

Sustainable Development Goals Initiative

Improving the institutional conditions for evidence-based policy-making in South Africa

The challenge

Since 2024, South Africa has been governed by a ten-party coalition, also known as the Government of National Unity (GNU), marking a shift in the country's policy landscape after the African National Congress (ANC) lost its majority in parliament. This comes after 30 years of democracy in South Africa. Despite efforts by the previous administration to improve the welfare of its citizens and advance developmental objectives, the triple challenge of inequality, poverty, and unemployment persists. With just four years left until 2030, the GNU is faced with a difficult task in fulfilling the targets of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Despite this reality, the government remains committed to evidence-based policy and decision-making in advancing its three national priorities over the coming years:

- driving inclusive growth and job creation
- reducing poverty and tackling the high cost of living, and
- building a capable, ethical and developmental state.

Amid these developments and central to policy coordination, is the Policy and Research Services (PRS) branch, established in 2019 within South Africa's Presidency. The PRS is responsible for coherent and evidence-based policy formulation and implementation to achieve the national priorities and the NDP. However, institutional weaknesses and capacity constraints limit the branch's ability to execute this mandate effectively.

The Sustainable Development Goals Initiative (SDGI) has been established together with The Presidency of South Africa to support the PRS in addressing these challenges.

Project name	Sustainable Development Goals Initiative (SDGI)		
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)		
Project region	South Africa		
Lead executing agency	The Presidency, Republic of South Africa		
Duration	10/2025 to 09/2028		



Our approach

Building on the work of SDGI I (October 2021 to September 2025), the project provides technical support to the PRS, to improve the institutional conditions for evidence-based policy-making in South Africa. The project's target groups are primarily intermediaries, i.e., middle and senior managers in the public administration, at both national and local level, who play a key role in the formulation or adaptation of laws, policies, and other regulatory measures. The programme comprises three complementary areas of intervention (outputs):

- **Output 1** - aims to strengthen the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System (SEIAS), by integrating new methods, optimising process steps, and improving the institutional conditions for SEIAS at both national and local government level.
- **Output 2** - aims to embed methodologies, quality standards, and guidelines for analysing and integrating evidence in the policy cycle, while advancing inclusive dialogues on prioritised policy areas.
- **Output 3** - aims to strengthen the skillset of selected policy advisors in the area of evidence-based policy-making.



Exemplary Results so far

SDGI I bridged academia with policymakers through the initiative's Secretariat. The Secretariat (comprised of the University of Pretoria, PRS, and GIZ) served as a co-ordinating hub, finding experts from South Africa's 26 public universities alongside consultancies, to respond to requests for evidence from The Presidency and various government departments. Between October 2021 and September 2025, the Secretariat responded to **32 requests for evidence** which focused on:

- Supporting the development of new or existing policies
- Informing policy analysis
- Strengthening policy advice and recommendations
- Informing evaluations for existing policies.

In addition to bridging the gap between academia and policymakers, the initiative made great strides in the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs through its partner African Monitor, representing civil society. Through our technical support, African Monitor **championed inclusivity, participation, and responsiveness in support of Agenda 2030** through a series of dialogues on important development issues, such as the mobilisation of action toward establishing the National Development Stakeholders Forum (NDSF).

The exploration and testing of digital solutions for evidence-based policy-making also gained momentum. In partnership with the Albert Luthuli Leadership Institute (University of Pretoria) and the Policy Innovation Lab (Stellenbosch University), several digital and AI tools were developed to enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of policy processes, these include:

- The South African SDG Hub
- Policy Summarisation and Comparison Tools
- Media Brief Generator
- Policy Brief Generator
- WhatsApp Chatbot for collecting citizen-generated data

Highlights

Study on the Alignment of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) with the SDGs: This study contributed significantly to the Presidency's capacity to drive a whole-of-government, evidence-informed response to GBVF. The study enabled practitioners within the Private Office of the President to use a structured analytical framework for understanding the intersections between the SDGs and the NSP. This improved the Office's capability to provide high-quality, evidence-based policy briefs, internal advisories, and strategic recommendations to the Presidency.

Coordinating and supporting civil society participation to ensure inclusive Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes: In 2023, South Africa took the decision to present its second VNR in 2024, following the release of the 2023 SDG Country Report by Statistics South Africa. The VNR is a process through which countries assess, and present national progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Alongside the diverse writing team comprising representatives from government, the private sector, civil society, and academia, SDGI supported the preparation of the VNR stakeholder engagements as well as the design of South Africa's 2024 VNR report.



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