# UNITED NATIONS SOUTH AFRICA SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FRAMEWORK (2026-2030)

## Overview and National Context

The United Nations South Africa Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2026–2030 represents a strategic commitment between the United Nations and the Government of South Africa to accelerate progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Grounded in the principle of "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB), the framework is specifically designed to align with South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP).

## 1. Core Development Challenges

South Africa enters the 2026–2030 period facing persistent structural challenges:

- Structural unemployment and skills mismatches
- Persistent poverty and extreme inequality (spatial, gender, youth)
- Weak economic growth and constrained fiscal space
- Governance weaknesses, corruption, and service delivery gaps
- High crime, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and social cohesion pressures
- Climate vulnerability, energy insecurity, and environmental degradation

While progress has been made in social protection, education access, healthcare, and constitutional governance, implementation gaps and fiscal constraints continue to limit transformation.

## Core Pathways to Impact

**Inclusive Economic Transformation:** Green, care, digital, and rural economies

**Human Capital & Access:** Foundational learning, TVET alignment, UHC, social protection

**Governance, Safety & Cohesion:** Anti-corruption, justice delivery, participatory governance

**Climate Resilience & Environmental Stewardship:** Climate-smart agriculture, green finance, disaster risk reduction

## *Impact Statement (2030):*

*By 2030, all people in South Africa live with dignity, are resilient and prosperous, thriving economically and socially, protected from shocks, and benefiting from a peaceful, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable society."*

The CF applies a human rights-based approach and the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle, prioritising:

- Women and girls
- Youth
- Persons with disabilities
- Informal workers
- Rural and marginalized communities
- Refugees and migrants

## The Cooperation Framework (CF) is fully aligned with:

- The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030
- The Medium-Term Development Plan (2024–2029)
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- The African Union Agenda 2063

## Guiding Principles:

- Leave No One Behind (LNOB)
- Human Rights-Based Approach, Gender Equality
- Climate and Environmental Sustainability
- Data and Evidence

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

# SUPPORTING ECONOMIC GROWTH, JOB CREATION, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND TACKLING STRUCTURAL POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

### Objective: Address structural drivers of poverty, unemployment, and inequality.

#### Key Focus Areas:

- Green, digital, and care economy job creation
- MSME development and value-chain integration
- Youth employment and skills alignment (TVET reform)
- Reduction of spatial inequality
- Just Energy Transition employment pathways
- Expansion and adequacy of social protection

**Technical Key Interventions:**

- Support to Operation Vulindlela reforms
- Investment in green industrialisation
- Strengthening informal economy protections
- Social protection system reform (including SRD redesign)
- Public employment programmes (green infrastructure focus)

**Transformation Goal:**
An inclusive economy that reduces inequality and creates decent work.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

### Promoting Good Governance, Accountability, Rights and Addressing Safety Deficits.

**Objective:** Build a capable, ethical, developmental state that restores public trust.

#### KEY FOCUS AREAS:

- Anti-corruption and accountability systems
- Justice and rule of law
- Strengthened local governance capacity
- Participatory governance mechanisms
- GBV prevention and response
- Social cohesion and prevention of xenophobia

**Technical Key Interventions:**

- Support to justice sector reform
- Strengthening public administration professionalism
- Community-based violence prevention models
- Participatory budgeting and civic engagement
- Capacity-building for municipalities

**Transformation Goal:**
A trusted state that delivers services effectively and protects rights.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

# BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY AND RISK PREPAREDNESS

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

**Objective: Safeguard development gains from climate and environmental shocks.**

### Key Focus Areas:

- Climate-smart agriculture
- Renewable energy transition
- Biodiversity conservation
- Disaster risk reduction
- Water and energy security
- Innovative green and blue finance

### Technical Key Interventions:

- Scaling adaptation and mitigation projects
- Embedding NDC targets into national system
- Strengthening Early Warning Systems
- Mobilising climate finance
- Community-level resilience building

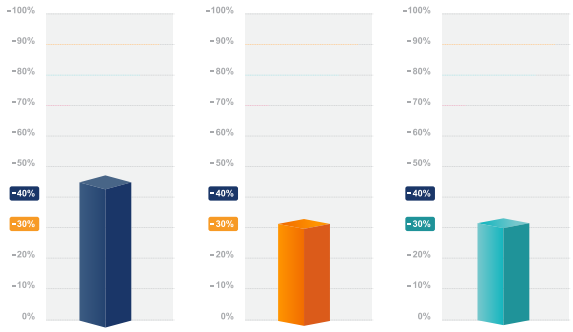
### Transformation Goal:

