

The Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa: investigating the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships

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Abstract

Achieving the SDGs depends on partnerships between stakeholders, from government, the private sector, civil society, academic and research intuitions, and international agencies. The UN system provides governance and support from an international perspective; national government creates an enabling and monitoring environment for implemented; civil society creates advocacy and awareness; the academic and research community provides knowledge, technologies and innovation for implementation; and the private sector does much of the implementation towards achieving the SDG targets. These different roles and responsibilities imply that development objectives cannot be achieved in isolation. There is a need for integration and partnerships between the different role-players. While partnerships do already exist, there is a call for interventions to strengthen them. Multi-stakeholder platforms are proposed as a mechanism to support and encourage partnerships and to provide leadership on successful partnerships for achieving the SDGs. Any partnership established needs to be accountable, as well as people-and planet-centred.

Keywords: sustainable development goals, partnerships, multi-stakeholders

1. Introduction

In September 2015, member states of the United Nations (UN) adopted a new sustainable development agenda, entitled “*Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” (UN, 2015). Central to the agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which build on the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aiming to complete what was not achieved in the MDG process. In essence, the goals centre on ending poverty; protecting the natural environment; and ensuring inclusive, just and peaceful societies, with prosperity for all (UN, 2015). The 17 SDGs are broken down further into 169 targets. The Agenda came into force on 1 January 2016, with the signatories intending to achieve the targets by 2030 (UN, 2015).

The new sustainable development agenda is much broader in scope and larger in ambition than that articulated in the MDGs (UNDP, 2016). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has identified several implications of this, including the increased need to adopt an integrated approach to development interventions, as well as the need to embrace universality (UNDP, 2016). This requires an understanding of the synergies and connections across the goals, while the universal nature of the agenda also calls for a more thorough approach to addressing common and shared challenges (UNDP, 2016). In particular, achieving the targets requires effective partnerships within countries; across all sectors, disciplines and spheres of government; as well as global partnerships across nations.

Indeed, ‘partnership’ is one of five areas of critical importance highlighted in the preamble to the 2030 Agenda¹. The formation of partnerships is not only a principle that underpins all of the SDGs, but is also identified as a key mechanism for their implementation.

The critical role of partnerships in the Agenda is emphasised further by the fact that one of the SDGs themselves (SDG 17) focuses exclusively on partnerships. The premise of SDG 17 is that “a successful sustainable development agenda requires partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society” (UN, 2017). A specific focus of Goal 17 is “a revitalised global partnership for sustainable development”, which should be “complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries and in particular developing countries”. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are the focus of one of the targets under SDG 17 (UN, 2015).

During the reporting that took place on the progress made in achieving the SDGs in May 2017, the UN pointed out that much still needs to be done regarding the achievement of SDG 17: “Despite some positive developments, a stronger commitment to partnership and cooperation is needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. That effort will require coherent policies, an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all actors and a reinvigorated Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” (UN, Division for Sustainable Development (UN-DESA), 2017).

¹ The others focus on ending poverty, avoiding environmental degradation, promoting prosperity for all and fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies (UN, 2015)

South Africa's implementation of the SDGs, within the context of existing regional and national strategic plans - such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the country's own National Development Plan (NDP) - reinforces the need for effective partnerships. Not only does Agenda 2063 articulate a Pan-African vision of integration, solidarity and unity on a continental level, but it also calls for coordination and cooperation in mutually beneficial partnerships between regions and continents to enable the realisation of this African vision (African Union, 2015). At the national level, South Africa has aligned, as far as possible, the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 with that of its NDP. This alignment means that efforts to achieve the SDGs have the potential to significantly impact the achievement of the country's national priorities as expressed in the NDP, and *vice versa* (PWC, 2016).

Given the central role of partnerships in the success of the SDG, NDP and Agenda 2063 agendas, it is crucial for South Africa to both establish and maintain functional partnerships. In light of this argument, this paper has the following objectives:

- 1) To identify different types of actors (including international agencies, government departments, civil society, business and academia) that have key roles towards meeting South Africa's development objectives, specifically those linked to the SDGs;
- 2) To understand the SDG "actor landscape" in South Africa within which partnerships may be established;
- 3) To identify and characterise existing linkages between different types of actors and to identify where stronger linkages could contribute to South Africa's implementation of the SDGs.

In short, the paper investigates the implementation of the SDGs in the South African context, with a particular focus on the need to establish effective and healthy multi-stakeholder partnerships between different types of actors. It starts by unpacking the development landscape in South Africa in terms of the country's key development policies, such as the NDP, and the relationships and partnerships needed to achieve development objectives. The paper then summarises the key groupings of actors in South African society who play a role in terms of the SDGs, and between whom partnerships should be established; including a preliminary assessment of the extent to which such partnerships already exist. Lastly, the paper concludes by summarising the overarching roles and responsibilities of the actors, and provides recommendations with regards to multi-stakeholder platforms as mechanisms to drive partnerships.

