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National Progress Report in the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda

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- Social Housing Regulatory Authority
- Community Schemes Ombud Service

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFIS	Advanced Fire Information System
AFUS	African Forum for Urban Safety
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BNG	Breaking New Ground
BOC	Bus Operating Company
BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
CBD	Central Business District
CBO	Community-based Organisation
COGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
COSUP	Community-oriented Substance Use Programme
CPSI	Centre for Public Service Innovation
CSG	Child Support Grant
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CSP	City Support Programme
DCOG	Department of Cooperative Governance
DDM	District Development Model
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
DHS	Department of Human Settlements
DLRRD	Department of Land Reform and Rural Development
DMC	Disaster Management Centre
DMRE	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
DPWI	Department of Public Works and Infrastructure
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DSBD	Department of Small Business Development
DSD	Department of Social Development
DWS	Department of Water and Sanitation
EGDI	E-government Development Index
EPHP	Enhanced People's Housing Process
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
FBS	Free Basic Services
FPL	Food Poverty Line
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
IBT	Innovative Building Technologies
ICM	Intermediate City Municipality
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IGR	Intergovernmental Relations
iRAP	International Road Assessment Programme
IRDP	Integrated Housing Development Programme
ISUPG	Informal Settlements Upgrading Partnership Grant

IUDF	Integrated Urban Development Framework
IUDG	Integrated Urban Development Grant
IWMP	Integrated Waste Management Plan
JET	Just Energy Transition
LGES	Local Government Equitable Share
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MBT	Minibus Taxi
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
MTDP	Medium Term Development Plan
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NHFC	National Housing Finance Corporation
NMBM	Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality
NPC	National Planning Commission
NSDF	National Spatial Development Framework
NUA	New Urban Agenda
NUF	National Urban Forum
NWMS	National Waste Management Strategy
PDIA	Problem-driven Iterative Adaptation
PHP	People's Housing Process
PIE Act	Prevention of Illegal Eviction and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act
PPD	Planning and Precinct Development
RD	Reconstruction and Development Plan
RIM	Regional Information Model
SAAQIS	South African Air Quality Information System
SACN	South African Cities Network
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDF	Spatial Development Framework
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SHRA	Social Housing Regulatory Authority
SLP	Social and Labour Plan
SPLUMA	Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act
SRD	Social Relief of Distress (grant)
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation
StratHub	National Strategic Hub
TIA	Technology Innovation Agency
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UISP	Upgrading Informal Settlements Programme
UN	United Nations
UN-Habitat	UN Human Settlements Programme
USRG	Urban Safety Reference Group

Foreword

I am pleased to present this second Country Report on progress in South Africa's implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA). Adopted in 2016, the NUA is a global multi-stakeholder commitment to addressing urbanisation over a period of 20 years, from 2016 to 2036. This second report is the product of extensive and all-inclusive stakeholder engagements at various spheres of government and sectors of society throughout the length and breadth of our beautiful land. We express deep appreciation to all the stakeholders who ensured that the country heeds the call made in the blueprint of the NUA, for countries to review progress of its implementation every four years and to make voluntary inputs to the UN Secretary-General's quadrennial report, which will be presented to the UN General Assembly in September 2026, as a mid-term assessment of the NUA.

Some of the stakeholders that played a critical role in the compilation of this report include the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), which coordinates government-wide implementation of the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) and the NUA localisation mechanism in our country. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) enabled seamless engagements with our local government structures, bringing together political leaders, public servants and their sectoral sub-national structures, such as the Working Group on Human Settlements and intermediate city municipalities, which are at the forefront of the implementation of the IUDF. The South African Cities Network (SACN) played a crucial role in conceiving the report compilation process, facilitating stakeholder engagements and drafting the report, working closely with my department.

Our stakeholder engagements included brainstorming sessions, preparatory meetings, workshops, site visits and open social participation through online submissions of information and data on cross-cutting projects located in the cities and communities. The selected projects were to advance the objectives of the NUA and the IUDF service delivery programmes. Participants in the engagements included representatives from all spheres of government, community-based organisations and activists, civil society organisations, the private sector, professionals, and the research and academic community.

The Department of Human Settlements (DHS) is the official representative of the South African Government in the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Therefore, capitalising on my previous experience at COGTA, I fully embraced the department's efforts to promote a multi-level and multi-governance approach to the localisation of the NUA and the commitment to compile periodic reports such as this one.



MS THEMBISILE SIMELANE

Minister of Human
Settlements, MP

The compilation of the second country report took place at a time when the world, of which South Africa is an integral part, was battling with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises, such as environmental and climate change issues that need even more urgent attention and solutions, and interstate political conflicts that threaten international stability and cooperation on developmental matters such as the NUA. At the same time, the exacerbation of social risks, such as inequality and rapid migration, have a direct impact on the implementation of urban development policies, induced by increased demands for basic services such as housing, health, education, water, sanitation, etc. What binds all these issues is the increasing pressure on finite public resources required to produce and implement timely interventions.

Although recent data demonstrates that South Africa has made important progress in implementing the NUA's transformative commitments, this progress has been mitigated by the profundity of poverty and inequality in the country. Furthermore, our developmental challenges in urban spaces continue to be dominated by high unemployment, housing deficits due to demand being higher than the supply of affordable and rental units, and inadequate public transport and essential services. Consistent with global trends, rapid urbanisation also strains existing infrastructure and is characterised by high levels of crime and urban sprawl, through the mushrooming of informal settlements and slums.

The government is making strides to address the urban challenges. These include the review of the IUDF Implementation Framework, which entails the strengthening of the leadership and coordination structures across government with full participation of critical stakeholders. The DHS revised the White Paper on Human Settlements, which was adopted by Cabinet in December 2024. Other processes in full swing are related to the reform of human settlements policies and the legislative framework, with the main goal being to accelerate service delivery.

In 2024, the government, working in partnership with stakeholders such as SALGA and the SACN, launched the inaugural National Urban Forum (NUF), in accordance with the provisions of the NUA implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Some of the NUF's objectives are adjusted annually, but others remain constant and include using this national multi-stakeholder platform to assess and accelerate the achievement of the targets of the sustainable development goals by addressing emerging urban challenges. These include promoting low carbon and disaster-resilient urban development, constructing sustainable human settlements and showcasing innovative approaches to inclusive and spatially just urban planning.

The conclusion of negotiations with UN-Habitat to open a Country Office in South Africa is another major milestone in our efforts to ensure that the transformative commitments of the NUA not only find expression in our

national development policies but, more importantly, are executed through social programmes that bring together all relevant stakeholders in the urban space. The experiences of our country's three decades of democracy has taught us that the government sets commendable precedents in relation to stakeholder consultations for public policy formulation. However, going forward, and as indicated in this report, stakeholders have to be fully engaged beyond policy-making through creating spaces and opportunities for them to contribute to public investments and to actively implement the agreed policies.

In relation to our ongoing policy reforms, the DHS is increasingly forging domestic partnerships for housing finance strategies. We are actively increasing access to additional social housing funding models in cooperation with essential national departments. The aim is to establish flexible financing avenues tailored for various household income levels in order to enhance both access and affordability for eligible families. It is crucial that diverse partners within the housing sector forge public-private partnerships anchored in community needs rather than mere business interests. We believe that the government should facilitate private sector investment in public human settlements along with the necessary infrastructure support services. Financial institutions must also be encouraged to lend to low- and middle-income earners, thereby minimising dependency on the fiscus and government subsidies.

In this report, stakeholders across the board declared their willingness and readiness to work closely with national government in the implementation of the NUA. My department is already responding to this interest by reviving regular interactions with different constituencies through the ministerial oversight and service delivery programmes, such as Title Deeds Fridays. In institutionalising these public and stakeholder engagements, the UN-Habitat Country Office will assist in convening stakeholders, as a facilitator of our national dialogues on urbanisation and human settlements issues. The focus is to promote transparency and accountability and, even more critically, to respond to the call of all stakeholders to engage with each other regularly and not only when the next four-year progress report on the NUA is being compiled.

Effective multi-stakeholder and multi-level collaborations will undoubtedly enable us to deliver on the three apex priorities of the seventh administration of our vibrant and emerging democracy. The priorities are aimed at delivering inclusive jobs, stimulating economic growth, reducing high levels of poverty and the cost of living, and building a capable, ethical and developmental state that is responsive to the basic needs of the populace.

It is generally accepted that leadership is a shared responsibility; thus, we will intensify our efforts to ensure that stakeholders across the public and private sectors, civil society, international organisations and academia collaboratively build a better and brighter future for our current and future generations. Regular and inclusive stakeholder engagement will serve as forums for securing all-of-society commitments and political will towards the achievements of the NUA commitments and will also be part of national platforms to address implementation constraints and to assess, monitor and review progress on our national urban development policies.

Executive Summary

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) National Progress Report provides an update on South Africa's implementation of the NUA, a global, cross-sectoral framework adopted in 2016 by UN-Habitat to guide the planning and development of sustainable cities. Domestically, this framework is localised through key policies, including the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF), the implementation of which is intricately linked to the implementation of the NUA.

South Africa is a highly urbanised country, and significant progress has been made in implementing the NUA. However, the report highlights that progress is tempered by deep structural inequalities, poverty and unemployment, which are exacerbated by spatial injustice and the proliferation of informal settlements. The report focuses on governance challenges and the critical need for improved intergovernmental collaboration, enhanced municipal capacity and meaningful engagement with all societal stakeholders to achieve a more equitable and integrated urban future.

The data-driven, evidence-based methodology used integrates extensive stakeholder engagement to reflect diverse perspectives. The report is rich in quantitative data, including key indicators linked to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and covers the majority of the NUA indicators. It also includes rich qualitative data and features numerous "local good practice" case studies, showcasing community-led initiatives in areas such as mobility, waste management and solar energy. In addition, the report draws on qualitative insights from South Africa's inaugural National Urban Forum (NUF) in 2024.

The report is structured around the NUA's four transformative commitments: Sustainable Urban Development for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty, Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All, Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development, and Effective Implementation. The fifth part, the Stakeholder Consultation Report, captures in detail the extensive nationwide, all-of-society consultation workshops that took place to gather data and information that informed the report. Finally, the report concludes with Strategic Ways Forward, proposing key actions to accelerate implementation by 2036.

This report has been prepared by the Department of Human Settlements, in partnership with the Department of Cooperative Governance, the South African Local Government Association and the South African Cities Network.

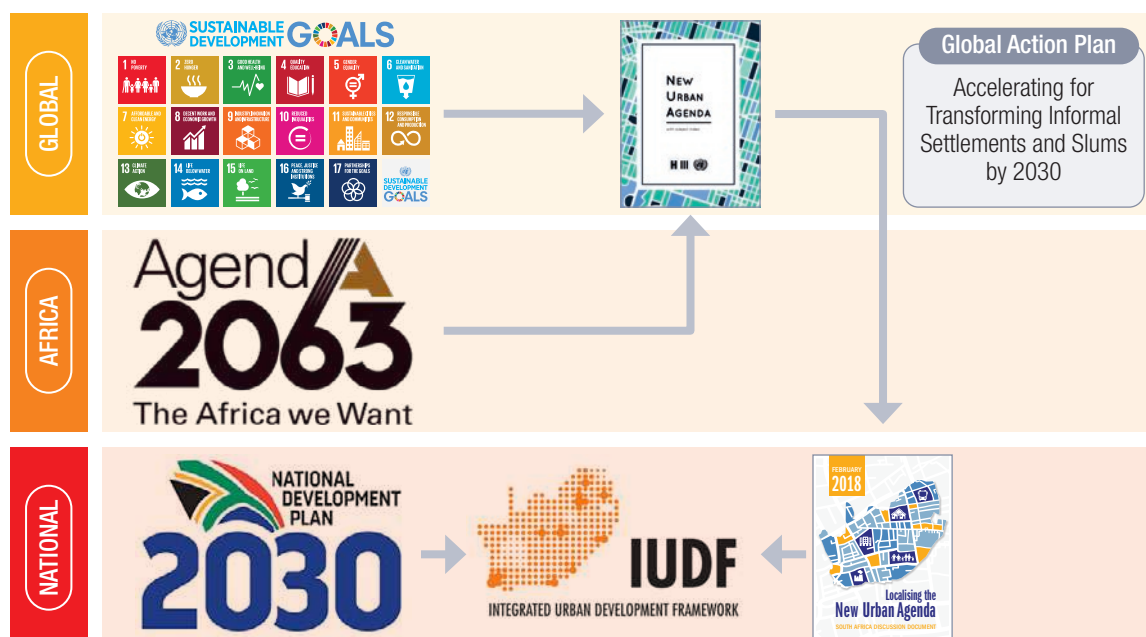
Introduction

In 2016, the United Nations (UN) adopted the New Urban Agenda (NUA) at the third UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urbanisation (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador. This global, cross-sectoral framework guides efforts to plan, manage and develop sustainable, inclusive and resilient cities. It positions urban areas at the forefront of addressing the pressing societal, economic and environmental challenges of poverty, inequality, unemployment and climate change, which are manifestations of the unsustainable nature of current development pathways. Like other UN member states that have adopted the NUA, South Africa has localised and implemented this framework through a broad suite of national and sub-national policies and regulations. This localisation process is undergirded by the following critical frameworks:

The [National Development Plan \(NDP\) 2030](#), which outlines South Africa's long-term strategic vision and is the roadmap guiding the country's development. It identifies poverty, inequality and exclusion as interlinked challenges stemming from apartheid-era spatial and economic legacies. The NDP calls for greater awareness and discussion on the future of our cities, towns and villages, as the first and crucial step towards addressing these historical challenges. It also underscores the need to integrate the country's urban and rural areas, which form parts of a continuum.

The [Integrated Urban Development Framework \(IUDF\)](#) and its associated [implementation plans](#) set out how South Africa can transform and restructure its towns and cities, guided by the vision of creating liveable, safe and resource-efficient cities. The IUDF identifies nine policy levers and three cross-cutting issues (namely rural-urban interdependence, urban resilience and urban safety) for managing urbanisation and achieving the interrelated aims of improving living conditions, creating jobs and developing the economy as envisioned in the NDP. The IUDF promotes spatial transformation, social cohesion and inclusive urban economies, focusing on the needs of marginalised urban populations, particularly residents of informal settlements, youth, women and people with disabilities. It recognises that dismantling the inherited patterns of spatial exclusion will require improved access to public transport, housing and socio-economic infrastructure and participatory urban governance. South Africa's Localising the NUA Framework aligns the IUDF with the NUA.

Figure 0.1: Policy environment for urban policy and practice in South Africa



South Africa is highly urbanised. As of 2023, almost 70% of its population lived in cities and urban areas (Figure 0.2). Over the years, urbanisation has steadily increased, reflecting economic and social shifts. Today, over half of South Africa's population live in the 17 largest metros and municipalities (Figure 0.3).

Figure 0.2: South Africa's 17 largest metros and municipalities

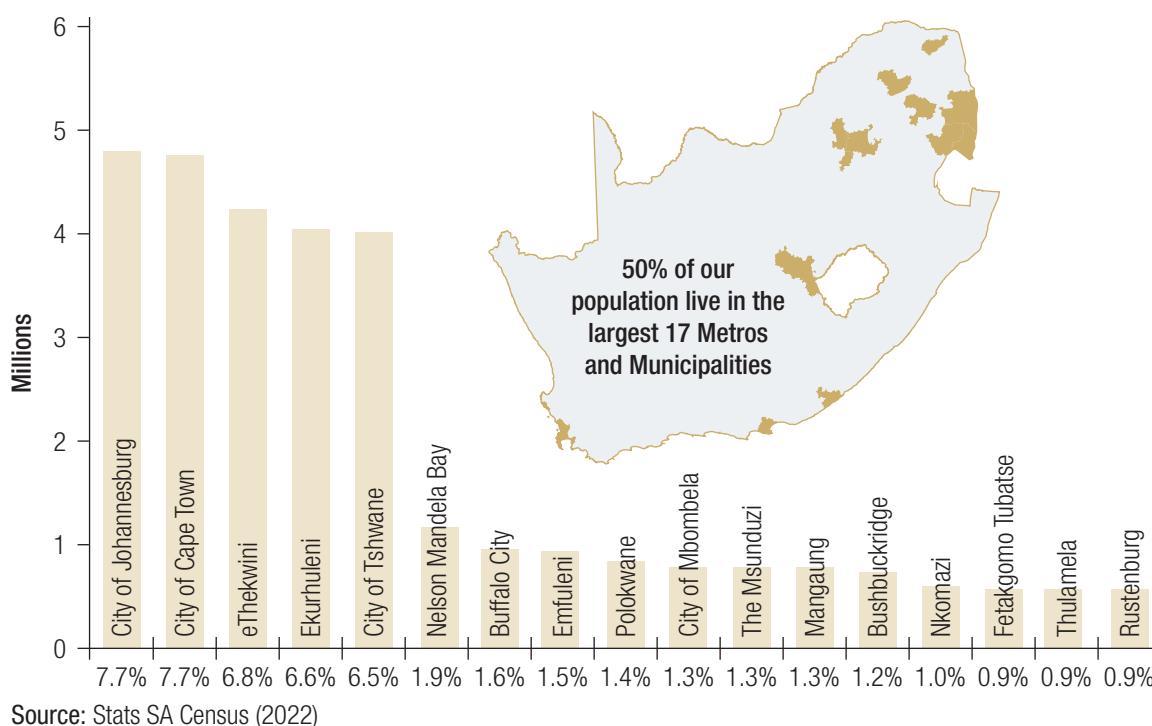
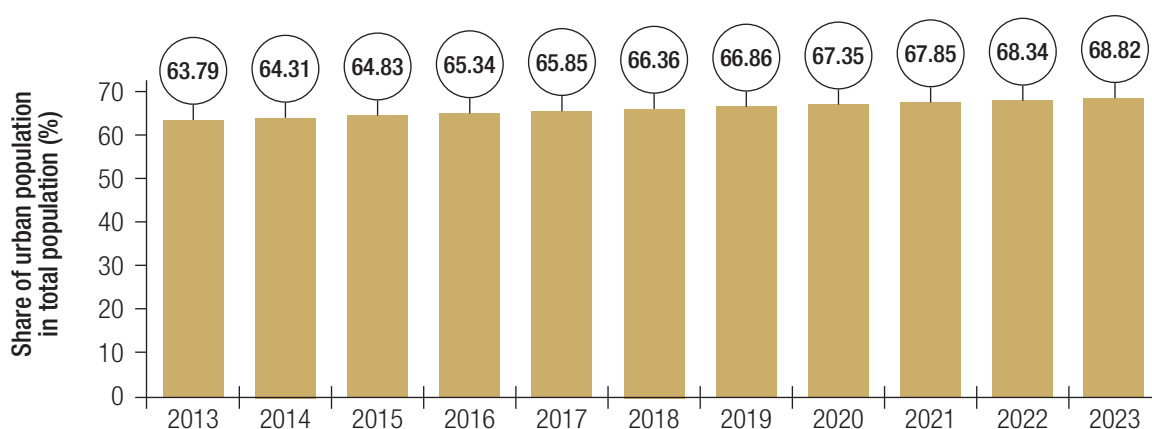


Figure 0.3: South Africa's urban population (2013–2023)



South Africa's Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) guides the government's programme over five years (2024–2029) in pursuit of three strategic national priorities:

- 1 Drive inclusive growth and job creation
- 2 Reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living
- 3 Build a capable, ethical and developmental state.

The MTDP is aligned with South Africa's NDP and incorporates regional, continental and international commitments, including the UN's SDGs 2030, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan.

South Africa has made significant progress towards implementing the NUA transformative commitments, but this progress is tempered by the depth of poverty and inequality in the country and the proliferation of informal settlements in urban areas due to spatial injustice and insufficient housing (as discussed in subsequent parts of this report). Indeed, with a Gini coefficient¹ of 0.67, South Africa has the highest level of inequality in the world (World Bank, 2022, 2025; Valodia, 2023), including income, spatial, racial, and gender inequalities. Further to this, according to DHS data, in 2023, over two million households were living in 4 297 informal settlements across the country, with most concentrated in the metropolitan municipalities (Comins, 2023). Contributing factors include the population growth rate, urbanisation and harsh economic conditions, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. The lower levels of access to safely managed water and sanitation services in informal settlements are testament of local government's shortcomings, specifically their inability to fulfil their service delivery mandates. Yet, given the current rates of urbanisation and the historic service delivery backlogs, it is unsurprising that local government has been unable to keep pace.

South Africa has reviewed two critical policy frameworks: The 1998 White Paper on Local Government and the 1994 White Paper for Human Settlements. The review of the White Paper on Local Government identified gaps between the 1998 vision and the on-the-ground realities of local government, with many municipalities having financial and capacity issues and facing service delivery challenges. The revised White Paper on Local Government will seek to bridge these gaps and result in a more accountable, efficient and responsive local government, with improved service delivery, enhanced financial management and increased community engagement.² The new White Paper for Human Settlements, which was gazetted in 2025, aims to address increasing challenges, such as inequality and rapid urbanisation by focusing on infrastructure, land use, governance and socio-economic factors.

A note on methodology

The methodology adopted was a data-driven, evidence-based and inclusive approach that integrated extensive stakeholder engagement to reflect diverse perspectives, local best practices and actionable ideas for improvement.

The report draws heavily on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) reports that were published by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) in 2019 and 2023. These reports provide comprehensive data and analysis on the 17 SDGs, which are closely aligned with most NUA indicators. This report covers 64 of the 77 NUA indicators (Table 0.1). An evidence base is provided for the NUA indicators that align closely with the SDG indicators because statistics are available, while partial evidence is offered for the other indicators that are not covered in the SDG reports, as indicated by an asterisk (*). This is because the NUA indicators are broader or require both more data than SDG indicators and disaggregation to local level.

Note on data

To track progress, comparisons were made utilising quantitative data from 2024 (due to statistical reporting lags) and 2022. However, due to COVID-19 disruptions to statistical data in 2020 and 2021, quantitative data from earlier years (2016) was used for some metrics.

1 The Gini coefficient is a widely used statistical measure of how income is distributed in the population of a country. It takes a value between 0 and 1. This metric measures income inequality on a scale from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). A coefficient above 0.6 is considered extremely high.

2 <https://www.cogta.gov.za/index.php/2025/03/19/reviewing-the-1998-white-paper-a-new-era-for-local-government-service-delivery/>

Table 0.1: NUA focus areas and associated NUA indicators and SDG indicators

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Sustainable Urban Development for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty		
Reduce Inequality, Promote Social Inclusion and Empower Vulnerable Groups	Proportion of population living below the poverty line (urban), disaggregated by sex and age	SDG 1.1.1 & SDG 1.2.2
	Presence of urban welfare programmes	SDG 1.3
	Life expectancy at birth, disaggregated by income	SDG 3.2
	Women's legal right to inheritance and property ownership	SDG 5.A
	National anti-discrimination legislation	SDG 5.1
	Average share of built-up area that is open space for public use	SDG 11.7.1
	% of road length with dedicated sidewalks and bike lanes	SDG 3.6 SDG 9.1
	Migration policy facilitating safe, orderly mobility	SDG 10.7.2
Ensure Access to Adequate and Affordable Housing	Proportion of adult population with secure tenure rights to land	SDG 1.4.2
	Housing investment as % of GDP	SDG 11.1
	Median housing & transport spending as % of household income	SDG 11.1 SDG 11.2
	Mortgage debt to GDP	SDG 11.1
Provide Access to Basic Services	Proportion using safely managed drinking water services	SDG 1.4.1 SDG 6.1.1
	Proportion using safely managed sanitation services	SDG 6.2.1.a
	Access to basic services (multi-sector)	SDG 1.4.1
	Access to public transport	SDG 11.2.1
Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All		
Inclusive Urban Economies	Gini coefficient at national/city/urban levels*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Unemployment rate by sex, age, persons with disabilities and by city	SDG 8.5.2
	Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training	SDG 8.6.1 & SDG 4.3.1
	Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex*	SDG 8.3.1
	Annual number of vocational and technical education individuals trained	not covered by SDG indicators

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All (cont.)		
Urban Productivity and Prosperity	Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person	SDG 8.2.1
	Small and medium-sized enterprises percentage share of GDP	SDG 9.3.1
	Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment	SDG 9.2.2
	Employment in cultural and creative industries as a proportion of total employment	not covered by SDG indicators
	Own source revenue as percentage of the total city revenue	not covered by SDG indicators
	Days to start a business	not covered by SDG indicators
Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development		
Resilient and Adaptive Urban Development	Share of urban population exposed to climate threats	SDG 11.5
	City or local authority adoption or implementation of local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies	SDG 11.b.2
	Proportion of sub-national/local government budget dedicated to climate change mitigation and adaptation actions*	SDG 11.8, SDG 11.a & SDG 13
	The number of cities that have/percentage of urban population that is covered by multi-hazard early warning systems*	SDG 11.5 & SDG 13.3
	Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution	SDG 11.5 & 11.6
	Urban heat island as variation of temperature relative to non-urban area	SDG 11.6, SDG 11.7 & SDG 13.1
Climate Change Mitigation	Total greenhouse gas emissions per year per capita	SDG 13.2.2
	Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g., PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)	SDG 11.6.2
	Domestic material consumption per capita & per GDP	SDG 12
	Material footprint per capita & per GDP	SDG 12.2.1
	Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption	SDG 7.2.1

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development (cont.)		
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation	Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate*	SDG 11.3.1
	Existence of an enforced coastal land management plan in the country	not covered by SDG indicators
	Proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flow safely treated*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Proportion of municipal solid wastewater collected and managed in controlled facilities*	SDG 11.6.1 & SDG 12.4.2
Effective Implementation		
Building the Urban Governance Structure: Establishing a Supportive Framework	Proportion of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups*	SDG 5.5.1
	Estimated share of revenue lost due to corruption*	SDG 16.5.1
	Proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Presence of a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operates regularly and democratically	SDG 11.3.2
	Proportion of seats held by women in sub-national/ local governments	SDG 5.5.1
Planning and Management of Urban Spatial Development	Number of provinces, regional governments, and cities in which plans and designs are publicly accessible to residents (on-line) and can be consulted at all times*	SDG 16.10
	Number of urban planners per 100 000 persons	SDG 11
	Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark	SDG 16.1.4
	Proportion of trips made in public transport	SDG 11.2
	Death rate due to traffic injuries	SDG 3.6.1
	Land use mix	SDG 11.3.1
	Presence of urban policies or regional development plans that: (a) respond to population dynamics, (b) ensure balanced territorial development, (c) increase local fiscal space	SDG 11.a.1
	Population density	not covered by SDG indicators

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Effective Implementation (cont.)		
Mobilisation of Financial Resources	The existence of a financing framework for implementing the agenda*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Own revenue mobilisation by local and regional governments*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Credit rating of local and provincial governments*	not covered by SDG indicators
	The existence of coherent, reliable and accountable systems of financial transfers from national to sub-national and local governments based on realistic needs	not covered by SDG indicators
Capacity Development and Enhanced Knowledge Sharing	Progress in expanding opportunities for city-to-city cooperation and fostering exchanges of urban solutions and mutual learning*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Existence and effectiveness of programmes for enhancing the capacity of all levels of government to monitor and implement the New Urban Agenda, including access and support of adequate higher-level education in built environment professions and fostering of professional associations for built environment professions	not covered by SDG indicators
Technology and Innovation	Expanded deployment of frontier technologies and innovations to enhance shared prosperity of cities and regions*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Development of user-friendly, participatory data and digital platforms through e-governance and citizen-centric digital governance tools*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Implementation of digital tools, including geospatial information systems to improve urban and territorial planning, land administration and access to urban services*	not covered by SDG indicators

* indicates partial information is reported.

The report also draws on the following voluntary reports:

- **Voluntary national review reports:** [SDG Country Report \(2019\)](#); [SDG Country Report \(2023\)](#)
- **Voluntary local reports:** [Buffalo City Voluntary Local Review \(2024\)](#); [City of Cape Town Voluntary Local Review \(2021\)](#); [City of Cape Town Voluntary Local Review \(2024\)](#); [City of Johannesburg Voluntary Local Review \(2023/24\)](#); [City of Tshwane Voluntary Local Review Baseline Report \(2024\)](#); [City of Umhlathuze Voluntary Local Review Baseline Report \(2024\)](#); [Koukamma Local Municipality Voluntary Local Review \(2024\)](#); [Mogale City Voluntary Local Review \(2024\)](#); [Municipality of Mossel Bay Voluntary Local Review \(2024\)](#); [Municipality of Rustenberg Voluntary Local Review \(2024\)](#)
- **Other voluntary reporting initiatives:** [Private Sector Voluntary National Review Report \(2019\)](#); [Private Sector Voluntary National Review Report \(2024\)](#); [The People's Report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2024\)](#)

These reports, which demonstrate the contributions of different sectors and spheres of government, were complemented with analysis and insights from engagements with a wide range of stakeholders, including all three spheres of government, civil society, academia and the private sector. These stakeholders made written and oral inputs during the stakeholder consultations that covered all nine provinces. Participatory methods were used to get stakeholders to reflect on the urbanisation process in South African cities and towns, with the aim of understanding the range of voices and experiences of different sectors of society. In addition, the call for local good practice projects attempted to showcase practical applicability, successes and challenges.

This methodology was informed by UN-Habitat's comments on the 2022 NUA Country Report, which highlighted the need for enhanced data collection and reporting; deeper analysis of key drivers, challenges and policy impacts; and improved documentation of stakeholder engagement. It has ensured a more objective and comprehensive assessment of the country's progress in implementing the NUA transformative commitments.

This high-level report on South Africa's progress in implementing the NUA since updating the 2022 submission was prepared by the Department of Human Settlements (DHS) and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) in collaboration with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the South African Cities Network (SACN).

The report is divided into five parts. The first three parts provide updates on progress made since 2022 on meeting the NUA commitments to sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty (Part 1), to sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all (Part 2) and to environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development (Part 3). Part 4 gives an update on the tools, frameworks and mechanisms that have been developed and adopted by all spheres of government – local, provincial and national – to monitor and report on implementation of the NUA. After the Stakeholder Consultation Report (Part 5), Part 6 concludes the report with a discussion on strategic ways forward to ensure continued implementation of the NUA until 2036.

PART 1

Sustainable Urban Development for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty

South Africa's commitment to reducing inequality and ending poverty is firmly rooted in both international and domestic policy frameworks. At the global level, the country aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, notably SDG 1 and SDG 10, which call for the eradication of extreme poverty, reduction of inequality within and among countries, and the empowerment of all people, especially those in vulnerable situations (UN, 2015). The NUA reinforces these obligations within the urban context. It advocates for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities that “leave no one behind,” with a particular emphasis on access to basic services, adequate housing, social protection and inclusive participation for all, including women, children, older persons, people with disabilities, migrants and those living in informal settlements (UN, 2016: paras. 13–20, 26–27). The NUA emphasises the vital role of cities in combating multidimensional poverty and inequality through comprehensive urban policies, spatial justice and institutional reform.

At the continental scale, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want articulates Africa's collective aspiration for inclusive development. It calls for a continent where women, youth and vulnerable populations are empowered through access to opportunities, equitable resource distribution, participatory governance and human rights protection (AUC, 2015). Agenda 2063 reaffirms the imperative of addressing structural inequality and social exclusion to realise the African renaissance.

These international and continental frameworks converge around a common vision, that social inclusion and the empowerment of vulnerable groups are foundational to sustainable development. The frameworks call for rights-based, participatory and redistributive approaches that dismantle historic inequities, enhance access to services and opportunities, and ensure that no one, regardless of gender, ability, income or location, is excluded from the development trajectory. Domestically, this commitment is embedded in:

- The Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), a socio-economic policy framework adopted in 1994. Its aim was to redress the social and economic legacies of the colonial and apartheid eras through the provision of basic needs, poverty eradication, democratisation of state and society, and redistribution.
- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, which guarantees the right to social security and protection for those unable to support themselves (RSA, 1996: Section 27).
- The NDP 2030 operationalises these rights, offering a long-term vision for a more equitable society. It proposes a multidimensional strategy that includes redistributive land reform, universal healthcare, expanded social protection, improved education outcomes and targeted employment programmes (NPC, 2012).
- The IUDF, which complements the NDP, was adopted in 2016 (COGTA, 2016). Specifically, it builds on Chapter 8 of the NDP (transforming human settlements and the national space economy) and the development framework outlined in the NUA and SDG 11.

A range of supporting policies reinforces this agenda. These include:

- The White Paper on Social Development of 1997, which frames social welfare as a developmental instrument.
- The Social Assistance Act (No. 13 of 2004), which governs the delivery of social grants to vulnerable populations.
- The National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF) of 2022, which prioritises spatial equity and directs investment to historically excluded areas.
- The National Social Development Strategy of 2023, which reaffirms the importance of inclusive service delivery.

Collectively, these frameworks represent a cohesive policy ecosystem aimed at advancing inclusive urban development, reducing multidimensional poverty and empowering all South Africans, particularly those historically left behind.

This part outlines the progress made by South Africa towards creating sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty, empowering vulnerable groups (women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and migrants), ensuring access to adequate and affordable housing, and providing access to basic services. The progress made towards realising this transformative commitment is measured in line with the suggested NUA indicators (Table 1.1), which are either fully or partially (as indicated with an asterisk) addressed. Part 1 also outlines the evidence and analyses the progress made by South Africa towards realising these indicators.

Table 1.1: NUA focus areas and indicators for sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Reduce Inequality, Promote Social Inclusion and Empower Vulnerable Groups	Proportion of population living below the poverty line (urban), disaggregated by sex and age	SDG 1.1.1 & SDG 1.2.2
	Presence of urban welfare programmes	SDG 1.3
	Life expectancy at birth, disaggregated by income	SDG 3.2
	Women's legal right to inheritance and property ownership	SDG 5.A
	National anti-discrimination legislation	SDG 5.1
	Average share of built-up area that is open space for public use	SDG 11.7.1
	% of road length with dedicated sidewalks and bike lanes	SDG 3.6 & SDG 9.1
	Migration policy facilitating safe, orderly mobility	SDG 10.7.2
Ensure Access to Adequate and Affordable Housing	Proportion of adult population with secure tenure rights to land	SDG 1.4.2
	Housing investment as % of GDP	SDG 11.1
	Median housing & transport spending as % of household income	SDG 11.1 & SDG 11.2
	Mortgage debt to GDP	SDG 11.1
Provide Access to Basic Services	Proportion using safely managed drinking water services	SDG 1.4.1 & SDG 6.1.1
	Proportion using safely managed sanitation services	SDG 6.2.1.a
	Access to basic services (multi-sector)	SDG 1.4.1
	Access to public transport	SDG 11.2.1

1.1

Reduce Inequality, Promote Social Inclusion and Empower Vulnerable Groups

Over the past two decades, South Africa has made incremental progress in improving life expectancy. Between 2000 and 2016, life expectancy at birth rose from 57.1 years to 63.9 years (WHO, 2024). The highest recorded figure was in 2019, with an average of 65.8 years (68.8 years for females and 62.5 years for males). The COVID-19 pandemic reversed some of these gains, with life expectancy declining to 64.6 years for females and 59.3 years for males in 2021. This reflects the broader health and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, which deepened poverty in the country due to businesses having to close, leaving many households without incomes (Stats SA, 2021a).

To measure poverty and inequality levels in the country, South Africa uses several internationally recognised measures, including the Gini coefficient, which is a statistical measure of income/wealth inequality in a given population. South Africa has a Gini coefficient of 0.67, making it the most unequal country in the world (World Bank, 2022). This underscores the vulnerability of poorer citizens, particularly women and children who continue to be affected disproportionately by increasing rates of poverty and inequality.

Social assistance

Social assistance (including public works programmes) is one of the components of the country's social protection and support system.³ In 2025, all forms of social assistance combined equated to 3.6% of the country's GDP (Madubela, 2025), an increase of 0.3% since 2022.

In 2020, South Africa introduced a new social grant, the social relief of distress (SRD) grant, which has become a critical but limited poverty mitigation measure. Nearly nine million people access this grant every month, but its value of R350 remains below the food poverty line (FPL)⁴, limiting its ability to alleviate poverty significantly (PBO, 2025; Ramaphosa, 2025). The SRD grant is one element of South Africa's social protection architecture. Delivered largely by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), the country's social protection grants reach over 28 million individuals. This has remained relatively unchanged since 2022 (Matsotso & Gasela, 2024). Table 1.2 outlines the main types, coverage and fiscal implications of the grants implemented since 1994.

As shown in Table 1.2, the backbone of the social assistance programme consists of five social grants that help address income inequality for the highest numbers of South African households, (i) child support grant (CSG), (ii) SRD grant, (iii) old age (state pension) grant, (iv) disability grant and (v) care dependency grant. Eligibility for these social grants is based on an income-based means test. These grants are part of a broad effort to offer social protection for the most vulnerable individuals in our country.

3 The other two elements of the social protection system are: Statutory funds: the Compensation Fund and the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and Voluntary Funds: retirement funds and medical aid schemes. Access to these social protection measures are also income-based, insofar as the individual makes contributions to these funds and schemes while employed. These, too, serve to buffer households from falling deeper into poverty.

4 The Food Poverty Line (FPL), which is also referred to as the 'extreme poverty line', represents the minimum amount of money an individual requires to be able to afford the minimum daily energy intake each month. That is, it is the cost of a basic and nutritionally balanced diet. In 2024, the FPL was R796 (approx. US\$45).

To ensure further protections for children and their rights, in 2025, the country adopted the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children. The strategy's key focus areas are protecting children's rights, addressing malnutrition and reducing poverty (Ramaphosa, 2025). The achievement of these objectives is supported by the continued rollout of the CSG, foster child and care dependency grants (the majority of SASSA beneficiaries receive either the CSG or the old age grant). In 2022, social grants paid to approximately 26 million beneficiaries accounted for 11% of the national budget (Steyn, 2023). By 2025, grant beneficiaries had increased to almost 28 million (Godongwana, 2025).

Municipalities also receive a share of nationally raised revenue, through the Local Government Equitable Share (LGES), which can be used to provide free basic services (FBS) to indigent households. In 2025, local government will spend 83% of the LGES on providing FBS to 11.2 million indigent households (Godongwana, 2025), compared to 2.6 million households in 2022 and 3.51 million (or one in five) households in 2017 (Stats SA, 2018; Stats SA, 2024e). Some of these households will qualify for 100% subsidised FBS, while others will receive less than 100% because they do not fulfil the criteria set by their respective municipalities.

Table 1.2: Social protection landscape in South Africa (2025)

Grant Type	Description	Reach	Impact/Budget
CSG	For caregivers of children <18	~13.2 million	~R80.9 billion; improves nutrition and schooling
Old age grant (state pension)	Pension for the elderly	~4.04 million	~R98.5 billion; boosts food security
SRD grant	Temporary R350/month grant	~9 million monthly	~R33.7 billion; mostly used for food
Disability grant	For adults unable to work	~1.06 million	~R27 billion; aids inclusion
Foster child grant	For legally fostered children	~270 000	~R4.1 billion; critical support
Care dependency grant	For severely disabled children	~380 000	~R4.1 billion; supports long-term care
Grant-in-aid	For full-time caregivers	~132 000	~R2.2 billion; supports dignity and caregiving

Sources: SASSA (2024); DSD (2025)

Gender and property

South Africa uses the Multidimensional Poverty Index to measure poverty levels in the country, based on the understanding that income is one dimension of poverty and that other aspects, such as health, living standards and education, also affect wellbeing. In other words, the Index recognises that income poverty intersects with access to basic services (including energy), living standards, health, income and gender. With respect to the latter, the statistics indicate that household wealth in South Africa is gendered. In 2022, male-headed households accounted for more than 60% of all household consumption expenditure, with the majority (81.5%) of consumption expenditure occurring in urban areas across both male- and female-headed households (Stats SA, 2023c).

Inheritance and property ownership are key considerations in relation to the gendered nature of household wealth. Constitutionally, women have the legal right to inherit and own property in terms of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No. 4 of 2000). This comprehensive anti-discrimination law prohibits policies and practices that unfairly discriminate against women and forbids any form of harassment and hate speech. Sections 6 and 8(c) and 8(d) in particular relate to the inheritance of family property and any inequitable “traditional, customary or religious practice which impairs the dignity of women and undermines equality between women and men” (Mubangizi & Tlale, 2023). However, several gender-based cultural practices remain, such as those relating to customary marriages, that violate women’s legal rights to inheritance and property ownership (ibid.). This accounts, in part, for the low (27.8%) percentage of women who own property alone and/or jointly (CAHF, 2024). Women’s legal rights to inheritance and property ownership are also protected by the Bill of Rights, specifically Section 9 of the Constitution, which prohibits (in)direct unfair discrimination against anyone. This section has been bolstered by the promulgation of the Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Act (No. 16 of 2023), which offers guidelines for effective enforcement and prosecution of those who commit hate crimes and hate speech offences.