**A climate-resilient, environmentally sustainable South Africa.**

# Implementation Architecture

The CF adopts a streamlined results structure, reducing:

| OUTCOMES | OUTPUTS | INDICATORS |
|---|---|---|
| −44% | −31% | −31% |




This ensures:

- Greater strategic focus
- Reduced monitoring burden
- Stronger accountability

### Governance Structure:

- UN Country Team oversight
- Results Groups co-led by Government and UN
- Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Group
- Cross-Cutting Thematic Group (LNOB focus)

Implementation uses existing national coordination mechanisms (e.g., SDG IMC structures), reinforcing national ownership rather than creating parallel systems.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES

## Strategic Priorities and Outcomes

The Cooperation Framework is organised around three interconnected Strategic Priorities implemented through five mutually reinforcing outcomes.

### Under Priority I: Economic and Social Transformation

The outcomes focus on advancing inclusive economic growth and expanding human capabilities to ensure equitable and sustainable livelihoods. This includes increased job creation across emerging sectors such as the green, digital, and care economies, alongside strengthened access to quality education, healthcare, and social protection systems. Together, these outcomes aim to reduce inequality, enhance productivity, and empower individuals with the skills and services needed to participate meaningfully in the economy.

### Under Priority II: Transformational Governance

The outcomes emphasise the development of accountable, effective, and responsive institutions that deliver quality public services and uphold human rights. They also promote a safe and enabling environment that strengthens civic participation, ethical leadership, and social cohesion, with a strong focus on preventing and responding to gender-based violence. These outcomes collectively contribute to building trust in governance systems and ensuring that all individuals can live in dignity and security.

### Under Priority III: Resilience and Sustainability

The outcomes center on strengthening environmental stewardship and promoting ecosystem-based approaches to support sustainable development and resilient livelihoods. They aim to enhance the capacity of institutions and communities to manage climate and environmental risks, while advancing sustainable resource use and low-carbon development pathways. Through these outcomes, the framework seeks to protect development gains and enable long-term resilience in the face of growing climate challenges.

## Implementation and Governance

To ensure national ownership and efficiency, the UN will utilize existing national coordination mechanisms rather than creating new joint structures. The UN Country Team (UNCT), under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, will oversee implementation through Joint Workplans and thematic Results Groups.

Financing the framework requires a diversified approach, including blended finance, public-private partnerships, and the mobilisation of domestic resources, given South Africa's status as an upper-middle-income country with constrained fiscal space. The total estimated resource requirement for delivering the Cooperation Framework is USD 266,928,748.

**Published by:**
The United Nations in South Africa | 2026

**Follow Us:** @UNinSouthAfrica
**Facebook** | **X** | **Instagram** | **TikTok**
**Website:** https://southafrica.un.org/

# UNITED NATIONS SOUTH AFRICA SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FRAMEWORK (2026-2030)

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The United Nations South Africa Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2026–2030 represents a strategic, evidence-based partnership between the United Nations and the Government of South Africa to accelerate the country's progress toward the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Grounded in the core principle of "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB), this streamlined framework is specifically designed to address South Africa's deep-rooted, structural development challenges—namely, high unemployment, extreme inequality, poverty, governance weaknesses, and escalating climate risks. By consolidating its results architecture to ensure greater strategic focus and stronger institutional accountability, the UN Country Team utilises existing national coordination mechanisms to foster complete national ownership and drive systemic transformation across three interconnected priority areas.

UNITED NATIONS SOUTH AFRICA

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 Inclusive Economic Growth and Human Capabilities

A comprehensive roadmap designed to dismantle the structural drivers of poverty and unemployment while fostering an inclusive, sustainable economy.

## Core Objective: Economic Transformation

Addressing the "Triple Challenge" of Unemployment, Inequality, and Poverty.

**Targeted Growth Sectors**
Prioritising job creation across the **green, care, digital, and rural economies**.

**Just Energy Transition**
Ensuring that shifts in renewable energy and critical minerals directly benefit **women and youth** through clear employment pathways.

**MSME & Informal Sector Expansion**
Boosting growth for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises by unlocking access to **finance, global markets, and digital infrastructure.**

**Policy & Rights**
Revising **labour and migration policies** to rigorously safeguard workers' rights while actively driving domestic industrialisation.

## Outcome 1: Equitable Livelihoods

**Digital & Financial Inclusion**
**IF** digital connectivity expands and evidence-based interventions improve market access for MSMEs... **THEN** enterprises will be better positioned to integrate into value chains and create jobs.

