Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions has been very well received by national stakeholders and aligns well with the ambition to strengthen gender considerations in public administration.

The UNDP Country Programme primarily addressed gender issues through the mainstreaming of gender across its programme interventions. In this regard, 95 percent of programme expenditures, totalling $29.6 million, was directed towards outputs with gender equality as a significant objective (GEN 2) whereas only 5 percent ($1.4 million) was allocated to outputs where gender equality was the primary objective GEN 3.[89]

The evaluation, however, noted a discrepancy in the assignment of the Gender Marker of the country office. The review of projects marked as GEN 3 did not always allow for confirming the focus on gender equality and empowerment as a primary objective of the interventions. Among the four projects marked as GEN 3, all included gender considerations in their implementation, but only three (social cohesion, social protection, and UNDP Climate Promise work) could be said to have gender equality and empowerment as their main objective. The work on social cohesion included an important emphasis on addressing gender-based violence and xenophobia. In addition, the project performed well in terms of gender targeting in its livelihood support with 70 percent of women beneficiaries, among whom migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers were purposefully targeted, reflecting consideration for intersectionality. UNDP's support through the Climate Promise was requested by national authorities to support strengthening the gender perspective in the nationally determined contribution. The organization also supported social protection, including a focus on women, particularly informal workers, who are often excluded from traditional social insurance schemes. Through these efforts, UNDP advocated for the expansion of social protection coverage to benefit marginalized groups, including taking initial steps towards designing a system that would provide maternity and pension benefits to self-employed informal workers.[90]

While not identified as an intervention that has GEWE as its principal objective (GEN 3), UNDP collaborated with the Department of Public Service and Administration and officially launched the Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions in August 2023 to help the government address challenges of gender equality and women empowerment in government. At the time of the evaluation, a roll-out plan and training-of-trainers was launched. To date, 19 government departments have signed an agreement to pilot the initiative, with UNDP financial and technical support. A similar initiative was also considered for the private sector, but could not be implemented due to limited interest and funding constraints. UNDP also initiated several gender-based violence (GBV) campaigns, including the Not in My Name Campaign on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, a five-day national radio campaign with UN Women, and the GBV bystander prevention model at Mangosuthu University of Technology and the University of Venda. These campaigns, conducted in collaboration with provincial arts, sport and culture departments, government entities, civil

[89] These projects were: social cohesion, emergency support in Kwazulu Natal, support to small business in the context of COVID-19, and UNDP's climate work.

[90] "Final Evaluation Report: Social Protection in South Africa Joint Programme (SPSA-JP)."

society organizations, regional bodies, and academic institutions, were strategically activated across seven provinces known as GBV hotspots. Through these interventions people were equipped with the necessary awareness and skills to actively intervene in GBV situations. UNDP also contributed to the development of the national strategic plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, and an evidence-based study on gender-based violence during the COVID-19 lockdown, culminating in a report on the status of GBV in the country.

The evaluation found that gender considerations in projects marked as GEN 2 (interventions with a significant contribution to GEWE) have been unevenly integrated into many projects. At the level of the environment portfolio, which represents a significant part of UNDP programmatic engagement, gender mainstreaming has been mixed, with some projects incorporating gender considerations from their inception, but many others adopting such measures retroactively during their implementation. For instance, in the Improving Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network project, gender analysis was conducted, and some changes were made to the results framework to capture gender considerations only after the midterm review identified gaps related to the integration of gender considerations. Similarly, the biodiversity project lacked an articulated gender approach from the outset, although attempts were made during implementation to enhance women's empowerment through targeted job creation.

A review of evidence available shows that the implementation of GEN 2 projects reflects an approach to gender equality and women empowerment characterized mostly by gender targeting. With the exception of the two GEN 3 projects noted above, gender mainstreaming has consisted in ensuring the integration of gender disaggregated and specific indicators, and in ensuring that women are among the beneficiary targets. For the most part, projects have fallen short in developing interventions that integrate consideration for changing social norms and barriers – the primary sources of gender discrimination and inequality. A notable gap limiting the gender responsiveness of interventions is the absence of differentiated approaches or measures that recognize the specific vulnerability of women. When gender was effectively mainstreamed in interventions, final GEF evaluations raised challenges in reporting on the impact of gender interventions across projects, hindering the ability to assess effectiveness and to make informed decisions for future programming. For instance, UNDP has been unable to track the contributions of its gender interventions such as the GBV campaign despite requests from national partners to conduct such assessments.

2.6 Factors affecting performance

Finding 16. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning: The M&E function of the country office meets most corporate requirements but presents some shortcoming in terms of evaluation coverage as well as weaknesses in its monitoring capacities. The current M&E practices fall short in supporting knowledge management and decision-making.