Multidimensional poverty is also reflected in inadequate access to and cost of basic services such as clean water, sanitation and electricity – expenditure on basic services comprises the largest share of monthly household costs for the urban poor (Stats SA, 2025b). These deprivations exacerbate income poverty and reinforce cycles of exclusion, especially in informal or peripheral urban areas where service backlogs persist. Informal settlement occupancy remains a significant marker of urban exclusion, particularly in metropolitan municipalities where as recently as 2022, 15.8% of households lived in informal dwellings (Stats SA, 2023c) – see more information in Part 1.2.

Public spaces and mobility

Access to formal dwellings is a proxy indicator for access to safe(r) public spaces. Safe and accessible public spaces are vital for social inclusion, people and environmental health, and child development. The National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children emphasises the critical role of open spaces in supporting children’s wellbeing. However, South Africa continues to face a significant shortfall in the provision of quality green and recreational spaces, particularly in historically marginalised and underserved townships, found mostly on the periphery of cities. This is due to the legacy of apartheid-era spatial planning, which was to some extent perpetuated post-1994 because of the government building houses in peripheral areas where the land was most affordable.

According to the International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP),⁵ of the 31 289 km of roads assessed in South Africa as of 2023:

- 3% have formal pedestrian sidewalks
- 2% include designated pedestrian crossings
- Only 47% of the pedestrian crossings are in good condition

Cycling infrastructure is even more limited, as only 4% of roads with speed limits under 40 km/h are equipped with cycling facilities.⁶

Many residents live on the urban periphery, far from places of work, education and economic opportunities. This has also shaped urban mobility, which is largely car-centric, and entrenched long daily commutes, especially into central business districts. The minibus taxi (MBT), which remains the dominant mode of public transport in South Africa, has both formal and informal characteristics. In 2022, over two-thirds (66.5%) of public transport commuters used MBTs, compared to 23.6% who used buses and 9.9% who used trains (DBSA & World Bank, 2022). The widespread reliance on MBTs reflects not only their flexibility, affordability and availability, but also the significant service gaps in state-led public transport systems, such as buses and trains.

Public transport access overall is relatively high – in 2024, approximately 70.6% of surveyed individuals lived within one kilometre of their nearest MBT, bus, or train stop (Stats SA, 2025c). However, inequalities are found in service quality, reliability and safety across different modes and locations. In many areas, particularly in low-income communities, bus or train services do not adequately cover key routes, compelling residents to walk long distances to reach alternative modes of transport (Mtizi, 2017).

This presents a particular challenge for the elderly, people with disabilities and school children, especially given that roads are not pedestrian-friendly. Although the entire road network has not yet been assessed, it is clear that more work needs to be done to improve roads for pedestrians and cyclists, given the public health benefits of walking and cycling.

South Africa has a robust legislative framework that can support the development, protection and equitable access to public spaces, including:

- National Environmental Management Act (No. 107 of 1998)
- National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999)
- National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (No. 57 of 2003)
- National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act (No. 39 of 2004)
- National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (No. 10 of 2004)
- Integrated Coastal Management Act (No. 24 of 2008, amended 2014)
- Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) (No. 16 of 2015)

These legal instruments collectively create an enabling environment for developing inclusive and sustainable public spaces, despite implementation gaps at the local level.

⁵ <https://irap.org/safety-insights-explorer/>

⁶ Ibid.



The iThemba Walkway – Reclaiming Unsafe Pedestrian Walkways

Community-based initiatives are transforming public spaces, such as in Gugulethu, Cape Town.

Background

Led by Kathryn Ewing, a principal investigator, researcher and educator at the University of Cape Town (UCT), iThemba Walkway is a community-centred public space transformation project in Gugulethu, Cape Town. It was born out of the need to reclaim overlooked and unsafe pedestrian walkways. What started as a single intervention has grown into a broader urban design research and teaching project, the Walkway Project, under UCT's Cities for Change initiative.

Actions

The walkway was a neglected passage filled with rubble and solid waste between Dora Tamana and Lolo Mkonto roads. Beginning in 2021, a series of co-design and co-production workshops brought together residents, youth, students and professionals to reimagine the space, which led to the walkway being renamed iThemba ("hope"). Key activities include "urban walks" that facilitate youth engagement and spatial learning, the use of mobile design tools (such as an "urban trolley") and the development of an off-grid e-library to support data collection.

The project has sparked advocacy engagements with the City of Cape Town around safer design and maintenance of public laneways and expansion into other areas. Over 24 walkways have been explored in Gugulethu, with two undergoing upgrading, and the work has spread to Langa, Khayelitsha, Philippi and Kanana, showing the ripple effect of a community-led approach.

Outcomes

The project is a model for participatory spatial development and a blueprint for unlocking the potential of forgotten urban spaces. It demonstrates how the power of collaborative, inclusive design in marginalised urban areas can foster safer, more resilient neighbourhoods.

iThemba Walkway has become more than a design intervention – it is an evolving partnership, involving multiple stakeholders, from street committees to active citizens, youth representatives, the City of Cape Town and UCT, who are committed to spatial justice, resilience and long-term community transformation. It has been recognised internationally (used as a social infrastructure case study by Gehl Studio in Copenhagen/New York and received a special mention at the International Design BuildXchange Award 2024) and locally (presented at the National Urban Forum and part of the City's Green Infrastructure Programme).

[iThemba Walkway: safe, inclusive spaces | UCT News](#); [iThemba Walkway | designbuild X change](#)

South Africa is signatory to the UN Charter on the Rights of People with Disabilities that includes Article 9: Accessibility, including public transport. Like Cape Town and Johannesburg, the City of Tshwane is developing and implementing guidelines for universal access across its bus services, as outlined in the National Land Transport Strategic Framework (2023–2028). This framework is part of South Africa's broader strategy to ensure universal access, safe walkability for pedestrians and, overall, safer and more orderly intra-national and international mobility.



Shonaquip 1LM Universal Access to Public Transport by Shonaquip Social Enterprise

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Shonaquip 1LM, are finding innovative ways to support people with disabilities.

Background

In many rural and township areas, traditional wheelchairs are unable to handle rough terrain, which means that people with disabilities are cut off from essential services, such as clinics, schools and public transport. The Shonaquip 1LM project offers a micro-mobility service to people with disabilities, providing off-road transport that enables them to access public transport safely and with dignity.

Actions

The project began in Amaoti, Inanda (eThekweni), following the 2021 floods in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) that washed away key infrastructure. Public transport was banned from the only remaining access route, a narrow sandbag footbridge, which meant that many residents, especially those with disabilities, were stranded. Shonaquip trained local porters to assist people in crossing the bridge and reaching clinics and schools safely. In uMshwathi (KZN), the project continues to serve rural communities where regular transport is limited. It supports daily, weekly and monthly commuters, many of whom are elderly or have permanent disabilities.

In Khayelitsha (Cape Town), the project has adopted a micro-enterprise approach. Parents of children with disabilities run their own 1LM services, helping others in the community and earning income close to home. While uptake has been promising, affordability remains a key challenge, highlighting the urgent need for a public transport subsidy for people with disabilities.

Outcomes

Over 100 people with disabilities have been directly assisted through Shonaquip's innovative mobility project. With strong support from partners, such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Swiss Re and the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO), and growing interest from government departments, the 1LM model offers a practical, people-centred solution to South Africa's transport inequality, especially in disaster-prone or underserved areas. The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has expressed interest in integrating the uMshwathi model into the Expanded Public Works Programme.

Watch the documentary: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUbicdVKp_w

With respect to international mobility, South Africa has taken additional steps to modernise its governance of migration to ensure safer and more orderly mobility across its borders. The Immigration Amendment Bill (B8–2024) proposes enhanced enforcement mechanisms to regulate movement while upholding migrant rights. Furthermore, South Africa's e-Visa system, which was introduced in 2022 for 14 countries, was expanded to 34 countries by 2025, improving administrative efficiency and access for bona fide travellers and skilled migrants (Nene, 2024).

Ensure Access to Adequate and Affordable Housing

Access to adequate and affordable housing remains a foundational element of inclusive and sustainable urban development in South Africa. Section 26 of the Constitution obligates the state to take reasonable measures to progressively realise the right to housing (RSA, 1996). The country's housing efforts are aligned with global commitments, notably SDG 11.1, which calls for universal access to “adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and the upgrading of slums by 2030” (UN, 2015). The NUA also underscores housing as a human right and promotes a continuum of housing options, tenure security, affordability, habitability, accessibility and cultural adequacy (UN-Habitat, 2016).

South Africa has promulgated the Expropriation Act (No. 13 of 2024), replacing the Expropriation Act 63 of 1975. This new legislation aligns expropriation procedures with constitutional principles by explicitly outlining criteria for “just and equitable” compensation in cases of land expropriation for public purposes, including infrastructure development, environmental conservation and public services. The criteria include current use of the property, market value, historical acquisition, state investments and subsidies in the acquisition, and beneficial capital improvements in the property (RSA, 2025).

In 2024, Cabinet approved the White Paper for Human Settlements, marking a significant milestone in South Africa's journey towards creating sustainable, inclusive and equitable communities. The White Paper was the outcome of an inclusive public participation process across the human settlements value chain and places great consideration on ensuring the realisation of the right of access to adequate housing. It serves as an overarching policy foundation for repealing the Housing Act (No. 107 of 1997) and seeks to enable government to respond to the SDGs, mainly SDG 11, which focuses on sustainable cities.

The White Paper's overall strategic intent is to enable the delivery of spatially integrated, inclusive, equitable and sustainable human settlements through a synergistic and holistic approach involving robust stakeholder engagement and coordinated action across sectors and jurisdictions. It gives special prominence to vulnerable people and marginalised groups, which include indigent families, the elderly, women-headed households, child-headed families, people with disabilities and special groups, such as military veterans.

Following the approval of the White Paper for Human Settlements, the DHS has initiated several responsive interventions contained in the White Paper policy principles:

- The White Paper provides that government will initiate legislative review and reforms, including the Prevention of Illegal Eviction and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act (PIE) of 1998, which governs the eviction process in the event of a land invasion by an unlawful occupier. Since the PIE Act was promulgated various interpretation and implementation problems have been identified, necessitating amendments to the Act. In response, the DHS has developed a draft PIE Policy, which will serve as a framework to the PIE Act amendments that aim to address the misinterpretations and misconceptions with respect to legislative gaps, inconsistencies and the manner in which PIE Act is applied and enforced.
- The White Paper provides for innovative financing mechanisms to stimulate the delivery of affordable rental housing stock. In response, the DHS has drafted the Rent-to-Buy Policy Programme, which is aimed at addressing dysfunctionality in the residential property market. The objective is to facilitate access to affordable homeownership, especially for first-time home buyers, particularly for the youth. The White Paper provides for the mainstreaming of innovative building technologies (IBTs) to fast-track human settlements delivery. The DHS has since developed a policy framework to guide the implementation of IBTs in South Africa.

The DHS is also reviewing the Housing Code and reformulating the Human Settlements Code with the aim of addressing the shortcomings embedded in the programme by simplifying the prescriptive measures to enable the effective implementation of sustainable human settlements.

State-subsidised housing

The DHS plays a role in driving housing policy and programme implementation across all spheres of government. Since 1994, South Africa has implemented one of the world's most ambitious state-subsidised housing programmes. Launched initially under the RDP, in 2004, it evolved into the Breaking New Ground (BNG) Strategy, which emphasised sustainable and integrated human settlements (DHS, 2004). Two decades later, the White Paper on Human Settlements DHS, (2024b) set out a new vision of integrated, inclusive and responsive human settlement development that is aligned with the Housing Act (No. 107 of 1997) and the IUDF.

Between 1994 and 2024, the government delivered over 3.3 million housing units and more than 4.7 million serviced sites (DHS, 2024a), contributing to an increase in the share of households living in formal dwellings. Between 2016 and 2024, households residing in formal dwellings grew from 78.8% to 84.1% (Stats SA, 2017; 2025b). Government-subsidised housing has played a crucial role in expanding access to secure tenure – in 2016, 13.5% of households in formal dwellings received government housing subsidies, declining slightly to 12% in 2023 (Stats SA, 2017; 2023a; 2023b).

The 2017 Project Process Guide for Human Settlements Programmes makes provision for two key housing programmes in the country. The Incremental Housing Programme covers various housing typologies, consolidation subsidies, the Enhanced People's Housing Process (EHP), Integrated Housing Development Programme (IRDP), Upgrading Informal Settlements Programme (UISP) and Emergency Housing, whereas the Rural Housing Programme provides for farmworker housing and rural subsidies. The incremental approach to housing development, which includes the upgrading of informal settlements, is a progressive and dynamic process through which the provision of housing is not seen as a static unit but is rather broken down into core components, allowing for greater participation by different stakeholders, through a participatory planning approach. The Rural Housing Programme is a mechanism that not only extends the benefits of the Housing Subsidy Scheme to individuals living in areas referred to as “rural”, where they enjoy functional security of tenure, but also helps to foster legal security of tenure. Furthermore, the Emergency Housing Response Fund has been established as an intervention to support government responses to natural disasters (DHS, 2009).

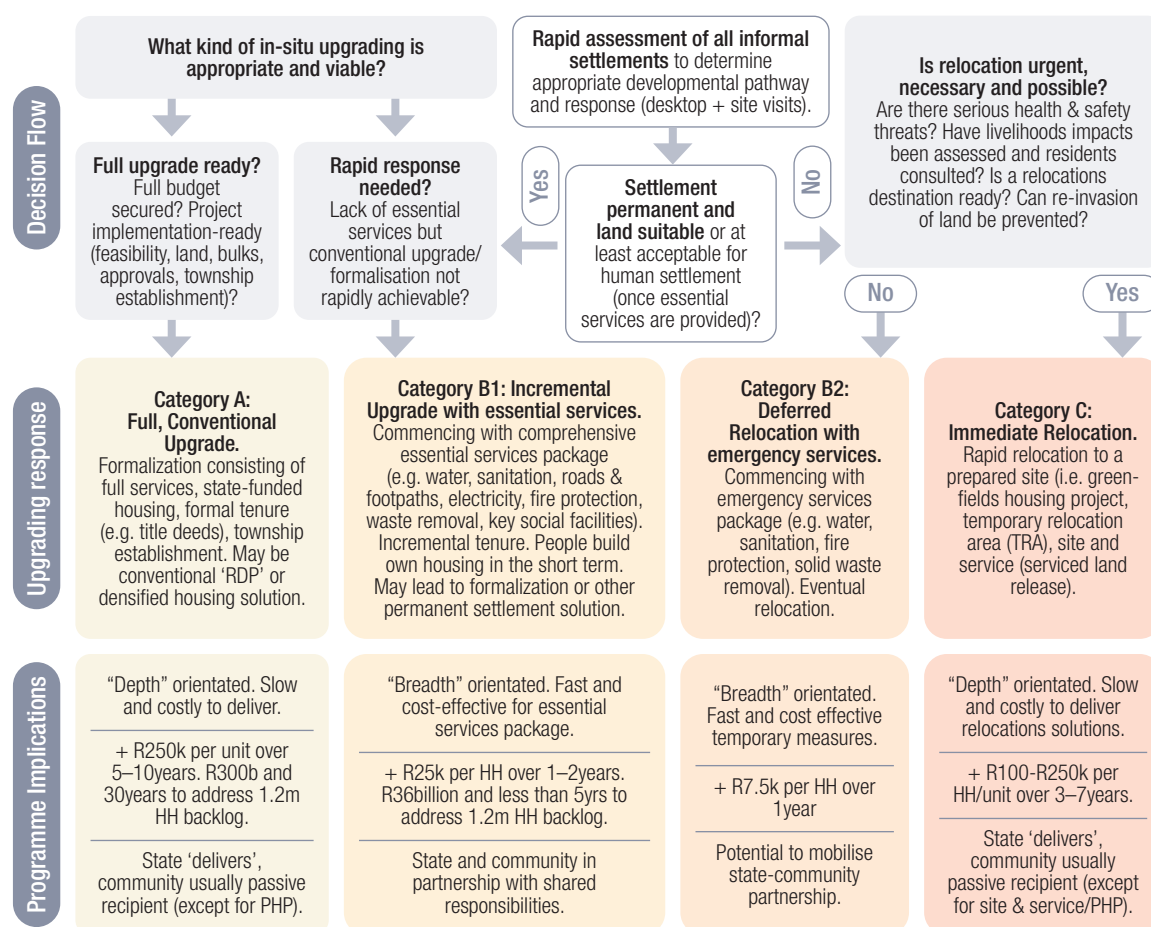
Nevertheless, despite this progress, challenges persist. The national housing backlog is estimated at over 2.3 million units, while the number of urban households still living in informal dwellings remained unchanged in 2021 and 2024, at around 11.7% of the total population (Stats SA, 2021b, 2025b). The MDTP 2024–2029 identified 4 075 informal settlements nationally, of which 3 669 have been audited and categorised for upgrading by 2029. This involves three phases: pre-feasibility studies, security of tenure and permanent engineering services. The MDTP targets are a demonstration of a clear commitment to formalising and improving informal settlements. The upgrading of informal settlements has been categorised according to the particular needs of different settlements and to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

Table 1.3: Assessed and categorised informal settlements per province

	Category A	Category B1	Category B2	Category C	Mixed Categories	Total
Eastern Cape	58	80	6	65	272	481
Free State	45	31	0	50	35	161
Gauteng	72	190	37	82	350	731
KwaZulu-Natal	65	355	113	71	200	804
Limpopo	13	39	2	18	2	74
Mpumalanga	17	37	14	3	297	368
Northern Cape	14	24	17	6	90	151
North West	29	31	10	12	54	136
Western Cape	59	111	234	140	219	763
Total	372	898	433	447	1519	3669

Source: DHS internal presentation to MINTOP (November 2025)

Figure 1.1: Flow chart for categorisation process of informal settlements



Source: https://thehda.co.za/pdf/uploads/multimedia/HDA_Rapid_assessment_and_categorisation.pdf

Housing and transport spending

Housing and transport costs together account for over 50% of total household expenditure in South Africa, disproportionately affecting lower-income households who tend to live on the periphery. In 2022, over a third (34.7%) of total household spending was on housing and utilities, while 15.3% was on transport (Stats SA, 2025c). For low-income (decile 1) households, housing costs represented 38.1% of income and transport 6.3%, compared to 33% and 19.2%, respectively, for high-income (decile 10) households (Maluleke, 2025). These figures are anticipated to have increased since 2022, but the level of increase is as yet unknown due to reporting delays.

Supported by DHS programmes, such as the UISP and the Informal Settlements Upgrading Partnership Grant (ISUPG), municipalities are increasingly taking the lead in informal settlement upgrading. Although capacity constraints and land-access challenges impede progress, options are gradually diversifying. In 2023, 23.7% of households were renters, reflecting increasing demand for flexible and affordable accommodation, particularly in urban centres (Stats SA, 2023b). DHS, through entities such as the Social Housing Regulatory Authority (SHRA), has expanded support for social and affordable rental housing, although demand continues to exceed supply.



Reblocking Pilot Project in Phola Park Informal Settlement, Afesis in Partnership with Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality

Not-for-profit organisations, such as Afesis, are working with communities to improve informal settlements.

Background

The non-profit organisation, Afesis, launched the first participatory reblocking project with the community of Phola Park Informal Settlement in Buffalo City and the local municipality. The aim was to improve living conditions and lay the groundwork for formal upgrading.

Actions

Working with a dedicated Project Steering Committee of residents, Afesis reorganised shack layouts to open up space for proper roads, pathways and infrastructure. This allowed for better stormwater management, reduced flooding and safer access for emergency vehicles. The process included community mapping, co-design workshops, formal surveying and local job creation during the construction phase.

Outcomes

- Directly impacted over 186 households that benefitted from improved access routes, repaired sewer lines and upgraded stormwater systems.
- Created the conditions for formal service delivery, such as electricity, water standpipes and communal toilets.
- Strengthened local governance through establishing a committee of residents.
- Influenced how the municipality approaches informal settlement upgrading. The model has been recognised by the national DHS, and scaling to other settlements across the city is being explored.



Land restitution is a key issue in South Africa. The legal basis for land restitution is provided by the 1993 Interim Constitution, Section 25(7) of the 1996 Constitution and the Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22 of 1994). The Constitution gives people and communities who had been dispossessed of land after 19 June 1913, as a result of racially discriminatory laws or practices, the right to restitution of that property or to fair compensation.



Protea Village Urban Land Restitution Project in Cape Town

This landmark project sets a new precedent for urban land restitution.

Background

Led by the Protea Village Communal Property Association (CPA) and supported by the City of Cape Town, the Protea Village Urban Land Restitution Project is returning land to 86 families who were forcibly removed under apartheid.

Actions

Following a successful land claim in 1995 by 86 families who were forcibly removed from Bishopscourt (one of Cape Town's most affluent suburbs), in 2021 the land was formally transferred. In October 2024, construction of new homes commenced.

The project uses a cross-subsidisation model, with open-market plot sales that help fund the development of claimant homes and generate long-term income for the Protea Village CPA. A four-hectare public greenbelt along the Liesbeek River has been expanded, as part of an environmental agreement that balances restitution with ecological protection.

Outcomes

- Land restitution to 86 families, due to decades of unity among claimants and collaborative partnerships with government and private stakeholders.
- Restoration not just of land, but of opportunity, dignity and a deep connection to place.

<https://iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/2025-03-11-30-year-struggle-ends-as-protea-village-community-returns-to-ancestral-bishopscourt-home/>

Housing as an asset

Housing is recognised as a household asset and a foundation for economic empowerment. In 2024, South Africa's residential property market accounted for 89.3% of the total property market and was valued at R6.9 trillion (US\$387.3 billion), an increase of R0.3 trillion (US\$5.29 billion) since 2022 (CAHF, 2023; 2024). And in 2023, the mortgage-to-GDP ratio reached 17.58%, up from 15.79% in 2022, reflecting the scale of housing-related finance (ibid.).

However, many township-based and low-income households are excluded from traditional mortgage products due to informality of income and land titling barriers, among others. This has not stopped the expansion of small-scale landlordism across townships and backyards. The informal rental housing constitutes a growing segment of the urban housing market, supported by innovative lenders which help township residents to construct rental units and access mortgage-type financing, as well as community savings schemes known as "*stokvels*" (see Masakhe Case Study described on page 29 of the NUA Country Report 2022). Furthermore, to address systemic gaps in the market, DHS has launched new subsidy-linked finance instruments in collaboration with the National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC), with the aim of crowding in private capital while ensuring affordability for the "gap market" (i.e., households that earn between R3 501 and R22 000 per month).

1.3

Provide Access to Basic Services

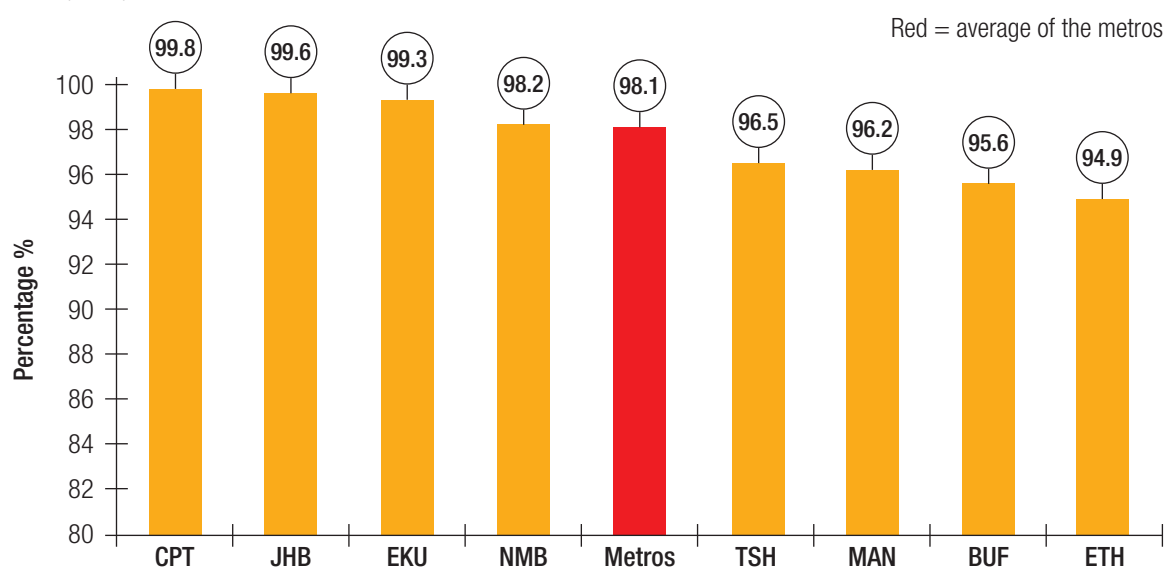
South Africa has made significant strides in expanding access to basic services, particularly those enshrined in the Bill of Rights and international human rights instruments. Water and sanitation is an area of measurable progress, with a growing number of households having access to improved or safely managed water services, as defined by SDG indicators and other internationally recognised benchmarks.

Water and sanitation

A key indicator is access to safely managed drinking water, which is defined as water that is free from faecal and priority chemical contamination, and available on the premises when needed (Bannister, 2025). Between 2017 and 2023, households with access to safely managed drinking water declined from 69% to 64%, due in part to population growth and increasing challenges with supply reliability (ibid.).

In addition to this SDG-aligned indicator, the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) also assesses domestic water supply using the basic level of service, which is a nationally defined metric. It measures the proportion of households with access to water from an improved source, provided it requires no more than a 30-minute round trip, including time spent queuing (ibid.). Nationally, between 2022 and 2024, the proportion of households with access to piped or tap water either inside their dwellings, on-site (e.g., in the yard), or off-site (e.g., through communal taps or a neighbour's connection) decreased slightly from 89.3% to 87.5%, which is lower than in the metros (Figure 1.1). This decline is linked to reductions in service provision in four provinces: Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and the Free State.

Figure 1.2: Households with access to piped or tap water in dwellings, on-site, or off-site by metropolitan area (2024)



Source: Stats SA (2025b: 29)

The DWS continues to monitor water provision levels, tracking progress towards national and global targets. In recent years, a notable improvement has been the increased focus on monitoring the reliability of water supply, which is not captured by either the safely managed or basic service indicators. Reliability monitoring helps identify systemic weaknesses in water infrastructure, which are then addressed through targeted interventions, including improving access to basic sanitation services.

Between 2016 and 2024, households with access to basic sanitation services increased by 2.1%, from 81% to 83.1% (Stats SA, 2025b). The most significant gains were in Gauteng and the Western Cape, where the country’s three largest metropolitan areas are located. These figures indicate improvements in the proportion of households using sanitation facilities that are not shared and where excreta are safely disposed of (but excluding handwashing facilities).

Measuring and Rewarding Safe Water Delivery



The Blue Drop Certification Programme is a regulatory tool and incentive-based mechanism designed to assess and improve (i) the quality of municipal drinking water and (ii) the performance of water treatment works across South Africa (DWS, 2023c). The programme seeks to strengthen core competencies within the sector and foster collaboration among government, civil society and the private sector.

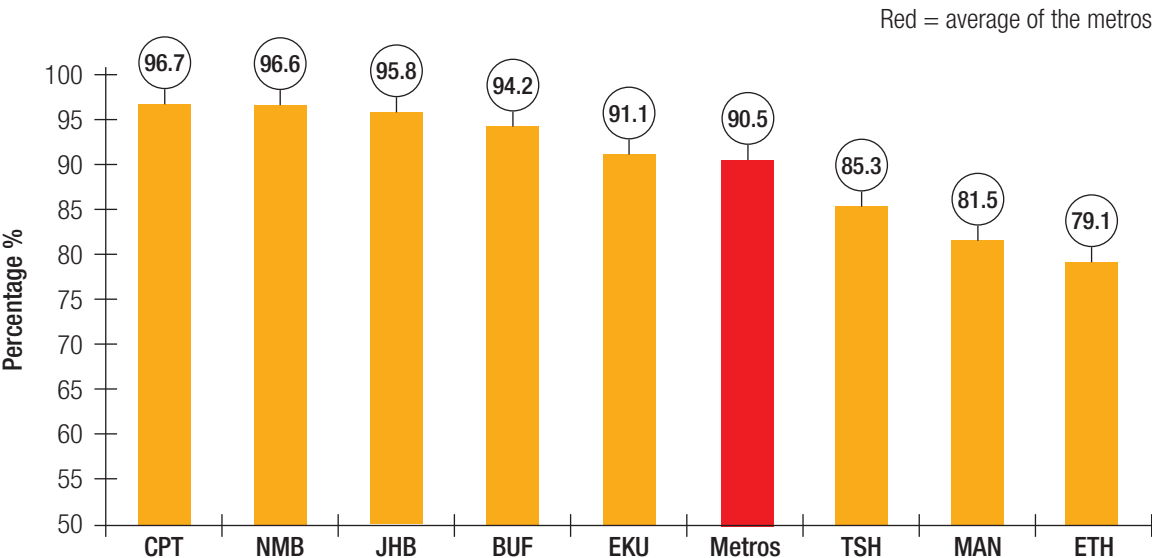
Under this programme, the DWS is the sector regulator. It promotes the efficient and sustainable delivery of water and sanitation services by benchmarking the performance of water service institutions. High-performing municipalities are recognised and rewarded, while those that fail to meet minimum norms and standards, as defined by the audit criteria, are subject to corrective action and potential penalties.

The DWS publishes an annual Blue Drop Report that contains comprehensive data and insights into the state of drinking water nationwide. It also provides tailored recommendations to help municipalities align with national norms and standards and highlights the regulatory instruments that must be leveraged to implement the proposed improvements effectively.

The Blue Drop Report should be read in conjunction with the No Drop and Green Drop reports. While the No Drop focuses on water losses and non-revenue water, the Green Drop assesses the performance of municipal wastewater management systems. Together, these reports provide a holistic overview of water services performance at the municipal scale.

In 2024, two-thirds (66.7%) of households used flush toilets, while 16.3% relied on ventilated improved pit latrines (Stats SA, 2025b), representing a marginal decline of 1.0% from 2023 (Stats SA, 2023c). The highest levels of access are found in metros, where 90.5% of residents had access to basic sanitation in 2024 (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Households with access to improved sanitation by metropolitan area (2024)



Source: Stats SA (2025b: 38)

Figure 1.4: Access to water and sanitation in informal areas (2023)



Given the country's deep socio-economic inequalities, it is important to examine access to water in informal settlements. Stark disparities exist between access to services and access to safely managed services, indicating a substantial quality gap (Figure 1.4).

The water and sanitation indicators do not account for the functionality of the infrastructure. Once system functionality is factored in, the actual proportion of the population with access to safely managed water and sanitation would be considerably lower (Bannister, 2025).

Asivikelane: Improving Basic Services in Informal Settlements

Asivikelane's project in Knysna is a model for gender-responsive urban governance and basic services across South Africa.

Background

Led by Crystal West at the Development Action Group, Asivikelane Western Cape works to improve basic services in informal settlements across Knysna, with a focus on safety, accessibility, and dignity, especially for women and vulnerable groups.

Actions

Since 2020, the project has empowered community facilitators living in these settlements to gather data on water, sanitation and waste removal services, using tools such as the Kobo app to provide regular, evidence-based reports. Findings revealed significant challenges that disproportionately affect women and children, including unsafe, unhygienic and inaccessible communal toilets. Communal (rather than gender-separated) toilets are hotspots for crime, especially at night and if located far from where women and children live.

In 2023 and 2024, Asivikelane made key inputs to municipal tender specifications and budget allocations, promoting a gender-responsive approach to service delivery. This advocacy led to Knysna Municipality revising its sanitation tender, awarding contracts to multiple providers to serve the diverse informal settlements better.

Outcomes

- Advocated successfully for gender-sensitive improvements in the informal settlement, including separate secure toilets for women and men.
- Influenced the Knysna Municipality's procurement processes and budgets.
- Informed the Western Cape's 2024 Policy on Gender-responsiveness to Basic Service Delivery in Informal Settlements, which institutionalises inclusive procurement practices, ensuring women participate in all stages, from needs assessment to contract monitoring.

The project's bottom-up, data-driven approach strengthens municipal accountability and fosters safer, healthier living environments.

[Asivikelane | Giving A Voice To Informal Settlement Residents in South Africa](#)

Other basic services

The overall slight improvement in access to safe drinking water and sanitation reflects broader positive trends in multisectoral basic service delivery.

Electricity: Between 2016 and 2022, households with access to electricity for lighting increased from 84.2% to 94.3% (Stats SA, 2024b; Stats SA, 2017). Yet, despite this progress, as of 2025, approximately 1.6 million households still lacked access to electricity (Van Diemen, 2025).

Waste removal services: Between 2016 and 2022, waste removal services declined from 64.9% to 57.3% (Stats SA, 2024b). Efficient solid waste management is essential for maintaining public health and environmental quality.

Refuse collection: In 2022, 67.1% of households – mainly in urban areas – received weekly refuse collection services (Stats SA, 2024b). However, this masks severe spatial disparities. In 2016, refuse collection at least once per week was available to 9.8% of rural households, 82.6% of urban households and 89.1% of those in metros (ibid.).



Cleaner Spaces, Shared Responsibility: Lessons from the Good Green Deeds Campaign

The Good Green Deeds Campaign is a national public awareness programme aimed at shifting societal attitudes and behaviours towards responsible waste management. Initiated by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE, formerly the Department of Environmental Affairs), the campaign promotes active citizen participation in addressing waste-related environmental challenges.

The programme is structured around three focus areas: (i) promoting litter-free and anti-dumping behaviours, (ii) encouraging waste minimisation and (iii) unlocking economic opportunities in the waste sector.

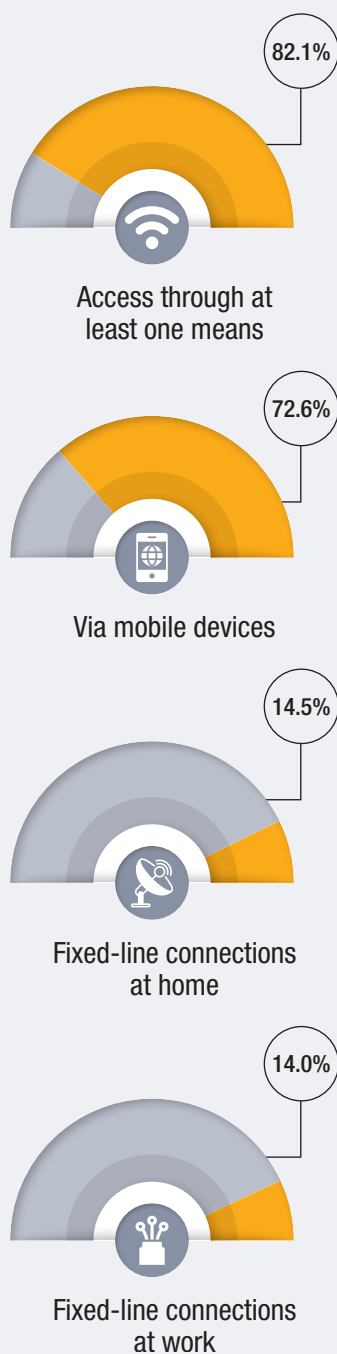
The campaign targets a broad cross-section of society, including pedestrians, motorists, waste pickers, households, schools, businesses, churches and other public institutions, particularly in high-footfall public areas. At the heart of its theory of change lies the conviction that every citizen can become an agent of environmental stewardship, or a “[Good Samaritan for Green Deeds](#)”.

Through coordinated clean-up campaigns, the rehabilitation of illegal dumping sites and public education initiatives, the programme seeks to build a culture of environmental responsibility and sustainable waste practices across all spheres of society.

Digital connectivity

In today’s world, meaningful participation in economic, educational and social life increasingly depends not only on physical access to urban opportunities via safe and reliable transport, but also on digital connectivity. In South Africa, like in many countries, digital connectivity is being recognised as a basic service. Government has made commitments, particularly through the South Africa Connect programme, to bridge the digital divide by expanding affordable, high-speed internet access to all. Progress has been notable.

Figure 1.5: Access to the internet



Source: Stats SA (2025b)

Since 2016, the proportion of households with access to the internet through at least one means has increased steadily, from 59.8% to 75.3% in 2022 and 82.1% in 2024 (Stats SA, 2024a; 2025c). As expected, metros have higher levels of connectivity than the national average – in 2023, 84.7% of metro households had access to the internet by some means (Stats SA, 2024b). Mobile devices are the most common form of access (Figure 1.5), highlighting a structural reliance on mobile networks over fixed broadband.

A major barrier to digital inclusion is the cost of mobile data. In 2023, the average cost of 1GB of mobile data in South Africa was R34.69 (US\$1.81), making the country 149 out of 237 in global affordability rankings.⁷ While this represents a significant decrease from R111.10 (US\$7.17) in 2019, prices are still unaffordable for many low-income households. The expansion of public fibre infrastructure and regulation of mobile data costs are essential to make internet access equitable, reliable and fast, particularly for underserved rural and township communities. Bridging the digital divide remains central to inclusive urban development and global economic participation.

Project Isizwe: Closing the Digital Divide



Project Isizwe's Africa Uncapped initiative provides affordable, uncapped internet access to schools, homes and communities in underserved areas, particularly townships. The project's mission is to connect learners, educators and households to the internet to enable digital inclusion, improve access to educational resources and unlock participation in the global digital economy.

Project Isizwe currently provides uncapped Wi-Fi to learners and teachers in 15 schools nationwide, reaching over 20 000 learners and 500 educators. The initiative is expanding to cover households in low-income areas, supporting blended learning and connectivity outside the classroom. One pilot in Philippi, Cape Town, provides 500 homes with 500MB of free daily Wi-Fi through hotspots enabled by SEACOM. Once this daily limit is reached, residents can opt to top up at a cost of R5 (approx. US\$0.28) per day per device. The service is funded through donations, which are converted into credits for beneficiaries to redeem for high-quality internet access.

To scale its reach, Project Isizwe has partnered with Investec to roll out 90 high-range Wi-Fi access points and 320 home extender units in Lamontville, KwaZulu-Natal. The goal is to connect 7 500 households, benefitting an estimated 35 000 individuals. Currently, an average of 1 000 unique users access the service monthly. Similar affordable Wi-Fi projects offering uncapped access at R5 per day have also been launched in Mphophomeni (KZN) and DuNoon (Western Cape), further demonstrating the project's scalable model for inclusive digital access.

⁷ <https://bestbroadbanddeals.co.uk/mobiles/worldwide-data-pricing/>

PART 2

Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All

The key drivers of inequality in South Africa include unequal access to economic opportunities, a racially segmented labour market, and persistent disparities in land and asset ownership, with race accounting for an estimated 41% of income inequality (World Bank, 2022a). Education is also a critical determinant, as only 7% of black South Africans possess tertiary education, compared to 40% of white South Africans. Educational attainment contributes approximately 30% to inequality and the continued exclusion of black, coloured and Indian populations from accessing economic opportunities and living decent lives (ibid.).

The South African government recognises that decent work and jobs and inclusive economic growth are foundational elements for sustainable development and for enabling everyone to live fulfilling, productive and healthy lives. To achieve this, all three spheres of government have undertaken a broad suite of interventions in collaboration with various stakeholders to address inequality and unemployment in the country and foster urban prosperity through diversifying the economy. Part 2 outlines the progress made by South Africa towards creating sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all and building inclusive urban economies. The progress made towards realising this transformative commitment is measured in line with the suggested NUA indicators (Table 2.1), which are either fully or partially (as indicated with an asterisk) addressed. This part also outlines the evidence and analyses the progress made by South Africa towards realising these indicators.

Table 2.1: NUA focus areas and indicators for sustainable and inclusive prosperity and opportunities for all

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Inclusive Urban Economies	Gini co-efficient at national/city/urban levels*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Unemployment rate by sex, age, persons with disabilities and by city	SDG 8.5.2
	Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training	SDG 8.6.1 & SDG 4.3.1
	Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex*	SDG 8.3.1
	Annual number of vocational and technical education individuals trained	not covered by SDG indicators
Urban Productivity and Prosperity	Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person	SDG 8.2.1
	Small and medium-sized enterprises percentage share of GDP	SDG 9.3.1
	Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment	SDG 9.2.2

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Urban Productivity and Prosperity	Employment in cultural and creative industries as a proportion of total employment	not covered by SDG indicators
	Own source revenue as percentage of the total city revenue	not covered by SDG indicators
	Days to start a business	not covered by SDG indicators

*indicates partial information is reported.