**Education Alignment**
**IF** academia and training institutions ensure curricula meet **labour market demand**... **THEN**, youth not currently in education or employment will benefit from specialised skilling and placement programmes.

**Investment & Infrastructure**
**IF** increased investment is mobilised alongside private-sector engagement to address infrastructure deficits... **THEN** the structural barriers to growth can be dismantled.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 Inclusive Economic Growth and Human Capabilities

## Outcome 2: Human Capabilities & Opportunity

**Universal Health Coverage (UHC)**
Expanding essential health services and strengthening pandemic preparedness to ensure a healthy, disease-resilient workforce.

**Educational Reform**
Accelerating foundational literacy/numeracy, upgrading teacher training, and reshaping TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) to align with emerging economic sectors.

**Social Protection**
Broadening security coverage specifically for informal workers and rural communities to fortify families against systemic economic shocks and lifecycle risks.

## Guiding Principle: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

**Deeply Rooted in Prioritising the Most Excluded Groups in Society.**

**Priority Groups:**

YOUTH

WOMEN

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MIGRANTS & REFUGEES

**Sustainable Gains:** Formalise informal enterprises and embed gains into national systems through impact investment and social enterprises.

## Key Implementation Partners

**Government Leadership**
Partners: Primary accountability rests with the National Treasury and the Departments of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC); Small Business Development; and Employment and Labour.

**Social Partners**
Partners: Trade unions (such as COSATU and FEDUSA) work alongside business associations (like BUSA) to secure fair labour practices and champion inclusive supply chains.

**Economic Drivers**
Partners: Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), commercial banks, and fintech companies collaborate to expand baseline financial access.

**UN Expertise**
Partners: A collaborative UN agency network provides tailored technical support, split into two primary operational areas:

- Economic Growth: Driven by ILO, UNDP, and UNIDO.
- Human Capital Development: Supported by UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 Transformational Governance, Accountability, and Safety

Designed to build a capable, ethical, and developmental state that restores public trust through effective service delivery and the protection of human rights.

## Core Objective: Governance & Safety

Closing the "Governance Gap" by Securing Institutional Integrity and Public Safety

**Anti-Corruption & Ethics**
Strengthening oversight functions and institutional accountability frameworks across government departments to reduce impunity, waste, and the inefficient use of resources.

**Financial Integrity**
Institutionalising spending efficiency, asset recovery, and anti-money laundering mechanisms to safeguard public funds.

**Justice & Rule of Law**
Enhancing the capacity of the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, and community-based organisations to improve justice delivery and implement evidence-based crime prevention strategies.

**Local Governance**
Building the capacity of municipalities for integrated planning and budgeting to ensure quality public services at the community level.

## Outcome 3: Accountable and Responsive Institutions

**Optimising the "Machinery" of the State for Transparency and Public Responsiveness.**

**Stakeholder Engagement**
**IF** mechanisms for dialogue and public participation are systematically strengthened... **THEN** state policies will be significantly better informed and more effectively enforced on the ground.

**Theory of Change**
**IF** oversight bodies (such as Chapter 9 institutions) and the judiciary are independent and adequately resourced... **THEN** they can fulfil their constitutional mandates completely and effectively.

**Sustainability**
**IF** robust ethics enforcement and financial management systems are deeply embedded within both national and sub-national levels... **THEN** public sector reforms become fully institutionalised, far beyond temporary project cycles.

5 GENDER EQUALITY
11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 Transformational Governance, Accountability, and Safety

## Outcome 4: A Safe and Enabling Society

Optimising the "Machinery" of the State for Transparency and Public Responsiveness.

**GBV Prevention & Response**
Rolling out comprehensive, multisectoral action plans to decisively tackle Gender-Based Violence (GBV), backed by expanded, immediate access to critical mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) systems for survivors.

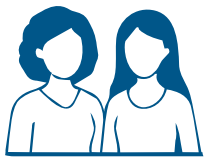
**Social Cohesion**
Systematically addressing and neutralising xenophobia, hate speech, and deep-seated discrimination—explicitly safeguarding marginalised communities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and migrants—to cultivate a genuinely inclusive national community.

**Citizen Empowerment**
Unlocking concrete channels for grassroots citizens to participate meaningfully in frontline governance structures, giving them a direct say in local planning, transparent municipal budgeting, and active service monitoring to rebuild institutional accountability and trust.