The implementation of the CPD's evaluation plan has been relatively effective. However, it should be noted that the evaluation plan and its implementation have been focused on compliance rather than learning and ensuring comprehensive coverage of the CPD portfolios. In this regard, and albeit the strong focus on GEF interventions, decentralized evaluations conducted by the CO have for the most part been of GEF projects, which requires mandatory mid-term and final evaluations. Of the 11 decentralized evaluations conducted during this CPD period, only two were non-GEF projects and covered land reform and TVET support. Expanding the timeframe, only four decentralized evaluations out of 22 commissioned over the last decade were non-GEF related. This means that the production of evaluative evidence has been limited for the inclusive growth and governance portfolios, but also highlights a reactive approach to the planning of evaluation focused on meeting compliance requirements.

At the project level, interventions under Outcomes 1 and 2 exhibited significant gaps in terms of progress monitoring and reporting. Many project proposals did not specify monitoring and reporting requirements, and even when such requirements were outlined, they were not systematically implemented. There were no specific reporting standards or templates used, and as such the few reporting documents that were available lacked needed details. Beyond this, projects under these portfolios did not always included basic documentation, an issue that was raised previously in an office audit in 2020.[91] While GEF projects under Outcome 3 presented a better situation, the implementation of M&E plans had, however, been rather mixed based on evaluations available. For instance, while some projects did not demonstrate any weaknesses, the M&E plans for the "Securing multiple ecosystems benefit through SLM in the productive but degraded landscape of South Africa" (2022) and the "Support to the Orange-Senqu River Strategic Action Programme Implementation" projects were affected by weak progress monitoring, internal activity monitoring, and impact monitoring in some areas.[92] Furthermore, the M&E of the project "Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network, South Africa" was also considered moderately satisfactory, with gaps identified in benchmarking and progress tracking.[93]

Output level monitoring is mainly based on annual reports from partners, midterm reviews, and terminal evaluations of the various projects. This situation, observed during the performance audit of GEF-funded projects in 2023, drew the attention of the country office to conduct monitoring activities sufficiently and, crucially, to take steps to validate evidence emerging from partner reports.[94] This is challenging for the country office with a small M&E team and projects spread throughout the country, though this represents a potentially important reputational risk for UNDP. As previously referenced, challenges related to the oversight of implementing partners and inaccurate reporting were faced by the digital skilling interventions funded by GIZ, whereby a donor verification mission shed light on the inaccuracy of reported results; and on the later inability of the CO and implementing partners to account for and track actual beneficiaries to ascertain results.

According to the CPD, the M&E and Knowledge Management Units were expected to work together to implement integrated knowledge management, but the latter unit was not established as envisaged. The M&E section pays significant attention on using the various project outputs for sharing of good practices and lessons learned, but the evidence suggests this is an area that needs further improvement. There is a need for the team to document the trends, challenges, and best practices emerging from its various interventions, and to create the spaces necessary for learning and sharing. This could ultimately inform the communication plan of the office as well as support the visibility, positioning, and resource mobilization efforts of the country office.

Finding 17. Internal coherence: There is limited evidence of internal coherence between UNDP interventions within and across programme areas despite important potential for synergies and the demonstration of integrated solutions. Several cross-cutting areas of the CO portfolios remain to be connected.

The implementation of the CPD has been rather fragmented, demonstrating a project focus rather than a portfolio focus. While Outcome 3, given its level of financing, demonstrates to some extent a degree of follow up and incremental progress towards objectives, inclusive growth and governance portfolios have

91 UNDP OAI (2020), Audit of UNDP country office, Report No. 2270.
92 UNDP (2022), "Evaluation of 'Securing multiple ecosystems benefit through SLM in the productive but degraded landscape of South Africa'"; "Evaluation of 'Support to the Orange-Senqu River Strategic Action Programme Implementation'," p. 28.
93 UNDP (2022), "Evaluation of 'Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network, South Africa,'" p. 37.
94 UNDP (2023), Performance Audit of UNDP's GEF Management, Audit Report No. 2585, 10 July 2023.

appeared more fragmented and more activity based. The evaluation found limited linkages between upstream and downstream work. While UNDP engaged in both types of interventions, they typically occurred in different sectors with minimal connections between the upstream and downstream efforts.

