

# The Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa: Key actors, roles, relationships, and gaps

## Summary

The successful implementation and achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) is dependent upon global, national and local partnerships with actors from the United Nations system, government, civil society, business and knowledge generators addressing innovation through research and development. Each of these clusters of actors have specific roles and responsibilities towards the SDGs including good governance, creating an enabling environment, knowledge generation, advocacy and awareness and implementation. In South Africa, strong relationships already exist between various actors to address development targets. However, the relationships between government and business, between business and civil society, and even between government and civil society are weak. While all actors in South Africa are committed to achieving the SDGs, this will require the presence of mechanisms and platforms to support and encourage multi-actor and multi-cluster partnerships. Interventions that would enable such partnerships need to be urgently defined. The CSIR endeavours to assist in the development of mechanisms that will enable such partnerships towards achieving the SDG goals within South Africa.

## Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1	<b>NO POVERTY</b>
2	<b>ZERO HUNGER</b>
3	<b>GOOD HEALTH &amp; WELL-BEING</b>
4	<b>QUALITY EDUCATION</b>
5	<b>GENDER EQUALITY</b>
6	<b>CLEAN WATER &amp; SANITATION</b>
7	<b>AFFORDABLE &amp; CLEAN ENERGY</b>
8	<b>DECENT WORK &amp; ECONOMIC GROWTH</b>
9	<b>INDUSTRY, INNOVATION &amp; INFRASTRUCTURE</b>
10	<b>REDUCED INEQUALITIES</b>
11	<b>SUSTAINABLE CITIES &amp; COMMUNITIES</b>
12	<b>RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION &amp; PRODUCTION</b>
13	<b>CLIMATE ACTION</b>
14	<b>LIFE BELOW WATER</b>
15	<b>LIFE ON LAND</b>
16	<b>PEACE, JUSTICE &amp; STRONG INSTITUTIONS</b>
17	<b>PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</b>

## Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as the main international mechanism for guiding development in all United Nations member states. They comprise of 17 goals and 169 targets, embodying a universally shared common global vision towards ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all.

South Africa (SA)'s contribution to the SDG negotiation process was informed by the priorities of its National Development Plan (NDP). The SDGs are broadly aligned with the objectives of the NDP and the accompanying Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), which is the five year plan through which the NDP will be implemented. By implementing and meeting the objectives of the MTSF, SA will be contributing towards achieving its SDG targets.

## Achieving the NDP outcomes and SDGs targets

The successful achievement of the NDP outcomes and SDG targets centres on SA's capacity to implement policies and create broad-based partnerships across all sectors of society (i.e. involving the public and business sectors as well as civil society organisations). This implies that government cannot be expected to realise the ambitious development goals linked to the NDP and SDGs on its own, but that all actors in society, including government, business, and civil society, have a role and responsibility towards contributing to the NDP and SDGs. This is emphasised in SDG 17, which is about creating partnerships to achieve the SDGs.

This Briefing Note explores the roles and responsibilities of specific clusters of actors towards the implementation, monitoring and reporting of development objectives and targets outlined in the SDGs from a South African perspective. These clusters include international organisations, specifically the United Nations (UN), as well as government, business, civil society, and the research and development (R&D) community. We identify the relationships between groups of actors in the clusters and between clusters, determine opportunities and constraints, and make suggestions on how SA can start overcoming challenges.

Information in this Briefing Notes was obtained through desktop research, as well as engagements with some of the actors themselves.



### United Nations cluster

The UN is the main inter-governmental organisation involved in spearheading and coordinating all aspects of the SDGs, from their initial development and negotiation, to implementation, and monitoring, reporting and review.

The UN system has a number of mechanisms in place to coordinate and provide support and guidance to member countries in their efforts to implement the SDGs. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is the main organ of the UN responsible for coordinating efforts towards achieving the SDGs, and the unifying platform for integration, implementation, follow-up and review. The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which meets annually under the auspices of ECOSOC, is mandated to "provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on the 2030 Agenda's implementation and follow-up; keep track of progress; spur coherent policies informed by evidence, science and country experiences; as well as address new and emerging issues" (United Nations, 2016). The HLPF is also the central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the SDGs (United Nations, 2016). South Africa participates in the HLPF through the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).