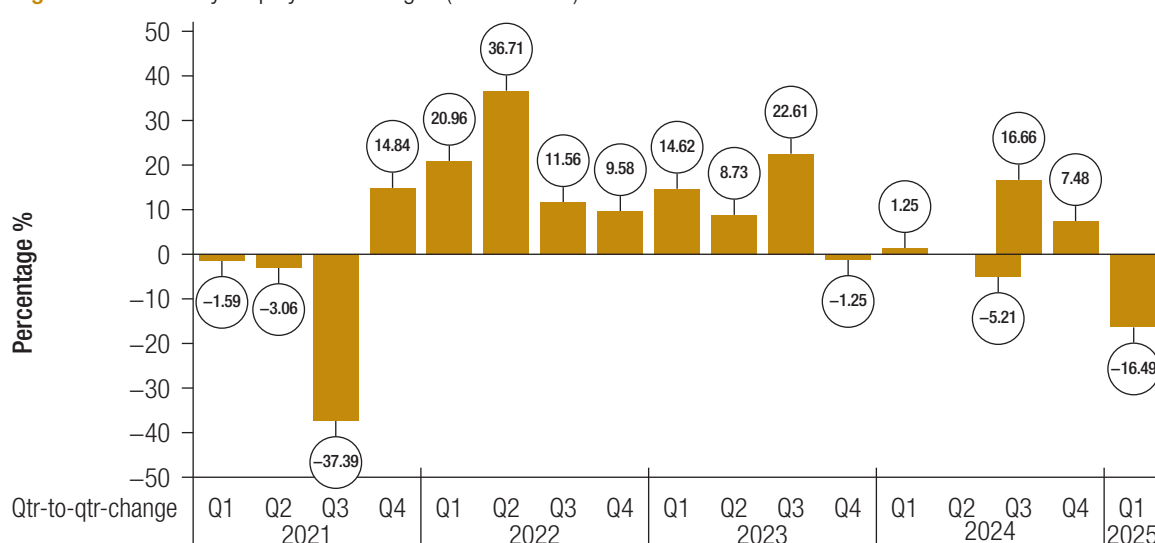
2.1 Build Inclusive Urban Economies

Inclusive economic development or inclusive economies is the bedrock of South Africa's economic policy, as articulated in the NDP and IUDF. The NDP identifies inclusive economic development and growth as *the* pathway for eradicating poverty, reducing inequality and addressing the country's high unemployment rates, while the IUDF's sixth lever focuses on inclusive economic development. South Africa's high unemployment rates reflect labour inequalities and overall wealth inequalities that have yielded a Gini coefficient of 0.67 (World Bank 2022a; Valodia, 2023).

Unemployment

In 2021, the unemployment rate stood at 34.9% and had, by Q1 of 2025, marginally improved to 32.9% (Figure 2.1). The quarterly changes in employment rates between 2021 and 2025 highlight a fragile labour market that has structural weaknesses and is struggling to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Investment in labour-intensive sectors is limited, as underscored by most job losses being in the construction and trade, and the community services sectors, while the transport and finance sectors saw gains (Stats SA, 2025a).

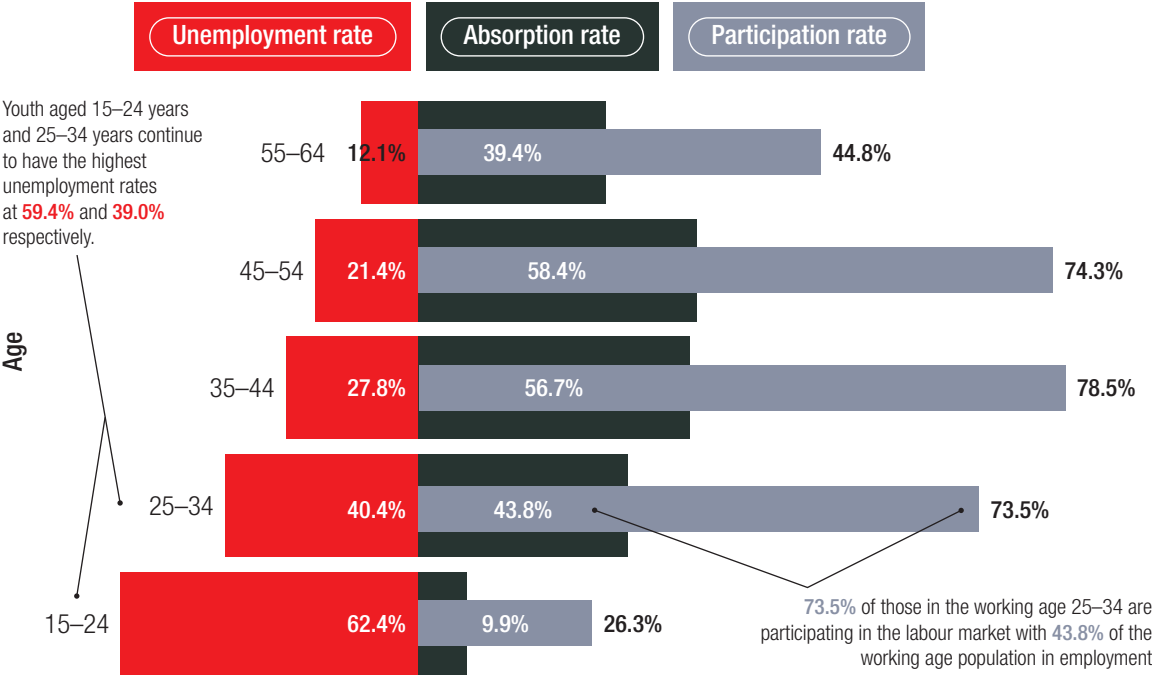
Figure 2.1: Quarterly employment changes (2021–2025)



Source: Stats SA (2025a)

Of concern is that the youth make up over half (50.2% or 20.9 million people) of the working age population (41.7% people aged 15–64 years) who are unemployed (Figure 2.2). Joblessness remains concentrated among low-skilled workers, leading to a widening of the gap between this group of workers and those with post-secondary education. Township and rural youth remain excluded from the formal economy even though the formal sector accounted for 68.1% of total employment in Q1 of 2025 (Stats SA, 2025a).

Figure 2.2: Labour market rates by age group (Q1: 2025)



Source: Stats SA (2025a)

The structural unemployment in South Africa is gendered and racial. In Q1 of 2025, the highest unemployment rate (39.8%) was for African women (Stats SA, 2025a). Many of these women, particularly those in urban areas, seek opportunities in the informal economy, which is characterised by a lack of legal and social protections for employees.

Informal economy

In Q4 of 2023, the informal economy accounted for 19.5% of total employment in the country, underscoring systemic failures in equitable job creation and social protection systems (Stats SA, 2025a). Informal employment is defined as including the following activities, whether or not they are carried out in formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises or households:

- Own-account workers employed in their own informal sector enterprises.
- Employers employed in their own informal sector enterprises.
- Contributing family workers, irrespective of whether they work in formal or informal sector enterprises.
- Members of informal producers' cooperatives.
- Employees holding informal jobs in formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises, or as paid domestic workers employed by households.
- Own-account workers engaged in the production of goods exclusively for own final use by their household.

Workers in the agricultural sector are excluded from this definition of informal unemployment.

People aged 35–64 years accounted for 33.1% of people working informally in 2023, compared to 27.9% in 2001 (Stats SA, 2025c). The informal sector remains a critical lifeline for women, providing work for 15.9% (or 1.2 million) of employed women (Stats SA, 2025d), although they are under-represented in traditionally male-dominated informal sectors, such as transportation. Geographically, informal work is concentrated in provinces with large urban populations: KZN, Gauteng and Eastern Cape.

Informal sector development

Informal trading in urban areas is often tightly regulated and contested, especially regarding access to public space and infrastructure. However, recognising that the informal economy in cities is not separate but linked to the mainstream economy in various ways, cities have started integrating informal work into their economic strategies and including informal economy support services in their integrated development plans (IDPs). These services include improving market infrastructure and reducing bureaucratic barriers associated with obtaining trading permits. A review of IDPs reveal that three metros have clear intentions to intervene in the informal sector's development and improve its functionality.

- Cape Town's IDP acknowledges that the informal economy is important, capable of providing employment and caters to the needs of lower-income communities. The city seeks to assist the informal section through partnerships and reducing barriers to create an enabling environment where informal businesses can flourish.
- Mangaung's IDP prioritises the informal economy by supporting efforts to enable employment initiatives, such as the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), and increase community awareness.
- Johannesburg's IDP is focused on increasing the ease of doing business and getting Council to approve and implement the city's informal trading policy.

Nevertheless, the competing realities of the informal economy are challenging for local government. On the one hand, the informal economy offers economic opportunity and gives expression to the rights of people to create their own livelihoods. Yet on the other hand, it can stress local infrastructure and increase contestation, particularly in public spaces.

Education and training

South Africa's structural unemployment is rooted in apartheid-era education and labour market systems (Altman, 2022). To address this, the country has mandated compulsory education for children aged 7–15 years and promotes inclusive access to early childhood development and basic education. Although tertiary enrolment has improved, South Africa still faces high graduate unemployment rates.

Misalignment persists between training outputs and the needs of key economic sectors, despite policy tools such as the sector skills plans that identify the skills development needs of various sectors. Reforms to the education and training systems, to ensure that learners are qualified, employable and have smooth education-to-employment transitions, have been slow. In response, several promising initiatives, such as the Installation, Repair and Maintenance (IRM) initiative, have been implemented. The IRM initiative, which is supported by government and private sector partnerships, has enabled over 30 000 township youth (60% of whom are women) to access skills training and employment opportunities through 13 IRM township hubs (NBI, 2024). Each of the hubs is located at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College campus and supports township-based IRM initiatives through enterprise and skills development. This demand-led model illustrates how targeted investments in practical skills and job matching can enhance employability and self-employment or entrepreneurship, as many of those young people who have benefitted from this initiative have gone on to create employment for themselves (ibid.).

In Q1 of 2025, approximately 3.8 million out of 10.3 million individuals aged 15–24 years were not in employment, education or training, equating to 37.1% of this age group (Stats SA, 2025a). This figure reflects, in part, the low participation and high dropout rates in TVET colleges. Technical and vocational training is a vital component of South Africa’s strategy to reduce youth unemployment and enhance labour market alignment. Yet TVET college enrolment figures have been declining since 2015, where they had peaked at 657 690 (DHET, 2016) – in 2024, enrolment at TVET colleges was 482 244 (Nzimande, 2024).



Sari for Change by Sari for Change Foundation

Sari for Change is a powerful example of how inclusive, climate-conscious entrepreneurship can create lasting change from the ground up.

Background

Founded by Rayana Edwards in 2014, Sari for Change is a Johannesburg-based social enterprise that transforms heritage textiles (donated saris) into luxury garments, while empowering unemployed women with skills to achieve economic independence. The initiative combines employment creation, sustainability and cultural preservation in a model that’s both socially impactful and economically viable. It promotes self-sufficiency, local manufacturing and mentorship.

Actions

The project provides a three-tier training and development programme that upskills women in garment making, personal growth and business acumen. After learning the craft, trainees establish home-based production units and eventually transition into suppliers who feed into Sari for Change’s retail and distribution network. Graduates go on to train others in areas, such as Cosmo City, Dobsonville and Yeoville.

Outcomes

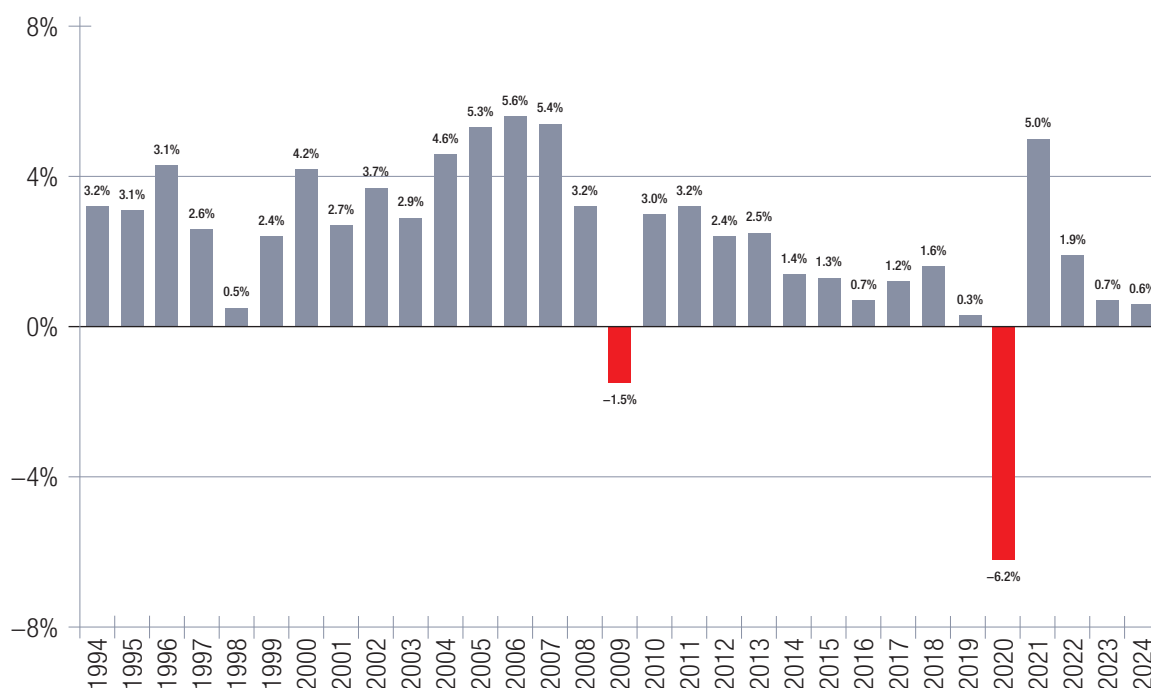
- To date, over 100 women have completed the programme, contributing to a growing ecosystem of sustainable fashion while diverting textile waste from landfills.
- Products made through the programme have reached national retailers like Pick n Pay and Big Blue, and the initiative has received international recognition for its innovative “pay it forward” model.

2.2 Generate Urban Prosperity and Productivity

South Africa’s urban areas are critical to the attainment of national prosperity as they contribute the majority share of the GDP and employment opportunities. However, the concentration of the economy in a few sectors, sluggish GDP growth and entrenched spatial inequalities limit urban areas’ potential to drive inclusive and sustainable prosperity (SACN, 2020; Abedian & Tsoanamatsie, 2021). After a sharp decrease in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa’s GDP grew by 5.0% in 2021 but then declined to reach 0.6% in 2024 (Figure 2.3). The agriculture, finance and trade sectors had the most significant positive impact on GDP growth – agriculture alone lifted GDP growth by 0.4 of a percentage point in 2024.⁸ Economic productivity – as measured by the country’s total output of goods and services – and economic expansion are low. This is indicative of structural economic problems, such as skills shortages (related to a mismatch between educational qualifications and skills required by business as discussed above) and underinvestment in technology.

8 <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=18124>

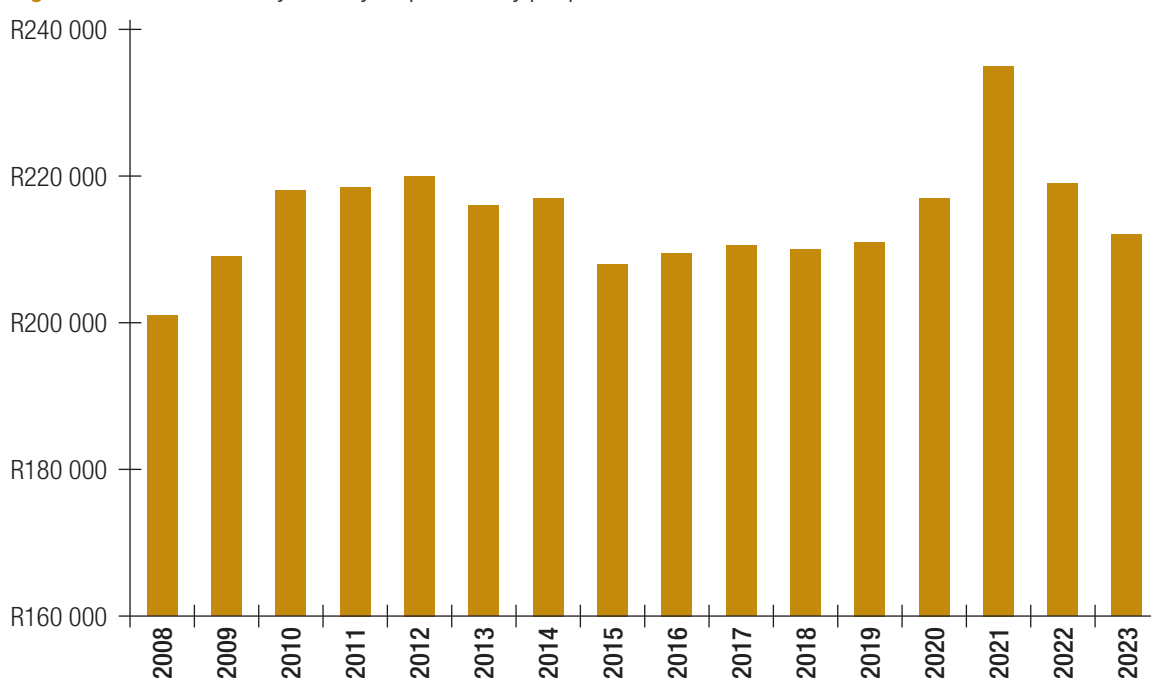
Figure 2.3: Annual GDP growth rate in constant 2015 prices (1994–2024)



Source: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=18124>

Between 2008 and 2023, South Africa's productivity, measured as real GDP per employed worker, has remained largely flat, averaging at just over R200 000 per worker annually, despite a slight spike in 2021 (PwC, 2024). Unsurprisingly, the year-on-year trendline for real GDP per employed worker (Figure 2.4) mirrors the GDP growth rate. These traditional measures of productivity tell a similar story, of an economy that is growing, albeit at slower rates each year, and is underperforming given the scale of the socio-economic challenges that need to be addressed.

Figure 2.4: South Africa's year-on-year productivity per person



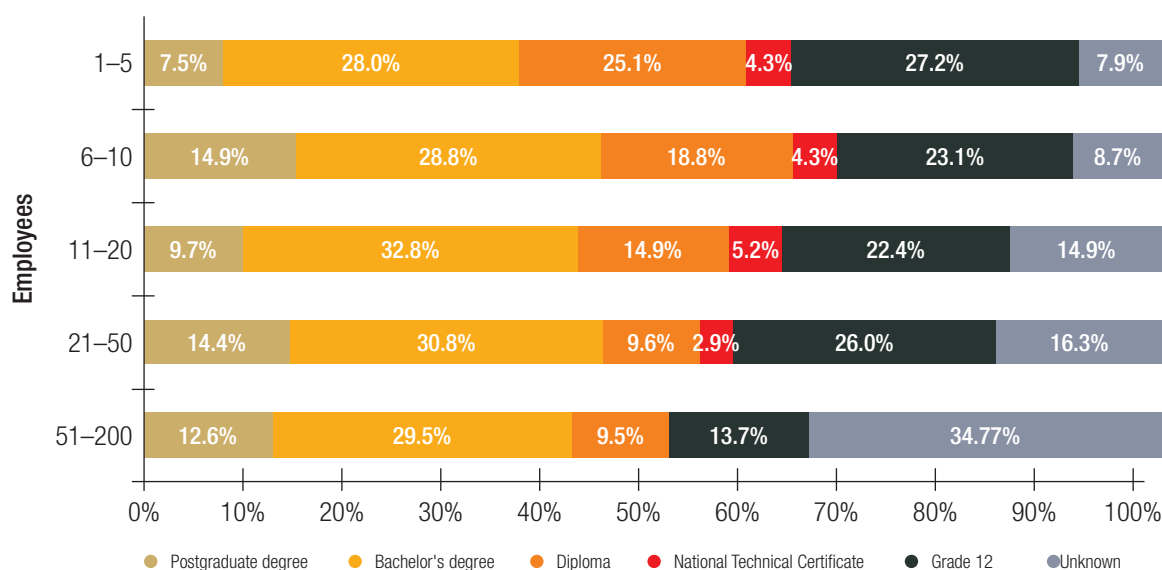
Source: PwC (2024)

Micro, small and medium-enterprises

Micro, small and medium-enterprises (MSMEs) are essential drivers of economic development and are often regarded as engines of growth and major job creators. In 2025, MSMEs contributed approximately 40% of the country's GDP, up from 34% in 2018 (IFC, 2018; DSBD, 2025). The NDP envisages that, by 2030, small enterprises will generate 90% of 11 million new jobs, including in retail, services, manufacturing and construction (NPC, 2012) – in 2024, MSMEs provided 80% of employment in South Africa, down from 87% in 2020 (FinMark Trust, 2021; 2024). MSMEs operate predominantly in the services and trade sectors, which include personal, education, financial and insurance, and professional services, and in wholesale retail, accommodation and real estate activities. Geographically, entrepreneurial activity is strongest in the major economic hubs, with a third of MSMEs based in Gauteng (34.6%) and the Western Cape (31.3%), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (15.1%) and the Eastern Cape (7.4 %). The other provinces, in particular the Northern Cape (1.1%) and North West (1.8%), are underrepresented, reflecting regional disparities in access to resources and markets (Shoprite Group, 2025).

Many MSMEs, specifically the micro-enterprises, operate informally (ibid.). However, despite the high proportion of women who work in the informal sector, women and youth are under-represented as business owners within the MSME sector, especially in larger enterprises. Women disproportionately own smaller enterprises and face challenges scaling their businesses due to the high rates of financial exclusion within the sector – according to the FinMark Trust (2024b), 15% of MSME owners are financially excluded. Younger entrepreneurs show innovation but also face similar barriers to entry, especially if they do not hold, at minimum, a bachelor's degree (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: MSME education level of owner by company size



Source: Shoprite Group (2025: 8)

The Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) has taken the lead in ensuring that the finance ecosystem is better aligned to the needs of MSMEs and cooperatives and to ensure that gaps in financial products and services are addressed. The Companies and Intellectual Property Commission has introduced various non-financial interventions to streamline the business registration process, including the BizPortal, which is a “one stop shop for registering a business”.⁹ It takes 7–26 days to start a business using this

⁹ <https://www.doingbusiness.org.za/doing-business/doing-business-indicators/starting-a-business-indicator/>

portal.¹⁰ The Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEDFA) has supported 62 321 MSMEs with financial and non-financial interventions. In 2024/25, the SEDFA disbursed R748.5 million to 32 015 MSMEs and provided non-financial support to 30 306 MSMEs (Makanda, 2025). This initiative is steadily building momentum, giving MSMEs much needed support.

Manufacturing sector

The manufacturing sector remains in decline overall due to market uncertainties and sluggish economic growth. Manufacturing jobs traditionally absorb semi-skilled labour and contribute to the creation of jobs in urban and peri-urban areas. In Q1 of 2025, the number of people employed in the manufacturing sector was 1.677 million, a slight increase from the 1.606 million in Q1 of 2024 (Stats SA, 2025a). In March 2025, manufacturing production fell by 0.8% year-on-year, with the petroleum, chemical products, rubber, plastics and electrical machinery sectors most negatively affected (ibid.). When manufacturing employment decreases, workers are shifted into lower-paying service roles, exacerbating income inequality. Less-educated workers are the most negatively affected, which worsens the socio-economic disparities within demographic groups. For cities, the decline in manufacturing has an impact on wages, property values, poverty^{11, 12} and mortality rates among the African population (Gould, 2021).



Innovate Durban: Building an Inclusive Innovation Economy

Innovate Durban is an inclusive, locally rooted model for supporting youth entrepreneurs and SMMEs.

Background

Innovate Durban is a non-profit organisation that supports youth entrepreneurship, township innovation, digital literacy and SMME development across eThekweni and beyond. Backed by the City and aligned with its Shape Durban strategy, the organisation provides practical support through three pillars: Innovation Support, Skills Development and Research.

Actions

Its Innovation Co-Lab in Cato Manor gives township-based innovators access to co-working and manufacturing facilities. The model has expanded to rural areas, such as Bhongweni in Kokstad, with backing from the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation. Innovate Durban collaborates with partners such as SAP, IKhokha, UKZN, and Adams & Adams.

Outcomes

- Supported 240 innovators annually, many of whom have launched prototypes and products.
- Enabled access to R3.3 million of funding (2023/24), with startups generating revenue of R11+ million.
- Trained over 900 people (2024/25) in design thinking, digital skills and 4IR tech.
- Focused on youth and women (of the innovators assisted 73% are aged under 35 years and 65% are women).

Innovate Durban was recently named the winner of the 2024 TIA Grassroots Innovation Awards, and the model is being adapted in other parts of the country.

[Innovate Durban: Building an Inclusive Innovation Ecosystem – Google Drive.](#)

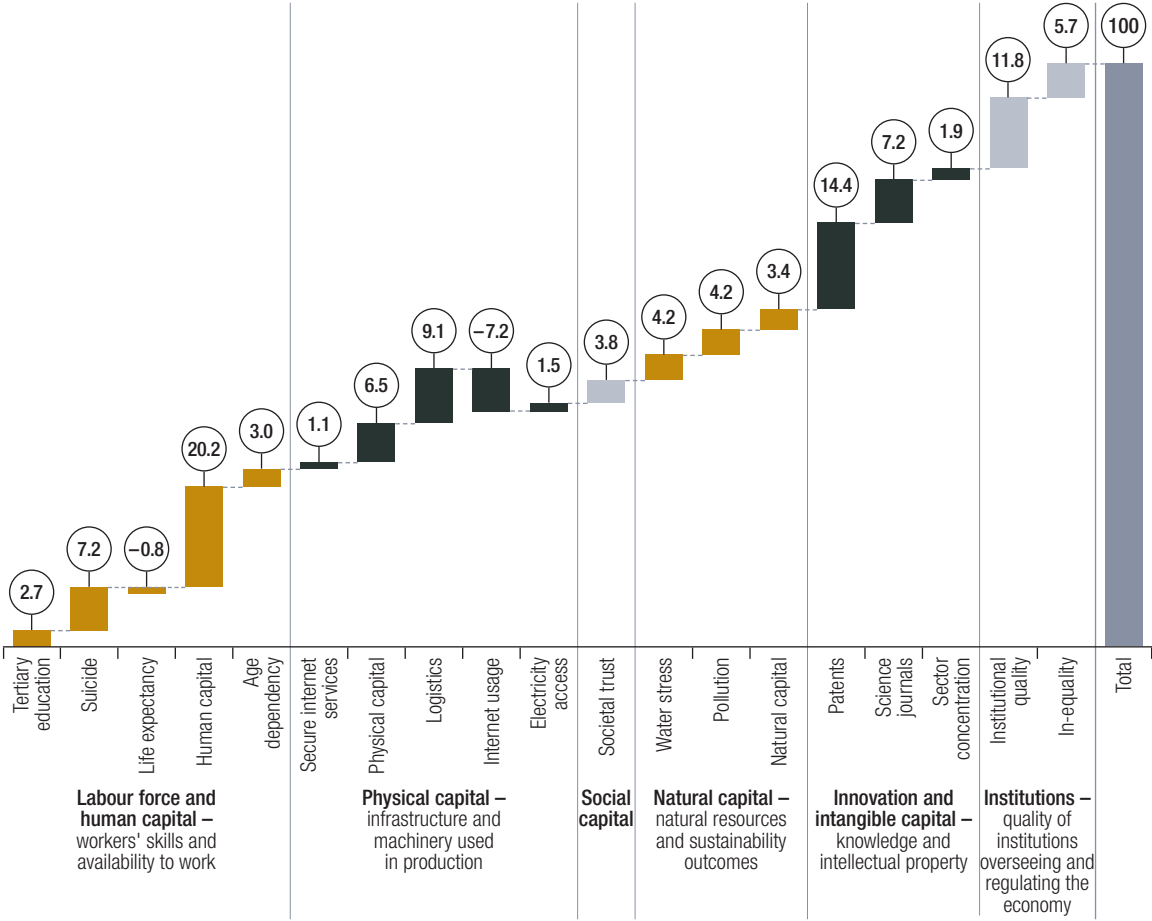
¹⁰ <https://smesouthafrica.co.za/the-basics-of-how-to-register-a-small-business-in-south-africa/#:~:text=How%20Long%20Does%20It%20Take,workload%20of%20the%20registrar's%20office>

¹¹ <https://ntiyisoconsulting.co.za/high-rate-of-de-industrialization-and-the-impact-on-south-africas-economic-resilience-emeka-umeche/>

¹² <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.659>

Traditional productivity measures have been criticised for omitting aspects that influence productive capacity, such as environmental degradation, erosion of societal trust or the weakening of equity that may result from a production process. PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has developed an alternative way of measuring productivity, the Productivity Potential Index (PPI), which uses machine learning to estimate country-specific potential productivity based on all available data. As Figure 2.6 shows, South Africa's productivity is strongly determined by human capital, logistics and the quality of institutions overseeing and regulating the economy. These aspects are currently at the heart of the country's biggest economic challenges – South Africa is ranked 55 out of 60 countries on the PPI (PwC, 2025).

Figure 2.6: South Africa's productivity potential index



Source: PwC (2025)

The PPI also recommends that the government should diversify urban economies, strengthen SMEs and foster creative industries.

Cultural and creative industries

South Africa has long recognised the potential of the cultural and creative industries to contribute to both economic and social development, as evidenced in the Cultural Industries Growth Strategy (DACST,¹³ 1998). A rich and diverse arts and culture heritage is among the country's most valuable resources, capable of generating substantial economic and social benefits.

13 Now the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition.

The Cultural and Creative Industries Masterplan (DTIC, 2022) identifies the following sub-sectors:

- Visual arts and crafts, including fine arts
- Photography and crafts
- Audio-visual and interactive media, including film and video, TV and radio (including internet live streaming), internet podcasting and video games (including online)
- Design and creative services, including fashion design, graphic design, interior design, etc.
- Performance and celebration, including performing arts, music, festivals, fairs and feasts
- Press, books and information, including newspapers, magazines, book fairs, etc.

The cultural and creative industries have the potential to contribute even more to employment, job transformation and economic growth in South Africa. In 2021, these industries added approximately R250 billion to South Africa's GDP, or 4.3% of total economic output (SACO, 2024). In 2023, the broader 'cultural economy' provided over one million jobs (6.72% of total employment). Currently, the sector supports approximately 1.2 million jobs, or about 7% of total employment in South Africa (ibid.), despite the sector's growth stagnating in recent years due to external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Provincial data shows that most cultural and creative industries are clustered in urban areas of Gauteng, KZN and the Western Cape. Gauteng's cultural and creative industries contribute the most (46.5%) to the country's gross value add (GVA), followed by KZN (14.2%) and the Western Cape (12.4%). Although city-level data is limited, major metros, such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and eThekweni, contribute the most to employment figures in the cultural and creative industries sector.



48-Hour Film Project (Durban Chapter)

Background

Led by Nerusha Maharaj, the Durban chapter of the 48-Hour Film Project empowers filmmakers and content creators to produce a short film over the course of one weekend. This project is part of a global effort spanning 145 cities and has seen significant growth in Durban over the past six years, earning the Durban chapter third place among participating cities.

Actions

Youth and community members receive training and mentorship, as well as attend workshops, with the aim of transforming them from passive content consumers into active creators. Through partnerships with art centres, schools and tertiary institutions, young people are exposed to various career paths in the film and media industry (e.g., writing, lighting, editing and wardrobe).

The project is inclusive, supporting participants with disabilities and engaging senior citizens in filmmaking. All qualifying films are screened in cinemas, with winners advancing to international competitions, including screenings at the Cannes Film Festival. By fostering volunteer-based productions, the project keeps filmmaking accessible and affordable. Over the years, it has provided emerging talent with bursaries, equipment rentals and cash prizes.

Outcomes

In 2025, a record for Africa was set, when 161 teams participated, including from South Africa, Lesotho, Nigeria and Ukraine.

Key partners include the National Film & Video Foundation, Film & Publication Board, Visual Network SA and educational institutions, such as Durban University of Technology and Creative Arts College.

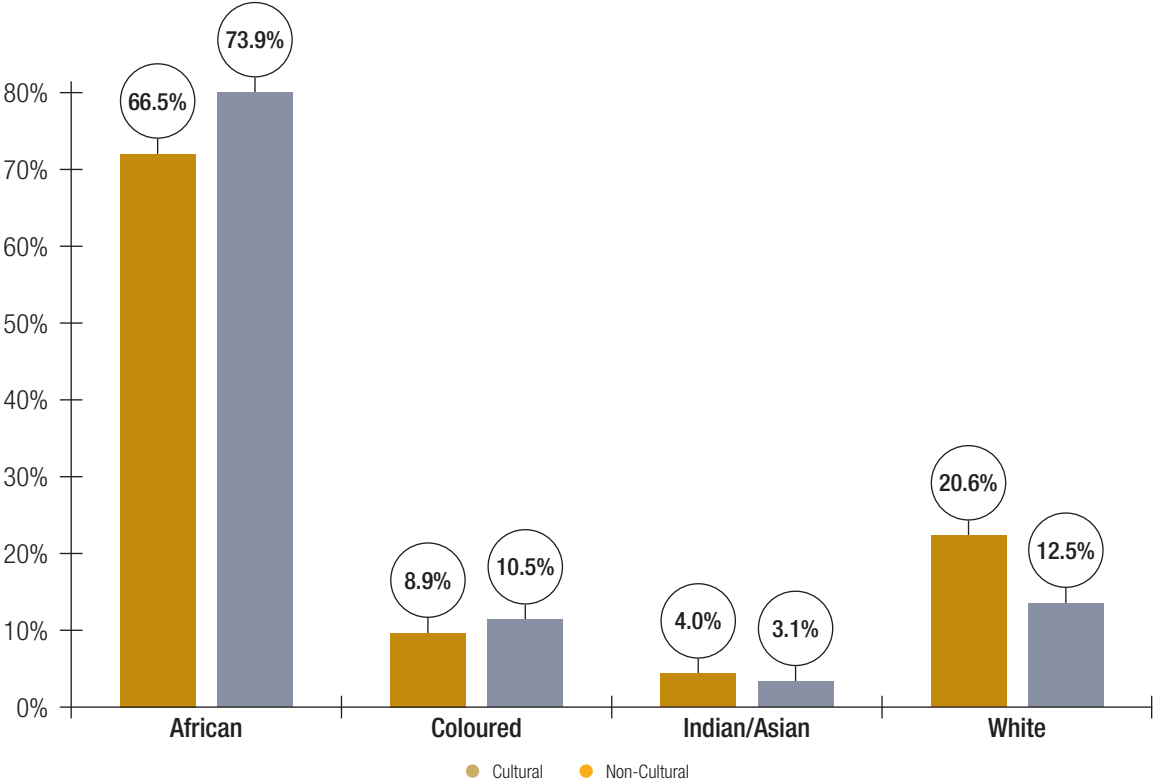
View the films by clicking on these links:

["Ubuntu" Movie Created by UAZA Team in 48 Hours](#) and [48 Hour film project Durban: Greenhouse Effect](#)

The cultural and creative industries also contribute to own revenue, which refers to funds generated by municipalities themselves through property rates, service charges, fines, licences, rentals and investment income, and excludes intergovernmental grants and subsidies. Own revenues are an indication of a city's fiscal autonomy and capacity to raise revenue independently. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on own-revenue sources due to business closures and reduced water and electricity sales, since 2016, metros have maintained or slightly increased their share of own revenue relative to total revenue, mainly through tariff adjustments and improved collections (National Treasury, 2024a). In 2024/25, the eight metros (Category A municipalities) accounted for 58.5% of total revenue raised by local governments, which is expected to increase to 59.8% in 2026/27 (ibid.).

The cultural and creative industries sector lacks racial diversification. In 2017, people working in this sector were somewhat less racially diverse than those in non-cultural occupations (Figure 2.7), with some sub-sectors more transformed than others, especially those requiring higher levels of education or formal qualifications.

Figure 2.7: Employment by race in cultural and non-cultural occupations



Source: SACO (2017)

In 2025, the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC), in partnership with the Academic and Non-Fiction Authors Association of South Africa (ANFASA), published the third annual DSAC Publishing Hub open call. Launched in 2023, this initiative is aimed at supporting authors, encouraging the creation of new literature in all official South African languages and amplifying marginalised voices.

PART 3

Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development

South Africa is faced with the complex challenges of addressing both historical (legacy) and present-day environmental challenges within a context of deepening inequality and poverty. Every year, the country faces several climate-related disasters, from droughts to floods, severe storms and fires, that pose significant threats to human and non-human lives (Sithole, 2023). These disasters not only threaten livelihoods and damage ecosystems but also increase the vulnerability of society's most marginalised. Ongoing urbanisation means that more people are exposed to disaster risks and stresses related to water availability, agriculture and ecosystems, among others.

South Africa's just urban transition continues apace, as evidenced by the development of climate change-related policy instruments for the sustainable management of natural resources and the implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. Building on national policies, cities have developed instruments aimed at ensuring urban spaces are socially and environmentally sustainable and resilient. These include climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience strategies; environmental strategies; climate action plans; water security strategies and integrated waste management plans; and green building policies.

Part 3 outlines the progress made by South Africa to foster environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development. The progress made towards realising this transformative commitment is measured in line with the suggested NUA indicators (Table 3.1). This part also presents the evidence and analyses the progress made by South Africa towards realising these indicators.

Table 3.1: NUA focus areas and indicators for environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Resilient and Adaptive Urban Development	Share of urban population exposed to climate threats	SDG 11.5
	City or local authority adoption or implementation of local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies	SDG 11.b.2
	Proportion of sub-national/local government budget dedicated to climate change mitigation and adaptation actions*	SDG 11.8, SDG 11.a & SDG 13
	The number of cities that have/percentage of urban population that is covered by multi-hazard early warning systems*	SDG 11.5 & SDG 13.3
	Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution	SDG 11.5 & 11.6
	Urban heat island as variation of temperature relative to non-urban area	SDG 11.6, SDG 11.7 & SDG 13.1

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Climate Change Mitigation	Total greenhouse gas emissions per year per capita	SDG 13.2.2
	Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g., PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)	SDG 11.6.2
	Domestic material consumption per capita & per GDP	SDG 12
	Material footprint per capita & per GDP	SDG 12.2.1
	Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption	SDG 7.2.1
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation	Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate*	SDG 11.3.1
	Existence of an enforced coastal land management plan in the country	not covered by SDG indicators
	Proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flow safely treated*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Proportion of municipal solid wastewater collected and managed in controlled facilities*	SDG 11.6.1 & SDG 12.4.2

* indicates partial information is reported.

3.1 Develop Resilient and Adaptive Cities

South Africa faces an increasingly broad spectrum of climate-related hazards, including extreme weather events and coastal and marine threats, which pose serious risks to both people and infrastructure.¹⁴ Many urban communities are highly vulnerable to human- and climate-induced hazards, such as wildfires and droughts, in particular in peripheral, underserved and ecologically sensitive areas.¹⁵ This vulnerability is differentiated and varies according to housing type (formal vs informal), geographic proximity to coastlines and socio-economic status.

Between 2016 and 2022, the percentage of urban households located in disaster-prone areas decreased from 13.9% (16.7 million) to 8.1% (17.8 million), which was a notable improvement (Stats SA, 2017; 2023c). However, households in these high-risk zones remain more susceptible to environmental threats. Vulnerability is exacerbated in coastal metros (Buffalo City, Cape Town, eThekweni and Nelson Mandela Bay), where exposure to sea-level rise and marine hazards is increasing.¹⁶

Disaster risk management

In South Africa, all spheres of government have a constitutional mandate for disaster management (Schedule 4, Part A of the Constitution), operationalised through the Disaster Management Act (No. 57 of 2002). The Act provides for an integrated, coordinated approach encompassing prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. South Africa's NDP 2030 requires disaster risk reduction (DRR) to

¹⁴ <https://www.ndmc.gov.za/Home/SAPProfile>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Climate Change Adaptation: Climate Information and Early Warning Systems: Adaptation Scenarios Series Factsheet 2 of 7

be embedded in all development and planning processes, while urban resilience is one of the IUDF's three cross-cutting themes.

The Disaster Management Act requires cities and towns to develop disaster risk management plans that are aligned with policy and integrated into their IDPs and overseen by local disaster management centres (DMCs). Guiding documents for cities include:

- The [Guideline on Integration of DDR into Municipal IDPs](#), developed by the National DMC in 2023.
- The [Greenbook I Adapting settlements for the future](#), developed by the CSIR and used by many municipalities, including eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, Ugu District Municipality, Nkangala District Municipality and Umhlathuze Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal.

Since 2024, sub-national climate responses have accelerated, following the adoption of the Climate Change Act (No. 22 of 2024), the publication of the Draft Sectoral Emissions Targets, the establishment of the Climate Change Response Fund, and the release of the Phase 2 Carbon Tax (2026–2030) Discussion Paper. Operationalisation of these policies began in the 2025/26 financial year (Deloitte, 2025).



Building a Resilient and Inclusive Durban: eThekweni's Pathways to Urban Resilience

eThekweni is one of only two metros in South Africa (the other is Cape Town) that is a member of the global [Resilient Cities Network](#) and a leader in climate change adaptation.