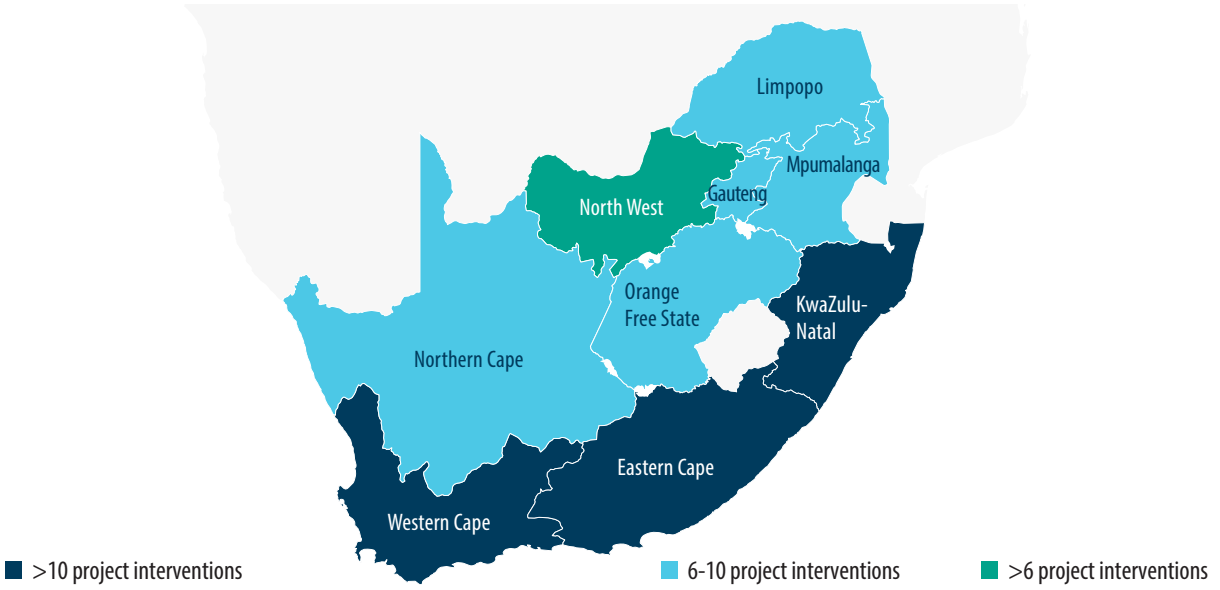
The Accelerator Lab of the country office stands as an exception and has in fact supported greater thematic and sectoral collaborations, though there remains room to expand such efforts. Indeed, the recurrent innovation competitions have been a useful way to strengthen synergies, helping to link business and livelihood opportunities with biodiversity, renewable energy, climate change, and other relevant social issues. Beyond these, the evaluation noted limited synergies between programmes and a prevailing siloed work environment across portfolios. This was found to present limitations in demonstrating the added value of integrated programming and to expand and enhance the reach of interventions and promote the broader adoption of best practices across the UNDP country office.

The evaluation noted missed opportunities to enhance integration of solutions piloted over time. For instance, there appeared to be missed opportunities to expand the use of low-cost Internet under Outcome 1 to other portfolios such as local governance, disaster prevention, and protected area work. More evidently, the support for employment did not appear integrated with the objectives of biodiversity, even though such linkage is well anchored in the CPD and national biodiversity strategy. Moreover, the CO has been supporting the implementation of the GEF Small Grants Programme, which places emphasis on community-driven solutions for biodiversity conservation. However, this work appeared totally detached from UNDP support to entrepreneurship under Outcome 1, but also from the broader environment portfolio (Outcome 3). At the level of the governance portfolio, albeit a lower level of programmatic expenditure, the lack of internal coherence appears even more pronounced, whereby linkage between interventions appeared absent, and consisted of mainly fragmented and separated interventions.

The absence of synergies between and within programme areas is partly driven by the earmarking of funding, which allows limited flexibility for integrating interventions geographically and thematically. In this regard, downstream level interventions of the country office appeared scattered across regions and localities. This presented challenges considering the CO's limited operational capacity to monitor and oversee the quality of interventions and produce evidence and learning to support the scaling up of successful experiences. While this should be nuanced given that GEF projects are likely to cover multiple provinces, it is worth noting that UNDP implemented programme interventions in all nine provinces of South Africa. With the exception of Gauteng and Northwest provinces, all other provinces were targeted by at least one intervention from all three of the CO programme portfolios. In provinces targeted by all portfolios, evidence of synergies and integration appeared limited, and knowledge of local partners of other UNDP interventions in their respective province was absent.

While the design of the CPD included an overall Theory of Change, there were no robust Theories of Change at the outcome level for the different portfolios. The CPD lacked clearly defined assumptions and pathways linked to specific outputs, outcomes, and impact objectives underpinned by a clear strategy based on what UNDP can realistically offer. This gap makes it difficult for the country office to identify and explore the complementarities and interconnections between various projects within the same outcome area and interventions across different outcome areas, resulting in the implementation of ad-hoc interventions without thinking strategically about opportunities arising from the different parts of its country programme.