In terms of monitoring and reporting, the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG -SDG) was formed to develop an indicator framework for the goals and targets and to support its implementation of the

SDG's. The South African Development Community (SADC), including South Africa, is represented by Botswana on the IAEG - SDG. The UN High Level Group (HLG) for partnership, coordination and capacity building for statistics is tasked with providing strategic leadership on the SDG implementation process and statistical monitoring and reporting. A key initiative to achieve the HLG's task focuses on improving data and statistics to help governments track progress towards achieving sustainable development. This initiative is being led by the Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) on Data Revolution. Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) represents SA on the HLG and the IEAG on Data Revolution. StatsSA is responsible for South Africa's country level statistics and by implication the indicators and data relating to progress towards achieving the SDGs. The SDG indicators provide an opportunity for monitoring and reporting initiatives in South Africa to become more streamlined and coordinated. However, the large number of indicators (currently 229 indicators are proposed), and the lack of resources for data generation and collection, remain challenging.

The UN has agency offices within SA, all of which play an important role in terms of working with stakeholders and partners in the country to implement initiatives aimed at making progress toward the achievement of specific SDGs. These initiatives are conducted in partnership with government, municipalities, civil society organisations, as well as science councils and universities. There are, however, limited partnerships with business, which the UN agencies would like to develop further.



## Government Cluster

Government institutions, by virtue of their governance and implementation mandates, have a critical role to play in implementing the SDGs in the South African context. All line departments of the South African government will form part of a proposed National Working Group. The purpose of this group, and particularly the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), as its proposed convener, will be to ensure a coordinated and integrated national effort towards the domestication, implementation and international reporting of the SDGs. This includes the coordination of an integrated follow-up and review process as well as an extensive stakeholder participation exercise, including civil society, business, academia and a range of non-state actors. In addition to the overarching purpose of the proposed National Working Group, each of its core members has a particular responsibility towards implementing the SDGs in SA. However, until such time as the National Working Group has been officially established, and its functions and operations have been finalised by Cabinet, the members of the group are not able to act decisively and with authority in the SDG space.

Due to the explicit aim of South African government institutions such as DPME, DIRCO and StatsSA to align the SDGs to the NDP as closely as possible, and the strong emphasis by national government on implementing the NDP, it should be feasible to considerably streamline the two reporting processes so as to minimise the reporting burden on individual line departments. While this exercise will require considerable effort by line departments it does present a valuable opportunity to minimise the reporting burden.

Challenges facing the government cluster include a lack of partnerships within and between the national, provincial and local levels of government, as well as between government and a number of actors that have a critical contribution to make towards achieving the SDGs. Government reportedly also finds it difficult to develop the appropriate mechanisms and know-how to establish such partnerships. There is also a need for awareness raising across government structures and society about the SDGs and their alignment to the NDP.

In addition, there are challenges relating to the Means of Implementation (MoI) for the SDGs, as well as the financing thereof. With donor aid for middle income countries, such as SA on the decline there are real concerns regarding how the SDGs will be financed. There is a need for greater efforts by the country to finance its own development by improving domestic resource mobilisation, including strengthening tax administration, better harnessing natural resource revenue, and curbing illicit financial flows. In this regard government has a catalytic role in attracting private sector financing. Significant political will is, however, required in order to mobilise the resources needed to implement the SDGs nationally.



## Civil Society Cluster

Civil society organisations (CSOs) work to advance the common interests of their members and are well-positioned to play a key role in SDG implementation. They can provide a link between communities and other key stakeholders. In the context of SDGs, CSOs in SA operate in a variety of ways and have linkages to and collaborate with different organisations, including international and regional agencies, government, and business.

CSOs that explicitly state the alignment of their work to specific SDGs open up opportunities for collaboration and partnerships on SDG work as they are easily identifiable by organisations doing similar work. CSOs that have a policy of working with government can facilitate government-civil society cooperation. Resultant government and CSO partnerships can facilitate learning and skills sharing, as well as, awareness-raising about the SDGs among diverse stakeholder groups because both government and CSO networks are required to reach people at different levels. Challenges for SDG implementation are when CSOs do not work with government and result in limited access to the skills, networks and regulatory authority that either party would have brought to such partnerships.