Background

In 2017, the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality adopted its Urban Resilience Strategy as a central framework for institutionalising resilience across the city.

Actions

The strategy was developed through a rigorous three-month public consultation process and so reflects the diverse voices and lived experiences of Durban's communities, civil society actors and institutional stakeholders. It identifies six core levers for change, which guide the municipality's efforts to navigate complex social, economic and environmental risks:

- Strengthening local communities and building social cohesion.
- Improving the effectiveness of education and skills development.
- Promoting economic growth in line with 21st-century trends and opportunities.
- Managing environmental assets more effectively.
- Creating a more inclusive and integrated spatial plan.
- Improving municipal effectiveness.

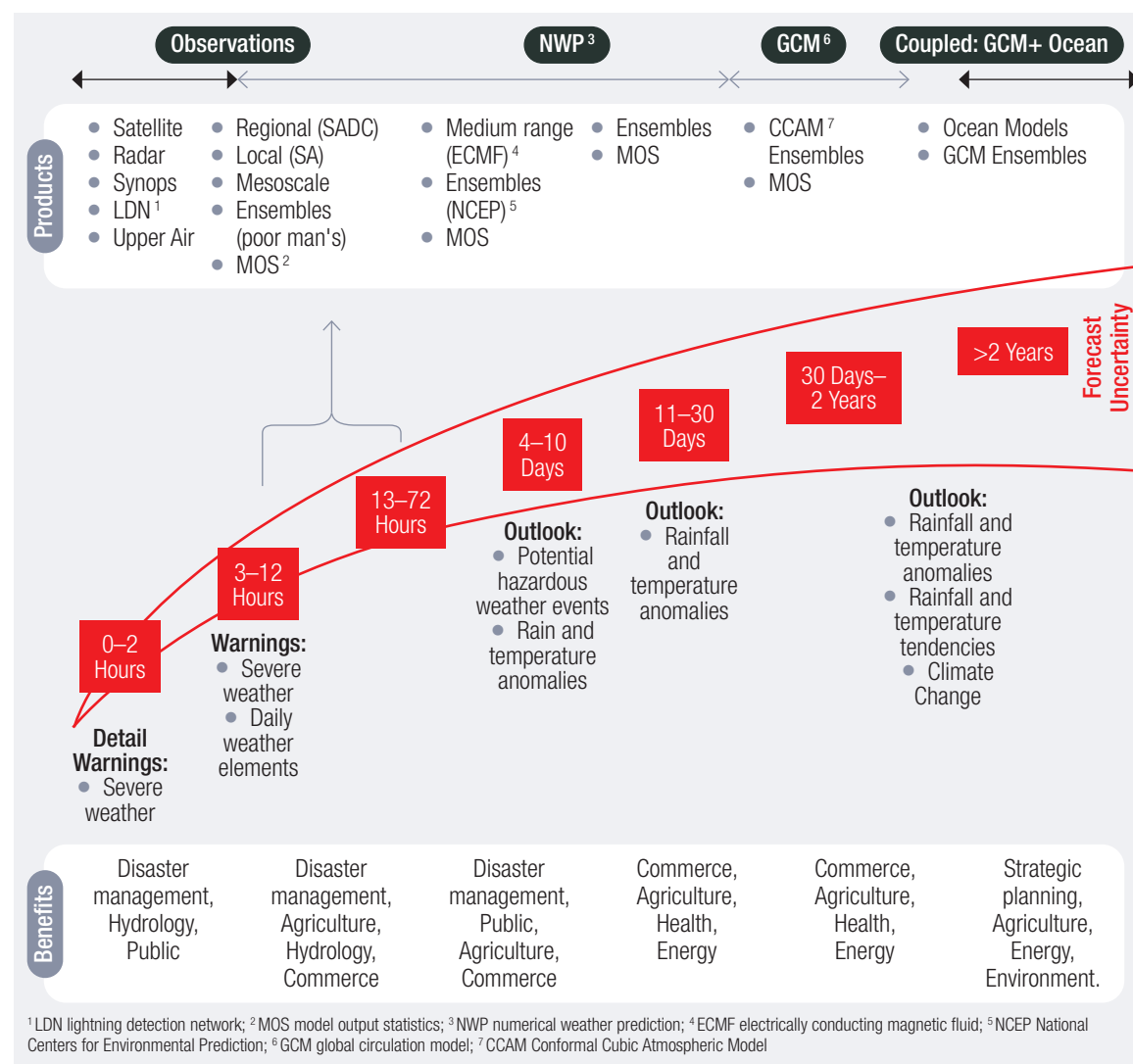
These levers form the backbone of two interconnected resilience-building pathways, which aim to protect eThekweni's extensive biodiversity and ecological assets and to address deep-rooted socio-economic vulnerabilities and emerging climate-related risks.

Outcomes

- Embedded resilience into the city's development agenda through a long-term vision of a more equitable, sustainable and climate-adaptive urban future.
- Developed through a participatory approach, which provides a foundation for shaping a shared understanding of resilience, grounded in local priorities and challenges.

All metros have established local DMCs, which complement nine provincial and 44 district-level DMCs.¹⁷ These centres collaborate closely with the South African Weather Service (SAWS), the country's lead agency for multi-hazard early warning systems. The SAWS operates a sophisticated forecasting system (Figure 3.1) based on international best practice that aggregates data from 25 regional weather offices, 166 automatic weather stations, 1 512 rainfall stations (automatic and manual) and 112 climate stations. The National Forecasting Centre in Pretoria coordinates forecasts that are disseminated to DMCs at provincial and local levels to support timely, informed disaster responses.

Figure 3.1: SAWS forecasting system



Source: DEA (2016)

¹⁷ <https://afrp.undrr.org/publication/south-africa-official-statement>

These efforts contribute to South Africa's progressive alignment with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and signify steady progress in reducing urban disaster risk and strengthening resilience.¹⁸



“Staying Ahead of the Flame: Real-Time Fire Risk Alerts for Safer Communities”

With climate change intensifying the frequency and intensity of out-of-control fires, early warning is crucial to prevent loss of life and destruction of property. By putting timely, location-specific fire information into the hands of users, the Advanced Fire Information System (AFIS) contributes to DRR efforts and helps build safer, more responsive communities.

Background

South Africa's CSIR developed the AFIS, which is a pioneering tool that enhances real-time fire monitoring and early warning.

Actions

Using satellite data, AFIS detects active fires across the country on a daily basis and provides this information to both public authorities and the general public. It includes two important features:

- The AFIS Windy Viewer, which allows users to monitor key weather variables that influence fire behaviour (such as wind direction and speed, temperature and pressure), providing them with a practical, near real-time sense of how conditions are evolving in their areas.
- The AFIS Alert System, which enables users to define specific geographic areas (geofences) and receive alerts when fires are detected nearby. It also notifies users of potential fire threats within a three-kilometre radius of their geofence, giving them the opportunity to trigger emergency protocols and reduce risk to people, animals and infrastructure.

Outcomes

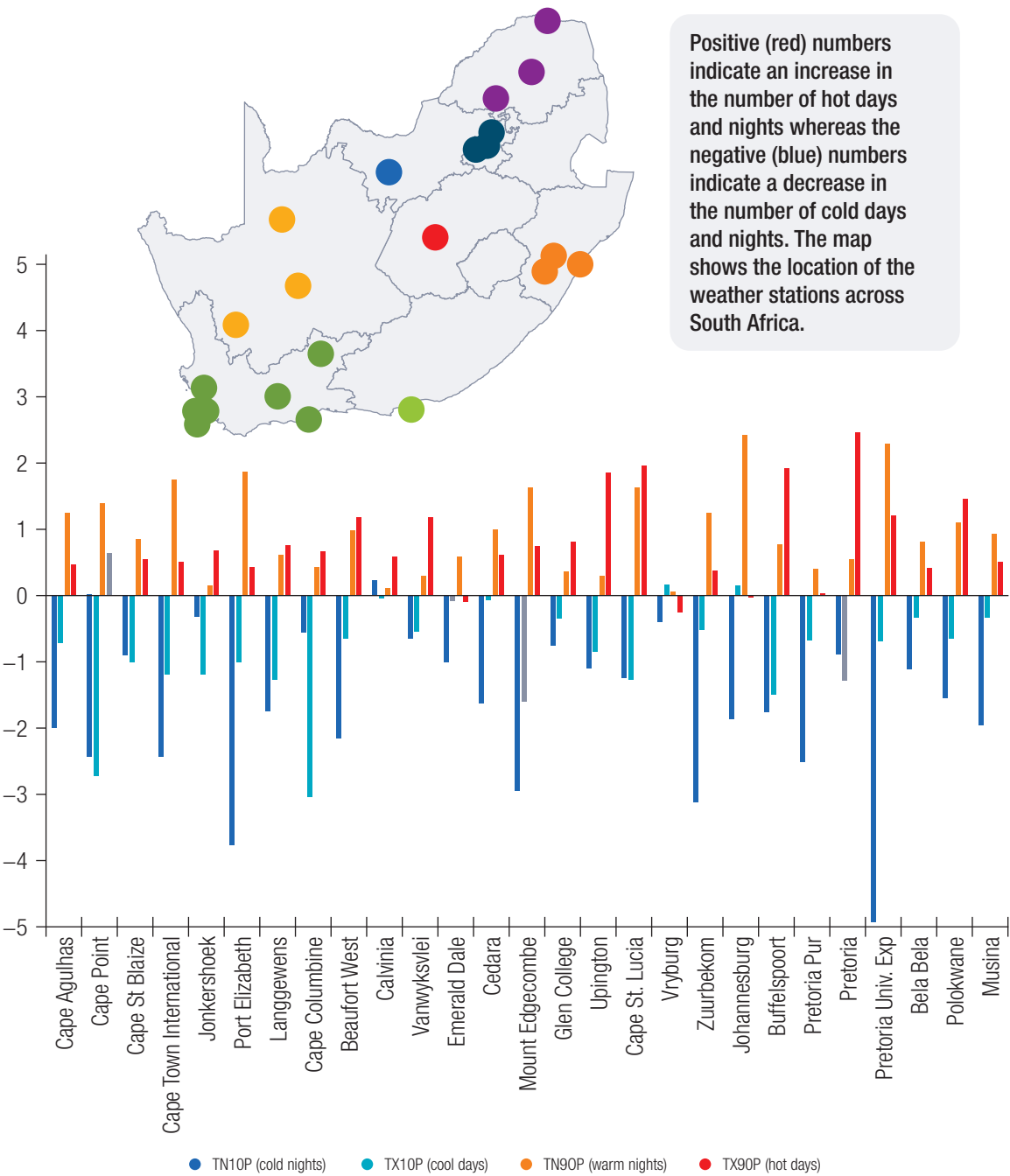
- Enables swift and informed responses to fire risks.
- Improves environmental monitoring and disaster risk management.
- Improves fire prediction, detection and risk assessment capabilities in South Africa.

¹⁸ <https://afip.undrr.org/publication/south-africa-official-statement>

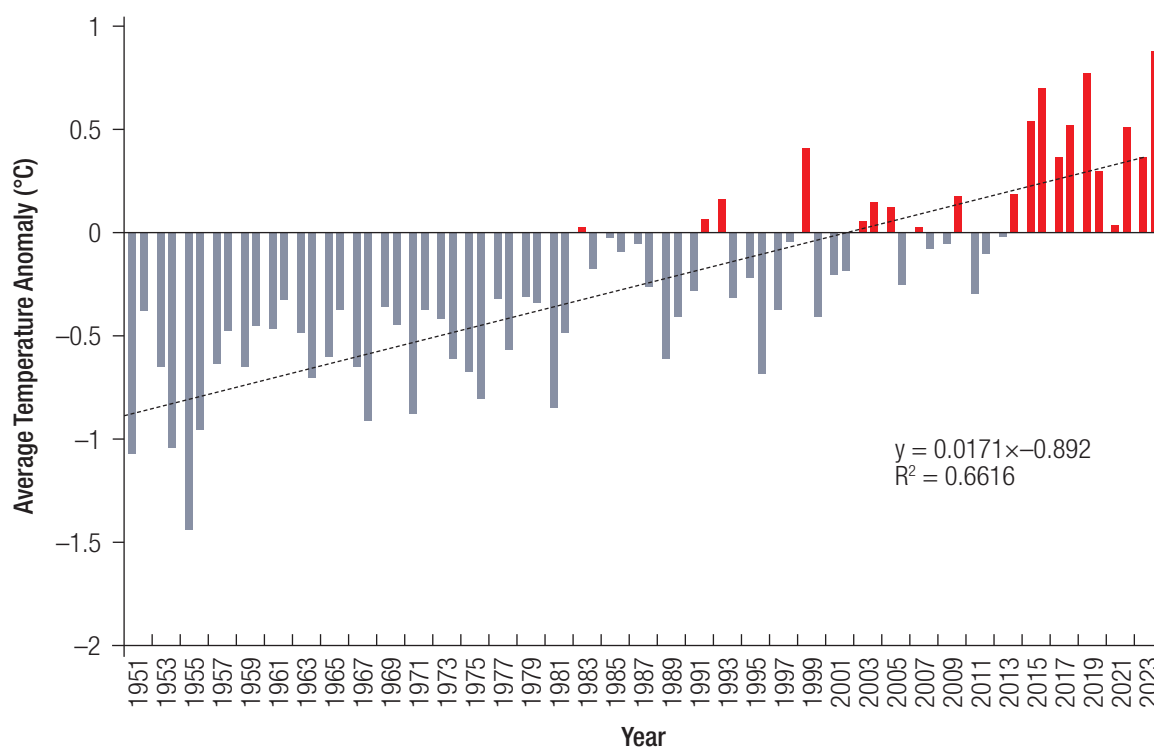
Urban heat island effect

One gap in South Africa’s urban disaster-risk efforts is a proactive response to the urban heat island (UHI) effect, which is a phenomenon whereby urban development alters natural energy balances. It results in significantly higher local temperatures compared to surrounding rural areas. Urban areas in South Africa are increasingly at risk of UHI (CSIR, 2018), especially as South Africa is experiencing more hot days and nights and fewer extremely cold days – the country recently recorded its hottest year on record (SAWS, 2025). Since 1951, South Africa has been warming at about 0.17°C per decade and, in 2024, average temperatures in 2024 were 1.45 ± 0.12°C above the 1850–1900 baseline, and as high as 1.55 ± 0.13°C in the southernmost regions (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

Figure 3.2: Trends in extreme temperature indices across 27 weather stations



Source: <https://catalogue.saeon.ac.za/records?referrer=SAEON>

Figure 3.3: Annual surface temperature anomalies

Source: SAWS (2025: 7)

Climate finance

Municipal budget constraints continue to delay the implementation of resilience-building initiatives. Currently, only 12% of tracked climate finance is allocated to adaptation, while 88% is directed towards mitigation (PCC, 2024), resulting in an uneven implementation of adaptation projects across the country. Climate change adaptation and DRR share similar goals (to reduce social vulnerability and increase urban resilience), and so cities have the opportunity to create synergies and integrate adaptation and DRR without assuming new, unfunded mandates (Matikinca, Nyamakura & Shackleton, 2024). This has begun, with cities mainstreaming DRR and climate change strategies in their IDPs, signalling a shift towards systemic, cross-sectoral planning for mitigation and adaptation. However, this integration also presents new challenges for tracking climate finance, particularly at the sub-national level.

Government remains the primary driver of public climate finance, contributing 55% (R12 billion or US\$664 million) of tracked public climate investments in 2017/18 (Cassim et al., 2021). Between 2019 and 2021, the government contributed R6 billion annually, or 33%, of total public climate finance (Meattle et al., 2023). These investments are in line with the NDP's objective of allocating 10% of GDP to the water, energy and transport sectors until 2030. The energy sector, in particular, remains central to South Africa's just transition agenda due to the country's heavy dependence on coal, which supplies 82.8% of the country's energy (Mkoko, 2024). This has contributed to South Africa having six of the world's largest nitrogen dioxide emission hotspots, nine of Africa's 10 largest nitrogen dioxide hotspots and four of Africa's most polluting sulphur dioxide sources, resulting in high levels of air pollution – an estimated 25 800 premature deaths annually are attributed to poor air quality (Gantsho, 2024).

These realities reinforce the urgency of transitioning towards a cleaner energy mix while simultaneously addressing adaptation, mitigation and resilience imperatives in South Africa's urban landscape.

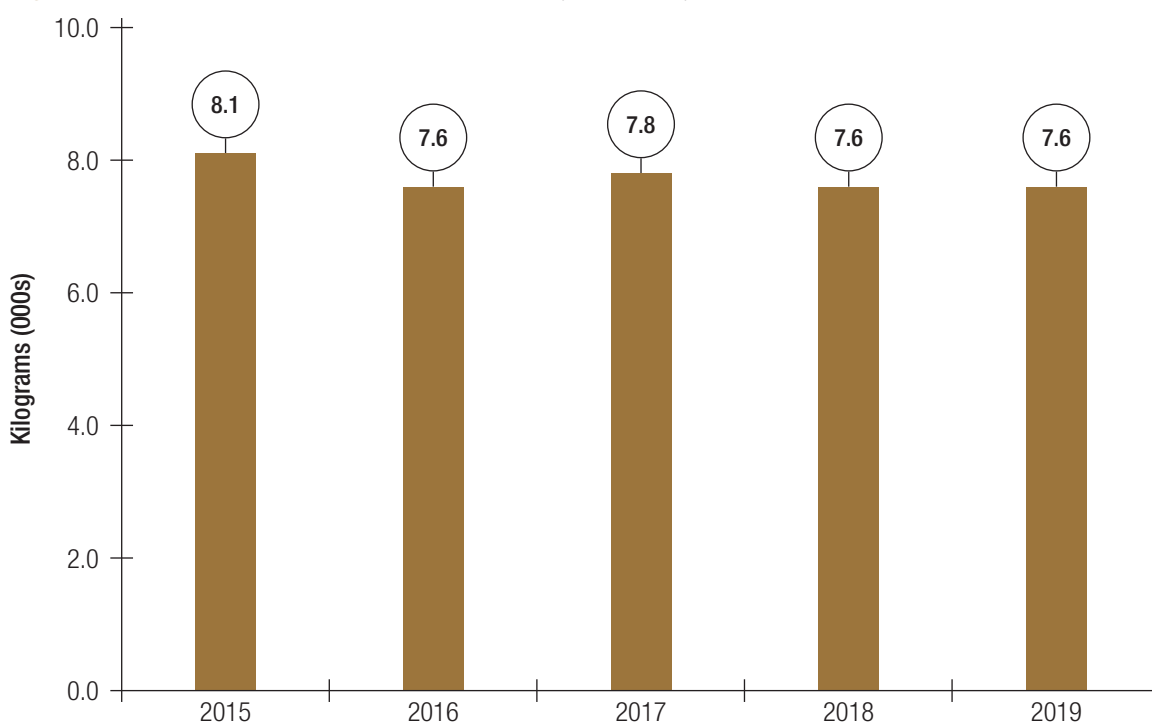
3.2 Mitigate Climate Change

In recent years, South Africa's efforts to mitigate climate change have gained momentum, with notable policy shifts and sectoral reforms. The Climate Change Act (No. 22 of 2024) is a framework law that aims to steer the country towards a just and sustainable low-carbon future. Led by the DFFE, the Act mandates long-term planning for energy transition, greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction and climate resilience. It forms part of a growing body of climate-related policy instruments that, while increasingly ambitious in their objectives, have not consistently translated into more stringent enforcement mechanisms.

Material footprint

Despite the existence of national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) and an extensive monitoring system, levels of particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) have continued to rise. Between 2016 and 2020, PM10 levels increased from 28 to over 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, surpassing the NAAQS limit of 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. PM2.5 levels also rose modestly during this period, highlighting the urgent need for more effective mitigation measures to reduce emissions and improve urban air quality (Stats SA, 2023a).¹⁹ These emissions are closely tied to the country's material consumption patterns, especially in energy-intensive sectors, such as coal-based electricity, agriculture, construction and manufacturing. Between 2015 and 2019, South Africa's material footprint per capita declined slowly, from 8.1 to 7.6 kilogrammes in thousands (Figure 3.4), and is largely correlated with economic downturns rather than a structural shift in consumption (Stats SA, 2023a; OECD, 2025). This confirms that economic growth remains tightly coupled with increased resource use, indicating the challenges of transitioning to a circular or decoupled economy.

Figure 3.4: South Africa's material footprint per capita (2016–2024)



Source: Stats SA (2023a : 122)

¹⁹ https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/country_profile/ZAF

Greenhouse gas emissions

South Africa is one of the highest per capita emitters of CO₂ globally, largely due to its reliance on coal-fired power. Metros, which consume an estimated 35% of the country's electricity, are major contributors to GHG emissions, with Johannesburg leading among urban centres.²⁰ However, from 2020 to 2023, the country recorded a gradual decline in emissions, particularly in the energy sector, that was driven by slower economic growth and increased use of renewables, reaching 17–20% in 2024, which is lower than the global average of 41% (Ember, 2025; OECD, 2025). This trend suggests that South Africa remains on track to meet its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), although progress is uneven (DFFE, 2024a).

South Africa has made significant progress in developing national data and reporting systems to inform decision-making. The South African Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting System (SAGERS) and AFIS have improved national capabilities to track emissions and disaster risk. However, gaps remain in data granularity, particularly for assessing the public health impacts of air pollution and the effectiveness of response mechanisms.

South African Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting System



SAGERS is a web-based platform managed by the DFFE that enables entities whose GHG emissions meet or exceed defined thresholds (measured in CO₂-equivalent units) to register as data providers and submit annual GHG emissions reports. The DFFE reviews and verifies submitted data to ensure compliance with the National GHG Emission Reporting Regulations, 2016 (as amended), thereby enhancing transparency and regulatory oversight.

SAGERS plays a key role in maintaining the National GHG Inventory and providing verified data to inform climate-related policy development and legislative processes. It complements the South African Air Quality Information System (SAAQIS), established under the National Framework for Air Quality Management in South Africa, by strengthening national capacity for integrated environmental monitoring and reporting.

Renewable energy

In 2025, a major policy advancement was the approval of the South African Renewable Energy Masterplan, which is a blueprint for growing the domestic renewable energy value chain and was developed in alignment with the Just Transition Framework and the Integrated Resource Plan. Even prior to the Masterplan's formal implementation, the uptake of renewable energy, particularly through private sector investment, had accelerated, enabled by regulatory reforms and the expansion of programmes, such as the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP). By 2024, renewables made up 8.8% of the national energy mix (GreenCape, 2021; Mkoko, 2024). Yet, despite the declining costs of renewable technologies, access remains deeply unequal. Many vulnerable and low-income communities are unable to afford alternative energy solutions and thus remain exposed to the socio-economic impacts of scheduled power outages and the broader energy crisis.²¹ This reinforces the need for equitable financing and targeted support in renewable energy rollout.

²⁰ <https://www.crses.sun.ac.za/sa-energy-stats/#:~:text=In%202017%20the%20most%20recent%20year%20for,with%20the%20largest%20consumption%20occurring%20in%20Johannesburg.&text=Although%20generation%20capacity%20has%20been%20sporadically%20added,has%20declined%20significantly%20from%201990%20to%202024>

²¹ Ibid.



The Bekezela SolarPunk Community Hub

Although overall access to renewable energy is deeply unequal, some innovative projects are emerging, such as in Bekezela.

Background

The Bekezela community is an informal settlement of around 610 people from diverse backgrounds who live next to the M1 offramp in Newtown, Johannesburg, South Africa (26°11'58.5"S 28°01'43.1"E). Many in the community make their living as "reclaimers", i.e., collecting and processing the recyclable materials from waste produced throughout the city. The Bekezela community crèche is a local initiative that provides early education to the young children who are also fed from the produce of the community garden.

Actions

Following extensive consultations with the Bekezela community and Bekezela community crèche management team, and after upgrading the Bekezela crèche infrastructure (walls, food, water and security), the Bekezela SolarPunk Hub project was given the green light.

In January 2025, activist and professional solar installer Sunny Morgan and his team installed the system, generously donating much of the essential hardware. The project provides the crèche and community with renewable electrical energy through a system comprising solar panels (3 × 410 W), an inverter (3 kW) and batteries (2.4 kWh lithium). Free power is available to the community via a charging station and, although the main charging points are only open during office hours, an external charging box allows 24/7 access to power via USB connection. The system is monitored and secured by local community member, Justin Ngozo, who works as the crèche caretaker and teacher.

On 29 January 2025, a short comedy performance was held that presented the Hub to the Bekezela community. The show demonstrated the various features of the Hub, explained the benefits of solar power and described its safe and proper use. This hilarious performance featured Mlindeli Zondi, Philani Tensso Mhlanga and Lumka Dumezweni, and was directed by Daniel Buckland.

Outcomes

The Hub provides the following additional services free of charge:

- A digital library hosted on a low-power Raspberry Pi computer containing one terabyte of data – the "internet-in-a-box" platform provides access to a vast array of educational materials, including Kiwix, Khan Academy videos, "Rachel"/OER2Go, YouTube documentaries, Wikipedias in isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Sesotho, Sepedi, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English, Openstreet Maps, and learning management systems (Kolibri and Moodle).
- An extensive book library that communities use for research and entertainment.
- High-speed (~300 MB/s 5G) internet, with dedicated 2.4 GHz and 5 GHz Wi-Fi connections for the crèche and the community.
- Space for digitally storing and sharing documents and media.

The Bekezela SolarPunk Community Hub project provides a highly marginalised community with access to energy, educational opportunities and digital connectivity.

3.3

Enhance Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation

The NUA frames biodiversity and ecosystem services as critical for achieving inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities. Specifically, the NUA (paras. 71–75) calls for the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable land use and the protection of ecosystems as essential elements of urban policy and spatial planning. South Africa has developed several policy frameworks that facilitate the integration of ecosystem-based approaches into urban development.

- The IUDF includes environmental sustainability as one of its four strategic goals, calling for the protection of ecological infrastructure and the integration of green spaces into the urban form to enhance resilience and liveability (COGTA, 2016).
- The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan outlines South Africa's national priorities for biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and equitable benefit-sharing. It stresses the importance of integrating biodiversity considerations into urban planning and infrastructure development, recognising cities as sites of both ecological pressure and opportunity (DFFE, 2015).
- The National Protected Area Expansion Strategy supports the spatial alignment of protected areas with priority biodiversity areas, including those adjacent to or within urban growth boundaries. By focusing on expanding conservation areas in under-represented ecosystems, the strategy contributes to safeguarding ecological assets that are vital for climate adaptation, DRR and the long-term sustainability of urban settlements (DFFE, 2016).

Land consumption and population growth rates

The land consumption rate (LCR) refers to the average annual rate at which urban land area increases (i.e., the expansion of the city's footprint), while the population growth rate (PGR) is the average annual rate at which the population increases. The LCR-to-PGR ratio reflects the level of efficiency of urban land use and helps determine whether cities are developing in a compact and sustainable manner. A balanced ratio suggests that population growth is being accommodated through efficient spatial planning and infrastructure use, while a high ratio indicates that land is being consumed at a faster rate than the population is growing, suggesting inefficient land use and urban sprawl.

South Africa's urban expansion continues to have a high LCR-to-PGR ratio. For instance, between 2017 and 2024, Johannesburg's LCR-to-PGR ratio was 5.66, as the built-up area expanded by an average of 0.035 km² per year, indicating steady spatial growth, whereas the population increased by 0.6% per year. In other words, urban land was consumed five times faster than population growth, suggesting urban sprawl. Similar patterns of urban sprawl have been observed across the country, which is of concern due to the impact on ecosystems services that are important for urban resilience.

Biodiversity-sensitive urban planning

The LCR-to-PGR ratio may serve as a quantitative proxy for land-use inefficiency, but its real value lies in informing planning and governance interventions that embed biodiversity into the urban spatial fabric. Aligning LCR-to-PGR data with ecological planning frameworks enables municipalities to make data-driven, biodiversity-conscious spatial decisions. Several South African cities have begun adopting biodiversity-sensitive urban planning approaches.

The **City of Cape Town** has implemented a Biodiversity Network (BioNet), which is underpinned by a Bioregional Plan (approved in 2015) that spatially identifies priority conservation areas within the metropolitan boundary (COCT, 2015), including critical biodiversity areas and ecological support areas, with the intention of guiding zoning, development control and infrastructure planning. These areas are integrated into spatial development frameworks (SDFs), zoning schemes and land-use decision-making processes to proactively guide growth away from sensitive ecosystems. The legal recognition of the Bioregional Plan, within which the BioNet is embedded, under the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (No. 10 of 2004), strengthens the city's ability to protect sensitive ecosystems, such as the Cape Floral Region, even as urban development continues.

Similarly, the **City of Ekurhuleni** has developed a Bioregional Plan (in 2011, reviewed in 2014 and 2020) that identifies and maps critical biodiversity areas and ecological support areas, with the aim of guiding land-use planning, environmental assessments and nature resource management. The **City of Johannesburg's** 2019 Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan also maps critical biodiversity and ecological support areas and includes plans for improving biodiversity management, protecting ecosystems and raising public awareness of the value of natural areas within cities.

eThekweni (Durban) has developed and institutionalised tools, such as the Environmental Management Framework (since 2002) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (since 2020), that identify ecologically valuable areas and guide sustainable urban expansion. It has also incorporated the Durban Metropolitan Open Space System (D'MOSS) into its SDF. While not all D'MOSS areas are formally protected under national law, the system plays a crucial role in identifying and preserving corridors of ecological value, wetlands and river systems across the metro. These tools provide a science-based foundation for spatial decision-making, enabling the municipality to balance development pressures with ecological integrity.

The **City of Tshwane** has also integrated conservation objectives into its planning instruments. Its 2016 Bioregional Plan, which was developed in collaboration with the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), maps critical biodiversity areas and provides guidance on compatible land uses within these areas. These biodiversity informants are considered in the city's SDF and related spatial planning processes, allowing Tshwane to balance urban expansion with ecological sustainability.

In 2014, **Nelson Mandela Bay** developed a Bioregional Plan with clearly delineated critical biodiversity areas that are considered in land-use management and development applications.

Buffalo City and **Mangaung** have acknowledged ecological considerations in their IDPs, although the extent of spatial integration into SDFs is still evolving.

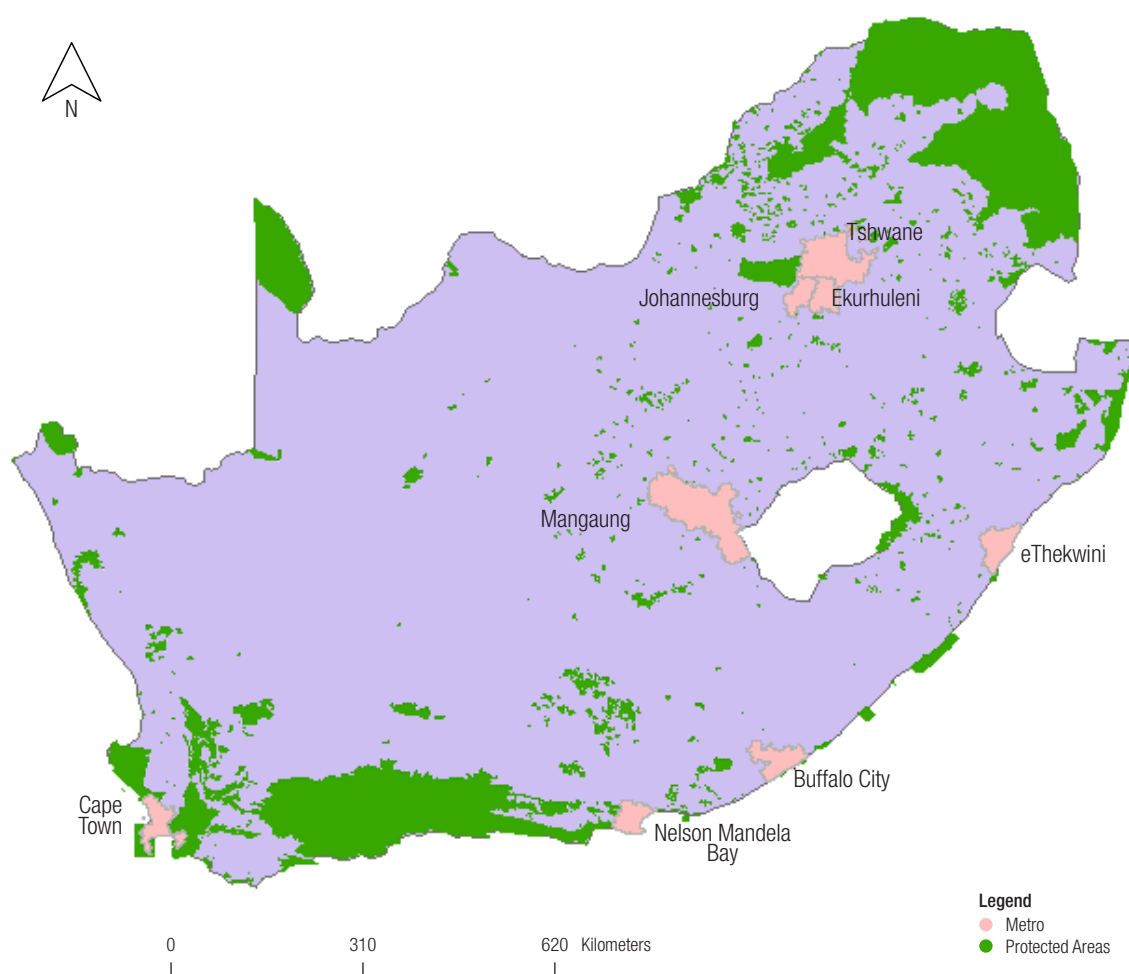
These efforts indicate an awareness of the need for biodiversity-sensitive urban development. As planning tools improve and institutional capacity grows, these metros have an opportunity to better align biodiversity conservation with their spatial and economic development goals. Nationally, the use of systematic conservation planning (SCP), a method pioneered by SANBI and widely adopted by metros, has enabled cities to prioritise ecosystems based on biodiversity value, connectivity and ecosystem services. The SCP has been instrumental in generating maps of critical biodiversity areas and ecological support areas, which are increasingly integrated into city SDFs, IDPs and land-use applications.

However, despite these innovations, mainstreaming biodiversity into urban planning remains uneven across municipalities, largely due to capacity constraints, fragmented governance and insufficient integration of environmental data into municipal systems. These constraints have also had an impact on South Africa's ability to relieve development pressures at protected areas, including national parks, nature reserves, biosphere reserves and world heritage sites.

Protected natural areas in metros

Figure 3.5 and Table 3.2 present the designated protected natural areas in metros within South Africa, revealing an uneven spatial distribution of conservation efforts across South Africa's metros.

Figure 3.5: Land under protected natural areas



Source: GIS data from African Geoportal <https://za.africageoportal.com/search?collection=dataset>

Table 3.2: Land under protected natural areas

Metropolitan Municipality	Province	Area Covered (km ²)	Protected Areas (km ²)	Area Protected (%)
Buffalo City	Eastern Cape	2 751	30.99	1.13
City of Cape Town	Western Cape	2 445	1 585.75	64.86
City of Ekurhuleni	Gauteng	1 979	199.82	10.10
City of Johannesburg	Gauteng	1 648	136.38	8.28
City of Tshwane	Gauteng	6 310	797.72	12.64
eThekweni	KwaZulu-Natal	2 558	15.51	0.61
Mangaung	Free State	9 899	563.24	5.69
Nelson Mandela Bay	Eastern Cape	1 957	56.50	2.89

Source: GIS data from African Geoportal <https://za.africageoportal.com/search?collection=dataset>

As Table 3.2 shows, almost two-thirds (64.86%) of Cape Town's land is formally protected, which is largely due to its location within the Cape Floral Region, a global biodiversity hotspot, and the presence of well-established protected areas such as the Table Mountain National Park. At the other end of the scale, and despite their proximity to sensitive coastal and estuarine ecosystems, three municipalities have less than 3% of land that is protected: eThekweni (0.61%), Buffalo City (1.13%) and Nelson Mandela Bay (2.89%). This signals a significant gap in conservation efforts in these metros. The Eastern Cape Biodiversity Conservation Plan and various municipal bioregional plans identify critical biodiversity areas, but translating these into gazetted, legally protected sites is lacking.

Reasons for the limited formalisation of protected areas include:

- Fragmented institutional mandates across municipal, provincial and national agencies, resulting in jurisdictional uncertainty and delays.
- Institutional capacity and budgetary constraints, with municipal environmental departments often lacking sufficient staff and technical expertise, which hinders their ability to pursue formal protection processes.
- The complexity of the land tenure system, particularly in peri-urban areas that are governed by traditional authorities.
- Pressures from in-migration, high unemployment, rapid informal housing growth and competing land-use priorities tend to deprioritise biodiversity protection and conservation, leading to encroachments on sensitive ecosystems in areas that are not formally protected.

No single, national average for green space per capita exists in South Africa, but the consensus is that green space is unequally allocated within cities (Jeeva, Cilliers & Gumbo, 2023). The spatial inequalities in the distribution of green spaces are mirrored in both private and public green spaces (Venter et al., 2020) and highlight a pressing need for targeted investment in green infrastructure, particularly in underserved and high-density urban wards. These areas, often located in the city's peripheries, lack adequate access to public green spaces despite being home to large populations whose health and wellbeing would benefit from a better and greener environment.

Community-led resilience initiatives, especially those that are informal or underfunded, are often not recognised by local and provincial authorities. Such initiatives play a crucial role in grassroots adaptation and mitigation but require stronger institutional support beyond public awareness campaigns. Integrating such efforts more deliberately into urban governance frameworks would be key to strengthening local capacity.



Green Spaces: Creating Safe, Dignified Public Spaces in Tafelsig by PAINT

Green Spaces is an example of communities developing resilient and adaptive spaces.

Background

Founded by Michael Bell, Green Spaces is a community-driven initiative based in Tafelsig, Mitchell's Plain that upgrades and revitalises neglected public areas in marginalised neighbourhoods. Through creative placemaking, the project aims to transform underutilised spaces into vibrant, welcoming environments that promote social inclusion, resilience and local economic activity.

Action

The project provides a platform for young and upcoming artists to showcase their talent. Six volunteer community members do the painting and keep the spaces clean. The murals are part of a planned street art wall along a major road in the area.

Outcomes

- Upgraded two community parks.
- Turned 17 blank walls into public art through collaborative mural art projects.
- Beautified the area and helped foster a sense of pride, ownership and safety among residents.
- Helped the communities reconnect with their surroundings while creating dignified public spaces.

Green Spaces contributes to a range of urban development goals, including reducing inequality, promoting inclusive economic participation, and encouraging adaptive urban planning.

Support from local and provincial government, along with partnerships with organisations such as Artbridge, AkzoNobel, and Hamilton's Brushware, has been key to the project's success. Green Spaces stands as a model for grassroots-led urban renewal and community empowerment.

Coastal land management

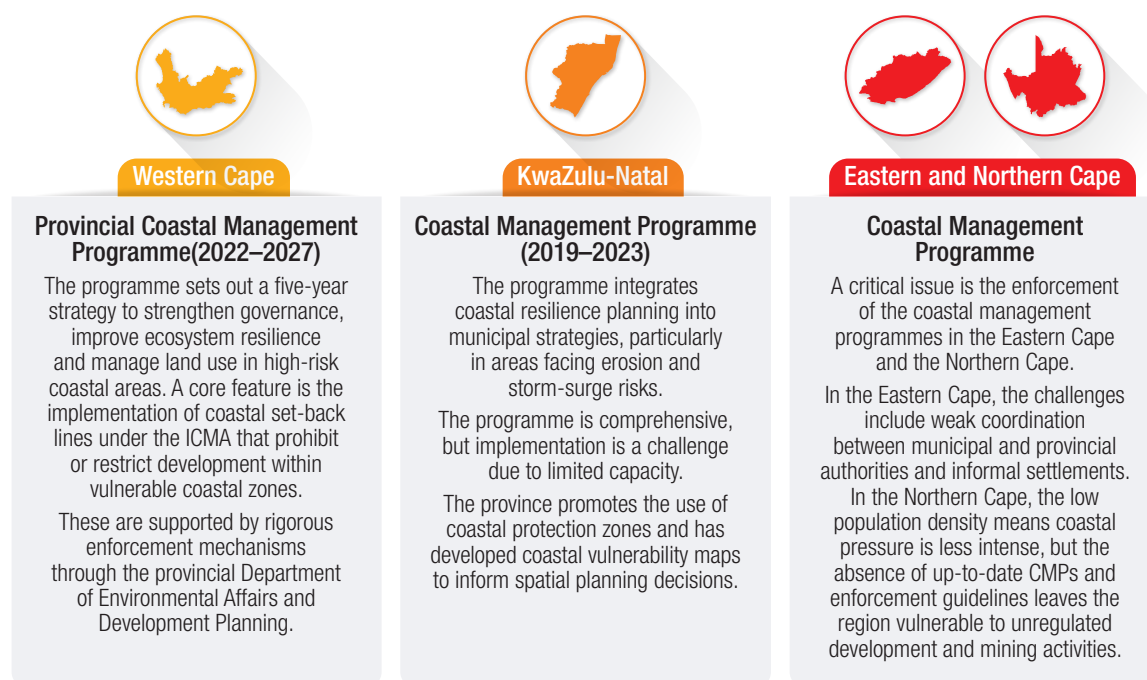
South Africa's coastal areas face mounting pressures from urbanisation, tourism, climate change and biodiversity loss (Sowman & Malan, 2014). The country has a well-established legal and policy framework for coastal management, but efforts to protect the 3 000-kilometre coastline are inconsistent.