FIGURE 7. UNDP South Africa project footprint 2020–2023



Source: Based on information compiled by the IEO

Finding 18. Partnerships: UNDP has established diversified partnerships and is recognized for its ability to convene stakeholder groups and sectors, providing increased reach and added value. However, the ability of UNDP to strategically leverage partnerships appeared weakened by their short-term and transactional nature, with missed opportunities to capitalize on collaborative achievements beyond project engagement.

UNDP has significantly broadened its strategic partnerships, engaging with diverse stakeholders across multiple sectors and moving beyond its traditional partners from previous Country Programme Document cycles. UNDP's partnership with the South African Government extends beyond the national level to provincial, municipal, and community levels, constituting an important strength of the organization and an asset in fulfilling its convening role. Among its comparative advantage, its distinct ability to convene multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships and its access to international experiences was perceived as a significant advantage and incentive to partner with UNDP.

The partnership with SANBI, spanning over the last 20 years, in the implementation of GEF programmes stands out, given the weight of GEF funding and programming in UNDP's overall country programme. Partnerships at the municipal and provincial level, outside of implementation of GEF programmes, were developed with various levels of implementation. One notable partnership has been with the South African Local Government Association in the context of mainstreaming the SDGs and in the conduct of voluntary local reviews. This has provided a useful conduit for engagement with South African municipalities, in line with recommendations from the past CPD evaluation.[95]

Furthermore, some engagements with partners have demonstrated fertile ground for exploration, allowing the testing of innovative ideas and approaches without committing to long-term obligations. In this regard, the Accelerator Lab established in the country office since 2019 has played a pivotal role, establishing

[95] UNDP South Africa (2017), "Final Evaluation Report of the UNDP South Africa Country Programme, 2013–2017."

relationships with over 45 partners spanning the private sector, civil society, traditional development partners, UN agencies, and government institutions. Beyond the traditional partnerships usually established by UNDP, the Acceleration Lab also supported the outreach of the country office to smaller CSOs, including grassroots and community-based structures, which were not part of the country office partnership basis in the past. Drawing from interviews, in some cases the Lab has done well in organically growing partnerships and evolving them in concrete engagement, leveraging networking opportunities during knowledge exchange events, and engaging with the South African innovation ecosystem.

The strategic partnership between UNDP and other UN agencies in South Africa is illustrated through various collaborative efforts aimed at addressing key development challenges and advancing national priorities. Notably, UNDP, in partnership with UN Women, UNICEF, OHCHR, and ILO, jointly implemented the Social Protection programme in South Africa. Moreover, UNDP's funding partnerships with external development partners, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency, GIZ, and USAID, further enhanced the reach of its programme and overall contribution during this cycle. Additionally, the joint effort of UNDP and UNICEF to promote a green and circular economy aligns with South Africa's National Development Plan 2030. However, it was noted that these partnerships were mainly driven by the existence of funding opportunities from the MPTF thematic pooled fund or other sources. Outside of these funding opportunities, the evaluation observed little engagement with other UN agencies, including in areas of collaborative interest, for instance, with ILO on youth unemployment, nor with FAO or UNEP in the implementation of environment and natural resource management projects.

A similar dynamic was noted in UNDP's engagement with some national stakeholders, where partnerships were weakened by their focus on specific project executions and appeared more transactional than strategic. In some cases, it was found to significantly limit the potential of partnerships and, notably, the prospect for their scaling up. For instance, despite the perceived success of the initiatives by all stakeholders involved, the evaluation noted limited follow up and a lack of proactiveness from UNDP on the success of its TVET initiative with Toyota, despite its demonstrated success and potential for replication and scaling with other TVET colleges, sectors, and/or car manufacturers in South Africa. This absence of follow-up was noted as a missed opportunity to promote its replication by stakeholders who participated in this initiative during interviews.

Reflecting UNDP siloed project approach, among all the CO stakeholders met during this evaluation not a single partner had visibility or awareness about UNDP's activities and interventions outside of their direct project engagement, reflecting on the absence of synergies as previously noted. Interviews helped to identify potential missed opportunities to broaden existing partnerships and relationships beyond boundaries of project or thematic portfolios. Despite modest levels, several institutional partners recognized the importance of funding brought by UNDP, especially given current fiscal constraints, while at the same time noting that other modalities of engagement could be considered. Indeed, several partners indicated the potential scope for broader collaborative engagement outside of project boundaries or usual work modalities, noting the possibility for UNDP to engage more in co-creation and joint external resource mobilization. They also expressed some readiness to contribute their expertise to the design of projects and programmes in which they were not directly involved, highlighting the potential to further foster cross-sectoral collaboration at the government level.