The limited interaction between CSOs and business can be seen as a further threat to successful SDG implementation. Structural transformation, such as change in the relative importance of different sectors and activities of an economy over time, is core to SDG implementation and business has a critical contribution to make to such transformation. Inclusive partnerships that involve business can facilitate awareness about SDGs, resource mobilisation and financial investments into SDG implementation.





## Business Cluster

This cluster of actors has a significant role to play towards the alignment and implementation of the SDGs, especially considering that industry and business activities are a driver of impacts on social and ecological resources. Business, therefore, has a dual function: firstly, to address the global development challenges, and secondly, to grow and harness the opportunities that have arisen in light of these challenges. Ultimately business actors are essential for SA to achieve the SDGs in that they have the ability to create sustainable, productive and decent employment, economic prosperity, resilient infrastructure and innovation that creates sustainable growth and opportunities for all (IHRB, 2015; WBCSD, 2016).

A number of organisations have defined the case for the engagement of business with the SDGs. These organisations, which include the UN Global Compact, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), have specifically highlighted how business aligns with the SDGs and the benefits that alignment and reporting on the goals would have for business. Relevant guidelines that have been produced include the SDG Compass and the SDG Industry Matrix. The organisations mentioned also have regional affiliates within SA and therefore offer services that are relevant to South African businesses. Similarly, large international businesses either based in SA or with SA offices are showing commitment through corporate social responsibility and aligning their products/service towards achieving SDGs. The smaller or more localised businesses generally have not yet established a need or possibly do not have the resources to engage with the same level of enthusiasm.

Businesses have the opportunity to be actors of change in that they have the ability to mobilise funding opportunities to implement and monitor progress towards meeting the SDG targets. The challenge associated with this, however, is creating an enabling environment that provides the right incentives, policies and regulations to stimulate business to contribute in a meaningful way.

Currently, the South African business domain is characterised by a lack of formal relationships and partnerships between business, government and civil society. While public-private partnerships are nothing new, the SDGs and specifically SDG 17 calls on each country to investigate ways to stimulate and strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships.



## Research and Development Cluster

At a broad level, the R&D cluster contributes to the SDGs through training, skills development, research, development and innovation. For the purposes of this Briefing Note, the R&D landscape focuses on the country's universities and research councils, whose chief mandate it is to undertake R&D related to the SDGs and/or in the national interest.

Education, training and research are funded from a variety of sources including government, business, UN agencies and other international funding agencies. In addition to their research capacity, the educational and training function of universities and research councils is critical to building SA's ability to implement the SDGs. Such education and training not only includes degrees conferred by universities, but also mid-career – and other – short courses. In addition, numerous research institutes within universities perform a critical function in supporting the country's move towards the SDGs facilitating work across university departments and linking research to user groups within society (e.g. governmental decision-makers, civil society, business and academia). The role of university institutes and research councils typically goes beyond research, education and training to include aspects such as raising awareness and informing governmental policy agendas.

An initial observation is that the R&D cluster would benefit from increased coordination between the various institutions around research directed towards the SDGs. There seems to be an opportunity for improved collaboration and partnerships, not only to ensure complementarities and efficiency, but also to enable more multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research.



## Conclusion

SGD 17 specifically emphasises the need for partnerships and cooperation to enable the realisation of the SDGs. Any good relationship, be it between individuals, organisations or different groups of actors in society, is based on trust and confidence. We therefore need partnerships that go beyond the traditional public-private partnerships and that are accountable, and people- and planet-centred. An integrated approach implies reducing the barriers created by institutional silos and strengthening sectoral and subnational coordination across implementing entities.

When looking at the roles and responsibilities of the clusters it is clear that each cluster has a particular function to perform to enable SA to achieve the SDG targets. The UN cluster provides governance and support from an international perspective; the government cluster creates an enabling and monitoring environment for the SDGs to be implemented in SA; civil society works towards creating advocacy and awareness in the SDG space; the R&D cluster provides the knowledge, technologies and innovation required to implement the SDGs; and the business cluster does much of the implementation towards the achievement of the SDG targets (Figure 1). These different functions highlight the need for integration and partnerships between different actors if the SDGs are to be achieved. While strong partnerships are critical for the successful achievement of the SDG targets, it is not yet clear what form such partnerships might take in practice, or how they can best be made to work.