## Guiding Principle: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

**Targeting barriers faced by those disproportionately affected by corruption and service backlogs.**

**Priority Groups:**



**WOMEN AND GIRLS** (PARTICULARLY SURVIVORS OF GBV)

**YOUTH**

**PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**RURAL COMMUNITIES**

**Access to Justice:** Ensuring that informal workers, migrants, and refugees gain improved access to legal protection and fair services.

## Key Implementation Partners

**State Entities**
Leading departments include Justice and Constitutional Development; Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA); National Treasury; and the South African Police Service (SAPS).

**Civil Society & Media**
NGOs and investigative media platforms act as essential watchdogs to sustain transparency and accountability.

**Oversight Bodies**
Critical roles for the Public Protector, Auditor-General, and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC).

**UN Expertise**
Technical guidance is led by UNDP and UNODC for governance and anti-corruption, and UN Women, UNFPA, and UNICEF for GBV and human rights.

5 GENDER EQUALITY · 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH · 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES · 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES · 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS · 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 Climate Resilience and Environmental Stewardship

Dedicated to safeguarding South Africa's development gains from climate-related and environmental shocks while fostering long-term sustainability.

## Core Objectives: Resilience and Stewardship

Strengthening Institutional and Community Capacity to Manage Environmental Risks.

**National Framework Validation**
Actively supporting the validation of critical national frameworks, including the Voluntary National Review (VNR) for the SDGs, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) on climate change, and National Biodiversity Strategies.

**Risk Management**
Institutionalising multi-layered disaster risk management frameworks - specifically embedding Early Warning Systems (EWS) and anticipatory action protocols - across national, provincial, and municipal tiers of governance.

**Climate-Smart Transitions**
Driving the adoption of climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy efficiency, and nature-based ecotourism to aggressively safeguard grassroots livelihoods while conserving vital ecosystems.

**Diverse Financing**
Mobilising a diversified matrix of environmental funding, leveraging advanced green and blue finance instruments along with deep investments from international development banks to resource sustainability targets at an impactful national scale.

## Outcome 5: Sustainable Growth and Resilient Livelihoods

**Enabling Economic Growth That Safeguards Environmental Health.**

**Cross-Sectoral Coordination**
**IF** the government ensures tight coordination among the environment, agriculture, rural development, and finance sectors... **THEN** macro policy coherence will be strengthened.

**Evidence-Based Decision-Making**
**IF** reliable data and reporting systems are in place to track commitments under multilateral environmental agreements... **THEN** high-level accountability and informed decision-making are enabled.

**Capacity Building**
**IF** institutional capacity and specialised workforce skills are systematically upgraded... **THEN** South Africa will successfully retain the long-term expertise required to manage natural resources and drive climate action.

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION
15 LIFE ON LAND
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 Climate Resilience and Environmental Stewardship

## Guiding Principle:
## LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

**Prioritising Environmental Resilience for Those Most Vulnerable to Climate Shocks.**

**PRIORITY GROUPS:**

Tailored programs will place a strong emphasis on smallholder farmers, pastoralists, women, youth in climate-sensitive sectors, and indigenous groups.

**URBAN AND INFORMAL SUPPORT:**

Actively protecting the urban poor living in high-risk informal settlements, alongside informal workers who are deeply vulnerable to environmental degradation.

**RESOURCE ACCESS:**

Ensuring these vulnerable groups gain secure land rights, full access to sustainable technologies, and active participation in the green transition.

## Key Implementation Partners

**Government Leadership**
Leading departments include Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment; Water and Sanitation; Agriculture; and Rural Development.

**Regional Bodies**
Collaboration with SADC and the African Union (AU) to scale green economy pathways and manage shared ecosystems.

**Financial and Technical Partners**
The Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and development banks to mobilise infrastructure investment.

**UN Expertise**
Technical support is provided by UNDP, UNEP, and FAO for adaptation and livelihoods, and by UNESCO and UN-Habitat for environmental education and urban resilience.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Ultimately, the strategic priorities of the United Nations South Africa Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2026–2030 form a cohesive, interlocking roadmap designed to shift the country toward a more equitable, resilient, and trusted society. Through this streamlined approach, the cooperation framework successfully balances economic capability with ethical leadership and environmental stewardship, ensuring that South Africa's long-term prosperity is securely built on institutional trust and shared civic progress.

UNITED NATIONS SOUTH AFRICA

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

**Published by:**
The United Nations in South Africa | 2026
**Follow Us:**
**Facebook:** @UNinSouthAfrica
**X:** @UNinSouthAfrica
**Instagram:** @UNinSouthAfrica
**TikTok:** @uninsouthafrica
**Website:** https://southafrica.un.org/