Finding 19. Oversight and coordination: There are recurrent gaps in the oversight and strategic engagement of UNDP's work and, more broadly, in the United Nations in South Africa, which have not helped in fostering greater national ownership, accountability, and mutual understanding.

As per UNDP programme and operations policies and procedures, "appropriate management arrangements and oversight mechanisms need to be established at programme and project levels to ensure UNDP's accountability for activities, results and the use of resources, while at the same time fostering national ownership and alignment to national processes." The CPD stipulated as part of its programming arrangements that the country office "will convene quarterly stakeholder and portfolio steering committee meetings, including citizen led consultations, to garner their views and promote transparency and trust."[96]

A country programme board or implementing partners meeting was established during this programming cycle, with documentary evidence of at least three annual meetings between 2019 and 2021. Minutes available show that these meetings helped to bring together implementing partners and some of the national coordination bodies (such as the National Planning Committee; Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation; Department of International Relations and Cooperation; and National Treasury) to review project implementation, present progress to date, and identify challenges and next steps. While the added value of these meetings could not be assessed based on the meeting minutes, the occurrence of these meetings represents a relevant step to strengthen oversight and accountability to partners, as this has been a recurrent issue in the working arrangement between the government and UNDP and, more broadly, the United Nations.

Coordination challenges between UNDP/UN and the government is a recurrent and persistent issue, raised in the last CPD evaluation, 2013–2017 (conducted in 2017), but also in the 2008 joint evaluation of UN cooperation in South Africa carried out by the United Nations Evaluation Group. In 2017 the evaluation found that the absence of an overarching coordinating mechanism limited visibility and accountability over progress reporting and monitoring of UN efforts in the country. At the level of the UN system, reports shed light on continuing challenges to establish an adequate joint governance mechanism to steer United Nations entities in the implementation of the UNSDCF. Illustrating this dynamic, the UNSDCF for South Africa was signed and adopted by the government about two years after its start in 2022, and therefore after the adoption of the CPD of individual agencies. As per the 2023 UNSDCF progress report,[97] the jointly approved governance arrangements faced significant delays. The effective operationalization of the results groups, which are expected to drive the implementation of the UNSDCF, was still a work in progress at the time of the evaluation. Notably, government participation through the chairing of results groups had not yet been established. At the UNDP level, the organization of annual coordination meetings is noted as an important step; but challenges, notably in clarifying modalities for government cost sharing, have remained, and as mentioned earlier, knowledge of the scope of UNDP engagement in the country appeared limited among stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation.

[96] DP/DCP/ZAF/3, UNDP South Africa Country Programme Document, 2020–2025.
[97] United Nations South Africa, UNSDCF 2020–2025, Development Process and Implementation Status, 2023.

CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This chapter presents the evaluation conclusions on UNDP performance and contributions to development results in South Africa, as well as the recommendations and management response.

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Strategic Positioning: UNDP is recognized as a credible partner owing to its long-standing presence and partnership with South African Government stakeholders, and its ability to convene stakeholders and to leverage access to international expertise and global experiences. The full expression of UNDP's comparative advantage and added value has, however, been hindered by the lack of flexible and predictable funding to sustain internal office capacities, its programmatic partnerships, and core areas of its mandate.

UNDP is valued by its stakeholders in South Africa owing to its long-standing presence in the country, its access and ability to connect global knowledge and experiences to local contexts, its ability to convene stakeholders both vertically and horizontally, and its provision of international technical expertise. All this, coupled with Its long-standing presence in the country, have earned UNDP a strong reputation as a credible development partner. However, the funding context for UNDP in South Africa, given its upper middle-income status and current fiscal constraints, has limited its ability to fully showcase those aspects of its comparative advantage, and have challenged UNDP to meet stakeholder expectations. The lack of predictable and flexible funding, particularly in the area of inclusive growth and governance, significantly diminishes the ability of UNDP to develop comprehensive programmatic approaches, which results in the short-term, ad-hoc provision of technical external expertise and support, weakening the potential of established partnerships. While UNDP's business model underpins this challenge, this evaluation noted the low degree of government cost-sharing, while there appears to be opportunities and demand for support when concrete value can be added to government initiatives. However, engagement with the National Treasury on this critical issue has stalled.

Conclusion 2. Relevance: UNDP's interventions have sought to address critical development challenges in South Africa, and have remained responsive to emergent challenges, including emergencies related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequences of social unrest, and natural disasters. The implementation of the country programme is marked by limited internal synergies within and across its thematic portfolio, which have led to missed opportunities to test and demonstrate integrated solutions, and to potentially foster greater sectoral collaboration in the process.