The Integrated Coastal Management Act (ICMA) (No. 24 of 2008) provides the legislative foundation for coastal zone management in South Africa. It mandates the development of national, provincial and municipal coastal management programmes (CMPs) and that municipalities should incorporate CMPs into their IDPs and SDFs, to ensure cross-sectoral alignment between coastal protection, land-use planning and economic development.

In 2025, the DFFE released the second National Coastal Management Programme (2025–2030), which identifies priorities for spatial coastal planning, enforcement of set-back lines and improved monitoring and evaluation of (M&E) coastal governance. It explicitly calls for tighter controls over coastal land use, strengthened capacity for enforcing environmental impact assessments (EIA) and penalties for non-compliance (DFFE, 2025).

The four provinces with coastal areas have adopted CMPs (Figure 3.6)

Figure 3.6: Provincial initiatives and planning approaches



However, complexities and gaps have hampered the enforcement of coastal management programmes in provinces and municipalities:

- Capacity constraints. Limited staffing and technical expertise affect the ability to monitor and act on coastal transgressions (DFFE, 2025).
- Weak coordination of stakeholders (including land-use planners, environmental officers and legal units), often resulting in fragmented responses to encroachments and environmental violations (ibid.).
- Monitoring of EIAs. Although EIAs are conducted as part of development approvals, there is often insufficient follow-up to ensure compliance with the conditions set out in those approvals, particularly in ecologically sensitive zones (Chigwanhire, 2021).
- Limited deterrence. Despite evidence of illegal developments and land-use changes in these areas, there are few recorded penalties or rezoning reversals (ibid.).

In response, the DFFE and its provincial counterparts are developing coastal monitoring and compliance frameworks aimed at strengthening oversight and enforcement mechanisms, although implementation remains incomplete and uneven across regions. At local level, eThekweni Municipality has developed a robust coastal management bylaw and enforcement model that incorporates spatially explicit overlays, real-time environmental monitoring, and clearly defined legal penalties for encroachments (EMM, 2019). This integrated model is gaining traction and is increasingly referenced in national coastal management dialogues as an example of best practice.

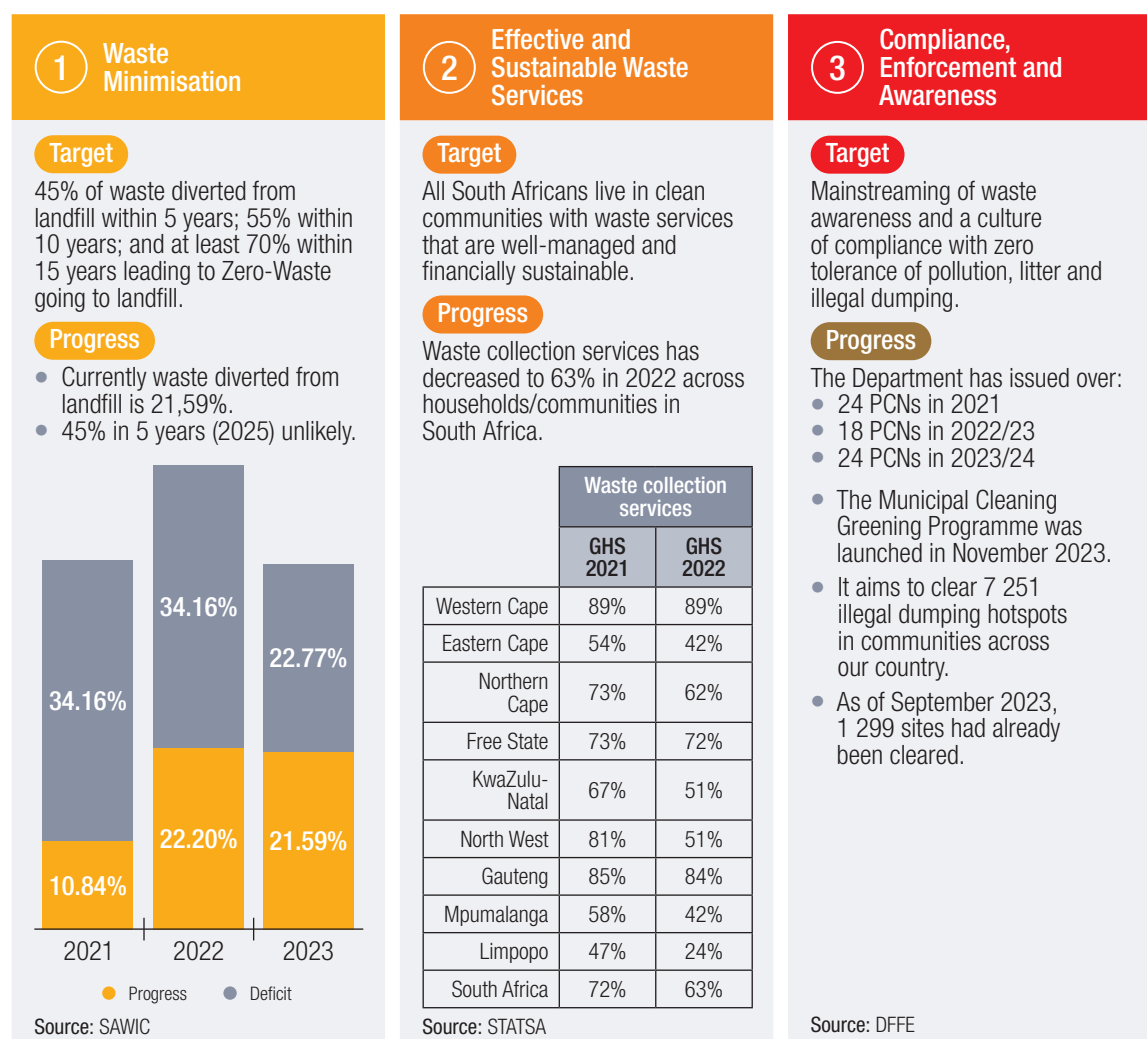
The DFFE is also developing a national coastal monitoring portal, which will serve as an online dashboard to track the implementation of CMPs, monitor EIA decisions in coastal zones and assess compliance trends across municipalities and provinces. Once operational, the portal is expected to enhance transparency and coordination in coastal governance. This is becoming increasingly important, as several municipal wastewater treatment facilities discharge treated municipal wastewater directly into rivers and, in some instances, the ocean.

Wastewater treatment

Over the past decade, the performance and management of South Africa's wastewater treatment facilities have deteriorated. In 2022, 39% of municipal wastewater treatment facilities did not meet the required effluent and sludge standards for compliant wastewater treatment (DWS, 2023a). Many of these facilities have ageing infrastructure, are inadequately maintained and lack skilled personnel – 334 (about 39%) wastewater systems are in a critical state and in need of urgent maintenance and repairs (DWS, 2023b).

The National Environmental Management: Waste Act (No. 59 of 2008), or NEMWA, governs the country's waste sector, specifically the repair and maintenance of waste infrastructure and the sound management of all waste streams in accordance with environmental principles. It mandates all municipalities to develop Integrated Waste Management Plans (IWMPs) and to align their IWMPs with the National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS) 2020. The NWMS sets targets that include diverting 45% of waste from landfill by 2025 and achieving 100% compliance with waste licensing and reporting systems. However, as of 2023, only 21.6% of waste had been diverted (less than half of the five-year goal), which suggests that achieving 45% by 2025 is becoming increasingly unlikely (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: NWMS 2020/23 performance dashboard



Source: DFFE (2024b: 4)

A review of IWMP compliance revealed that many municipalities were failing to include their IWMPs into their broader integrated management plans, and even fewer were implementing them effectively.²² Furthermore, some municipalities continue to operate illegal or unlicensed landfills, which is in breach of NEMWA provisions. Compliance monitoring remains a challenge due to capacity and budget constraints at local government level, leading to a decline in waste collection and an increase in illegal dumping (Stats SA, 2023c). The Municipal Cleaning and Greening Programme, launched in November 2023, aims to clear over 7 000 illegal dumping hotspots, yet only 1 299 had been addressed by September 2023.²³ Many of these hotspots are found in rural and peri-urban areas that still rely on open dumping or unregulated landfill sites, while in Limpopo, Eastern Cape and parts of the Northern Cape, audits found numerous sites lacking basic containment or leachate systems.²⁴ This situation is compounded by the low rates of waste separation at source (Kadyamadare and Samson, 2024). Even in metros like Johannesburg, recyclables often end up in landfills due to inadequate systems or behaviour (DFFE & SAWIC, 2023).



Better.Belville.Together: Waste Portfolio

Through its focus on public space activation, waste infrastructure and inclusive economic participation, Better.Belville.Together offers a replicable model for circular, climate-smart urban development.

Background

Led by Candice Mostert and spearheaded by the Greater Tygerberg Partnership and Waste-ED, the Better.Belville.Together Waste Portfolio began in 2023. It is rooted in the belief that public space, waste management and community engagement are key levers for enhancing climate resilience, driving job creation and promoting urban renewal. At its core is a circular economy model designed to divert food, recyclables and organic waste away from landfills and into local solutions, such as composting and recycling.

Actions

The Waste Portfolio converts the waste streams from the central business district (CBD) into resources through better infrastructure, service support and education. Following a pilot project at the public transport interchange, the separation-at-source bin system was launched along key routes in the CBD, expanding the project across high-traffic public areas. It has also established a waste-to-resource centre, which serves as a growing hub for compost production and community learning.

The project is supported by strong partnerships with the City of Cape Town and continues to work closely with urban mobility and cleaning services to scale impact.

Outcomes

- Diverted over two tonnes of food and recyclables from the public transport interchange, with 20–40% of total waste now being processed through local systems.
- Provided support to 30 small to medium businesses and an estimated 100 informal traders who collectively diverted seven tonnes of food waste each month.
- Collected between three and five tonnes of garden waste monthly and used to produce compost for food and public gardens.
- Educated over 11 000 people, including traders and vulnerable groups, helping to drive behavioural change and link participants to legal compliance tools, such as IWMPs.

22 <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/34368/>

23 https://www.dffe.gov.za/speech/creecy_cleaningandgreeningeasterncape#:~:text=Across%20the%20country%20we%20are,of%2020%20days%20a%20month

24 <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/40401/#:~:text=Despite%20existing%20strategies%2C%20illegal%20dumping,environmental%20sustainability%2C%20and%20social%20progress>



Durban Zero Waste Movement Project by groundWork, Durban University of Technology and the eThekweni Municipality

The Durban Zero Waste Movement Project is a small, local solution that contributes to climate mitigation, urban sustainability and community resilience.

Background

Led by Tamlynn Fleetwood, in partnership with groundWork, Durban University of Technology and eThekweni Municipality, this project addresses the city's climate, waste and food security challenges through a decentralised organic waste composting model. In so doing, it reduces methane emissions from landfills, creates green jobs and strengthens urban food sovereignty.

Actions

Established in 2021, the project works closely with informal market workers, municipal officials and university partners to divert organic waste from fresh produce markets. Organic waste is collected, composted at sites (e.g., the Durban Botanic Gardens) and then distributed to support local food growers and municipal parks.

In June 2022, the first organic waste diversion took place, and, in 2023, a cost-benefit analysis showed significant municipal savings. The project has also expanded to new markets and informal settlements, engaging hundreds of people through training and workshops.

Outcomes

- Diverted over 291 tonnes of organic waste.
- Produced 117 tonnes of compost from the waste.
- Created 10 new jobs.
- Signed a formal memorandum of understanding with the municipality to scale the model across all nine fresh produce markets.

Water supply

In 2023, nearly half (46%) of the country's water supply systems that were assessed did not meet microbiological water quality standards, and 29% were in a critical state (Table 3.3). With municipal water supply systems performing poorly, water shortages are becoming regular occurrences. Municipalities are also receiving less money due to increasing levels of non-revenue water, which refers to the difference between the amount of water added to the water supply system and the actual amount of water billed to customers. Between 2014/15 and 2022/23, non-revenue water across the country increased from 42% to 46% (PwC, 2025).

Table 3.3: Blue Drop Report 2023 insights on drinking water quality

Measure	Findings
Drinking water quality	Almost half (46%) of water supply systems failed to meet microbiological water quality standards, posing health risks to consumers.
Critical systems	Out of 958 water supply systems assessed, 277 (29%) were identified as being in a critical state of performance (up from 174 systems in 2014).
Provincial performance	Gauteng had the highest percentage of systems with excellent or good performance (62%), while the Northern Cape had the highest percentage of systems with poor or critical performance (87%).



SUNCASA – Scaling urban nature-based solutions for climate adaptation in sub-Saharan Africa

This project aims to restore a river through collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, the private sector and communities, supported by evidence-based planning and sustainable governance.

Background

Launched in 2024, the SUNCASA project is led by the International Institute for Sustainable Development and the World Resources Institute. The aim is to restore the Upper Jukskei River catchment in Johannesburg by focusing on nature-based, gender-responsive solutions to reduce flooding, improve urban heat management, enhance water security and protect biodiversity, and ultimately benefit over one million residents.

Actions

In Alexandra Township, a key flood-prone area, SUNCASA collaborates with local communities to remove invasive species, plant indigenous vegetation and clear solid waste through community-led arts and recycling initiatives. The community is encouraged to take active stewardship of the river and have the opportunity to build skills. Media outreach is used to raise awareness of the river's ecological importance.

Outcomes

- Restored the river ecosystem (116 hectares of riparian areas).
- Removed 750 kg of waste daily.
- Created 1 000 jobs.

Art and Litter Traps by the Kula Marolen Foundation

This project is an example of low-cost, community-driven innovation intersecting with climate change mitigation, job creation, cultural preservation and local empowerment.

Background

This six-week project was led by the Kula Marolen Foundation, a non-profit organisation that focuses on heritage, the environment and township economics. The aim was to tackle pollution in the Jukskei using art as the medium, as part of their broader mission of preserving Alexandra's cultural heritage through storytelling, heritage tours and eco-tourism.

Actions

Ten local youth and elders taught themselves to design and handcraft fish-shaped litter traps and repurposed old tyres into seating.

Outcomes

- Designed and constructed five macramé litter traps, including Alexandra's first-ever fish-shaped litter trap.
- Repurposed old tyres into seating.
- Made the river cleaner and brought art into the public space.
- Created awareness of how craft can serve as a tool for climate action.

The team remains committed to scaling the initiative and calls for additional support to create more traps for rivers and oceans.

PART 4

Effective Implementation

South Africa's governance system is rights-based, developmental, participative and cooperative. It is anchored in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), specifically Chapter 3 that speaks to cooperative governance, and includes mechanisms for promoting and facilitating intergovernmental relations (IGR). The intention is that the three different spheres of government work together rather than in competition to ensure the efficient provision of services to citizens. The [Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act \(No. 13 of 2005\)](#) provides the formal structure for achieving cooperative governance, including mechanisms and procedures for cooperation.

Supportive and enabling urban governance frameworks are crucial for realising government's commitments to transform the lives of the most vulnerable in society, particularly for local government, which is the sphere of government closest to citizens with the mandate to deliver services and promote development. Therefore, it is important to bolster the capacity of local government and to link urban policies to budgets and programmes. Introduced in 2019, the District Development Model (DDM) aims to align all three spheres of government to collaborate on an integrated plan for each district (the "One Plan") to address key issues, such as poverty, unemployment and inequality. The DDM works hand-in-hand with instruments, such as the municipal five-year [IDP](#), which is crucial for implementing national priorities at the local level, through a participatory approach.

While the constitutional, legislative and policy foundation for urban governance is strong, the actual task of governing South African cities and towns has not been without its challenges. In particular, cities and town have struggled to implement services equally, thus contributing further to spatial inequality, often along racial divisions. Despite efforts to achieve participatory governance, urban governance is increasingly characterised by deteriorating levels of trust between communities and government.

Part 4 outlines progress made by South Africa to ensure effective implementation of the interventions required to realise the transformative commitments. The progress made is measured in line with the suggested indicators (Table 4.1). This part also outlines the evidence and analyses the progress made by South Africa towards realising these indicators.

Table 4.1: NUA focus areas and associated NUA indicators and SDG indicators for effective implementation

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Building the Urban Governance Structure: Establishing a Supportive Framework	Proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups*	SDG 5.5.1
	Estimated share of revenue lost due to corruption*	SDG 16.5.1
	Proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Presence of a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operates regularly and democratically	SDG 11.3.2
	Proportion of seats held by women in sub-national/local governments	SDG 5.5.1
Planning and Management of Urban Spatial Development	Number of provinces, regional governments and cities in which plans and designs are publicly accessible to residents (online) and can be consulted at all times*	SDG 16.10
	Number of urban planners per 100 000 persons	SDG 11
	Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark	SDG 16.1.4
	Proportion of trips made in public transport	SDG 11.2
	Death rate due to traffic injuries	SDG 3.6.1
	Land-use mix	SDG 11.3.1
	Presence of urban policies or regional development plans that: (a) respond to population dynamics, (b) ensure balanced territorial development, (c) increase local fiscal space	SDG 11.a.1
	Population density	not covered by SDG indicators
Mobilisation of Financial Resources	The existence of a financing framework for implementing the agenda*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Own revenue mobilisation by local and regional governments*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Credit rating of local and provincial governments*	not covered by SDG indicators
	The existence of coherent, reliable and accountable systems of financial transfers from national to sub-national and local governments based on realistic needs	not covered by SDG indicators

NUA Focus Area	Suggested NUA Indicators	Link to SDG Indicators
Capacity Development and Enhanced Knowledge Sharing	Progress in expanding opportunities for city-to-city cooperation and fostering exchanges of urban solutions and mutual learning*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Existence and effectiveness of programmes for enhancing the capacity of all levels of government to monitor and implement the New Urban Agenda, including access to and support of adequate higher-level education in built environment professions and fostering of professional associations for built environment professions	not covered by SDG indicators
Technology and Innovation	Expanded deployment of frontier technologies and innovations to enhance shared prosperity of cities and regions*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Development of user-friendly, participatory data and digital platforms through e-governance and citizen-centric digital governance tools*	not covered by SDG indicators
	Implementation of digital tools, including geospatial information systems, to improve urban and territorial planning, land administration and access to urban services*.	not covered by SDG indicators

* indicates partial information is reported.

4.1 Build Supportive Urban Governance Structures

Urban governance forms the institutional backbone for implementing the NUA. Governance systems need to manage the pace and scale of urbanisation in a manner that is democratic, transparent, inclusive and accountable, especially as cities become increasingly complex, fragmented and unequal. In South Africa, this task is inseparable from the country's post-apartheid democratic project. The transformation from a centralised, racially exclusive governance model to a rights-based, decentralised and participatory system marks one of the country's most ambitious institutional reforms.

Introduced as a practical IGR mechanism, the DDM is intended to enable all three spheres of government to work collaboratively with civil society and the private sector to turn “service delivery challenges [...] into local level development opportunities, through localised procurement and job creation”.²⁵ However, its implementation has been uneven, with most efforts going towards coordinating government plans, budget, resources and capacity to accelerate service delivery and economic activity at the district level, rather than directly addressing “the lack of capacity or governance failures at a municipal level” (DPME, 2024: 29). To date, 35 ‘One Plans’, which are long-term development plans, have been developed in collaboration with key stakeholders for some of the identified districts and metros. The MTDP 2024–2029 envisages that the formalisation of One Plans will continue, as a way of improving “coordination of the planning and implementation of strategic local interventions” (ibid.: 93).

25 <https://www.cogta.gov.za/ddm/index.php/about-us/>

Gender parity

South Africa has not yet reached gender parity in political decision-making positions and has seen an overall decline in representation of women in recent years. From 2004, the representation of women in political leadership positions improved but has decreased since 2019 (except for the National Council of Provinces). The percentage of women MPs declined from 46% to 42.8%, women in Cabinet from 50% to 43.8% and women premiers from 22% to 11% (Stats SA, 2023d).

At local government level, ward-based systems and executive roles remain male-dominated. In 2022, women held only 32% of executive mayor and mayoral positions, with the Eastern Cape (54%) and the North West (50%) the only provinces to reach or exceed parity. Nationally, men also dominate full- and part-time municipal councillor positions, with women occupying just 37.7% of these positions (ibid.).

In the public service, some progress has been made towards gender parity in middle and senior management. In 2023, women held 46.4% of middle management positions, up from 45.2% in 2019, and 45.2% of senior management positions, up from 42.4% (ibid.).

These achievements are largely driven by voluntary party quotas, public sector equity policies and targeted recruitment programmes. However, women continue to face structural barriers, such as gatekeeping, political violence and informal norms that constrain leadership opportunities, particularly at the municipal level. Ward-level structures (ward committees and IDP forums) also often lack resources.

Participation

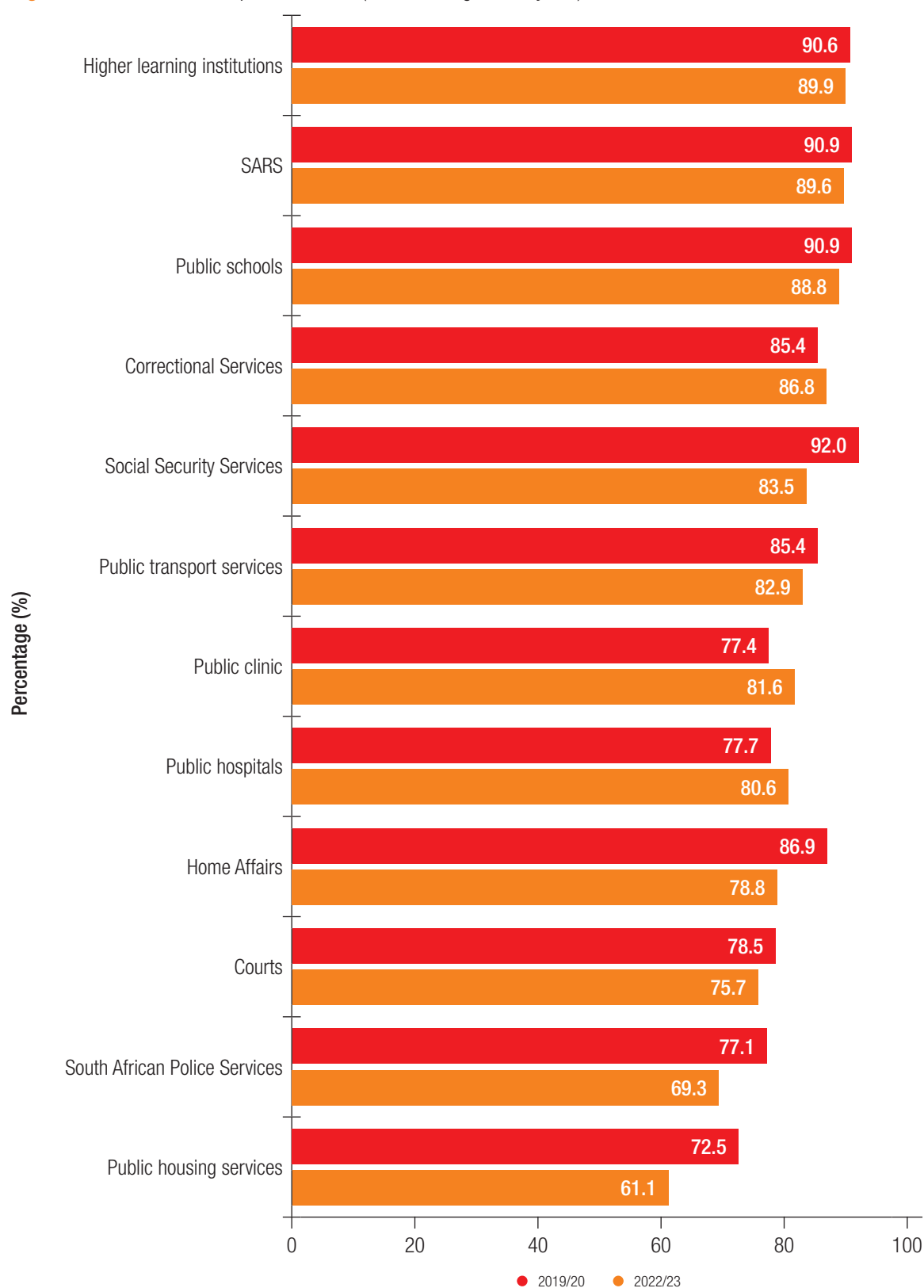
Participation is a key tenet of governance at the local level, as outlined in the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000). At the start of its term, each municipality must adopt an IDP as a “single, inclusive and strategic plan for the development of the municipality” (Section 25(1)), which is based on an elaborate participatory drafting and adoption process.

Cape Town, eThekweni and Johannesburg have piloted more robust models of participatory governance, including neighbourhood planning units, participatory budgeting and digital engagement tools. Digital governance is gaining traction, particularly in metros. Cape Town’s Open Data Portal, Johannesburg’s GIS-linked citizen dashboards and eThekweni’s smart billing platform showcase the transformative potential of technology to improve transparency, streamline service delivery and enhance public engagement (see Part 4.5). However, such innovations remain largely confined to metros, as rural and intermediate municipalities struggle with inadequate ICT infrastructure, poor broadband coverage and low digital literacy, reinforcing spatial and socio-economic divides.

Public satisfaction

Corruption undermines urban governance, erodes public trust and diverts resources from service delivery. The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (2022), more commonly referred to as the Zondo Commission, estimates that 5–15% of municipal procurement budgets are lost to corruption or inefficiency. In 2021/22, municipalities incurred R30.2 billion in irregular expenditure (AGSA, 2022). Weak supply chain management, lack of real-time oversight tools and limited accountability mechanisms exacerbate the problem, particularly in smaller municipalities. Corruption contributed to the decline in public satisfaction with services between 2019/20 and 2022/23 (Figure 4.1)

Figure 4.1: Satisfaction with public services (individuals aged 16+ years) 2019/20–2022/23



Source: Stats SA (2023d: 14)

Mirroring the national sentiment, over the same period, satisfaction with public services also declined for both metros and non-metros (Stats SA, 2023d).

Plan and Manage Urban Spatial Development

The effective planning and management of urban spatial development is essential for realising South Africa's commitments to the NUA, particularly improving the quality of life for vulnerable communities. Since adopting the NUA, South Africa has introduced legislative reforms to clarify roles, strengthen mandates and embed urban integration principles. Amendments to the Municipal Systems Act and regulations under SPLUMA have enhanced the ability of municipalities to make spatially informed decisions. At the time of reporting, the White Paper on Local Government was also under review. The IUDF has emerged as a guiding framework for spatial and fiscal alignment, while the DDM aims to break down silos by fostering joint planning and budgeting among national, provincial and local actors. These innovations have improved vertical integration, especially in metros, which increasingly align SDFs with capital budgets.

Public access to information

South Africa's spheres of government are increasingly using information and communications technology (ICT) to broaden access to public services. The State Information Technology Agency (SITA) has led initiatives such as the South African Revenue Services (SARS) e-filing system and the National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS). Yet, despite these efforts, e-governance adoption remains uneven, especially at the municipal level.

To address digital inequality, due to the prohibitive cost of data in South Africa, the government promotes the use of Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) platforms, which do not require smartphones or mobile data. However, limitations persist, including poor website functionality, limited user capacity due to high data costs, and inadequate digital literacy.

A positive trend is that archiving practices are receiving greater attention in South Africa, with increasing compliance with the National Archives and Record Service of South Africa Act (No. 43 of 1996), which mandates that municipalities maintain digital recordkeeping strategies and standards. Many government departments continue to rely on paper-based recordkeeping systems and even when digital records exist, they are often not uploaded to public platforms, particularly those related to procurement (Dullah Omar Institute & IBP, 2020).

If necessary, residents can request the assistance of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) to access information through the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) (No. 2 of 2000). This ensures that even the most vulnerable members of society are able to gain access to information.

Urban planning and planners

Despite urban and regional planning being offered at 11 higher education institutions, the ratio of planners remains low in South Africa. Between 2011 and 2024, the number of planners per 100 000 people increased from 3.33 to 7.26 (UN-Habitat & African Planners Association, 2014).²⁶ However, despite this growth, the sector faces a brain drain, with many young planners seeking opportunities abroad. This presents a critical risk to strategic planning, disaster risk reduction and effective urban development management in a country where planners are vital for the transformation of the apartheid spatial legacy in cities.

Between 2016 and 2025, population density in South Africa grew from 46.9 people/km² to 53.1 people/km².²⁷ However, the population is unevenly distributed, between rural and urban areas and within cities. In 2020, 40% of South Africans lived in metros that occupy only 2% of the national land area.²⁸ Within cities, the population densities are found on the periphery, in townships and informal settlements, while lower densities are characteristic of wealthier and formal neighbourhoods. The urban form continues to be shaped by land-use separation, rooted in apartheid planning, with spatially segregated residential, commercial and recreational uses (NPC, 2012). The resulting fragmentation exacerbates transport inefficiencies and environmental pressures.

As mentioned, South Africa's urban areas are car-centric. Private cars account for 36% of all commutes, while MBTs remain the dominant mode of public transport (28.1%), followed by buses (5.8%) and trains (1.1%) (Stats SA, 2021a). However, public transport use is declining. Between 2013 and 2020, the number of commuters using public transport declined from 5.4 million to 4.7 million (ibid.), while public transport costs are increasing. More commuters, including 9.7% of scholars, are walking instead of using public transport,²⁹ often along roads that are not suited to pedestrians (see Part 1.1). In 2023, pedestrians accounted for 45.11% of road user fatalities (RTMC, 2023). Meeting the targets of the National Road Safety Strategy (2016–2030) and the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety will require stronger enforcement, infrastructure for active mobility and traffic calming in pedestrian zones to shift the car-centrism that is embodied in spatial planning. In addition, urgent investment in rail infrastructure is needed to address the declining affordability and reliability of public transport, which undermine national goals of creating a sustainable, efficient and accessible transport system.

Public perceptions of safety

In 2020, about two-fifths (41.7%) of commutes were made on foot (Maluleke, 2021). Fewer people walk after dark due to safety concerns, with women feeling less safe than men. Between 2022 and 2024, the percentage of the population that felt safe walking alone at night in their neighbourhoods declined from 37% to 34.9% (Stats SA, 2024c). Of concern is that people also feel less safe walking during the day – between 2020 and 2024, the percentage of people who felt safe walking during the day declined from 86.6% to 80.4% (ibid.).

²⁶ <https://sacplan.org.za/registered-planners/>.

²⁷ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST?locations=ZA>

²⁸ https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0302&SCH=72634

²⁹ <https://sdg.statssa.gov.za/goals/sdg/1/>

Mobilise Financial Resources

The mobilisation of financial resources is a central pillar of the NUA and is reinforced by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. These call on national governments to strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, ensure predictable and equitable intergovernmental fiscal transfers, and establish sustainable financing mechanisms to support empowered and capable local and sub-national governments (UN, 2015; 2016).

Although South Africa lacks a dedicated and consolidated national urban financing strategy, several intersecting frameworks shape urban investment but lack implementation strategies. The NDP underscores infrastructure-led growth and spatial transformation but does not offer targeted urban financial instruments (NPC, 2012), while the IUDF serves as the core policy platform for urban development but does not articulate a clear financing plan (COGTA, 2016). Furthermore, although the NSDF provides a spatial vision for South Africa's future, it does not include mechanisms for translating its vision into actionable urban investments (DALRRD, 2019). The Division of Revenue Act governs fiscal transfers between national and sub-national governments but does not facilitate urban investment tracking in a systematic manner (National Treasury, 2023).

Financing urban development is a multifaceted and often fragmented undertaking. In South Africa, structural inequalities, capacity constraints across municipalities and heavy reliance on conditional grants have historically hindered the pursuit of a coherent urban financing strategy. Nevertheless, since 2016, there have been increased efforts to align financial planning with national development priorities, with government introducing several reforms and programmes aimed at improving integration, accountability and data-driven governance. Some progress has been made in implementing programmatic and transparent budgeting reforms, such as the DDM, Municipal Standard Chart of Accounts (mSCOA), and Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations, which seek to improve intergovernmental coordination at the district level. However, the outcomes have been uneven due to deep-seated historical inequalities, institutional fragmentation and capacity disparities between municipalities.

Challenges in coordinating efforts across sector departments and the different spheres of government lead to misaligned priorities and delayed infrastructure delivery. Institutional support from SALGA, the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agent (MISA), National Treasury's Cities Support Programme (CSP), and the SACN has been instrumental in building capacity, but technical skills shortages, especially in non-metro municipalities, hinder the ability to operationalise policy mandates. The continued absence of a coherent urban financing framework is also a significant policy and institutional gap that inhibits the full realisation of the NUA.

Municipal own revenue

The capacity of municipalities to raise own revenues is central to their fiscal autonomy. However, in South Africa, the ability of municipalities to generate own revenue (from property rates, service charges, fines and other levies) varies across types of municipalities. Metros consistently generate 65–75% of their income from own sources, while intermediate cities struggle to raise more than 40–55%, and rural municipalities generate less than 30% of their income from own sources, and in many cases this proportion is declining (SALGA, 2023; National Treasury, 2023).

A high share of own revenues grants cities autonomy to co-finance strategic infrastructure and respond dynamically to urban pressures, whereas municipalities with a low share of own revenues have to rely heavily on conditional grants from national government, such as the Municipal Infrastructure Grant. These grants, while vital, often come with rigid compliance requirements and delays that limit municipal flexibility and lack alignment with IDPs. Economic and administrative challenges exacerbate this already uneven landscape, as smaller, less resourced municipalities tend to rely on manual billing systems, face delays in updating property valuation rolls, have lower than budgeted collection rates and weak credit control (SALGA 2021; National Treasury 2024b).³⁰ In addition, challenges, such as political pressures, a small and shrinking tax base and the high cost of living, often hinder necessary tariff adjustments, undermining financial sustainability.

Intergovernmental transfers

Intergovernmental transfers remain a lifeline for municipalities, especially those with limited revenue-generating capacity. South Africa's system is governed by a well-established legal framework, including the Constitution, the Division of Revenue Act, the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, the Public Finance Management Act and the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA).

Together, these instruments ensure a rules-based system for the equitable distribution of nationally raised revenue (National Treasury, 2023), as well as efficient and equitable administration of municipal revenue. The Equitable Share Formula is designed to allocate resources based on objective indicators, including population size, poverty levels and economic activity, with the intention of addressing historic inequalities by directing funds to where needs are greatest. However, challenges in the timeliness and predictability of transfers persist, with delays in disbursements creating cash flow constraints and undermining municipal planning and service delivery.

Furthermore, the lack of inter-municipal equalisation mechanisms, beyond the Equitable Share, exacerbates spatial inequality and inhibits equitable public service delivery. From an equity perspective, the implications are profound. While metros can leverage their own revenues to co-finance infrastructure or climate resilience projects, smaller and rural municipalities remain structurally constrained.

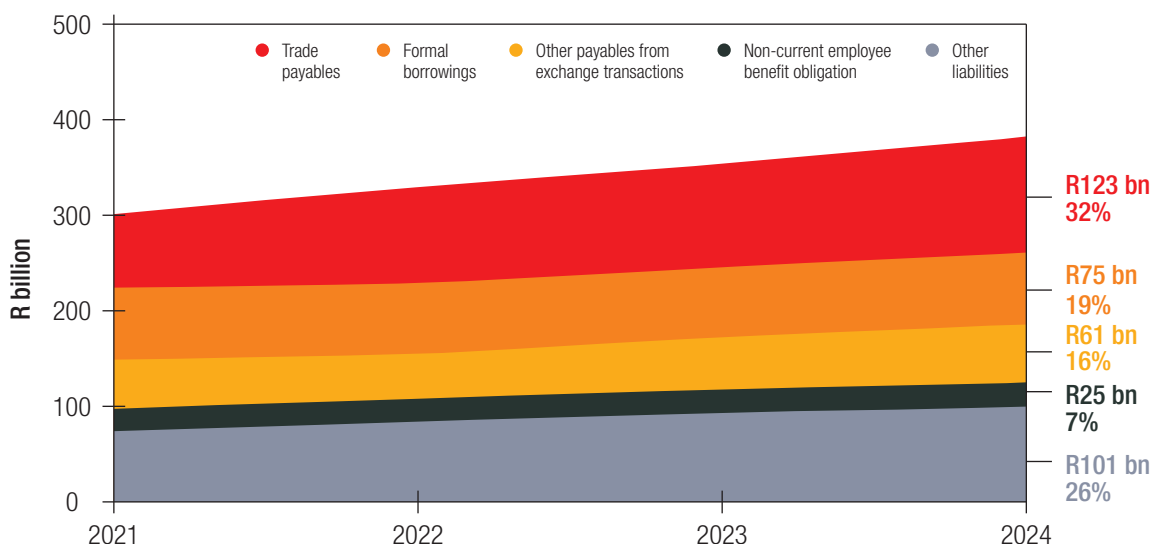
Municipal debt

South Africa's municipal debt is a significant and growing problem and is directly contributing to poor service delivery, as municipalities lack the funds to provide adequate services. In 2024, total liabilities for South Africa's 257 municipalities amounted to R386 billion, while formal borrowings accounted for 19% of municipal liabilities and trade payables, which include unpaid bills to suppliers, accounted for 32%³¹ (Figure 4.2). The National Treasury's Debt Relief Programme aims to address these issues but has not yet been able to curb the debt escalation.

30 <https://mfma-2024.agsareports.co.za/pages/financial-management#:~:text=As%20in%20previous%20years%2C%20our,the%20amounts%20were%20recorded%20incorrectly.>

31 <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=18802#:~:text=In%20non%2Dfinancial%20circles%2C%20the,over%20the%202021%E2%80%922024%20period.>

Figure 4.2: Breakdown of liabilities for South Africa's 257 municipalities



Source: Financial census of municipalities for the year ended 30 June 2024 <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=18802>

A key contributing factor to the high levels of debt is the inability of municipalities to collect revenue efficiently and effectively. In South Africa, the cost of collecting revenue ranges from about 3% (in metros) to 8% (in smaller municipalities) of total revenue (SALGA, 2024). These higher costs are linked to systemic inefficiencies, including manual billing systems, outdated software, fragmented customer databases and inefficient meter-reading processes. The financial and operational consequences of these inefficiencies are severe, resulting in reduced net revenue, inaccurate billing and weakened credit control systems.

The problem of uncollected revenue further compounds these challenges. As of Q3: 2025, municipal consumer debt had ballooned to R416.1 billion, compared to R347.6 billion in Q3: 2024, with households owing the majority (72%) of this debt (National Treasury, 2025). Reasons include widespread economic hardship, limited enforcement, high levels of illegal connections and socio-political resistance to service disconnections.^{32, 33}

Evidence shows that municipalities with digitised systems consistently outperform others in areas such as debt recovery, customer service and audit outcomes (SALGA, 2024). While some progress has been made in digitising municipal revenue systems, full integration has not yet been attained, especially outside major cities. The mSCOA reforms and support from the CSP have facilitated standardisation, but the adoption of digital platforms in rural and intermediate municipalities remains sporadic. Digitised systems also has some bearing on the municipality's ability to access capital markets, as they signify financial efficiency and financial management to potential lenders.

Municipal creditworthiness

Access to capital markets is a key enabler for long-term infrastructure financing and urban transformation. As of 2023, only six metropolitan municipalities (Cape Town, Ekurhuleni, eThekweni Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Bay and Tshwane) held formal credit ratings from agencies such as Moody's and Global Credit Ratings (GCR, 2024). These metros dominate municipal borrowing and represent the majority of long-term municipal capital investment. Intermediate cities and rural municipalities lack formal credit ratings mainly because of weak audit performance, limited administrative capacity and unstable revenue bases.

³² <https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/28383/#:~:text=The%20South%20African%20municipal%20distribution,entities%2C%20businesses%2C%20and%20households.&text=1.,strain%20and%20declining%20service%20delivery.>

³³ <https://mfma-2023.agsareports.co.za/pages/financial-management#:~:text=So%2C%20while%20a%20municipality's%20revenue,for%20their%20financial%20health%20concerns.&text=In%20addition%20to%20highlighting%20our,will%20take%20longer%20to%20address.>

Since 2020, municipal creditworthiness has declined slightly. Although Cape Town and Johannesburg have retained investment-grade national scale ratings, other metros have been downgraded to speculative levels due to rising debt burdens, service delivery challenges and macroeconomic risks.³⁴ This accounts, to an extent, for the low levels of access to capital markets. Most metros rely on development finance institutions, such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa, for infrastructure loans. This points to systemic barriers, including legal ambiguity under the MFMA, limited project preparation capacity and low investor confidence.