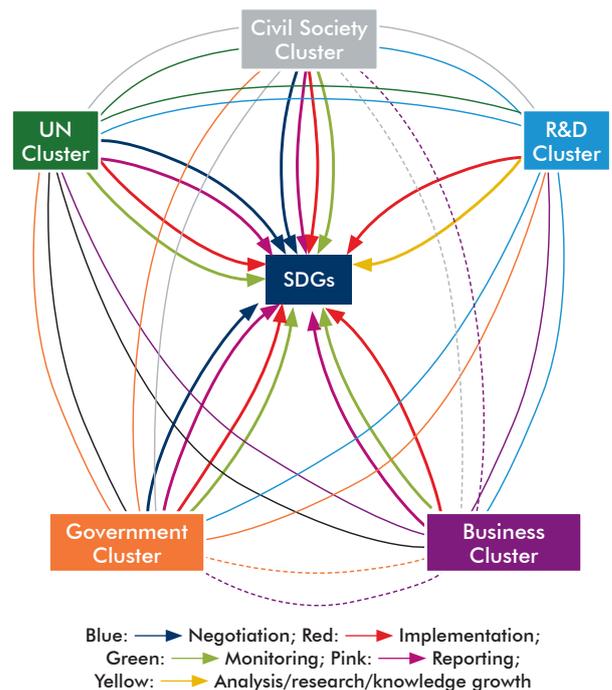
The findings of our initial engagements with the groups of actors discussed in this Briefing Note are depicted in Figure 2. This figure depicts an integrative summary of each group's role and responsibility towards implementing the SDGs, as well as the relationships between the groups. In most cases, strong relationships already exist between the actors to address the SDG and NDP linked development targets (depicted by the solid lines). However, the relationships between government and business, between business and civil society, and between government and civil society (depicted by the dotted lines) are generally considered to be weak. From our research we conclude that many actors in SA are committed to achieving the NDP and SDG-related development goals. Despite this commitment, the CSIR team has identified the need for mechanisms and platforms to support and encourage multi-actor and multi-cluster partnerships and to provide leadership and learning on successful partnership arrangements.

As pioneers of sustainability science, evidence-based policy making, and leaders in technology development, the CSIR endeavours to assist in the development of mechanisms that will enable the actors involved in the NDP and SDG space to form partnerships aligned with achieving the NDP and SDG goals. Furthermore, the CSIR conducts research to develop an understanding of the systematic challenges and opportunities that characterise each of these goals. The findings of this research have the potential to enable the respective actors to define innovative means to address the particular development objectives which they are most closely linked to.

**Figure 1. The key functions of each cluster in terms of their roles and responsibilities towards the achievement of the SDGs**



**Figure 2. Summary of the roles and responsibilities of the five clusters of actors towards the SDGs**



## References

---

Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), 2015. State of Play: Business and the sustainable development goals. Mind the gap-Challenges for implementation. Online. Available: <https://www.ihrb.org/pdf/state-of-play/Business-and-the-SDGs.pdf>. Accessed 14 June 2016.

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), 2016. Delivering on the sustainable development goals: The inclusive business approach. Online. Available: <https://www.wbcsd.org/contentwbc/download/407/4378>. Accessed 13 September 2016.

United Nations, 2016. High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Online. Available: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>. Accessed 30 June 2016.

## Acronyms

---

<b>CSIR:</b>	Council of Scientific and Industrial Research
<b>CSOs:</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>DIRCO:</b>	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
<b>DPME:</b>	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>GRI:</b>	Global Reporting Initiative
<b>HLG:</b>	High level group
<b>HLPF:</b>	High Level Political Forum
<b>MDG:</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>Mol:</b>	Means of Implementation
<b>NDP:</b>	National Development Plan
<b>R&amp;D:</b>	Research and Development
<b>SA:</b>	South Africa
<b>SADC:</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>SDG:</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UN:</b>	United Nations
<b>WBCSD:</b>	World Business Council for Sustainable Development

## Authors

---

Lorren Haywood, Nikki Funke, Anton Nahman, Connie Musvoto and Michelle Auduoin  
Natural Resources and the Environment  
CSIR

## Contact us

---

Dr Lorren Haywood  
Lhaywood@csir.co.za  
012 841 2885