



The Role of the Private Sector in Advancing SDG Localisation in South Africa

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ABOUT THE UN GLOBAL COMPACT



A photograph of Kofi Annan, the 7th Secretary-General of the United Nations, speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt, and a blue patterned tie. He has a grey beard and is gesturing with his hands while speaking into a microphone. The background is a blue wall with the United Nations logo.

THE WORLD IN 1999

A HUMAN FACE TO THE GLOBAL MARKET

“ *I propose that you,
the business leaders...
and we, the United Nations,
initiate a global compact
of shared values and
principles*

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General (1997–2006)

A PRINCIPLES BASED APPROACH



HUMAN RIGHTS



LABOUR



ENVIRONMENT



ANTI-CORRUPTION



UN GLOBAL COMPACT: OVERVIEW

23,000+

businesses committed
to the Ten Principles
of the UN Global
Compact

56%

of participating
businesses are SMEs

160+

countries with
UN Global Compact
participants

70+

Country networks
and growing



HUMAN RIGHTS

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WHY LOCALISATION MATTERS?





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Why localisation matters?

- **SDG localisation means translating global goals into local business action.**
- **Businesses operate closest to communities – where change happens.**
- **Accelerates job creation, sustainable cities, and climate resilience.**



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THE VNR 2024 JOURNEY





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THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2024

In May 2023, the Global Compact Network South Africa began the process of reviewing how the private sector were progressing action to deliver the 2030 Agenda.



This is the
private sector
response →



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COLLABORATING ACROSS SECTORS

The private sector view was then integrated with perspectives from the public sector and civil society to deliver the South African Report 2024.



The GCNSA facilitated the Private Sector Voluntary National Review



Participation on the National Writing team to integrate findings with across sectors.



Playback and review of the South African VNR 2024 Report with stakeholders.



The Presidency will report back to the UN High Level Political Forum

JULY 2025



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EXTENSIVE PARTICIPATION

.The private sector is a key actor in delivering the 2030 Agenda.

16

**Stakeholder Engagement
Virtual Round Tables**

132

**Companies participated
in the process**

3,410

**Insights captured and
analysed**

300+

**Individual contributors
participated**

37

**Company Case
Studies**

6

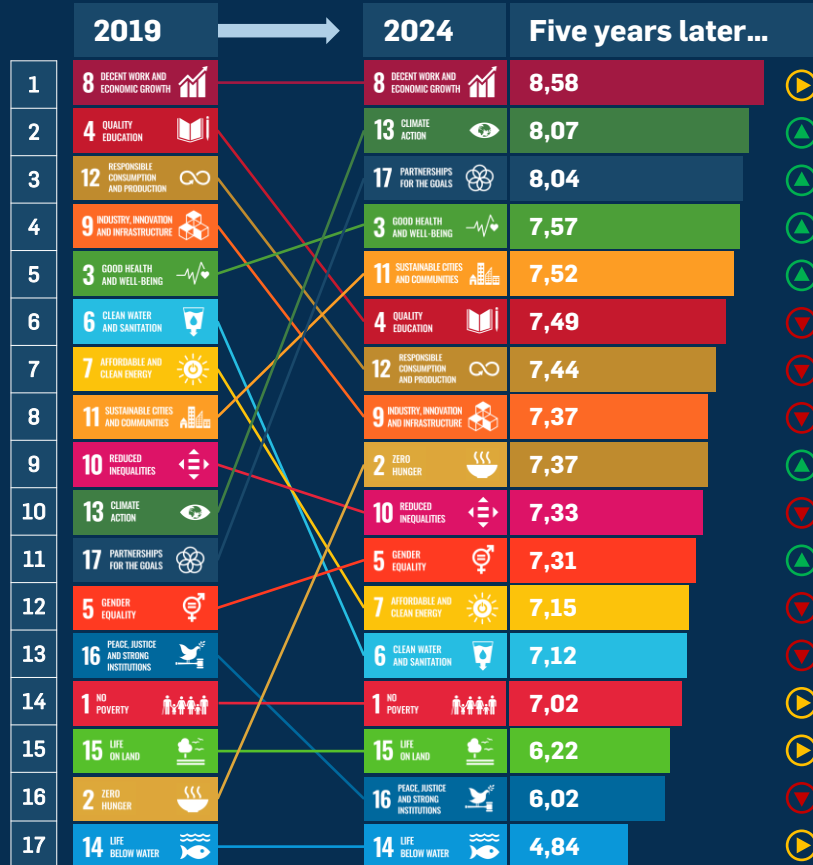
**In Collaboration with
Strategic Partners**



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SHIFTING SDG PRIORITIES

Climate Action, **Partnership for the Goals**, and Zero Hunger saw the sharpest rises.
Innovation, Education, and Responsible Consumption and Production fell steeply from the top 5.



The Likely Rationale

1. Rise in awareness and policy relating to Climate Action
2. Economic hard times and volatile trading environments
3. Negative impact of the pandemic on staff and operations
4. Negative financial impact due to loadshedding
5. Impact on communities, including inflation, poverty and hunger



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INDUSTRY INSIGHTS





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VNR SUMMARY THEMES (1/2)

Across industries, companies called for a focus on communities and local economic development, supporting customers and workforces, especially the empowerment of youth and women.