4.4 Develop Capacity and Enhance Knowledge Sharing

Capacity development is recognised as fundamental to implementing the NUA. It is a multifaceted approach that combines individual, societal and institutional capacity to formulate, implement, enhance, manage, monitor and evaluate public policies for shared and sustainable urban futures. Government is a key contributor in building the capacity that enables implementation, while local government associations are central to driving capacity development. Capacity development and knowledge sharing can take place through multi-actor collaborations, peer learning and partnerships.

Multi-actor collaborations

Through collaborating with communities, civil society, academia and professional bodies, government can enable systemic knowledge sharing and cooperation on a global, regional, national, sub-national and local scale.



Regional Information Model (RIM) by Isibuko Labs

A transformative shift in how digital technologies can support inclusive governance, infrastructure resilience and poverty reduction in under-resourced communities.

Background

Pilisiwe Zamafaku Masiba, a researcher at Isibuko Labs, is part of a pioneering effort to develop the Regional Information Model (RIM), a digital twin ecosystem tailored for the towns of Lusikisiki and Mthatha in South Africa's eastern seaboard. Anchored in GIS and real-time local data, the RIM platform is designed to support innovative infrastructure planning and delivery across water, electricity and sanitation services. The plan is to scale the platform regionally.

Outcomes

- Co-developed with local officials, traditional leaders and residents.
- Enabled simulations, diagnostics and planning in an accessible, user-friendly interface that can be used by everyone from treasury officials to ward councillors and citizens with basic smartphones.
- Designed to bridge the rural-urban divide by empowering municipalities with data-informed tools for equitable development.

The project was a top-five finalist in the CivX Data to Decision Challenge in the US.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeilmUeR1Ng&list=PPSV&t=7s>

34 <https://www.moody.com/web/en/us/datahub/data-sets.html#accordion-81b16bcefa-item-e48693c666>



Municipal Capability and Partnership Programme

Partners include the CSIR, Anglo American (private sector mining), COGTA, SALGA, municipalities, provincial departments and other actors.

Background

The programme supports mining towns facing infrastructure and planning challenges by strengthening municipal teams and fostering collaboration with mines, communities and other partners. It focuses on co-creating solutions for water, spatial planning, infrastructure and local economic development.

Outcomes

- Reduced water losses (by 6% in Mogalakwena) and improved Blue Drop compliance in five municipalities.
- Increased asset register validation and project completion (e.g., from 70% to 87% in Blouberg).
- Co-produced eight SDFs and scaled mine-municipality planning.
- Involved more than 800 residents in food initiatives.

Of the 235 team members, 85% reported lasting value from the programme.

<https://www.mcp-programme.co.za/>

The National Urban Forum

Drawing on its experience convening the Executive Leadership Impact and Innovation Programme,³⁵ in 2019, SALGA convened the inaugural National Urban Forum (NUF) in October 2024, with COGTA, SACN, DHS and UN-Habitat, to support NUA localisation and promote dialogue across sectors on human settlements, climate action and funding for urban transformation. The NUF also provided an accredited continuing professional development (CPD) platform for urban professionals. A second NUF was held in 2025. (See Part 5 for the NUF 2024 and 2025 declarations.)

Peer learning

South Africa has developed a variety of peer-learning mechanisms, including thematic reference groups, practice-based research forums, and inter-municipal partnerships coordinated by actors such as COGTA, SALGA, SACN and National Treasury's CSP.

SACN's reference groups

Since its inception, the SACN has used reference groups as the anchor for driving its research agenda and for facilitating peer-to-peer learning and capacity-building. One such reference group is the Urban Safety Reference Group (USRG), which is a platform for structured learning and exchange on urban safety. Its members include city practitioners and representatives from COGTA, the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, National Treasury and the DHS, with the SACN as Secretariat. Members set the USRG's research agenda and topics for discussion. The USRG prioritises understanding urban safety within a local context, responses to gender-based violence (GBV) and exploring violence and crime prevention through holistic strategies that address the social and economic drivers of violence. The USRG's work includes regular peer-learning sessions, research outputs and policy briefs that support interdepartmental collaboration and knowledge ownership. The USRG also collaborates with the African Forum for Urban Safety (AFUS) and UN-Habitat to contribute to the global Urban Safety Monitor.

³⁵ Convened in partnership with the University of California, Berkeley, this was a high-impact learning exchange for mayors, municipal managers and senior officials. Activities included benchmarking with US cities, exposure to digital and smart city innovations, and peer-to-peer dialogue on municipal reform.

Another key reference group of SACN is the Built Environment Integrated Task Team (BEITT), which fosters cross-departmental collaboration and spatial transformation within cities. Its focus areas range from the political-administrative interface to small-scale rental housing and addressing institutional fragmentation and system-level barriers to spatial justice. BEITT uses practice-based research, thematic case studies and peer engagement to support the implementation of SPLUMA and the IUDF. Members include built environment practitioners from SACN member cities, the CSP and COGTA. The BEITT model reflects the importance of practitioner resilience, policy feedback loops and knowledge embedded in lived city experiences. It is an example of what learning, capacity development and coordinated voice for professionals already in the system might look like.



The Hammanskraal Central Business District

A precinct-based safety intervention by the USRG, with technical support and funding from the SACN and GIZ.

Background

The Hammanskraal central business district (CBD) is located on the northern edge of the Tshwane metropolitan area, about 40 kilometres from the city's core, surrounded by agricultural land and next to the N1 freeway, a key national transport route. Hammanskraal was part of the former Bophuthatswana homeland and is spatially disconnected from the city's employment centres, except for the Babelegi industrial zone.

In July 2023, the City of Tshwane launched a community-led safety initiative in Hammanskraal CBD, which is characterised by a blend of formal and informal trading, high unemployment and persistent crime. The aim was to develop a precinct-level plan for the area that would tackle public safety issues, while supporting inclusive urban development and economic resilience.

Actions

- Assessed safety risks within the Hammanskraal CBD through engagements with a broad range of stakeholders and using data from the City of Tshwane's public employment programme's safety audit.
- Identified safety concerns, including GBV, substance abuse, chaotic transport nodes and limited services.
- Held workshops and mapping exercises for local associations, policing forums, youth groups, informal traders and municipal departments, to provide input into the precinct safety plan.

Outcomes

- Produced a comprehensive precinct safety plan with input from multiple stakeholders.
- Formed a Safety Reference Group, to coordinate local interventions and advocate for improved intergovernmental collaboration.
- Initiated clean-up campaigns and GBV awareness drives.
- Established a community-oriented substance use programme (COSUP) support centre in the local metro police offices.
- Strengthened trust between communities and the city.

Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation

Developed by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government's Building State Capability Programme, the Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) had been used by National Treasury's Government Technical Advisory Centre, the Department of Small Business Development and the Western Cape Provincial Government. However, it had not been applied at scale in a city context.

In 2023, a PDIA pilot was initiated in the City of Johannesburg, facilitated by SACN, to address illegal dumping, illegal recycling and hijacked buildings. The pilot resulted in some important lessons for the city practitioners, including the benefits of working in transversal teams, the use of data in strategic communication to build support for implementation among senior city management, and increased awareness of the importance of citizen engagement. They learnt a method that increased their capability to begin solving seemingly intractable problems.

Partnerships

Many metros are involved in international partnerships and networks. Cape Town, Ekurhuleni, eThekweni, Johannesburg and Tshwane are all members of the global C40 Cities Network, which promotes ambitious, evidence-driven climate action planning. This includes capacity-building through embedded technical support and global funding partnerships.³⁶

Since the launch of the Durban Adaptation Charter in 2011, eThekweni has been involved in various multi-stakeholder climate adaptation partnerships and city-to-city collaborations. Partners include the International Institute for Environment and Development, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and cities in Kenya, Tanzania and the US. Two notable outcomes of this collaboration are the Miji Bora Project (2020–2022), which co-developed river management and sanitation solutions in Mombasa, and cross-continental learning on coastal adaptation, risk reduction and participatory governance (EMM, 2021). eThekweni has also been the key partner of UN-Habitat's Safer Cities Programme and has a long-standing agreement with UN-Habitat to address urban development and sustainable human settlements.

Johannesburg maintains sister-city relationships with Addis Ababa, Windhoek, Birmingham, London and New York. These partnerships enable cross-municipal learning on housing, transport, library systems and youth development. Johannesburg is expanding such initiatives under its International Relations Strategy, with a focus on African urban diplomacy.³⁷

South African cities, including Umhlathuze, KwaDukuza, Stellenbosch and Nelson Mandela Bay, are part of Dialogues for Urban Change (D4UC), which is a project of the German Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building. D4UC offers structured, multi-year, peer-to-peer exchanges based on the “living lab” methodology. Each city shares knowledge, experiences and progress on one of its strategic urban development projects, all of which adopt an integrated urban approach with a clear place-based focus (neighbourhood level).³⁸

³⁶ <https://www.c40.org/about-c40/>

³⁷ https://joburg.org.za/about/_Pages/About%20the%20City/About%20Joburg/Twinning-Agreements-.aspx

³⁸ <https://city-transitions.global/Resources/specifics-of-the-south-african-german-network/>

SALGA has several international partnerships for advancing local government in South Africa, through connecting with global entities for knowledge sharing, capacity-building and support. These entities include academic institutions, such as the University of California Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy, and other local government associations, such as the [Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy](#).

South Africa has expanded local government capacity-building initiatives, with an increase in co-produced practice-oriented knowledge, collaborative partnerships and innovative peer-to-peer models. Practitioner-led platforms reflects a shift from donor-driven models to practitioner-centred, embedded learning ecosystems. However, challenges remain, including persistent institutional silos and limited integration between collaborative platforms; underfunding of or over-reliance on external partners; and the lack of a national architecture for coordinated knowledge exchange, that could enable scale, continuity and formal recognition of learning.

4.5 Harness Technology and Innovation

South Africa's NDP emphasises the importance of science, technology and innovation (STI) as a structural driver for growth, inclusion and city-level transformation, while acknowledging gaps in provincial and municipal uptake (NPC, 2012). Similarly, the 2019 White Paper on STI notes that limited institutional presence at sub-national levels constrains the alignment of STI with urban development goals and digital governance (DST, 2019). The country's relevant support institutions for STI in cities include:

- The National Advisory Council on Innovation, which tracks national and provincial performance through its STI Indicators Reports but lacks municipal-level metrics.
- The Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI), which has piloted digital tools (e.g., the Let's Talk app in Waterberg and OR Tambo).
- In partnership with SALGA and COGTA, the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation's (DSTI, formerly Department of Science and Technology, DSI) Viability and Validation of Innovations for Science Delivery Programme is institutionalising municipal innovation through funding technology and innovation pilots aimed at improving basic service delivery.
- SALGA, which promotes municipal innovation via learning platforms and the Municipal Innovation Recognition Awards, in partnership with DSTI and CoGTA.

Recent developments include the consolidation of the CPSI and Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) awards into the National Batho Pele and Innovation Awards, launched in June 2025 to promote innovation in public sector service delivery.

The ability to harness technology and innovation in part depends on a municipality's ability to invest in critical infrastructure needed to deliver e-services. However, as explained earlier (Part 4.3), municipalities have different levels of financial autonomy, with the larger cities (metros) most able to invest and develop e-services.

Furthermore, despite high smartphone ownership (~94% households), access to e-services is uneven. The majority (~7.6%) of households access the internet from mobile phones, compared to 14.5% from home-based devices (Stats SA, 2023b). These disparities limit equitable e-service uptake.

Frontier technology

The few examples of frontier technology are found in metros. The City of Cape Town provides centralised real-time service monitoring through its Public Emergency Communication Centre, while Vumatel/Vumacam have rolled out thousands of CCTV cameras in Gauteng and Cape Town that are used for urban security and smart monitoring.

Urban innovation ecosystems are slowly developing in provinces where the larger metros are located. For instance, innovation hubs, which foster start-ups, skills and tech innovation, have been established Johannesburg (Tshimologong), eThekweni (Innovate Durban) and near to Cape Town (Stellenbosch's Technopark). Stellenbosch has been called "South Africa's Silicon Valley", as it is close to Stellenbosch University and active venture capital firms.³⁹ Cape Town is home to 550 tech enterprises (with over 40 000 professionals) that include established startups, such as Takealot, Yoco and Aerobotics.⁴⁰

E-governance and digital platforms

In 2024, the UN e-government survey ranked South Africa 40th in its e-government development index (EGDI), with a "very high" EGDI score of 0.8616, up from 65th place and a score of 0.7357 in 2022, making it the highest ranked African country (UNDESA, 2024). This improvement signals progress in using digital tools to enhance service delivery and governance – the national e-government portal currently offers approximately 134 services online.

All metros have websites and make use of different platforms to communicate with residents. Tshwane's e-Tshwane Online Portal enables account access, service requests and municipal interactions via web and mobile, while Ekurhuleni's My Ekurhuleni app provides complaint tracking, councillor information and service integration. Other municipalities are experimenting with mobile platforms, such as Stellenbosch's Citizen app that allows residents to raise service delivery concerns directly with the Office of the Mayor.

Cities also leverage social media platforms, such as X (formerly twitter), Facebook and WhatsApp, to engage citizens, especially where formal e-governance infrastructure remains undeveloped. In 2019, eThekweni won a Public Sector Innovation Award for its use of WhatsApp to improve public access to municipal services).

39 <https://ventureburn.com/2025/02/south-africas-future-as-a-tech-powerhouse-stellenbosch-leads-the-charge/#:~:text=South%20Africa%20is%20rapidly%20emerging,2>.

40 <https://businesstech.co.za/news/technology/489253/south-africas-silicon-valley-has-over-450-tech-firms-and-employs-more-than-40000-people/>

Digital tools

The move towards e-governance is accompanied by efforts to establish a single source of truth in urban and regional planning. This involves creating centralised data repositories to ensure that planners and decision-makers work from consistent, verified datasets.

All eight metros use GIS for planning and land administration. However, currently only Cape Town and eThekweni operate fully functional open data portals exposing spatial, land-use and infrastructure datasets. These operate under the legal framework of the Spatial Data Infrastructure Act (No. 54 of 2003). Efforts underway to standardise open data include the National Spatial Planning Data Repository⁴¹ that aims to centralise and share spatial data across all spheres of government and the private sector. The Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution is developing an Open Data Policy Guideline and Framework, with the aim of accelerating the adoption of open data and driving the open, transparent exchange of data. The stakeholders involved include the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, SALGA, SACN, COGTA, DPSA and the cities of Johannesburg, Tshwane, eThekweni and Cape Town.



City of Johannesburg Planning Support Using Urban Growth Modelling by CSIR

The city's SDF is translated into a dynamic modelling tool, enhancing strategic urban planning and supporting evidence-based budgeting.

Background

Carike Karsten leads a project at the CSIR, collaborating with the City of Johannesburg to develop the city's first interactive, cloud-based urban growth model, aligned with the Johannesburg Spatial Development Framework 2040. The project also includes a social facilities gap analysis, pinpointing areas with inadequate access to education and healthcare services.

Outcomes

- Generated six detailed growth scenarios based on various spatial and economic assumptions.
- Enabled the city to plan long-term infrastructure investments through its Capital Expenditure Framework.
- Enabled various municipal departments to collaboratively analyse and compare scenarios using shared, up-to-date data on population, employment and built environments.
- Built city capacity to use scenario planning for more inclusive, effective development decisions.

41 <https://nspdr.dlrrd.gov.za/portal/home/>



eThekwini Strategic Hub, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality

Enabling evidence-based planning, enhanced accountability and improved municipal service delivery.

Background

The eThekwini Strategic Hub was developed to create a centralised digital platform that provides accessible, reliable data and visuals across various municipal environments. Designed and maintained primarily by internal municipal teams in partnership with key stakeholders, the Hub serves as a single source of truth for municipal officials, supporting planning, decision-making, citizen engagement and service delivery. Launched officially in September 2022, the project continues to evolve with the addition of new datasets and dashboards, alongside ongoing redesigns to enhance user experience. The platform is publicly accessible, except for dashboards containing personal information, ensuring transparency and promoting wider digital inclusion.

Outcomes

- Developed partnerships with civil society, government entities and development partners. Partners involved include Microsoft, the UK government, CSIR and the Housing Development Association.
- Improved collaboration within municipal departments.
- Promoted digital transformation within the municipality.

In 2023, the project won the BCX Digital Innovation Award for Best in Technology in the Public Service Category* and was placed second at the Public Sector Innovation Awards in 2022**

* <https://www.itweb.co.za/article/sas-digital-innovators-recognised-at-bcx-awards/LPp6V7rBg5W7DKQz>

** <https://www.durban.gov.za/news/EThekwini+wins+two+SITA+Digital+Public+Service+Awards>



Development of a Social Progress Index at Sub-municipal Level by the CSIR

The successful development of a Social Progress Index (SPI) at ward level demonstrated its feasibility as a tool for planners and policymakers to identify underperforming areas and target interventions more effectively.

Background

Led by Jhan Maritz, the CSIR developed a SPI tailored to the sub-municipal (ward) level across the Waterberg District. The SPI measures human development by focusing on social and environmental outcomes (e.g., education, health and equity), rather than solely economic factors.

Outcomes

- Addressed challenges related to data availability and granularity by identifying and processing highly localised indicators.
- Produced detailed SPI scores by standardising and aggregating data using GIS mapping and statistical analysis.
- Published the pilot project's findings in the *Journal of Town and Regional Planning*.
- Laid a foundation for the potential national rollout of the SPI for improved M&E of social development.

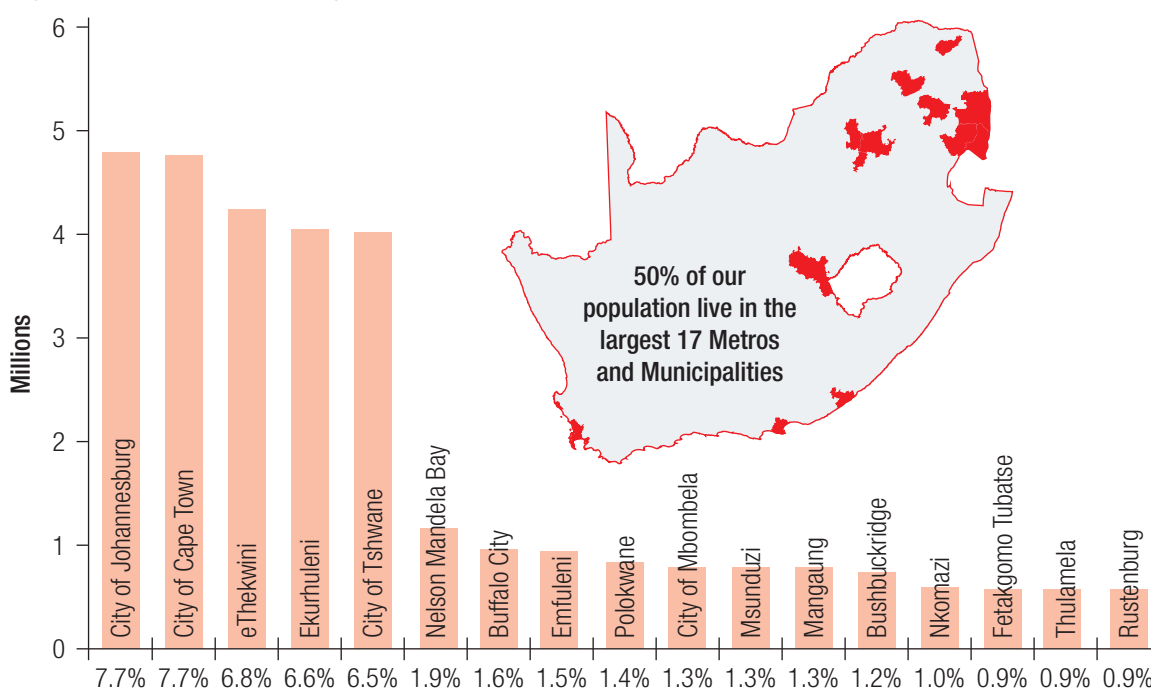
PART 5

Stakeholder Consultation Report

5.1 Introduction

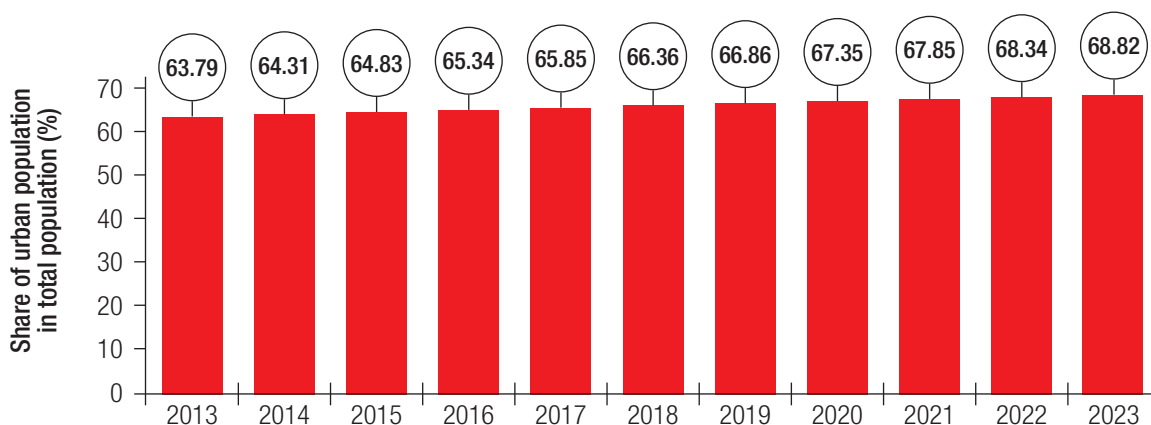
South Africa is highly urbanised. As of 2023, almost 70% of its population lived in cities and urban areas (Figure 5.1). Over the years, urbanisation has steadily increased, reflecting economic and social shifts. Today, over half of South Africa's population live in the 17 largest metros and municipalities (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.1: South Africa's 17 largest metros and municipalities



Source: Stats SA (2022)

Figure 5.2: South Africa's urban population (2013–2023)



Source: Statista.com (2025)

Stakeholder consultation is a crucial aspect of preparing the NUA Country Report. In this way, stakeholders provide input and are part of the inclusive, participatory and transparent process to formulate the Report. The NUA guidelines for stakeholder engagement call for an inclusive and participatory process, multi-level coordination and reporting, transparency and evidence-based engagement, integration with other reporting frameworks, knowledge sharing and capacity development, digital tools and smart governance, and integration with national and sub-national planning.

Between March and July 2025, workshops were held with stakeholders to inform them of the process and obtain their contributions to the content of the NUA Country Report. The aim was to enable a variety of voices to be heard; to discuss and debate urbanisation; to understand the current state of villages, towns, small and large cities; and to work together on planning and implementation.

In addition, between 24 June and 21 July 2025, the NUA social media campaign took place, with the objective of reaching a broad cross-section of society and finding local good practice projects to incorporate into the NUA Country Report. The projects would be used to show how local actions are transforming South Africa’s towns, cities and communities. They would highlight the relevance of adopting a decentralised engagement model, ensuring representation of informal and marginalised groups, using participatory action research techniques, and leveraging local and indigenous knowledge.

During the same period, the planning of the NUF was underway. With South Africa hosting the G20 and U20 in 2025, the NUF took place on 21–22 August 2025, earlier than World Urban Day at the end of October. In 2024, the inaugural NUF was held on 9–11 October, replacing the annual Urban Festival from previous years. Furthermore, in June and July 2025, stakeholder consultations were conducted to discuss the IUDF Implementation Plan, in a follow-up to an initial consultation with IUDF partners on 1 November 2024.

5.2 NUA Stakeholder Engagements

Figure 5.3: NUA stakeholder engagements



Department of Human Settlements Internal Workshop



18 March 2025



Officials of the DHS



- To reflect on the 2022 Report and comments received from UN-Habitat.
- To outline the project's aims and objectives.
- To discuss the modalities of reporting (Comprehensive Report/Update of 2022 Report/NUF report).

Key points

It was agreed to produce an update of the 2022 Country Report, which would include new data and information on some indicators of the NUA based on the availability of verifiable evidence, as producing a quality Comprehensive Report was not practical given the time constraints.

- The Updated Report 2026 would seek to improve a data-driven, evidence-based and inclusive approach, and integrate extensive stakeholder engagement (to reflect diverse perspectives), local best practices and actionable ideas.
- The Report would be an objective and comprehensive assessment of progress in implementing the NUA transformative commitments, focused on enhanced data collection and reporting; deeper analysis of key drivers, challenges and policy impacts; and improved documentation of stakeholder engagement.

National Government Consultation



30 May 2025



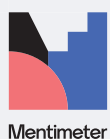
Officials from 15 national departments/entities: Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs; Community Schemes Ombud Service; Transport; Human Settlements; Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation; Rural Development and Land Reform; Science, Technology and Innovation; Water and Sanitation; Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment; Public Works and Infrastructure; Sport, Arts and Culture; Housing Development Agency; National Treasury; National Home Builders Registration Council; Social Housing Regulatory Authority; and SALGA.



- To share the process of formulating the NUA Country Report.
- To present preliminary results of the desktop research, outlining readily available data and data gaps for reporting on NUA indicators.
- To obtain from departments guidance on addressing the data gaps and information about programmes or projects linked to the NUA transformative commitments.

Key points

- The contribution of the SDG Country Report 2023 to the NUA Report was acknowledged.
- Other sources of data were identified, including Stats SA, which produces official demographic, economic and social censuses and surveys; the DWS (validating data and disaggregated data with key insights); the National Strategic Hub (StratHub), the Presidency and the Ministry of Women (for data on vulnerable groups).
- Digitisation should be elevated as a key theme, drawing on initiatives by Stats SA, the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development (DLRRD) (spatial data) and the StratHub.
- National Treasury through the CSP provided a report on the implementation of the IUDF 2020–2025.
- A perspective was that the NUA Report should be closely aligned with the following national frameworks and initiatives: SPLUMA (regulatory basis for spatial planning and land-use management), NSDF (national investment focus on strategic spatial nodes), DDM (One Plans – integrated planning model across spheres of government) and Operation Vulindlela (accelerating structural reforms in critical economic sectors).
- The role of traditional leadership in land governance and service delivery should be acknowledged in expanding urban peripheries.
- The digital divide must be addressed, as unequal access to digital infrastructure affects urban service delivery, livelihoods and inclusion.
- The economic empowerment aspect of housing, as advocated by the National Housing Symposium hosted by the CSP and the World Bank, could be a focus.



100% participants found the session useful/wanted future updates on the NUA and IUDF
83% participants knew of the NUA
63% participants said the NUA impacted their work
29% participants had read the 2022 NUA country Report

Consultation with SALGA Human Settlements Work Group



17 June 2025



SALGA's Human Settlements Work Group included the NUA Country Report 2026 on its agenda



- To inform local government councillors in all nine provinces of South Africa of the planned all-of-society engagements and the NUA social media campaign to identify local good practice projects.
- To provide a background on the purpose of the NUA Country Report and process to be followed.

Key points

- The councillors welcomed the all-of-society engagements that would include municipalities in the provinces.
- The councillors were pleased that municipalities could submit local good practice projects through the NUA social media campaign.

All-of-Society Engagements



26 June to 16 July 2025



Representatives from whole of government (local, provincial and national) and all of society (civil society, the private sector, academic institutions and international organisations operating in South Africa)



“Looking back, taking stock, creating the future”

- To reflect on the past: Progress made in implementing the NUA and IUDF, key milestones and achievements, major challenges (governance, funding, spatial transformation, etc.).
- To understand the present (status quo): Current state of urban governance, infrastructure, housing and sustainability; alignment of national and municipal strategies with the IUDF; biggest gaps for achieving integrated urban development.
- To shape the urban future: Key actions to prioritise up to 2036; reforms needed in urban planning, governance and finance; ways of better integrating climate resilience in cities; smart cities and equitable growth; policy recommendations for national and local governments; role of international partners in supporting urban development; ways of securing political commitment for accelerated implementation.

Objectives of the all-of-society engagements

- To position the IUDF as the key national urban policy agenda directly linked to the NUA.
- To assess past progress and challenges in implementing the IUDF and NUA.
- To evaluate the current status of urban planning, governance, infrastructure and spatial transformation.
- To develop strategic actions for achieving urban sustainability, resilience and inclusivity by 2036.
- To strengthen policy recommendations for national and local governments.
- To identify opportunities for international support and political commitment to accelerate implementation.
- To build relationships with civil society organisations for inclusion in the NUA report as case studies of good practice.
- To position the NUF as the platform for ongoing NUA and IUDF reporting and implementation
- To create buy-in for the NUA in South Africa among all-of-society stakeholders.

Some of the provincial engagements incorporated site visits to look at projects being implemented. The site visits enabled participants to observe the links between policy, project performance and reporting.

Design of the all-of-society engagements

The in-person engagements were designed for maximum participation over two days, through various activities as described below. As the workshops unfolded, the facilitation team tweaked and modified the methodology and approach to incorporate learnings. While each in-person provincial workshop followed the same design, sessions were tweaked to respond to local nuances and conditions, which resulted in not all engagements covering all items of the workshop programme. Engagements with four provinces (Northern Cape and Free State, Limpopo and Mpumalanga) were virtual and used tools, such as Mural and Mentimeter, to maximise participation online.

Group work

Working in groups, participants built a puzzle of South Africa, with the purpose of getting to know each other and of experiencing that building our country is a collective effort. The exercise included a dictionary of terminology used when discussing the NUA and IUDF, NDP and SDGs, to promote a shared understanding.

Presentation

A presentation on the NUA and IUDF outlined the importance of the NUA Country Report and explained how the consultation process complemented the desktop research in formulating the 2026 NUA Country Report. The presentation was supported by a [video](#) on the NUA process.

Lived experience

Working in groups, participants discussed their lived experience in villages, towns and/or cities and then rated (on a scale of 1–5) three aspects of the “status quo” based on the transformative commitments, i.e., social (Sustainable Urban Development for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty), economic (Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity) and environmental (Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development). The intention was for participants to reflect on enablers and barriers to implementing the IUDF and to prepare themselves for the site visits.

Site visits

These visits were intended to provide practical examples of programme and project implementation. Participants were able to witness firsthand how these projects change the lives of community members and how policy decisions and plans can translate into real, tangible improvements. The visits were also intended to provoke a critique of policy decisions and to test the relevance and impact on communities. In addition, posters describing the [case studies from the 2022 NUA Country Report](#) (with updates where possible) were displayed on the wall of the venue. This gave participants the opportunity to learn about past good practice projects and get an idea of what kind of projects could be submitted to the NUA social media campaign.

Mind the gap

This participatory exercise divided the participants into “sectors”, which were then pitched against each other in describing their interaction in development. While it was a fun activity to point fingers, it also brought to light the difficulties and challenges faced by each sector and generated a better understanding of how to work with each other.

Planning for the future

The participants self-selected their area of interest and then worked in groups to discuss and take stock of the current status quo and how they would plan for the next 5+ years, based on the transformative commitments. Participants were provided with guidelines for creative approaches in relation to the area of interest and had access to a variety of materials for use in preparing their presentations, which they then shared at the plenary session. Participants could choose from the following groups:

- The Urban Park: Story tellers, performers and visionaries in an urban park theatre who highlight sustainable and resilient urban development in a city that thrives in harmony with nature.
- The Economic Hub: Entrepreneurs, innovators and small business owners who create and showcase inclusive urban prosperity in an economic zone.
- The Art District: People in the creative industries (including journalists) who reflect, investigate and report on social inclusion and ending poverty.
- The Town Hall: Key decision-makers who shape policies, debate policies and begin the real action, marking the importance of effective implementation.

The rest of Part 5 provides a high-level summary of each provincial consultation workshop and ends with an overview of the common thematic insights and recommendations made.

Gauteng Province



A map of Gauteng Province, South Africa, with a location pin in the center. The word 'Gauteng' is written below the map.

-  26–27 June 2025
-  56 participants
-  Along the Vaal River, Emfuleni Local Municipality

Key points

- Concepts, such as the NUA and IUDF and prosperity and resilience, are subjective and require inclusive communication rooted in education.
- Despite successes in Gauteng, the public perception remains that government is underperforming.
- Government aims to address poverty, but efforts are hindered by insufficient budgets.
- Issues of transparency and accountability persist, including poor community engagement, illegal dumping and challenges in implementing indigent support policies (e.g., access to free basic services).
- Planning processes often exclude communities, with little to no consultation.
- Urban planning continues to prioritise car-centric transport systems, limiting more sustainable mobility options. A more integrated infrastructure and service delivery plan, linking transport and urban development, would improve implementation outcomes.
- There is a perception that no centralised database of housing needs or general population data to guide planning exist.

- Industrialisation is vital for urban development, but the closure of industries leads to reduced municipal revenue and increased unemployment.
- Natural environments, such as wetlands and rivers, are undervalued in planning and are often privatised, limiting public engagement and environmental stewardship. There is a lack of environmental education and tools for building circular, eco-conscious communities. Waste management remains a significant challenge in many developments. However, positive examples of strategic infrastructure do exist, such as the FNB Stadium linking Johannesburg to Soweto.
- The importance of “reverse” urbanisation, where development is transforming rural areas (e.g., Venda) into semi-urban hubs, potentially reducing migration to urban centres like Gauteng.
- The concern about globalisation and South Africa’s role in contributing to the promotion of Africa’s interests, including the challenge of attracting private sector investment in underserved areas.
- The need for other sectors (transport, health and education) to be more involved in integrated planning – the NUA engagements are often too focused on human settlements only.

The Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO)



A participant from the GCRO explained that the indicators measured by the GCRO’s Quality of Life (QoL) surveys include how satisfied citizens are with basic service provision and other factors that contribute to the quality of living.

The GCRO is a partnership between the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand, the Gauteng Provincial Government and SALGA-Gauteng. Its flagship project is the QoL Survey, which is designed to provide a regular understanding of the quality of life, socio-economic circumstances, satisfaction with service delivery, psycho-social attitudes, values and other characteristics of residents in Gauteng. It serves as a tracking and diagnostic tool, affording a rich information resource for those people in policy-making, business, civil society and the public wanting to see where progress is being made, and where concerns remain.

The QoL Survey is a household-based survey with randomly selected adults (18+ years of age) as respondents. The GCRO has conducted seven QoL surveys since its inception in 2009. [Quality of Life Survey 7 \(2023/24\) | GCRO](#)

Site visits

Boiketlong Mega Human Settlements Project in the Emfuleni Local Municipality has two sub-projects: one in Sebokeng Ext. 30 (4 000 housing units) and one in Lethabong (2 888 housing units). Mega projects incorporate a range of housing typologies and tenure (e.g., standalone units, walk-up units, and First Home Finance Subsidy Programme, social and affordable housing), with provision for community facilities and social infrastructure. The extensive bulk infrastructure required includes social and economic facilities, such as shopping centres, business hubs, taxi ranks, schools, hospitals/clinics, railway station upgrades, sporting facilities and places of worship. They offer opportunities for households from nearby informal settlements and the broader communities, including senior citizens and child-headed households and physically challenged people.

- Upcoming phases will include stand-alone units designed to accommodate persons with disabilities.
- A body corporate model is being introduced whereby beneficiaries will form and manage their own corporate (a supporting policy is being finalised). Upon completion and handover, beneficiaries will assume responsibility for their own water and electricity accounts.
- Challenges include SMMEs employing undocumented foreign nationals, which makes accounting for them in official statistics difficult, the electrification of housing units in Sebokeng Ext. 30 (which is being addressed by Emfuleni Local Municipality) and in Lethabong (funding for electricity bulk capacity remains unresolved).

Eastern Cape Province



Eastern Cape

 30 June–1 July 2025

 45 participants

 Boardwalk Hotel, Gqeberha

Key points

- Moderate progress has been made in housing delivery, school nutrition programmes, social grants and minor job creation. However, inequities in access persist, especially for historically disadvantaged areas, and there are monitoring and implementation gaps in poverty reduction and job creation initiatives.
- Moderate progress has been made in housing provision. However, there has been a sharp decline in economic opportunities, unemployment is high (95%) and enabling infrastructure is lacking. Urban prosperity is affected by high crime, infrastructure deficits and limited investment in economic drivers.
- Some infrastructure, such as ports, water tanks and green buildings exists, but implementation is sporadic, underfunded or politically constrained. Poor spatial planning has led to development in flood-prone areas, neglected green infrastructure and weak climate adaptation efforts.
- Both municipal and provincial stakeholders cited weak monitoring, lack of follow-up and poor coordination in relation to the effectiveness of implementation.
- Major obstacles identified included political interference, land invasions and the absence of bylaws and/or enforcement.
- There needs to be improved community engagement via ward councillors and basic skills development (e.g., plumbing, bricklaying).

Site visits

The site visits focused on two mixed housing projects implemented by Imizi Social Housing Utility. Both projects are fully tenanted with waiting lists.

- 1 Fairview West, where Imizi has partnered with The Home Market non-profit company to provide 4 200 housing opportunities, which are a mix of social and affordable housing for the low to middle income groups and part of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) Urban Network Strategy. Major challenges include:
 - Bulk sewer capacity: The municipal bulk sewer capacity is insufficient to serve the 2 800 opportunities planned for the remainder of Phase 3 (Willowest 396 Social Housing Units) and the 2 800 opportunities in Phase 4.
 - High costs of rates: Imizi and The Home Market are required to pay high rates for the vacant land even though the area is not currently developable because of the lack of bulk infrastructure. Outstanding rates of between R800 000 and R1.35 million had to be paid before the Fairview West and Mimosa Village erven could be registered.

- High cost to install connector services: The Home Market has spent in excess of R6 billion to link the sites to existing services, installing a 1.5km water main pipe (1 600mm diameter) between Mimosa Village and Willow Road and an electrical substation, and had to pay for sewer and transportation development levies and rates clearance certificates to ensure that the project goes ahead
- Market demand and affordability: The demand for stock is subdued due to the target market's high levels of indebtedness and the need to spend significant amounts of money on providing bulk connections, obtaining rates clearance certificates and planning authorisations (e.g., EIA). Fewer beneficiaries qualify for housing subsidies, which has had significant impacts on the project's rollover, income mix and social inclusion.

- 2 The Khwezi John Street project in Uitenhage, also in partnership with The Home Market. This project comprises 385 bachelor units, one- and two-bedroom units on two separate sites on John and Hendrietta streets. The project is located in the NMBM Restructuring Zone.

Western Cape Province



Western Cape

 3–4 July 2025

 40 participants

 City of Cape Town offices

Key points

Community representatives expressed deep frustration with government processes, particularly the lack of meaningful engagement and responsiveness. Policies are often developed without reflecting on the lived realities of the people, leading to a disconnect between what is planned and what is needed by communities. Communication gaps between government departments and communities remain a major barrier. Government is often not people-centred in its planning, and local councillors are sometimes unaware of projects being implemented in their wards.

- Communities and NGOs stressed the need to be included from the beginning of the planning process, saying: “Don’t plan without us.” For example, Siyahlala has established nine agricultural hubs in informal settlements, yet they face challenges due to a lack of support, environmental education and guidance from the government. In some cases, infrastructure such as toilets are built inappropriately close to shacks, posing serious health and safety risks.
- Practical examples of community-led efforts were shared by NGOs such as Siyahlala and the Federation for the Rural and Urban Poor. For instance, some NGOs collect their own data in informal settlements and then approach municipalities to request services, such as sanitation. However, these efforts are often met with bureaucratic resistance or are dismissed due to misaligned government plans and priorities. It was noted that the Budget Speech of the Minister of Human Settlements used to be open to the public but is now less accessible, contributing to the sense of exclusion.

Input

- Continuous dialogue is essential. The government must shift its mindset to plan with the people, not for them. The report must reflect this ongoing journey, capturing the transition between reports and, most importantly, the lived experiences, challenges and collective solutions that emerge along the way.
- The next NUA Country Report could include sections or chapters contributed by a range of stakeholders, as some NGOs raised the possibility of doing their own report to UN-Habitat. This signals that governments probably don't represent NGO and CBO voices and perspectives as they would like to see it.



IMPLEMENTING
THE NEW
URBAN AGENDA

- Government officials highlighted their internal frustrations, citing a lack of coordination and fragmentation between departments and a lack of coordination. They also highlighted the challenge of misalignment between political promises and administrative capacity. Politicians often make commitments during election periods that do not align with municipal budgets, timelines or legislative mandates, causing confusion and unrealistic expectations among communities.
- The lack of understanding about project implementation was raised by both the public and elected officials, especially related to timelines and processes. This disconnect has led to mistrust, particularly when promises are not fulfilled promptly.
- Crime, extortion and poor law enforcement are obstacles, particularly criminal activity that delays the construction of housing projects. While communities are criticised for harbouring criminals, there is also a lack of effective policing and safety initiatives. People expressed a desire for more support for community-driven crime prevention and environmental clean-up campaigns, which currently lack oversight and recognition.