UNDP's interventions have been well aligned with South Africa's national priorities, as framed in its National Development Plan and the Medium-Term Strategic Framework. Its broad mandate and modalities of work have enabled it to remain flexible to meet rising demands and to respond to emerging challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, deteriorating social cohesion, and natural disasters. While UNDP's work in an upper middle-income country such as South Africa is bound to be demand driven, the organization has also been able to supply programmatic offers that have stimulated interest and that serve as entry points for broader engagement. Albeit with limited resources, UNDP has been able to remain consistent with its human centred perspective mandate and the 'leaving no one behind' principle, notably through its inclusive growth portfolio and work of the Accelerator Lab.

On the other hand, there is room to strengthen considerations of social dimensions in its environmental work, not only to meet ecological goals but also to address the socio-economic challenges within communities. While the interventions implemented by UNDP South Africa have been coherent with national priorities, the evaluation noted missed opportunities to leverage relevant thematic and geographical synergies across the country programme thematic portfolios and to enhance the effectiveness of its interventions.

Though constrained by the limited and flexible nature of financing, the sets of interventions that were implemented also lacked the needed internal coherence, conceptually and geographically, to reinforce each other. Resulting organizational silos have not fostered a collaborative work environment whereby existing expertise and capacities are leveraged across portfolios to support the achievement of common goals, and have limited the ability of UNDP to demonstrate the added value of integrated development solutions.

Conclusion 3. Effectiveness: UNDP's effectiveness against stated CPD outputs was highly contingent on the availability of funding to sustain its engagement; and in this regard its contributions were more tangible in its environment portfolio, which has benefitted from multi-year funding through the GEF. Ad-hoc funding for inclusive growth and governance portfolios has affected the quality and depth of UNDP contributions, emphasizing a short-term focus and fragmentation in its engagement. While UNDP's resource mobilization efforts during this cycle can be deemed successful, they also present transaction costs and present a risk of focusing on the delivery of downstream implementation at the expense of upstream policy advice, as is expected of UNDP in an upper middle-income-country context.

Given the important reliance of UNDP on GEF financing, UNDP contributions have particularly stood out in this area of work, where the organization continued to support the expansion of South African protected areas as well as fostering an enabling environment for biodiversity finance and wind energy. UNDP has been able to record some of its highest share of annual expenditure from core and third-party financing in over a decade, which has permitted it to sustain programmatic engagement in the area of inclusive growth, and to a lesser extent in the area of governance. While a positive development, the nature of funding has meant that UNDP programmatic engagement was short-term and fragmented. It also placed a heavier burden on already stretched internal capacities as the bulk of financing sources required a direct implementation modality from UNDP. This represents a considerable risk, as the need for resource mobilization in a challenging context may push UNDP to act as a project implementer focused on delivery at the expense of its role as a policy advisor, consistent with the country's upper middle-income context.

Conclusion 4. Sustainability: The sustainability of UNDP's interventions presented a mixed outlook, with some interventions demonstrating strong ownership by partners and initial evidence of uptake, while many interventions appeared to be missing the necessary buy-in, showcased only limited policy support, and were weakly anchored with existing national initiatives. There were also weaknesses in UNDP's ability to demonstrate the impact and added value of interventions, which limited adaptive learning and UNDP's advocacy in promoting the uptake and/or scale-up of development solutions.

Despite modest resources and sometimes slow processes, UNDP has been able to record some success in terms of uptake of some of its interventions and support. Strong ownership and buy-in characterizes cases that have shown greater sustainability potential. In some cases, the innovative nature and high relevance of UNDP development solutions have sufficed to garner interest and build buy-in. However, several UNDP interventions, despite perceived success, have received limited attention and visibility from UNDP stakeholders, as well as limited follow-up and nurturing from UNDP. This has been notably reflected in the absence of exit strategies and/or initiatives for identifying and supporting pathways for uptake and scale-up. The dispersed nature of interventions on the ground and high dependence on downstream partner reporting limits UNDP's ability to validate findings and claim improvements on the ground, as it lacks bottom-up mechanisms for evidence collection. There is scant evidence of how the monitoring and evaluation of evidence generated has been utilized to inform cross-portfolio learning and strategic direction. Furthermore, limited investments have been considered to build a robust evidence base that would support the future uptake and scale-up of interventions. While funding constraints limit comprehensive programmatic engagement, there is scope for UNDP to strengthen its emphasis on post-intervention follow-up in its downstream work, and to invest more in promoting the effective uptake and scale-up of its interventions.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The next CPD should be underpinned by a detailed Theory of Change, cascading at the portfolio level, to help guide strategic direction and focus, promote internal coherence in UNDP interventions, and identify synergies to be operationalized in the implementation of the next country programme. The process to develop this Theory of Change should build on iterative internal and external consultations to define realistic objectives for UNDP support and ensure continued anchoring of UNDP interventions in national policy initiatives.