2. The development landscape in South Africa

South Africa has endeavoured to align the implementation of the SDGs with its domestic development agenda. This is the case with respect to the alignment between the NDP and SDGs in terms of both the identified development priorities; and, importantly, a strong emphasis on the critical importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in achieving the country's development objectives. In this section, we discuss both the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and Action Plan (NSSD 1) and the NDP, as supported by the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), and provide examples of how these cornerstones of the South African development agenda emphasise the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

2.1 The National Strategy for Sustainable Development and Action Plan: 2011-2014

The NSSD 1 (DEA, 2011) provides a high-level roadmap for strategic sustainable development. Its intention is to provide public and private sector organisations with guidance when it comes to their own long-term planning, as the development of sector-specific strategies and action plans must be consistent with the NSSD 1. With relevance to partnerships, the strategy calls for an interdependency approach across sectors and actions on sustainability. Furthermore, the strategy invites all role players to engage in an ongoing and constructive dialogue, inspired by the need to develop a more efficient and equitable economy. According to the NSSD 1, it is critical that all role-players implement the initiatives highlighted in the strategy, while it is also emphasised that collective actions make a significant contribution to environmental sustainability.

2.2 The National Development Plan as the blueprint for development in South Africa

Although the NDP pre-dates the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, there is much alignment between the development priorities highlighted in the NDP and the SDGs. As such, the NDP provides a roadmap for South Africa's efforts to achieve the SDGs, as well as the development priorities identified in the NDP itself.

The implementation of the NDP requires the participation and cooperation of all sectors of South African society. As stated by the National Planning Commission (NPC, 2011): "Making the plan work will require a complex interplay of actors and actions, and progress in any one area is almost always dependent on progress in another. The plan will provide a common focus for action across all sectors and sections of South African society". Similar to the global sustainable development agenda, therefore, the interdependent nature of the various aspects of the NDP - and the shared challenges that different actors in society face - necessitates effective and mutually beneficial partnerships. For example, to reach South Africa's goal of creating 11 million jobs by 2030; the creation of partnerships between the public sector, business and labour to facilitate investment in labour intensive sectors, is among the actions recommended in the NDP (NPC, 2011).

Furthermore, the NDP is the primary, overarching vision for South Africa's development to 2030, and is integrated into government administration and planning, most notably through the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of 2014-2019. The MTSF is government's strategic plan for the 2014-2019 electoral term. The MTSF states the actions that government will take and targets that are to be achieved in order to meet the NDP objectives, and also provides a framework for other relevant plans at the national, provincial and local levels. In particular, the MTSF emphasises government's support for a competitive economy, the creation of decent jobs and the encouragement of investment (The Presidency, 2014). The NDP is therefore integrated into government planning and performance management through the MTSF.

The NDP (NPC, 2011) notes that making progress in addressing development priorities depends on doing things differently, including prioritising partnerships and participation. In this regard, the NDP highlights the need to unite "all South Africans around a common programme to achieve prosperity and equity" and to promote an "active citizenry to strengthen development, democracy and accountability" (NPC, 2011). The emphasis here is on unity and an active and involved citizenry.

Importantly, the NDP suggests that a formal social compact² may be valuable when addressing the need for nation-building and creating a more cohesive and equitable society with an active citizenry. Social compacts are also recommended specifically at the neighbourhood level, to bring together civil society, business and the government in addressing local-level problems (NPC, 2011)

The NDP further acknowledges the need for structured participation by those involved in development, noting that “clarity is needed for when parties outside government are responsible for implementing parts of the plan. Business, labour and civil society are diverse groupings and rarely speak with a common voice” (NPC, 2011). The NDP, therefore, identifies a particular challenge here, namely that of the diversity of different groups of actors who often do not agree on issues of importance. In addition, the NDP states that in many areas; business, labour and civil society can themselves identify how they can best contribute to the plan’s priorities. In some cases, the role will need to be formalised (NPC, 2011: 61), thus indicating that partnerships and participation could be both formal and informal.

Finally, according to the NDP, the implementation of development initiatives requires improved coordination between different government departments (NPC, 2011:429). It refers specifically to the problem of government departments pursuing competing objectives or not taking responsibility for particular priority areas, instead of working together and drawing on each other’s strengths in order to be more effective (NPC, 2011).