Site visits

- 1 The Goodwood social housing project was developed by the DCI Community Housing Services, a social housing institution, in partnership with the SHRA and the Western Cape Provincial Government. The greenfield project planned to deliver 1 055 housing units in four-storey buildings.
 - PRASA awarded the land to the developer in 2011, but development of the site officially began only in 2022. Construction had been delayed due to having to rezone the area and to secure finance from SHRA and loan providers. The first two phases have been completed – Phase 1 in December 2023 and Phase 2 in August 2024 – and tenant occupancy is currently over 70%.
 - To qualify, individuals/households must earn R1 850–R22 000 per month. Monthly rentals range from R776 (bachelor unit) to R1 782 (one bedroom) and R4 708–R6 490 (two bedrooms).
 - Qualifying residents are required to attend workshops on community living, development rules, available social programmes and financial literacy. Rules include restrictions on sleepovers and limits on the number of occupants per unit. In addition, undocumented foreigners are not permitted for cleaning services, to discourage illegal employment practices.
 - The development prioritises safety and order, with 24-hour security and CCTV cameras installed on all floors, which has significantly reduced crime in the area. The high density of the development also supports natural surveillance.

- The development has had a positive impact on the surrounding area. A substation was built to support the development's electricity needs, and improvements were made to water and sanitation systems, stormwater drainage and overall water reticulation (important because of high groundwater levels).
- The economic impact of the project includes 2 800 individuals employed during construction through the EPWP, including construction workers and professionals, and nearby shops have begun to develop and renovate.
- Environmentally sustainable features were integrated into the design, such as natural greening to absorb excess water, permeable paving and effective drainage systems. In addition, ground-floor units were specifically equipped to accommodate persons with disabilities, ensuring inclusive access to housing.

2 The Nkanini project in Khayelitsha is being implemented under the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme and is aimed at improving living conditions for approximately 963 families currently residing in the informal settlement adjacent to the site.

- The families were relocated from a flood-prone area below the dune in Nkanini to a new site with a firmer surface and access to basic services. However, the current site is prone to formation of sand dunes.
- The project team is undertaking extensive earthworks to level the ground according to the design specifications. Civil services installation is scheduled to begin in October 2025.
- Once completed, each beneficiary will receive a fully serviced stand along with a formal structure, significantly improving their quality of life and access to infrastructure.
- Due to ongoing challenges related to intimidation and extortion, heavy security has been deployed to protect personnel and safeguard the site.

Planning for the future

The Urban Park group, which focused on environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development, planned a future where parks are being developed in the area, although safety remains a major concern, as playground equipment is frequently stolen or vandalised.

- The design and features of these parks often do not align with the actual needs and preferences of the community.
- This disconnect highlights the importance of involving local residents in the planning and development process to ensure that public spaces are both secure and truly beneficial to those who use them.

The Art District group, which focused on sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty, shaped a future where the government is contributing to poverty alleviation through skills training initiatives, notably the EPWP, which provides community members with employment opportunities and practical skills.

- Collaboration between government and community-based organisations (CBOs) holds great potential for addressing gaps and improving service delivery. Within communities, positive innovations are already emerging, such as the introduction of smart irrigation systems.
- A day hospital is available for the community, but it has high patient volumes and limited staffing. It is also 30+ years old and has not been adequately maintained or upgraded to meet the needs of the growing population. Access remains a major challenge for persons with disabilities who often struggle with mobility due to a lack of inclusive transport options in the area.

The Town Hall group, which focused on governance and effective implementation, predicted a future where flooding is a major issue affecting the community, largely due to informal structures being built on stormwater drainage systems. Addressing this challenge requires:

- Short-term interventions: Mapping flood-prone areas using the EPWP, which also helps create local employment.
- Medium-term interventions: Investing in critical infrastructure development to improve drainage and mitigate flood risks.
- Long-term interventions: Expropriating land, which may be necessary to ensure safer and more sustainable human settlements.

Loosening building regulations for micro housing developers



Officials from the City of Cape Town advised that the City was planning to introduce a bylaw in July 2025 that supports small-scale rental developments. It would allow flats and apartments to be built in township areas, offering a legal framework to increase housing supply in a controlled and safer manner. The bylaw enables homeowners in 194 communities to legally build affordable rental units on their properties – these areas had experienced a high number of backyarder dwellings and informal structures. [See Cape Argus dated 17 July 2025.](#)

KwaZulu-Natal Province



7–8 July 2025



52 participants



Margate, Ray Nkonyeni Local Municipality (KZN South Coast)

Key points

- Municipal officials noted the lack of feedback from studies into the challenges of implementing the Priority Human Settlements and Housing Development Areas, despite multiple engagements and research efforts conducted by external stakeholders. This had left a gap in communication and accountability. A key challenge identified was the funding of bulk infrastructure, which remains a significant constraint to implementation.
- Land governance is a major point of contention due to the fundamental clash between traditional authorities who view land as communal property and the municipality which views land through urban planning and development lenses. Policies and planning frameworks tend to support the municipality's approach, often overlooking or undermining the role and rights of traditional authorities. This creates tension and hinders progress on development initiatives.
- The political system in South Africa is highly fragmented and misaligned. Ministers often oversee multiple departments with varying mandates but whose priorities are not aligned with those of local governments. Even within the same sector department, the different spheres of government (national,

provincial and local) often have conflicting objectives. This misalignment hampers the implementation of projects. The current structure of three spheres of government contributes to inefficiency and a lack of accountability, raising questions about the necessity of having three spheres.

- The division of responsibilities across different government spheres adds another layer of complexity. According to the Constitution, local municipalities handle roads, electricity and basic services, while districts are responsible for water and sanitation, and provinces oversee housing. However, this results in situations where (for example) a municipality wants to build houses but cannot proceed because the district is prioritising potable water over supporting urban development. Collaborative work across sectors and spheres of government is crucial.
- The ineffective budgeting system is one of the most pressing issues. Financial resources are often allocated to areas where they are not needed, while critical areas remain underfunded. This is due to poor planning and disjointed strategic frameworks. Ward councillors may push for projects based on local preferences or needs that do not align with municipal or national priorities, resulting in duplication and poor coordination of efforts.
- Bulk infrastructure delivery also suffers under this fragmented system. Municipalities function more effectively when designated as Water Services Authorities, which allows them to directly implement infrastructure plans without having to rely on district municipalities that may have different priorities. The DDM was introduced to improve coordination and promote joint planning between district and local municipalities but has yet to deliver on the promise of “One Plan, One Budget”. Currently, there are many plans and still no alignment.
- Political interference further complicates the implementation of frameworks and policies. There is a growing need to create space for councillors to fully understand and engage with projects at the portfolio committee level.
- Policy responses frequently address symptoms rather than root causes. For example, urban informal settlements are often treated as a housing issue, whereas many residents already have homes in rural areas but migrate to cities in search of economic opportunities. The real issue is the uneven spatial distribution of economic activity, which goes beyond the mandate of municipalities and requires a broader focus on inclusive economic growth and job creation in rural areas. Until rural economies are revitalised, urban migration and the rise of informal settlements will persist.

Site visits

The site visits focused on the Margate Airport and Masinenge Slums Clearance (Informal Settlement Upgrading). The two projects are near each other.

- 1 Margate Airport is the southernmost aerodrome in KwaZulu-Natal. It is currently a Category 4 airport, but plans are underway to upgrade it to a Category 5 facility, which would allow larger aircraft to be accommodated. This upgrade is supported by the recent acquisition of a firefighting truck to meet the necessary safety requirements.
 - The airport currently hosts one scheduled flight per day to OR Tambo International Airport, operated by CemAir, but during peak holiday seasons, more flights are scheduled to meet the tourist demand.
 - In addition to commercial flights, the airport is used by charter services, the South African Police Service, the National Defence Force and sea rescue operations.
 - The KZN Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs provided funding for the airport’s recent upgrades, but additional funding is needed to refurbish the terminal building and to maintain/extend the runway. Recurring infrastructure issues, including stormwater drainage problems that result in the flooding of hangars, parking areas and terminal buildings, require urgent attention to ensure the airport is functional and safe, particularly as it seeks to grow.

- An Airport Master Plan, based on a Smart City concept, has been developed to guide the long-term growth and modernisation of the facility. Additional land adjacent to the airport would need to be purchased to allow for expanded services, such as cargo handling and the development of an agri-zone. A private investor had previously expressed interest, but progress stalled due to challenges in formalising a public-private partnership with National Treasury. The municipality is considering outsourcing the management of the airport because its core mandate does not include running airports.
- 2 The Masinenge Settlement is a BNG housing project of 882 opportunities, aimed at slum clearance, where beneficiaries from the adjacent informal settlement receive housing units free of charge. Each unit is a 46m² two-bedroomed house. To date, 506 units have been constructed. Future phases of the project will include free-standing units designed specifically for people with disabilities. To support the development, additional funding has been secured for the construction of a pump station.
- A key challenge has been the continuous growth of the informal settlement, raising the concern that the people occupying Phases 4 and 5 exceed the number of units planned for construction.
 - Illegal electricity connections have increased. Although Eskom requires 80% occupancy before proceeding with official installations, the process of installing proper electricity infrastructure has recently commenced.
 - Government officials often do not fully appreciate the invaluable work done by people on the ground. There is a lack of effective M&E of the project's progress and of clear ways of measuring the impact of development.
 - A recurring challenge is balancing limited resources against high community demands and expectations. In some cases, resources become concentrated in specific areas, such as Masinenge, where informal settlements continue to grow despite ongoing interventions.
 - The project highlighted the stark imbalance between rural and urban development and the continued legacy of spatial apartheid. It stands out as a commendable initiative to bridge this gap through locating human settlements closer to economic opportunities. However, to make such projects truly effective, planning departments within municipalities must be better supported and empowered.

Planning for the future

The Urban Parks group (environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development) identified an ongoing significant disconnect between what communities need and what government programmes and interventions are able to provide. This often results in frustration, misaligned priorities and underutilised resources.

The Economic Hub group (urban prosperity) included both the formal and informal economies in development strategies, highlighting that the potential and contribution of the informal economy is often underestimated or overlooked. Yet the informal economy plays a significant role in sustaining livelihoods and local economic activity.

The Art District group (social inclusion and ending poverty) recognised the importance of collaboration and community participation, particularly through small-town regeneration initiatives that promote social inclusion and provide essential infrastructure. Community-building models, such as stokvels, encourage collective ownership and financial resilience. There is a need for skills development programmes, especially offering graduates internships and access to transaction centres. Lastly, a crucial step in reducing spatial inequality is to strategically place human settlements closer to economic opportunities.

North West Province




10–11 July 2025


61 participants

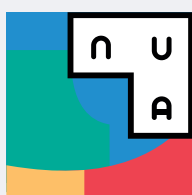

Rustenburg Local Municipality

Key points

- Urbanisation continues to pose complex challenges for inclusive development, particularly as the demand for space increases and land becomes more expensive, resulting in the marginalisation of lower-income communities who cannot afford to live in well-located urban areas. The challenge is how to design inclusive cities when the space that is closer to economic opportunities has become expensive.
- To enhance participation and bring new voices into planning processes, social media platforms should be recognised as essential tools for public engagement, particularly among younger demographics and digitally connected communities. These platforms can help broaden outreach, gather real-time input, and democratise planning conversations beyond formal spaces.
- A concern is the establishment and facilitation of forums intended for ongoing engagement. There needs to be a clearly defined institutional arrangement detailing who will set up, coordinate and, most importantly, participate in these forums. In the past, many forums have not worked effectively for the people, as they are often consultative in name only and lack the power or follow-through to influence implementation.
- Consultation and engagement are different. Consultation often involves extracting feedback with no commitment to action, while true engagement co-creates policy with stakeholders and is grounded in lived realities. This disconnect is frequently reflected in the absence of decision-makers and implementers at stakeholder engagements, which undermines trust and limits the impact of such sessions.
- Municipalities and provinces have a responsibility to support CBOs that are already embedded in local development work. CBOs act as intermediaries between communities and the state, particularly in the face of worsening climate change impacts and deteriorating water quality. Civil society organisations, such as FEDUP (collects community-level data) and PLANACT (develops community-led projects in Gauteng) demonstrate how locally driven initiatives can shape planning processes and restore dignity to residents.
- CBOs and NGOs voiced concerns about limited access and closed doors, when their on-the-ground experience is vital for effective planning. Platforms often created by SACN demonstrate how sharing knowledge from the ground up can be as valuable as top-down policy transfer. These practices should be more intentionally replicated at district and local levels.
- The People's Housing Process (PHP) should be reviewed to assess whether it continues to meet its intended purpose. Proposals for improvement should be informed by beneficiary experiences and alternative delivery models that promote genuine empowerment and sustainable livelihoods.

Input

- The NUA Country Report must reference the Global Action Plan on Informal Settlements in principle and demonstrate how its objectives have been localised and aligned with national actions.
- Clarity is needed on how informal settlement upgrading programmes, data collection and participatory methods are being used to meet global targets.



IMPLEMENTING
THE NEW
URBAN AGENDA

- Traditional leaders play a critical role, especially the Royal Bafokeng Nation, which has a considerable presence in Rustenburg. With extensive influence over land, education, infrastructure and housing developments, their involvement in planning processes is essential for the successful implementation of development initiatives.
- Best practices that demonstrate the meaningful involvement of traditional leaders in development planning must be documented, shared and scaled. In some instances, traditional leaders have turned rural villages into revenue-generating areas. An example is the Msikaba Bridge, a project that symbolises both infrastructure advancement and cross-border integration between KZN and the Eastern Cape.
- Given the positive outcomes in some DDM sites, consolidating or rationalising underperforming local municipalities could improve efficiency.
- The lack of efficient research is a challenge, as policy development is most effective when informed by context-specific research. Without a strong research base, policies may fail to address the real needs of communities or anticipate future challenges.
- The IUDF emphasises integration, but the current engagements were led almost exclusively by the Department of Human Settlements, with limited visibility of other key departments – this weakens cross-sector alignment. The involvement of the DLRRD is critical due to the province's rural nature and unique spatial and land-use dynamics that require tailored approaches to tackle development, land tenure and resource allocation.
- As the province continues to face climate-related risks, disaster risk management and resilience stakeholders must be engaged, as their participation will strengthen the province's ability to anticipate, respond to and recover from adverse events, ensuring that development efforts are sustainable and protective of vulnerable populations.

Site visits

The site visits covered two projects, Yarona, the bus rapid transit (BRT) system, and the new Greater Boitekong Substation, an electricity and energy infrastructure project.

- 1 The Yarona BRT system in Rustenburg is a public transport initiative operated through a 12-year contract with a private company, the Bus Operating Company (BOC), in partnership with the municipality and South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL).
 - In 2012, initial planning and stakeholder engagements for Yarona began and culminated in an innovative partnership with the MBT industry. To minimise job losses and ensure stakeholder buy-in, MBT owners sold their vehicles to the BOC and became shareholders in the new system. Gender inclusion was a focus

when training former MBT drivers and others to be bus drivers – two women are already driving, and 10 more are undergoing training.

- The system includes 24 buses and 49 scheduled MBTs, with plans to expand to 45 buses by June 2026 and extend services to the CBD and eastern areas. The BOC also acquired Gautrain buses, which are being repurposed for the Yarona fleet, with enhancements for universal accessibility, ensuring inclusivity for people with disabilities.
- Yarona services operate on a timetable, alongside scheduled MBTs, creating a hybrid system that aims to retain the flexibility of informal transport while introducing predictability and structure. However, challenges persist, particularly with commuter behaviour, as MBT passengers continue to request stops at non-designated points rather than the formal stops that are spaced approximately 500 metres apart.
- The BRT infrastructure includes dedicated (but not fully segregated) lanes in the CBD and designated stops for both buses and MBTs. Stations are being constructed but face delays due to infrastructure backlogs. Traffic patrol personnel manage flow during peak hours to improve safety and efficiency. The Master Plan envisions the full coverage of Rustenburg, including rural regions, but implementation is phased due to financial constraints.
- Yarona incorporates modern fare collection via a “tap-and-go” top-up card system, with SANRAL providing the back-end infrastructure. Although MBTs still operate on a cash basis, the plan is to transition them to card-based systems to align with the broader shift towards account-based ticketing, which will eventually allow commuters to pay using bank cards and mobile phones.
- The next major milestone is the rollout of services on the R510 corridor, which will result in the formal removal of approximately 500 MBTs from that route. This shift marks a significant move towards formalising public transport in Rustenburg and improving urban mobility.
- It is important to note that public transport systems are not profit-driven. Like similar systems globally, Yarona is subsidised by the government, and its value lies in social, economic and environmental returns rather than financial gain. The Rustenburg BRT model presents a noteworthy case of inclusive public transport transformation, balancing infrastructure development with stakeholder empowerment and gradual integration of informal services.

2 The Greater Boitekong Substation is an infrastructure project spearheaded by the Rustenburg Local Municipality, with a total investment of R87-million by the Department of Electricity and Energy. The project is planned over a three-year period and is being managed in close coordination with the municipal electricity department.

- In the Greater Boitekong area, the rapid growth of both formal and informal settlements has resulted in increased electricity demand, placing strain on the existing substation, which is insufficient to meet future demand. Therefore, the new substation was planned to accommodate the growing needs and qualifies for a full government subsidy.
- The substation is designed as a two-bay 40MVA facility, with provision for a third bay of 20MVA to accommodate future load growth. It will directly supply formalised extensions, such as Extension 35 and Extension 13, as well as take over supply to Boitekong Extensions 3, 4, 5 and 8, which will be removed from the current substation’s load.
- In the surrounding informal settlements, illegal electrical connections are widespread. Despite these areas being serviced and roads being planned, there is community resistance to the removal or relocation of structures that are illegally connected to the grid. The municipality is working to balance infrastructure development with community needs and safety.
- The new substation operates without emissions, supporting the municipality’s shift towards cleaner, more sustainable energy practices. In parallel, the municipality is rolling out smart metering infrastructure, which enables accurate billing and usage monitoring. Additional funding

is being sought to support the rollout, as the implementation of smart metering typically requires partnerships with private service providers under long-term agreements, usually spanning around 20 years.

- The Rustenburg Platinum Mine (now owned by Sibanye-Stillwater) donated land that is earmarked for informal settlements upgrading. However, the land is located near tailings dams, which pose environmental and safety risks. Sibanye did not initially object to the EIA but has since raised concerns about the suitability of the site for residential development. This has led to contention, as the DHS had already commenced planning and development in these areas. It is important to note that the decision to donate the land predates Sibanye's ownership, having been made by the former Rustenburg Platinum Mine.
- This project highlights both the opportunities and challenges in expanding infrastructure in rapidly urbanising areas, particularly where formal planning intersects with informal settlement realities, land governance complexities and environmental risks.

The site visits and stakeholder dialogues brought to light a complex and evolving urban landscape in Rustenburg, where the challenges of infrastructure, governance and community engagement intersect. These reflections are crucial in contextualising the IUDF and its practical implementation.

- The Greater Boitekong substation is important for alleviating electricity demand, but its proximity to informal settlements presents both safety and environmental risks, including the potential for oil spills. The illegal electricity connections, located adjacent to the substation, also pose a serious risk to infrastructure and public safety. These connections are symptomatic of broader systemic gaps – where government does not proactively accommodate growing populations in its planning, communities are left to provide for themselves, often unsafely. The absence of critical technical data from engineers onsite, specifically the number of households to be serviced, underscored the need for better planning integration, both among government departments and across all sectors involved in spatial and infrastructure development.
- The Yarona BRT system demonstrates a rare but valuable partnership between the public sector and the MBT industry, where former MBT owners became shareholders and trained drivers within the BOC. This approach minimised job losses and presents a compelling case study on inclusive transformation, which could inform similar partnerships across South Africa. Furthermore, notwithstanding its inclusive intent, the impact of Yarona on the existing MBT industry is being questioned, with suggestions that the MBT sector is collapsing or being displaced rather than transformed.

Planning for the future

The Urban Parks group (environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development) highlighted that, while mining companies often contribute to corporate social investment initiatives, the true potential for sustainable development lies in the effective implementation of social and labour plans (SLPs).

- SLPs are regulated by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) and are intended to align mining operations with the socio-economic needs of host communities. However, in practice, SLPs are frequently disconnected from local development agendas, particularly the municipal IDPs.
- This misalignment is largely because SLPs are developed and approved at the national level (DMRE), often without sufficient consultation with local governments or affected communities. In many cases, councillors are tasked with implementing aspects of these plans, but the broader community engagement (which should be central to SLP development) is minimal or absent. A case in point is Madibeng, where communities report having little influence over the SLP initiatives intended to benefit them.

- A meaningful solution requires structured dialogue between the DMRE, DHS, provincial governments, mining companies and the communities themselves. These conversations must be institutionalised and ongoing (not ad hoc) to ensure that SLPs are aligned with municipal IDPs, responsive to local needs, and accountable to the people they are meant to serve.
- The mushrooming of informal settlements around mining towns is often a direct consequence of internal migration, when mineworkers relocate from other provinces in search of employment. Many of these workers have already accessed government housing subsidies in their provinces of origin, making them ineligible for further assistance (e.g., BNG houses or social housing) in their new places of residence. Others earn above the income threshold for state-assisted housing, yet they cannot afford formal rental options, which pushes them into informality.

The Economic Hub group (urban prosperity) found that the North West is gradually developing into a more diverse economy to prepare for a future beyond mining.

- As mineral resources decline, there is a growing need for a just energy transition within urban areas to support sustainable development.
- Challenges remain, particularly in informal settlements where road infrastructure is poor and housing typologies do not meet the needs of diverse communities. Despite ongoing improvements in basic infrastructure, more integrated planning is required.
- The presence of three private hospitals reflects growing investment in health infrastructure.
- Efforts to bring economic sectors into rural areas are essential for balanced regional development and inclusive growth.

The Town Hall group (effective implementation) felt that South Africa must shift from drafting new plans to focusing on implementation, especially in advancing the SDGs, where it has previously shown leadership.

- To ensure real progress will require combatting corruption, strengthening accountability and promoting transparency across all spheres of government. Also needed is a more effective IGR system and the capacitation of local institutions.
- On the ground, practical solutions, such as malls equipped with solar panels and rainwater harvesting systems, demonstrate sustainable innovation.
- The mushrooming of informal settlements remains a pressing challenge. Municipalities must adopt and implement clear, proactive strategies to manage and upgrade informal settlements, as part of inclusive urban development.

Northern Cape and Free State Provinces



Northern Cape



14 July 2025



20 participants



Virtual – tools, such as Mural and Mentimeter, used in conjunction with a specialist facilitator, to maximise participation



Free State

Participants were asked to describe their lived experience in villages, towns and/or cities.

Northern Cape. The province is defined by its vast natural landscapes, rich cultural diversity and warm, resilient communities. The scenic beauty and hidden gems, such as the Namaqua region with its wildflowers and coastal access, offer great tourism potential, but the province is not yet established on the national or global tourism map. The sparsely populated, expansive geography presents both opportunities and challenges. While it enables unique experiences across many small, culturally distinct towns, it also creates difficulties in infrastructure funding and service delivery. To develop the province effectively, innovative and locally tailored solutions are needed that bridge long distances and connect people to essential services, economic opportunities and one another.

Free State. The province is characterised by diverse cultures and languages, and the warmth of its people. Its size and central location provide strategic linkages to other provinces but also contribute to the deterioration of infrastructure and difficulties in service delivery. There is strong support for IGR that foster collaboration, although there is still room for improvement. Unemployment and poor municipal governance remain pressing issues, often leading to increased crime, unspent budgets and delays in implementation, particularly in critical areas such as human settlements. Entities, such as SARS, are working with stakeholders to promote fiscally responsible citizenship, and the province holds significant potential if governance and accountability structures are strengthened. Free State participants rated their daily lived experience of social inclusion and urban prosperity between 3 and 3.5 out of 5.

Key points

- Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality exhibits some level of development, but many smaller towns and villages face severe service delivery challenges, particularly in accessing clean water. The introduction of the BRT system is a positive step towards improved mobility, but its impact on social and economic inclusion remains limited, particularly given the long travel times.
- There is a growing concern that investment and development efforts are concentrated in Mangaung, while smaller towns and rural areas in the Free State are left behind. This imbalance hampers local economic development and limits employment opportunities, particularly for young people who are already facing high levels of unemployment and exclusion. The financial instability of many municipalities, driven by a weak revenue base, further restricts their ability to deliver services and grow.
- Mangaung has made strides in integrating residents of informal settlements into the formal system through granting permission-to-occupy tenure. The municipality has also engaged stakeholders and investors to identify key areas for investment, signalling a partnership approach and collective willingness to stimulate local economies.
- Despite the upgrading of informal settlements and efforts at social inclusion, deep-rooted governance issues persist and undermine sustainable progress at Mangaung. The municipality remains under administration and has a history of corruption and financial mismanagement, including embezzlement of funds. In some areas, municipal offices have closed due to financial constraints and social unrest.
- Young people are eager to contribute to meaningful change and bring fresh perspectives to development challenges but are often excluded from key forums and decision-making spaces. Their enthusiasm and innovation remain underutilised, despite growing calls (especially from students) for broader societal engagement that includes all sectors. Similarly, the exclusion of traditional leaders from critical dialogues undermines efforts towards inclusive governance, particularly in communities where they hold significant influence over land, cultural heritage and local development priorities. Ensuring that both youth and traditional authorities are meaningfully included in policy and planning processes is essential for building cohesive and responsive communities.

- The province's proximity to Lesotho has contributed to a diverse and multicultural population, with many immigrants successfully integrated into the social fabric. The Free State's strong agricultural potential is underutilised, and there is a clear need to promote inclusive participation in agri-processing, ensuring that opportunities extend across racial and community lines to support equitable economic development.
- The environmental impact of mining in the Free State is significant. Areas such as Welkom have experienced severe land degradation due to unregulated small-scale mining, contributing to long-term ecological damage. Mining activities have also led to air, soil and water pollution, further threatening the health of communities and ecosystems. In addition, climate change is intensifying environmental pressures across the province, with extreme weather patterns such as heavy downpours, prolonged droughts, and flooding particularly affecting farmers and vulnerable residents in informal settlements. The Free State needs to develop and implement a comprehensive climate change strategy in order to address these challenges, protect livelihoods and build resilience.
- The private sector remains hesitant to invest due to instability in municipal leadership, lack of accountability and poor implementation of plans on the ground. Although collaborative frameworks exist, the absence of effective consequence management results in weak follow-through and eroded trust. To build investor confidence and ensure meaningful progress requires consistent leadership, transparent implementation and accountability mechanisms.

Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces



Lived experience

As the engagement was virtual and involved two provinces, individual provincial scores per aspect were not recorded. Instead, participants were asked to describe their lived experience in their provinces.

Limpopo. The province is characterised by rich contrasts and significant potential due to its proximity to nature, typology of settlements and strategic regional location bordering Zimbabwe and Botswana, making it a vital trade corridor. It is endowed with a good climate, diverse cultures and heritage, fertile land that supports agriculture, and abundant mineral resources (e.g., platinum) that contribute meaningfully to employment. Tourism is bolstered by the province's proximity to Mpumalanga and the Kruger National Park. Despite ongoing development initiatives, such as the special economic zone (SEZ) and high-speed rail, the province faces high youth unemployment, a skills mismatch, an infrastructure backlog and inequality

(as highlighted by visible homelessness in urban centres such as Polokwane). The people are friendly, but the province is also experiencing a brain drain, with many residents seeking better opportunities in Gauteng. Addressing service delivery in informal settlements and improving the healthcare system are key to realising Limpopo's full potential. Limpopo scored between 2.5 and 4 out of 5 for the three social, economic and environmental transformative commitments.

Mpumalanga. The province has great natural beauty and economic potential. It is known for its tourism attractions (e.g., the Kruger National Park), scenic routes (e.g., the Panorama Route) and cultural heritage sites. The province's strategic location (sharing borders with Mozambique and Swaziland) means it is well positioned for trade and regional integration. Its friendly people and proximity to nature contribute to a vibrant social and tourism environment. However, challenges persist. Many towns suffer from historic planning issues, with town entrances and internal routes that limit connectivity and flow, while the lack of alternative access routes within and between towns hampers mobility and economic activity. Concerns include the deterioration of infrastructure, particularly in small towns, and the expansion of informal settlements, which negatively affect urban quality and liveability. Despite its strengths in mining, agriculture and tourism, Mpumalanga must address these spatial and infrastructure challenges to fully unlock inclusive and sustainable growth.

Key points

Mpumalanga

- The province holds a strategic position in South Africa's economy. In addition to having coal reserves and several coal-fired power stations, it is home to Emalahleni, the largest coal-producing area on the continent. However, concerns are growing about the just energy transition (JET) due to the lack of visible action by the DMRE to ensure that the mining sector contributes meaningfully to this transition, particularly in Mpumalanga, where mining dominates the economy.
- The province has untapped potential in agriculture, which is a mix of commercial and subsistence farming, and tourism. Sector departments at national level (especially the DMRE, the DFFE and the Department of Tourism) need to collaborate and coordinate more effectively in planning for a diverse and sustainable future. For the JET to be successful and inclusive, DMRE needs to actively engage local stakeholders, support economic diversification, and ensure that mining towns and communities are not left behind in the shift towards cleaner energy sources.
- The province's progress in spatial planning and development is mixed. Participants gave a rating of 3 (out of 5) for the implementation of provincial and municipal SDFs and their alignment with the IUDF. In the first five years, 50–60% of projects identified in the Provincial SDF were executed in collaboration with various stakeholders. However, implementation and enforcement challenges persist, primarily due to limited financial and human resources, and inconsistent political will and support. Municipalities are also burdened by budget constraints and significant debts to Eskom and Rand Water, which further hamper service delivery. Of the 17 municipalities, six are classified as intermediate city municipalities (ICMs), but only one qualified for the Integrated Urban Development Grant (IUDG), and so financial support for key interventions is limited.
- Mpumalanga has been benchmarked for DDM best practice, with dedicated district-level structures, appointed DDM champions and established reporting mechanisms to drive coordinated development efforts. The DDM advisory committee incorporates multiple sectors, enhancing integrated governance. However, significant challenges remain at local level, particularly in water and sanitation services due to aging infrastructure and vandalism. Addressing these local-level issues is critical for sustained provincial development.

- Community unrest and vandalism of infrastructure undermine development progress. Efforts are needed to engage communities, so that they take ownership of local resources, and to put in place security measures after project handovers, to protect investments. Municipalities also face difficulties with revenue collection, as some departments and community members are not fulfilling their payment obligations. Between 2016 and 2022, population growth has driven increased service demand, and catalytic projects funded by grants are helping to generate employment opportunities. Initiatives, such as the Metro FM Awards, further support social cohesion by celebrating local achievements and bringing communities together.
- Municipalities support informal traders by providing designated trading spaces and involving them in governance structures, promoting inclusion. The Mpumalanga Green Cluster is a notable initiative, supporting youth and women while advancing sustainable waste management. However, the lack of targeted planning for youth amenities, such as safe parks, leads to youth misplacement and missed opportunities for engagement.
- The new Mpumalanga Fresh Produce Market is expected to bolster local farmers and generate approximately 96 400 permanent, temporary and seasonal jobs. This growth will benefit numerous SMMEs and increase youth participation in agriculture. Progress on the Nkomazi SEZ has been slow, but upcoming developments promise to deliver significant social impact, including new human settlements, schools and shopping centres. Identified tourism investment projects, such as the Bourke's Luck Potholes Hotel in Graskop, are also part of the district development initiatives, although funding constraints continue to delay implementation.
- The Local SDF highlights critical challenges related to water scarcity in areas where communities increasingly rely on underground water sources, which is not sustainable in the long term. Some regions also lack proper sanitation infrastructure, which exacerbates health and environmental risks. Certain areas identified as heat zones (vulnerable to drought and extreme temperatures) could be suitable for solar farming as part of climate adaptation and green energy initiatives.
- Conflicts over land use arise when mining activities encroach on highly protected areas, often in rural areas, leading to environmental degradation and hazards such as sinkholes, which endanger nearby residents who frequently settle near rivers or in flood-prone zones. This underscores the urgent need for environmental education and awareness to inform communities and stakeholders about the risks and necessary precautions.
- Engaging traditional local authorities is crucial, as they play a key role in managing land use and community safety in rural areas. Proper planning and proactive responses from government are essential, particularly regarding flash floods and other climate-related impacts, to protect vulnerable populations and ensure sustainable development.
- Effective implementation hinges on establishing a clear and consistent M&E framework that operates at all levels of government – national, provincial and municipal. Without regular oversight, programmes risk becoming dormant until reactivated by occasional interventions. An M&E system ensures continuous tracking, accountability and follow-through, which are critical for translating plans into tangible outcomes.

Limpopo

- A key concern is the accountability of the local government system, particularly the limited appreciation of government's legislation and institutional powers. The portfolio committee system at local government level may be considered structurally strong but often underperforms because it focuses on accountability within municipalities. Its oversight does not include sector departments and external institutions, which are also crucial for service delivery and development.
- There is a disconnect between how the IDP is understood and implemented. The 1998 White Paper on Local Government clearly positions the IDP as a tool for coordinating the implementation

of sector department plans, but in practice municipalities tend to treat the IDP as an independent municipal plan rather than a collaborative framework. This weakens intergovernmental alignment and undermines the effectiveness of local development. The province needs to reaffirm the original intent of the IDP and strengthen interdepartmental collaboration and shared accountability across all spheres of government.

- Poor planning and limited understanding of grant mechanisms, especially among the political leadership, leads to unspent funds (e.g., the IUDG) having to be returned to National Treasury. Despite receiving approximately R7 billion annually for infrastructure, a substantial portion is allocated to maintenance rather than new catalytic projects, which delays spatial transformation and social inclusion.
- The Provincial SDF strategically connects SEZs and catalytic projects, especially in Polokwane, to stimulate economic activities in key nodal and growth areas. Infrastructure and economic initiatives include the Limpopo Central and Academic Hospital, sports and recreational facilities, industrial parks and major transport upgrades, such as a high-speed rail to improve connectivity and urban mobility.
- Polokwane is the only urban centre, underscoring the need for infrastructure that connects rural communities to economic hubs. Strategies, such as the BRT and the Local SDF, provide a clear vision, but implementation is lagging due to weak collaboration with municipalities and institutional capacity constraints.
- Efforts are underway to bridge the urban-rural divide and integrate rural areas to unlock broader prosperity. Efforts include fostering enterprise development, such as young entrepreneurs owning small tourism-linked enterprises supported and sponsored by Standard Bank. Water infrastructure projects are prioritised to ensure community access to essential services, while agriculture support programmes seek to help local farmers transition to commercial farming, emphasising the need to transform rural areas so that development benefits flow between rural and urban spaces.
- Engaging municipalities and traditional authorities requires sensitivity to established protocols and governance structures. While municipal officials have direct lived experience, effective engagement often involves interacting through traditional leadership structures, such as local or provincial houses, rather than direct national-level engagement. The existing Service Level Agreement between traditional authorities and SALGA supports a more direct role for traditional leaders in development, fostering collaboration that respects both customary governance and statutory planning frameworks. This approach can enhance inclusive and culturally appropriate development planning and implementation. The ongoing review of SPLUMA presents an opportunity to strengthen the involvement of traditional leaders, particularly by formally incorporating them into land-use tribunals and decision-making processes.
- Many EPWP projects have been implemented, employing large numbers of people, often through partnerships between mining companies and government. These include environmental rehabilitation (restoring degraded land) and waste management projects. Such projects contribute to economic activity and community development, particularly within ICMs, although only Polokwane has qualified for related grants to date.
- Land-use management remains fragmented, with existing institutions often under-resourced and disempowered, resulting in poor enforcement and oversight.
- Social cohesion is promoted through cultural festivals, such as the Marula Festival, which is widely celebrated and supported by the Department of Sports, Recreation and Culture, reflecting a strong commitment to unity and community spirit.
- Overall, the gap between policy and implementation persists, and unless institutional capacity, planning and financial literacy improve, Limpopo may continue to struggle to unlock its full developmental potential.

Insights from the all-of-society engagements

Participants at the all-of-society engagements were mostly provincial and local government officials from the human settlements sector, with a significant number of private sector developers involved in human settlements projects. Other stakeholders included representatives from NGOs, CBOs, civil society, academic institutions, as well as individuals with an interest in urban development.

The all-of-society engagements met the objectives set and established a solid foundation for the future. Buy-in for the NUA was created, with all stakeholders expressing their desire for (and the importance of) continued inclusive collaboration, as government alone cannot achieve the aspirations of the NUA and IUDF. Going forward, there needs to be a better balance between sectors of society and participants from various disciplines e.g., transport, economic development, agriculture and rural development, etc., to ensure more effective discussion and action.

Lived experience

Participants at the in-person engagements (Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Western Cape) rated their lived experience in villages, towns and cities using a scale of 1–5 and based on the transformative commitments (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4: Lived experience rated by participants in the engagements



The scores across provinces were weak to moderate (3 or less out of 5). This correlates to the evidence-based data reported according to the NUA indicators. While there are successes on many fronts, there are challenges that require focused and sustained actions to reduce poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Perhaps a collective effort from all stakeholders could make significant progress rather than government trying to do it themselves with little or insignificant collaboration with key stakeholders.



Common themes

Although each engagement had its unique characteristics, some common themes emerged:

The desire to be involved in shaping South Africa's future

This sentiment was expressed by different sectors of society at all the engagements.

- Participants requested regular and continued workshops and conversations among stakeholders, not simply when preparing an NUA Country Report. They want a single repository of good practice and ongoing learning from each other on a regular basis rather than when required to report.
- Participation means meaningful and sustained engagement at local, provincial and national spheres, not a mere tick-box exercise.

Explore the possibilities of changing the nature of engagement and for the government to go into deep listening mode and then co-create solutions with all-of-society stakeholders. Use social media platforms to engage with the public, especially younger demographics.



The need to plan with – not for – communities

True engagement is about co-creating with stakeholders.

- Policies and plans must be informed by the lived reality of people, which means involving communities in co-creation – NGOs and CBOs can act as intermediaries.
- The result of little or no consultation with communities is a disconnect between what is planned and what the communities need, leading to a lack of ownership of the projects.

Resist the temptation to cut and paste from international or national policies and replicate what's working in another context because local conditions vary widely. Solutions must deal with actual challenges faced at local level and include all-of-society stakeholders.



Very good policy development but poor implementation

South Africa is really good at policy development but needs to enhance the art of doing/implementing.

- The political/administrative interface was highlighted across sessions as the barrier to effective implementation.
- Active attention needs to be paid to procurement, project management, M&E and value for money.

Improve institutional capacity, planning and financial literacy – educate councillors on governance.



Misalignment of priorities

- Political promises are not aligned with municipal objectives and mandates, leading to ineffective implementation and budget allocation.
- National, provincial and local governments have different priorities and do not coordinate efforts, resulting in duplication and poor planning.

Improve horizontal integration at national level, especially between DHS, DMRE, Department of Transport, COGTA and other departments (depending on local context).



Rural and urban are interconnected

The rural-urban continuum must be acknowledged and included.

- Traditional authorities and municipalities have different views on land but need to work together.
- Traditional leaders play a key role in land use and management and community safety in rural areas.

Explore the potential role of traditional authorities to guide and advise on the rural/urban continuum and revitalise rural economies.



Communicate, communicate, communicate

The public perception is that government is underperforming, even when there are successes.

- Participants want to see transparency, accountability, follow-up and implementation (action).
- There is a tendency to over-complicate concepts with a lot of jargon and academic-sounding inputs that are not understood by all stakeholders and the general public.

“Keep it simple, focus on the big picture issues and less talk, more action” is a consistent call.



Priority recommendations

Some priority recommendations (2025–2035) offered were:

National-level Priorities	Local Government Priorities	Cross-sectoral and International Support
• Revisit and streamline key urban policies (e.g., Human Settlements White Paper, SDFs, Public Financial Management Act). • Strengthen national-to-local alignment through clearer implementation frameworks. • Expand community awareness and accessibility of national urban development frameworks (e.g., NUA, IUDF). • Pause the large-scale construction of new housing until people living in informal settlements have equitable access to basic services, including clean water, energy, sanitation and digital connectivity.	• Localise NUA and IUDF in community-friendly formats and languages. • Strengthen the role of municipalities in promoting eco-friendly urban development and integrating climate resilience. • Reinforce by-law enforcement, participatory governance and urban safety mechanisms. • Focus on regularising and supporting small-scale rental accommodation, which often serves as a critical and affordable housing option for many. In this way, inclusion, dignity and access to services are prioritised before further expansion, and incremental upgrading is used as a pathway to sustainable human settlements. • Review current planning processes and adopt a more proactive approach in order to accelerate implementation. • Institutionalise and formally support CBOs and residents who live in affected areas – plan with, rather than for, the people. • Engage communities from the outset, to ensure more sustainable outcomes and greater accountability. • Include communities in M&E processes, to ensure transparency and help residents understand the progress and content of reports produced about their areas.	• Promote public-private partnerships and inclusive economic hubs (township economy, oceans economy, green industries). • Leverage international climate finance cautiously, with a focus on debt-free, equitable models. • Expand global peer learning in waste management, urban resilience, and participatory governance.