The next CPD should be guided by a comprehensive Theory of Change and cohesive interventions developed in close collaboration with national partners. The Theory of Change should clearly establish the conceptual interconnections between individual projects and across portfolios. A systemic mapping of initiatives against expected results would help map opportunities for synergies not only among projects and activities implemented by UNDP but also with those of other donors operating in the respective areas and across the UN system. In-depth and iterative consultation and participation of national stakeholders would support this effort and help reflect on the role UNDP can realistically play, especially given the changed governance landscape brought about by the last general elections. This process could then guide internal capacity needs assessments within the country office and across UNDP global and regional networks, with a view to ensuring the timely provision of support and helping to strengthen UNDP value proposition in its programme engagement. Regular monitoring and updating of a common framework could help sustain internal synergies, continuously identify opportunities, and foster structured learning and exchanges within the country office. Fostering greater interlinkages and synergies across interventions could also foster equivalent collaborations at the level of government.

Recommendation 2. UNDP should seek to systematically mainstream key aspects of its demonstrated comparative advantages into its interventions and engagement, placing emphasis on its human centred perspective, multi-stakeholder convening, and global knowledge and experience sharing.

UNDP stakeholders in South Africa unanimously recognize UNDP's value proposition as hinging on its reputation and credibility as a trusted international development partner, granting it access to global networks and knowledge, and its ability to convene and facilitate multi-stakeholder platforms for information sharing, collaboration, and consensus-building across different spheres of South African society. To sustain its positioning in the South African context, UNDP needs to strengthen these key aspects of its perceived comparative advantage and ensure their mainstreaming in all of its programmatic interventions. This will require enhancing internal capacities to identify suitable experiences and facilitate outreach in other UNDP programme countries, as well as refocusing its programmatic interventions, in light of limited funding, to avoid fragmentation of its support across too many themes, geographical areas, and stakeholders. In the absence of sustained financing for its country programme, UNDP should be selective in its programmatic engagement to avoid spreading its capacities too thinly, and to ensure the sustained quality of its interventions as opposed to the quantity.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should engage with the UNDP Regional Bureaux and UNDP Global Policy Network to proactively map and identify opportunities for knowledge exchanges aligned with South Africa policy aspirations and context, with a view to accelerate learning and uptake of experience while increasing the interactions and participation of UNDP's network in its programme in South Africa.

There is a strong culture and appetite for South-South cooperation and experience sharing in South Africa, both to gain from other programme country experiences and to share South Africa's experiences regionally. UNDP has to some extent been able to fulfil this expectation during this country programme, though

funding availability had in some instances jeopardized initial plans. In this regard, there is scope to expand this aspect of UNDP's value proposition by proactively mapping opportunities for peer learning, building on the organization's global network, but also more broadly on the assets and capabilities of the UN system. Strengthening access to UNDP and the United Nations' global expertise, as well as leveraging its global presence and making it an integral and more visible part of what UNDP can offer, could help strengthen its perceived thought leadership and added value.

Recommendation 4. UNDP should seek to strengthen its capacity to generate compelling evidence of the success or failure of its demonstration projects with the view of informing replication and potential scaling-up of its successful intervention model. Given limited internal capacities, UNDP should consider leveraging existing partnerships to augment its monitoring and evaluation capacities.

The country office knowledge management system, while meeting corporate compliance requirements, has fallen short of supporting learning and programme adaptation. The evaluation found limited evidence of detailed assessment conducted by the CO or commissioned to document performance and enhance understanding of the factors of success. Given the emphasis placed on the implementation of demonstration projects, which is consistent with the country context, the uptake of UNDP solutions by national stakeholders will hinge upon UNDP's ability to provide convincing and robust evidence over the impact and value for money to enable the scaling potential of an intervention. In this regard, enhancing rigorous evidence generation should be seen both as a way to continuously demonstrate UNDP added value and as a potential source of thought leadership in the country. UNDP has already established working relationships with national stakeholders, such as the water resource commission, the Department of Science Innovation, and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), for example, which have existing protocols to conduct impact assessments that could be leveraged in this regard. Similarly, UNDP's partnership with the Seriti Institute for the conduct of large-scale surveys in the mining sector could also serve as a useful model to be expanded and considered in other areas of the UNDP programme in South Africa. In addition, partnerships established with CSIR and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) under the Rural Television White Space Network Operators Support Programme, whereby FCDO provided technical support for monitoring and evaluating, is another example that could be followed.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should actively engage in strategic consultations with the National Treasury and other key governmental stakeholders to jointly identify the appropriate working modalities, reporting, and oversight arrangements to enable government cost sharing.