FOCUSING ON THE LOCAL LENS

Companies are vocal about the essential importance of focusing on the sustainable development needs of local communities.

Community based organisations were consistently cited as necessary collaborative partners for landing successful local cross sector initiatives.

All industries called for action to stimulate more local production to enable socio economic prosperity and sustainability outcomes.

TARGETING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Industries universally expressed concern about unemployment, especially for the South African youth. Companies consistently reported that many entry level and low skill traditional jobs are being automated or eliminated.

Companies called for cross sector action to support and incentivise action to accelerate skills development for scarce skills. Industries all identified opportunities for sustainable business that can create future jobs.

REALISING GENDER EQUALITY

Vibrant activity to enable gender equality in both the world of work and within communities is a focus across industries.

Companies consistently recognised better performance and productivity when workplaces adapted to address the needs of women, and when the gender balance at all seniority levels was improved.

Addressing the gender pay gap was consistently recognised as a priority, with varied degrees of progress.



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VNR SUMMARY THEMES (1/2)

Companies consistently noted technological advancement, which brings innovation and opportunity, but erodes traditional roles. Ethical, informed governance and energy were also key.

RAPID DIGITAL ADVANCEMENT

All industries are experiencing rapid and disruptive digital and technological transformation. Companies see the ability to successfully adopt innovative processes and systems as vital to business sustainability.

Participants consistently reported escalating costs of software, implementation challenges and a lack of access to scarce ICT skills and affordable, quality best practices.

TRANSPARENT, ETHICAL GOVERNANCE

Across industries, companies are increasingly appointing Board and C-Level representation and roles for sustainability strategy and leadership.

Companies noted consistent progress on the end of state capture, citing sustained improvement as a vital enabler for trusted business. Participants also consistently called for robust consequences for unethical governance within both the public and the private sector.

ENDING THE ENERGY CRISIS

Industries have been significantly negatively impacted by loadshedding. Many companies have invested in renewable energy solutions that enable operational resilience. Participants consistently called for better access to sustainable financing and acceleration of a just transition to renewable energy.

Low carbon energy is consistently seen as a vital enabler for South African products and services that are both competitively priced and sustainable.



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LOCALISATION IN ACTION





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- **Collaboration Platforms – GCNSA Compact Dialogues uniting 100+ companies (SDG 17).**
- **Public–Private Partnerships -Renewable Energy & Just Transition – REIPPPP: local renewable energy projects (SDG 7, 8, 13, 17).**
- **Local Procurement & Enterprise Development – Mining & Manufacturing supply chains (SDG 8, 9, 10, 12).**
- **Youth Employment & Skills – YES Programme by MTN, Absa, Clicks (SDG 4, 8, 10).**
- **Community Health & Education – Aspen, Vodacom, Old Mutual (SDG 3, 4, 5, 11).**
- **•Water Stewardship – UMngeni-Uthukela partnerships for water resilience (SDG 6, 13).**
- **• Gender Equality & Inclusion – Women-led enterprise development (SDG 5, 8).**



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Challenges on the ground

➤ **Fragmented sustainability ecosystem**

➤ **Limited access to finance for sustainability transitions**

➤ **Inconsistent data collection and reporting**

➤ **Skills mismatches for green and digital jobs**

➤ **Lack of validated, comparable company data**

➤ **Inconsistent private sector data metrics**

➤ **Working in silos – missed opportunity for collective impact**

➤ **Limited engagement with the VNR process**



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Challenges on the ground

➤ **Concerns over the extensive time commitment required**

➤ **Company lack of awareness of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda**

➤ **Scepticism regarding the practical benefits of the VNR and the relevance of the SDGs**

➤ **Challenges in Ensuring Full Completion of the Process**

➤ **Lack of validated, comparable company data**

➤ **Inconsistent private sector data metrics**

➤ **Absence of integrated KPIs and shared metrics**

➤ **Limited engagement with the VNR process**



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Lessons from Localisation

-  **Partnerships drive SDG localisation success**
-  **Continuous tracking and data improvement are essential**
-  **Data and reporting gaps persist.**
-  **SME inclusion is vital for sustainability.**
-  **Collaboration and multi-stakeholder partnerships**
-  **Encourage participants to onboard SMEs in their value chains.**



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Five Strategic Imperatives for Business-Led SDG Impact



Embed SDGs into Core Business Strategy



Drive Localisation Through Municipal Collaboration



Build Trust Through Reporting & Accountability



Foster Collective Business Leadership



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Private Sector as a Catalyst for SDG Acceleration in South Africa

The business community holds the **innovation, capital, and operational scale** needed to deliver measurable SDG impact. The Global Compact Network South Africa mobilises over 100 companies committed to aligning business practices with the UN Global Compact Principles and the 2030 Agenda—transforming how South Africa achieves sustainable development at scale.



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Closing Message

“Localising the SDGs is not just a government responsibility — it’s a collective opportunity to shape a sustainable and inclusive future.”