5.3

NUA Social Media Campaign for Local Good Practice

A social media campaign was designed and implemented in the search for local good practice projects (Figure 5.5).

It was broadcast on social media platforms (X, LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook) and announced at each of the all-of-society engagements.

The call for projects was made on 24 June and closed on 21 July 2025.

Figure 5.5: Call for local good practice projects



Calling All Changemakers!

Do you have a **local project or initiative** making a difference in your community? Whether you're improving access to housing, creating jobs, driving climate action, or building more inclusive cities, **we want to hear from you!**

South Africa is preparing its **National Report** on progress in implementing the **New Urban Agenda (NUA)** to UN-Habitat. This report showcases our country's achievements in promoting **sustainable and inclusive urban development** over the past four years, since the last submission in 2022. Your story could be featured as a **best practice**, highlighting how local actions are transforming South Africa's towns, cities, and communities.

Who can submit?

We welcome submissions from **municipalities, NGOs, private companies, community organisations, academic institutions** and **individual changemakers** working on impactful local initiatives.

What are we looking for?

Projects or initiatives that contribute to **sustainable urban development**, particularly those addressing one or more of the following themes:

- Reducing Inequality & Promoting Social Inclusion
- Access to Adequate Housing
- Access to Basic Services (Water, Sanitation, Energy, etc.)
- Inclusive Urban Economy, Productivity and Prosperity
- Resilient and Adaptive Urban Development
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation
- Strengthening Urban Governance
- Spatial Planning and Land Use Management
- Financial Resource Mobilisation
- Capacity Development and Knowledge Sharing
- Technology and Innovation for Urban Transformation

Why submit?

From all submissions, **20 projects** will be selected for inclusion in **South Africa's NUA Country Report 2025**, gaining **national and international visibility** on a platform that celebrates local innovation and impact.

Deadline for submissions: [Deadline Date]

Need more info? Contact us at: [contact email]

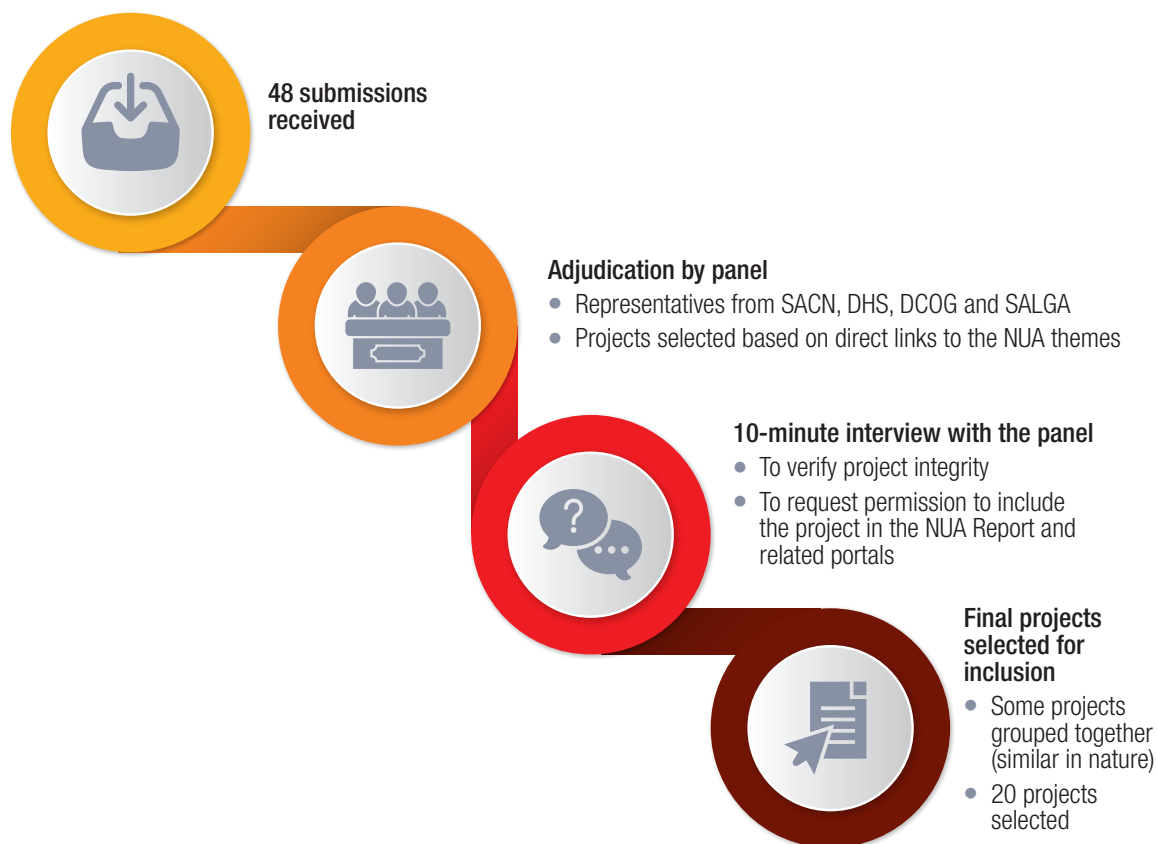
For more information on the New Urban Agenda: <https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/nua>

Access South Africa's 2022 Report: <https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/node/720>

Let's show the world how local action is building a better urban future for all South Africans!

#SustainableCities #NUA2026 #UrbanDevelopment #CommunityAction #SouthAfrica

Figure 5.6: Selection of case studies



The chosen projects complement evidence or analysis contained in the NUA Country Report and have been included in the appropriate parts of this Report. They will also be uploaded on the NUA 2026 Local Good Practice Portal and may be used by any of the NUA partner organisations to showcase the projects.

ePocket – Bridging the Digital Divide in South Africa



Karabo Seduma, COO of ePocket, is leading efforts to bridge the digital divide in South Africa through a mobile-first fintech platform designed for the informal economy. Based in Gauteng, ePocket provides township and rural communities with easy access to essential financial services via smartphone or USSD, enabling them to send and receive money, pay bills and purchase airtime or data with ease.

The platform not only empowers individuals with greater financial autonomy, but also enables informal businesses to transact, access credit and expand their customer base. ePocket's model is helping to formalise the informal sector while expanding digital inclusion in underserved areas.

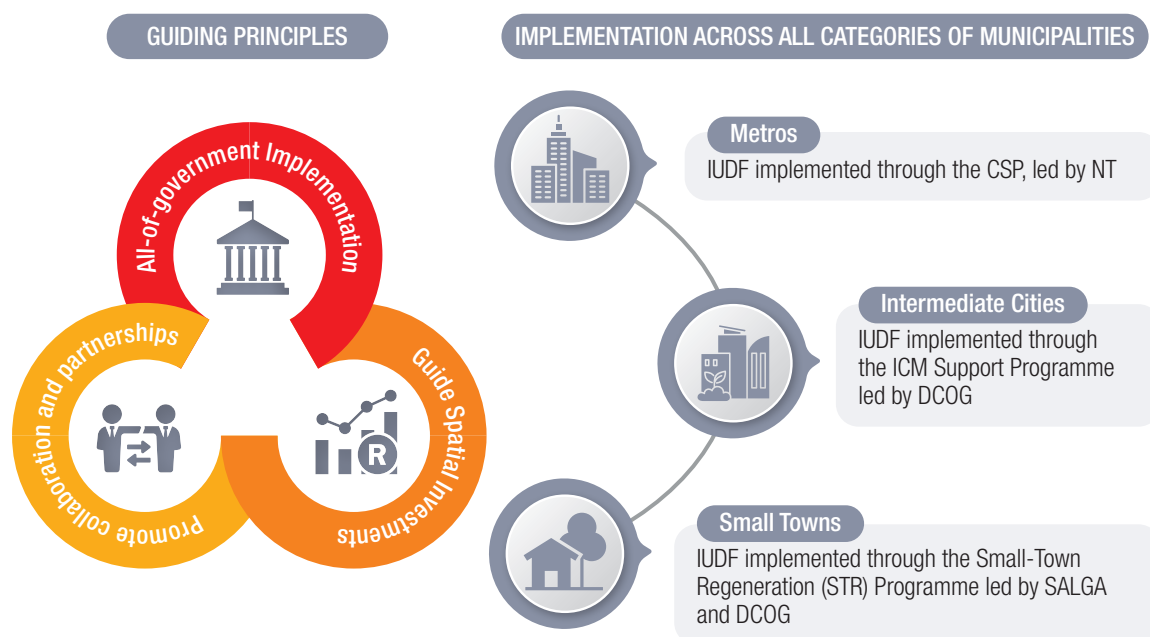
Backed by partners like Soft Tech and Blue Advance, ePocket has been featured in *Impact Magazine* and has participated in accelerator programmes to strengthen its growth.

Over the next four years, all good practice projects included in the 2026 NUA Report, as well as the projects from the 2022 Report will be tracked to assess impact, replicability and scalability. The intention is to include these good practice projects on the programme of future NUF meetings, to celebrate the valuable contributions from a cross-section of society.

5.4 Stakeholder Consultations on the IUDF Implementation Plan

The IUDF is implemented nationwide through three implementing mechanisms or partners that focus on the different settlement types (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7: Implementing partners of the IUDF



The DCOG is the custodian of the IUDF and supports ICMs, while the SACN and the CSP support metropolitan municipalities, and SALGA supports small towns. Other government departments that have adopted the IUDF and contribute to its implementation include the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI), which has a Planning and Precinct Development (PPD) Programme to improve government accommodation and enhance public access to public services. The PPD Programme is part of the DPWI's Real Estate Investment Services branch within their Property Management Trading Entity.

Figure 5.8: IUDF implementation plans



In 2025, the current 2020–2025 Implementation Plan ends (Figure 5.8). A roadmap has been developed that outlines the key activities and timelines for developing the Phase 3 implementation plan, and a working team comprising National Treasury (CSP), DHS, SACN and SALGA has been established to work with DCOG to coordinate the development of this plan. A collaborative approach is critical to ensure that the plan is collectively owned and has buy-in across government and other critical stakeholders. DCOG is also collaborating with the DHS to ensure alignment with the development of the NUA Country Report 2026.

In November 2024, the Review of the 2020–2025 IUDF Implementation Plan began with a meeting of key partners. All partners agreed to provide written inputs to report and review implementation for the period and to suggest key areas of focus for the 2026–2030 Implementation Plan. In May 2025, DCOG and the DHS agreed that the NUA stakeholder engagements would incorporate the IUDF consultation process.

Consultation with IUDF key partners



1 November 2024



IUDF Partners: National Treasury (CSP), DHS, SACN, SALGA and DCOG



- To reflect on progress, challenges and successes of the IUDF since 2016, with a specific focus on 2020–2025.
- To make recommendations for the new implementation plan (2026–2030).

Recommendations

- Strengthen governance frameworks with clearly defined accountability structures to effectively support IUDF goals and ensure transparent oversight. This can include a robust coordination platform that includes both political and technical representatives.
- Establish a resilient funding model to secure long-term financial support for urban initiatives aligned with IUDF priorities.
- Implement targeted capacity-building programmes at both local and national levels to address administrative gaps and enhance operational efficiency.
- Integrate specific IUDF performance metrics into national and local government key performance indicators to improve accountability and track progress.
- Actively engage private sector partners, civil society and international organisations to build wider support for IUDF initiatives.
- Establish a central data hub that aligns with national systems, enhancing IUDF reporting and M&E processes.

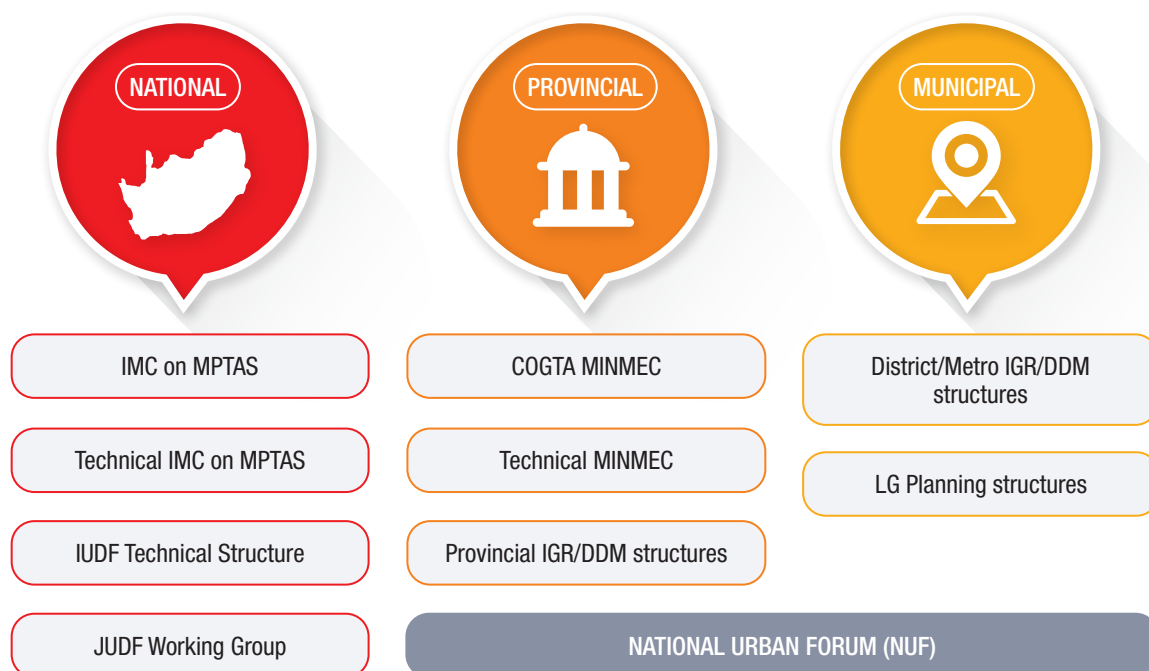
Core elements to be included in the IUDF implementation plan (2026–2030):

- High-level reflection of performance in terms of Phase 1 (2016–2019) and Phase 2 (2020–2025) of the IUDF implementation plan.
- Five-year implementation plan outlining the key initiatives to be implemented by different spheres of government in line with the IUDF's nine policy levers and three cross-cutting issues.
- Reporting mechanisms outlining key indicators and targets to be achieved in the five years.

Structures

In the past, various IUDF technical and political structures were created at national and provincial levels. However, as structures exist that bring together the stakeholders required to drive the IUDF implementation, it is proposed that the IUDF implementation be coordinated at a political level through the already established Inter-Ministerial Committee on Municipal Performance Turnaround Committee, which is chaired by the Minister of COGTA. At the provincial and local government level, relevant structures (e.g., DDM/IGR structures) must be identified to enable all-of-society (municipalities, provinces, NGOs and academia) to report on their various elements of the IUDF implementation (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9: IUDF political and technical structures



Consultation with ICMs



26 June 2025



Intermediate City Municipalities (ICM) Forum convened by DCOG



- To deal with the modalities of the IUDG, a grant specifically for ICMs introduced in 2019/20, and to advise that IUDG applications for 2026/27 were open to interested ICMs (closing in July 2025).
- To inform ICMs of the NUA Country Report 2026 and invite contributions of quantitative and qualitative data or programmes and projects for the Report.

Key points

- The IUDG is a funding mechanism introduced by government to support urban transformation and guide sustainable urban growth and development in ICMs.
- The IUDG seeks to support IUDF implementation in ICMs, which are experiencing a surge in population, contribute 28% of the gross value add (GVA) but are faced with inequality and insufficient economic growth and job creation. The IUDG is currently available to nine ICMs and one local municipality (Alfred Duma Local Municipality).
- The support specifically targets funding for state-driven infrastructure investment, with an emphasis on spatially aligned investment. It also focuses on fiscal framework support and building the capacity of ICMs to manage large capital projects.

- The ICMs were asked to report on the last five years of implementation of the IUDF Implementation Plan (2020–2025), highlighting successes, challenges and impact, as well as local good practice case studies of IUDG and Urban Settlements Development Grant implementation.
- The ICMs were requested to identify what should be included in the next five-year IUDF Implementation Plan, drawing lessons from 2020–2025 to identify opportunities, especially around improved coordination and implementation, and which elements of reporting could also align to or feed into future NUA Reports.

Consultations with metropolitan municipalities



29 July 2025



85 officials from seven metropolitan municipalities (metros), drawn from a range of departments, hosted by the SACN



- To collate the voices of metro officials on progress with the NUA–IUDF transformative commitments to date.
- To discuss what should be included in the 2025–2030 IUDF Implementation Plan.

The questions and provocations used in the virtual workshops were the same as those used in the all-of-society engagements, but the design of the workshop was different, as it used Mentimeter rather than group work. The Mentimeter results indicate the need to raise awareness of the NUA and IUDF among metro officials and how their work affects progress on the global and national frameworks.



Mentimeter

70% of participants knew of the NUA, as it impacted their work.
65% of participants knew about the IUDF.
Less than 20% of participants had read the 2022 NUA Country Report.

Lived experience

Participants rated their city's performance based on the key transformative commitments.

Social inclusion and ending poverty



Average: 45% Low: 48%

Despite progress (in basic service provision, informal settlements upgrading, implementing transit-oriented development programmes/BRT, inclusionary housing policies and urban renewal projects that improved public spaces while providing job opportunities), areas for improvement include growth management strategies, better tenure security in informal settlements, more effective waste management strategies, more effective partnerships with communities and addressing homelessness.

Inclusive urban prosperity

 Low: 50%

While recognising the role of public employment programmes in the context of low economic growth and increasing unemployment, areas for improvement include more private partnerships, better growth management to address in-migration, and a reduction of red tape to increase investments.

Sustainable and resilient urban development

 Average: 44%

Much more needs to be done, although there are examples of what some cities have done well.

Effective implementation

 Average: 47%  Low: 33%

This points to a growing gap between policy and implementation, one that has the most direct impact on lived experience in cities.

Recommendations

- **For national government:** Funding, addressing political delays, and addressing capacity and capability of local government.
- **For metro government:** Introduction of inclusionary housing policies, alignment of national and provincial policies to local government priorities, and deepening community engagement and co-production.
- **For international support:** Technical assistance, funding and capacity-building.

There was a 100% support for regular participative engagements on the NUA and IUDF.

5.5

National Urban Forum 2025

Following the inaugural NUF, which took place on 9–11 October 2024, the second NUF took place in eThekweni on 21–22 August 2025. UN-Habitat supported the event and praised South Africa for being the first country in Africa to host a NUF that would contribute towards the implementation of IUDF.

Almost 900 delegates participated in the 2025 NUF (750 in person and 120 online). The NUF was attended by politicians and officials from regional, national and local governments, sector departments and government entities, as well as representatives from international organisations, including UN-Habitat, C40 Cities and Cities Alliance. Also in attendance were representatives from the private sector, academics and researchers, civil society organisations and community groups, urban planners and built environment professionals.

NUF 2025 Declaration

Drawing on the declarations and commitments of the inaugural 2024 National Urban Forum, first Africa Urban Forum and the Twelfth Session of the World Urban Forum, the second NUF reaffirmed the commitment to achieve the aspirations of the SDGs (particularly SDG11 focusing on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), the NUA, UN Habitat Strategic Plan 2026–2029, the African Agenda 2063, South Africa's NDP 2030 and IUDF.

The NUF Declaration recognised the following:

- Cities and towns are at the forefront of global opportunities and challenges. Local governance is therefore at the centre of driving the urban agenda.
- While urbanisation has been an inevitable and an unavoidable global trend over time, the rapid rate of urbanisation in South Africa requires particularly intentional management.
- South Africa is the most urbanised country in Africa at 68% with an expectation of reaching 80% by 2050.
- Urban and rural development is interconnected.
- Climate change and extreme weather events are increasing, thus negatively affecting human settlement and urban infrastructure.
- South African cities are engines of the country's economy, but paradoxically, also where poverty, unemployment and inequality are most visible.
- Cities are only as resilient as their most vulnerable residents.
- Urban infrastructure and mobility are an integral part of sustainable urban development.
- The importance of developing expertise in planning and built environment to create more sustainable, resilient and community-centric urban environments.

It acknowledged:

- The IUDF's vision, of liveable, safe, resource-efficient cities and towns that are socially integrated, economically inclusive and globally competitive, where residents actively participate in urban life, transcends mere aspiration but embodies a solemn commitment to future generations.
- The success of the IUDF is a collective mandate shared across all of government and all of society.
- Urban transformation must be people-centred and mainstream the voices of youth, women and marginalised communities at every stage of planning, implementation and reporting.
- The need for climate resilience and transition to sustainable practices are crucial.
- The impact of data, artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure on everyday life and growth.

The key resolutions of the 2025 NUF included the following:

- 1 Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms
 - Establish a national mechanism to coordinate whole of government and all of society and institutionalise accountability through, among others, the District Development Model (DDM).
 - Improve cooperative governance and collective leadership in advancing development.
 - Improve governance in municipalities.
- 2 Review the Funding Model of Local Government
 - Pool resources and reduce duplication of grants.
 - Explore a developmental finance approach, NOT grants for financing the IUDF implementation.
 - Consider alternative funding models.
 - Make municipalities more bankable and reduce risk by ringfencing pipelines and adopting project financing structures.

- 3 Enhance Skills in Municipalities
 - Speed up the process of professionalisation of the public sector in general and built environment disciplines in particular.
 - Build in-house skills and reduce reliance on consultants.
 - Develop capacity for disaster preparedness and management.
- 4 Advance Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability
 - Ensure all sectors (public and private) understand the impact of climate change on the environment.
 - Integrate and embed sustainability into municipal plans and include circularity in waste management.
 - Include greening in housing developments (existing and future).
 - Seek solutions in indigenous knowledge systems and alternative technologies and promote community-led solutions and plans.
- 5 Reinforce Linkages between Urban and Rural Development
 - Recognise that rural and urban spaces are interconnected, so plan for both rural and urban growth.
 - Localise and identify competitive advantages of different Metropolitan Areas, intermediary cities and towns and rural areas.
 - Strengthen the role of the Office of the Surveyor-General in supporting spatial transformation and planning.
- 6 Empower the Youth
 - Amplify youth voices in shaping cities and urban spaces.
 - Promote youth-led initiatives and solutions.
 - Include youth voices in governance.
 - Implement national youth policy and development strategies at provincial, district and local levels of the State.
- 7 Put Citizens at the Centre
 - Mobilise and involve communities, especially youth, women and marginalised groups.
 - Mainstream gender and safety of women in urban planning.
- 8 Improve Urban Safety
 - Promote knowledge exchange and twinning of cities to improve safety and security.
 - Investigate innovative financing for safety-conscious housing and infrastructure development in cities.
 - Promote the use of transversal design and communication to enhance city safety frameworks.
 - Capacitate city housing and infrastructure practitioners to embed safety in their respective processes and procedures.
- 9 Unlock Access and Urban Mobility
 - Make public transport the backbone of urban mobility.
 - Promote the integration of public transport services, increase access and affordability, and reduce inefficiencies.
 - Collect and use intelligent data to make informed decisions on urban mobility.

- 10 Land Reform, Integrated Human Settlements and Governance
 - Accelerate the implementation of efficient land governance and management systems to support urban development (reduce red tape) based on authentic cadastral boundaries and spatial maps.
 - Improve capacity of the State to respond to disasters
 - Improve the capacity of the State to respond to informality.
 - Consult with municipalities when developing national and provincial plans.
 - Support municipalities to institutionalise long-term development plans (national and provincial government).
- 11 Foster Collaboration and Partnerships
 - Improve collaboration with and inclusion of other stakeholders in planning and implementation of sustainable development (communities, professional bodies, academia and research agencies, traditional leadership, private sector and government departments).
 - Maximise infrastructure development through partnerships with industries.
 - Promote the pooling and sharing of skills among municipalities for discharging similar functions.
 - Exchange skills and resources through local and international networks.

African Forum for Urban Safety

On 20 August 2025, the AFUS took place at the same venue as the NUF 2025. In South Africa, urban safety is identified as a cross-cutting issue in the IUDF, with the other two cross-cutting issues being urban resilience and the rural-urban interdependency. Furthermore, eThekweni Municipality, UN-Habitat, AFUS and SALGA jointly hosted the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Dialogue at the Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban.

- **Themes covered:** The role of human settlements in designing safe and secure cities, digital technologies and human rights, responsive design and adaptive governance, and cities at the centre of an integrated human security approach.
- **Emerging lens:** Human security calls on cities to be human-centred and to consider health, social, political, food, safety and economic precarity/vulnerability when designing interventions and thinking about city development, transformation and urban management.
- **Highlights:** Evidence-led safety planning and crime prevention; lessons, experiences and practices from the SACN's USRG, which has an expansive evidence and data agenda that is documented in its regular [State of Urban Safety in South Africa Reports](#); invitation to submit case studies on spatially driven, preventive interventions from eThekweni and neighbouring municipalities, including Umhlathuze.
- **Site visits to city-led projects:** Inner-city bad building repair led by eThekweni's Development Planning Unit and integrated law enforcement and smart policing led by the eThekweni Safer Cities Unit.

PART 6

Strategic Ways Forward

The preceding parts have outlined South Africa's progress towards the NUA's transformative commitments. Both the desktop research and the all-of-society and government engagements confirmed that much work has been done to move the country closer towards realising these commitments, but much work is still needed.

Part 6 explores ways of advancing the implementation of the NUA and realisation of the transformative commitments by 2036. The list is not exhaustive (nor is it meant to be) but rather reflects strategic actions that, if undertaken, could scale the (positive) impacts of efforts aimed at helping South Africa meet its development and transformation objectives.

6.1 Implement Key Actions by 2036

Between now and 2036, South Africa has an opportunity to advance decisively its NUA commitments. Bold reforms will be needed in social protection (with a particular focus on historically marginalised groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities and informal dwellers), infrastructure, housing, energy, skills development and economic inclusion, alongside robust monitoring and data systems. The following sector-specific recommendations are proposed as the next steps for government action.

Housing, spatial integration and urban welfare

Expand affordable housing finance instruments. Many informal income earners are excluded from traditional bank lending because they lack formal payslips, credit histories or collateral. This limits their ability to invest in housing, trapping households in informal settlements. There are also many who work in the formal sector but do not earn enough to qualify for traditional housing finance. Supporting non-bank lenders, microfinance institutions and community savings schemes would contribute to greater access to formal housing, spatial integration and improved urban welfare. Expanding affordable housing finance instruments will improve access to finance by micro-developers and first-time homeowners (especially informal income earners) in the affordable and gap markets. This will, in turn, increase (formal) homeownership, strengthen community resilience and stimulate the local construction economy.

Reform land-use regulations, simplify approvals and expand concessional loan facilities for township landlords. The small-scale rental sector is an important provider of affordable rental housing, but its expansion is restricted by regulatory and financing barriers. Reforming land-use and approval processes, combined with expanding concessional loans, would encourage an increase in small-scale rental developments, unlocking thousands of safe, affordable rental units. Ultimately, this will increase affordable housing stock, promote local entrepreneurship and improve living standards for tenants living in affordable housing.

Strengthen municipal capacity to upgrade informal settlements. Informal settlement upgrading is a complex process that not all municipalities have the technical, financial and institutional capacity to address through the conventional top-down approach. Nonetheless, the upgrading intervention should be through community-driven planning and delivery. Empowering municipalities with the required resources, skills and tools would enable them to deliver upgrading projects in a manner that responds directly to the needs of residents, ensuring that informal settlements do not remain underserved and that the poverty cycles and inequality are not reinforced. The strengthening of municipal-community partnerships would also enhance social cohesion, reduce conflict and accelerate progress towards the transformative commitments.

Release public land for mixed-income developments near transport hubs and job centres. Colonial and apartheid-era spatial planning displaced millions of South Africans far from CBDs where a myriad of opportunities and services are located. Currently most new small-scale rental developments and informal settlements are located in townships, continuing the spatial patterns. This reinforces poverty and inequality by imposing high transport costs and reducing access to opportunities for low-income households. Using public land for mixed-income housing near economic nodes would reduce spatial exclusion, create diverse neighbourhoods and enhance productivity by shortening commutes and broadening access to jobs and other opportunities.

Skills development, education and employment

Strengthen TVET institutions. TVET colleges are crucial for developing the skills base needed to realise economic growth. Currently, the declining enrolment in TVET colleges is compounded by high dropout rates and weak engagement with the business sector. The TVET college system needs better funding, quality assurance and employer partnerships. This would enable more students to be enrolled, improve the quality of technical training, and ensure that higher numbers of employable youth will graduate with skills that are aligned to growth sectors.

Implement learner-tracking systems and expand work-integrated learning. Many young people fail to transition smoothly from education to employment due to gaps in support and tracking. A system for monitoring learner transitions would improve job placement rates, help policymakers identify bottlenecks and guide the development of more suitable career support systems. In tandem, more business–training collaborations are needed, so that graduates can be better matched with labour market demand. This entails updating skills forecasting frameworks, where necessary, to ensure that forecasts reflect real-time demand across various growth sectors. Real-time, sector-specific skills planning would ensure that training systems respond to economic shifts, thereby boosting competitiveness.

Scale public employment programmes (PEPs). South Africa faces high unemployment and, while the PEPs provide some relief, it is only temporary. Scaling these programmes would help build transferable skills for a larger number of participants, enabling them to transition into permanent employment or entrepreneurship. School leavers would be provided with additional support that embeds skills training, ensuring that youth employment opportunities are meaningful and productive.

Informal economy and MSME development

Develop municipal-level informal economy strategies. National policies often overlook local realities, particularly for those working in the informal economy who have little voice in municipal decision-making. South Africa needs to develop new or refine existing municipal strategies, which should be co-produced with informal worker associations and MSMEs, to support livelihoods and protect rights. This would support the sustainable development of the informal economy and MSMEs.

Expand micro-finance access, business support services and infrastructure for informal traders. Many informal traders and MSMEs operate in poorly serviced environments, such as townships and informal settlements, and lack access to land, skills or finance, limiting their ability to grow. Income inequality, unequal land ownership and education gaps prevent broad participation in economic opportunities. Improving access to micro-finance, services and infrastructure would enable traders to expand and potentially even formalise their businesses, increasing their incomes and the number of people employed. The Department of Small Business Development would need to identify the different funding needs of informal traders throughout the MSME lifecycle. This intervention should be part of broader efforts to facilitate more inclusive growth by enhancing access to productive assets. South Africa needs to explore a suite of options to broaden access to land, education and training for all, particularly for entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals in the informal economy and MSMEs. This will enable the development of more secure livelihoods and foster social mobility.

Strengthen credit information systems and streamline business processes. Many MSME and workers in the informal sector do not have credit histories with traditional (formal) financing institutions, limiting their access to finance. To expand MSME access to finance, credit information systems need to be developed that incorporate alternative data, such as stokvel or burial society credit lines. This would increase the likelihood of their survival and their capacity to scale their businesses. The processes of formalising and closing a business also need to be streamlined and simplified, so that it is easier and more cost-effective to formalise informal MSMEs or to close businesses, reducing risk for the business owner and encouraging re-entry into business.

Establish incubators and accelerators. Many entrepreneurs lack access to the requisite networks, mentorship opportunities and technology that can help them grow their businesses. Providing entrepreneurs with mentorship, market access and specific support for scaling businesses through incubators and accelerators would assist them to succeed and scale, drive innovation and create jobs.

Creative and cultural economy

Provide MSMEs with funding, training and digital platforms. Many potential entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals in the creative industries face significant barriers to entry, due to lack of education, financing and support, preventing them from creating jobs for themselves and others. Lowering these barriers through expanding dedicated funding mechanisms and rethinking the regulations for accessing funding (particularly the number of years of experience required) would unlock enterprise creation, stimulate local economies and reduce unemployment through self-employment and MSME growth.

Ensure fair wages, social protections and labour rights for the cultural and creative industries. Workers, which include cultural workers, freelancers and micro-enterprises, in these industries are excluded from some of the social protections and labour rights afforded to workers in other sectors. Extending and strengthening protections to workers in the cultural and creative industries would legitimise their livelihoods and support productivity in the sector.

Invest in digital literacy, broadband affordability and digitisation of local content. Digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), are increasingly shaping the global creative economy, from streaming services and online art markets to e-learning and digital design. However, in South Africa, high data costs and low digital literacy exclude many, especially women, youth and township-based creatives, from participating in these markets. Without digitisation, local cultural content also risks being under-represented or lost. Such investments would expand access and inclusion, by reducing the digital divide and enabling more people to participate in and benefit from the creative economy, as well as preserving and sharing South Africa's heritage with a broader audience. This, in turn, would open new pathways for youth entrepreneurship, create enterprises and open new export and tourism opportunities.

Prepare for the future of work. AI is transforming creative industries and being used to generate art, music and literature, while disrupting traditional business models. This raises serious challenges around copyright, cultural ownership and fair compensation for creatives, and the risk of South African creatives being exploited and losing their livelihoods. AI-driven change needs to be balanced with authenticity, intellectual property protection and cultural rights. South Africa should establish protections (so artists and cultural workers benefit fairly from their creations), safeguard the country's diverse cultural expressions (so they are not diluted or misappropriated), and strengthen its cultural rights frameworks (to encourage innovation in the creative economy).

By taking the steps outlined above, South Africa can further embed rights-based, participatory and integrated approaches and, in so doing, foster inclusive, resilient and just urban futures.

6.2 Improve Implementation Gaps

South Africa is at a critical moment in its urban development trajectory. Despite significant progress in service delivery since 1994, structural challenges, such as poverty, low economic growth and high unemployment rates, are undermining these gains, deepening inequality and placing unsustainable pressure on the country's social protection system. To safeguard the most vulnerable, it is essential that social grants are at least aligned with the food poverty line, ensuring a baseline of dignity and protection against further deprivation.

Spatial transformation and infrastructure investment

At the structural level, South Africa must confront entrenched spatial inequality and weak municipal capacity. Cities and towns need to be spatially transformed, supported by investment in infrastructure. This will require:

- Strengthened capacity of metros and secondary cities to plan and implement informal settlement upgrading, with active community participation.
- Improved intergovernmental collaboration, which is needed to drive integrated human development systems that align housing, infrastructure, economic and social outcomes.
- A repair, maintenance and upgrading programme for infrastructure, equipment and technology. The declining performance of water systems and wastewater treatment works illustrates the urgent need for renewed investment in capacity development, infrastructure maintenance and modernisation, for increased operational efficiency.

Inclusive and decoupled economy

South Africa cities are facing pressures due to economic stagnation, climate impacts, energy crises, governance weaknesses and corruption. It is imperative that South Africa develops a more inclusive, labour-intensive economy whose growth is decoupled from energy consumption. Reform of the energy sector is underway, with the promulgation of the Electricity Regulation Amendment Act (No. 38 of 2024) that establishes an independent Transmission System Operator and facilitates competitive electricity trading, and is expected to boost investment, reduce energy costs and improve supply reliability. However, South Africa needs a more labour-intensive growth model that is underpinned by a stronger alignment between post-school training and labour market demand. This will require deeper partnerships between TVET colleges and the private sector, to ensure skills relevance and youth employability.

Creative economy and future of work

South Africa's transformation agenda should embrace its cultural and creative assets. Connecting cultural knowledge with enterprise development will stimulate new markets, leverage township creativity and harness indigenous knowledge systems. Unlocking the creative economy for youth employment will require robust support structures for MMSEs and cultural policies that balance economic growth with inclusion, rights and social justice. With digital technologies and AI reshaping business models and intellectual property regimes, the sector must prepare for the future of work and ensure that workers in the creative industries, including freelancers, benefit from fair wages, social protection and legislative safeguards. Barriers to digital inclusion, such as high broadband costs, must also be addressed to ensure broad participation in the creative economy.

Monitoring and reporting

To ensure that these commitments translate into lasting impact, South Africa must invest in continuous, collective monitoring and reporting mechanisms, building on the all-of-society engagements. These mechanisms would enable transparent tracking of progress, strengthen accountability and foster collaboration across government, private sector and civil society. Timely, high-quality data is crucial, including disaggregated housing-market data, particularly data on informal rentals and settlement upgrading that can inform responsive planning and inclusive human settlements policy. The current two-to-three-year lag in national datasets hampers responsive, let alone proactive, decision-making, but new initiatives, such as the development of a near real-time national development data portal, hold promise for bridging this gap, enabling more agile and evidence-based policymaking.

A multidimensional strategy is needed to close the implementation gaps. The strategy must be anchored in poverty alleviation, data-driven policy reform and M&E, municipal capacity-building, structural economic reform, energy security, infrastructure renewal and cultural innovation. Integrating these actions into a coherent, well-coordinated strategy will enable South Africa to achieve spatial justice, economic inclusion and resilient urban futures.

Secure Political Commitment Across Government Spheres

To accelerate the implementation of the NUA, political commitment must move beyond statements of intent. Political commitment is secured when it is institutionalised (laws, budgets, reporting), incentivised (funding, recognition, accountability), and legitimised (citizen participation, international obligations). Political commitments need to be secured, institutionalised and maintained across all spheres of government. This will require the following actions.

Institutionalise commitment beyond electoral cycles

NUA-aligned principles are already enshrined in binding policies and frameworks (the NDP and IUDF) and (to varying extents) the spatial planning legislation and frameworks. Provincial, district and municipal SDFs also need to enshrine these principles, in such a way that their commitments survive changes in leadership.

Align incentives with delivery

South Africa needs to align incentives with the effective implementation of urban policies and practices. This can be done through establishing political recognition mechanisms that publicly reward provinces, municipalities and leaders who demonstrate best practice in implementing inclusive urban policies and practices.

Strengthen multi-level governance

Multi-level governance can be strengthened by further clarifying roles and responsibilities across the three spheres of government, to avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts and establishing city-national compacts. These compacts will be tailored agreements that bind metros and secondary cities to specific NUA-related targets and, to be successful, must be supported by national financing and technical resources.

Build political will through citizen engagement

Citizen engagement, which is a pivotal element of the NUA that promotes inclusive, participatory planning and decision-making, is also the foundation for building political will. South Africa needs to further institutionalise community-driven planning (especially in informal settlement upgrading) to secure legitimacy and reduce resistance to projects. This can be accomplished through strengthening social compacts between government, civil society, labour, private sector and cultural groups to create broad coalitions that drive collaborative projects with political actors. The use of participatory budgeting at municipal level can also ensure citizens directly influence how resources are allocated towards NUA commitments.

Leverage international and regional obligations

South Africa can use its commitments to the SDGs, Paris Climate Agreement, African Union Agenda 2063 and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area as anchors to further compel domestic action. These commitments can be leveraged by deepening participation in peer-review mechanisms, such as the voluntary national reviews on SDGs and the African Union peer reviews, in order to keep political actors accountable at the continental and international scales. To ensure greater implementation of these commitments, South Africa must align development financing with these global commitments to avoid non-compliance, as this increases the risk of losing international support and credibility.

Ensure resource commitment

To ensure greater implementation of activities that are aligned with the global commitments, specifically the NUA, sufficient resources must be committed. South Africa should guarantee predictable, long-term financing for NUA priorities by ringfencing budgets to address implementation gaps. This would also entail strengthening partnerships with the private sector and development finance institutions, to reduce the fiscal burden on government and make the commitments more politically feasible.

Build capacity and political champions

South Africa needs to train and capacitate mayors, councillors and municipal managers on NUA principles and explicitly link NUA principles to political delivery outcomes. This must be accompanied by identifying and developing additional urban champions within Parliament, Cabinet and provincial legislatures who would advocate for NUA-aligned reforms within their respective departments and/or organisations. In addition, leadership coalitions need to be developed across political parties, to make urban transformation a non-partisan national priority.

Enhance monitoring, transparency and accountability

Monitoring, transparency and accountability can be enhanced by developing a public dashboard of NUA implementation that is linked to the SDG indicators. This dashboard must be accessible to citizens, media and civil society. A pivotal step in developing such a dashboard is to increase South Africa's capacity to collect the evidence base needed for a comprehensive evaluation of progress in implementing the NUA. This will help South Africa to fill the data gaps that have led to the partial (or non) reporting on some of the indicators in this report.

Strengthen anti-corruption measures

Tackling corruption will ensure that the resources intended for urban transformation are not diverted. This will build public trust in political commitments.

Through implementing the above actions, urban commitments will be transformed from short-term political promises to long-term, cross-cutting national priorities.

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