Given the funding landscape and operating costs in South Africa, UNDP's level of engagement in South Africa and its ability to consistently demonstrate its comparative advantage will hinge upon its ability to attract government cost sharing. Interviews during this evaluation have highlighted the potential for UNDP to support local stakeholders in joint resource mobilization as well as government cost sharing opportunities. While UNDP and national institutions have faced some roadblocks, recent and past experiences demonstrate that there are pathways and conditions to unlock government cost sharing contribution. UNDP operational and development services support could be more fully leveraged to realize efficiency gains and complement the organization's human perspective in the advancement of national development priorities, as seen in other upper middle-income countries where UNDP operates. Engagement channels are, however, necessary to ensure that the National Treasury is fully engaged, and that mutual understanding is fostered about ways to move forward.

3.3 Key recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1.

The next CPD should be underpinned by a detailed Theory of Change, cascading at the portfolio level, to help guide strategic direction and focus, promote internal coherence in UNDP interventions, and identify synergies to be operationalized in the implementation of the next country programme. Process to develop this Theory of Change should build on iterative internal and external consultations to define realistic objectives for UNDP support and to ensure continued anchoring of UNDP interventions in national policy initiatives.

Management response:

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Conduct comprehensive internal and external engagements to inform the development of the new Theory of Change, which is strategically aligned to address national priorities and serves as a foundational element in the formulation of the new Country Programme Document (CPD).	March/April	Senior Management Team, M&E unit		

RECOMMENDATION 2.

UNDP should seek to systematically mainstream key aspects of its demonstrated comparative advantages into its interventions and engagement, placing emphasis on its human centred perspective, multi-stakeholder convening, and global knowledge and experience sharing.

Management response:

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Clearly define the Value Proposition and UNDP offer emerging from the ongoing strategic review, ensuring alignment with organizational priorities and the needs of stakeholders.	March/April	Senior Management Team		

RECOMMENDATION 3.

UNDP should engage with the UNDP Regional Bureaux and UNDP Global Policy Network to proactively map and identify opportunities for knowledge exchanges aligned with South Africa policy aspirations and context, with a view to accelerate learning and uptake of experience, while increasing interactions and participation of UNDP's network in the UNDP programme in South Africa

Management response:

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Apply and leverage the knowledge generated from global, regional, and GPN experts to position UNDP as a thought leader that brings development solutions that help to meet the country's aspirations. This knowledge will be applied throughout the programme roll out, but will be part and parcel of the CPD design and consultation/ quality review process.	February to November 2025	Senior Management Team		

RECOMMENDATION 4.

UNDP should seek to strengthen its capacity to generate compelling evidence of the success or failure of its demonstration projects with the view of informing replication and potential scaling up of its successful intervention model. Given limited internal capacities, UNDP should consider leveraging existing partnerships to augment its monitoring and evaluation capacities.

Management response:

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Appoint full-time Communications Specialist as part of strengthening the Communications Unit with human resources and equipment.	March	Senior Management Team		
4.2 Allocate budgets for all pilot projects and leverage partner (donors, government, beneficiaries) capacities to document and disseminate success stories and impact from the pilots.	March	All programmes, Communications Team		

4.3 Revisit data sources for the next CPD to leverage existing credible and reliable sources that are nationally monitored or linked to Social Protection/SDG-related indicators.	June	M&E team	This will be part of the CPD Results and Resources Framework development.	

RECOMMENDATION 5.

UNDP should actively engage in strategic consultations with the National Treasury and other key governmental stakeholders to identify jointly the appropriate working modalities, reporting, and oversight arrangements to enable government cost sharing.

Management response:

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Conduct breakfast dialogues with strategic partners for cost sharing and opportunities for collaboration.	October	Senior Management Team	2/3 sessions in 2025	
5.2 Re-establish relationship with the National Treasury, leveraging UNDP G20 support and have an entry point for our work.	February to November	Senior Management Team, Africa Sustainable Finance Hub		
5.3 Revive the CPD programme board and have a co-chair from either the Ministry of Finance, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, or Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation, and align our working arrangements and modalities with government clusters.	September	Senior Management, M&E Unit, and Communications Unit	This activity will be carried out during the CPD endorsement and approval process. The CO will also seek to engage with the permanent representation of South Africa in Headquarters to secure this level of engagement.	

5.4 Expand and package district development model projects at the municipal level to create more opportunities for co-financing through government cost sharing (scaling up of current pilots and demonstration projects).	September	All programmes, M&E and Communications units	This is linked to action 4.2. September is the earliest that we can expect to see results from the subnational-level pilot projects.	

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database.

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/24318.

Annex 1. Evaluation terms of reference

Annex 2. Evaluation matrix

Annex 3. Country at a glance

Annex 4. Country office at a glance

Annex 5. Project list

Annex 6. Status of Country Programme Document (CPD) Outcome and Output Indicators Matrix

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