2.3 Summary

It is clear from the above that the need for the involvement of different actors and the importance of partnerships to achieve South Africa’s development objectives was already recognised prior to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is particularly evident in the NDP and accompanying MTSF, as well as in the NSSD. In this regard, the NDP also highlights required areas of improvement which the South African government needs to take into account as it works towards achieving the SDGs.

Having established the need for partnerships both at the SDG and domestic development framework level, the next step is to identify the existing actors and relationships in South Africa (in relation to the SDGs and the domestic development framework), what their roles are, where the gaps are in terms of partnerships, and how these can be addressed.

3. Actors required in partnerships for implementing a development agenda

The United Nations, through its various international agencies, associated local branches, funds and programmes, has been pioneering partnerships since the first World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 (Witte and Reinicke, 2005). The UN has emphasised that to overcome development challenges, there is a need for integrative, multi-stakeholder engagements

² In their discussion document “*Towards a Social Compact for South Africa*”, the NPC (2015: 3) acknowledges that there are multiple definitions of a social compact but that there is “...broad consensus in the South African discourse that the most beneficial will be one that includes the elements of a core agreement among various societal role-players and government which outlines the rights and duties of each party. The NDP identifies the importance of forging a social compact in dealing with collective problems ranging from labour market policy to spatial planning”.

and partnerships. In particular, it called for civil society and business to join government as partners in the global development agenda, specifically during the period of the Millennium Development Goals (2000 – 2015) (Witte and Reinicke, 2005).

The interconnectedness and complexity of global change requires an evolution in the definition of partnerships. During the period of the MDGs, many ‘partnerships’ essentially took the form of the north giving the south aid, debt relief and trade access (Harrington, 2015). Private sector actors were called upon to provide medicines and technology to people in developing countries (Harrington, 2015). In terms of the SDGs, on the other hand, Agenda 2030 calls for partnerships to be forged on mutual terms and on a more equal footing, due in part to the shift in the global economy’s centre of gravity from developed to developing countries (Harrington, 2015).

In addition, while MDG Goal 8 called for partnerships for aid, trade and technology, SDG 17 requires knowledge-centred partnerships (Harrington, 2015). Specifically, the SDGs require a knowledge base that goes far beyond sharing what is already known, towards co-creating new knowledge to stimulate greater shared understanding. Knowledge becomes a catalyst for broadening collaboration and building much-needed trust among stakeholders. As such, there are new players and partnerships that have gained prominence in the development agenda, specifically that of the private sector, philanthropic foundations and institutions that support science, technology and innovation for achievement of the SDGs (Evan and van der Heijden, 2014).

In the case of South Africa, we have identified five key groupings of actors between which multi-stakeholder partnerships need to be secured in order to reach the targets defined by Agenda 2030. These are (1) international/multilateral institutions, and in particular the UN system and its various agencies and branches; (2) government; (3) the private sector; (4) civil society organisations; and (5) the scientific and academic community, including universities and research institutes. The remainder of this paper investigates the respective roles of each of these types of actors, as well as the extent to which partnerships between them already exist.

4. Methodology

In order to understand and define the roles and responsibilities of the actors that form part of the SDG landscape in South Africa, as well as the linkages between them, we made use of a combination of qualitative data collection approaches, specifically a literature review, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and an open-ended electronic questionnaire.

In order to develop an understanding of the role of the UN, we conducted a literature review to define the key roles, responsibilities and relationships of relevant UN agencies and their involvement in defining, finalising, implementing and monitoring the SDGs.

In the case of government actors, we engaged with the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) and Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). Each of these government entities has and continues to play an important role in the SDG space with their respective

responsibilities regarding planning, monitoring and evaluation; negotiation and implementation; representation at the UN level; and reporting. We built on our meetings with these primary departments by also investigating the roles and responsibilities of a number of relevant line departments, including the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), the Department of Trade and Industry (the dti) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST). During our interviews, we discussed roles and responsibilities as well as opportunities and constraints in terms of achieving the SDGs amongst national government departments in South Africa.

In order to understand the roles and responsibilities of business and civil society in the SDG space, we compiled and electronically distributed questionnaires that asked the respondents to describe their roles and responsibilities within the SDG landscape. The respondents were also asked to identify any opportunities and constraints they currently experience. Finally, for the scientific and academic community, we conducted a literature review to develop an understanding of what South African universities and research institutions are currently doing to address the SDGs.

Once the data had been collected, we mapped the various types of actors and the relationships between them, specifically in relation to the SDGs. We also attempted to depict the strength or weakness of the various linkages, in order to indicate how well developed the various relationships are and to identify areas where there is a need for relationships to be strengthened.

5. Understanding the SDG actor landscape in South Africa with a specific focus on partnerships

In this section we present the key groups of actors who have a role to play in terms of implementing the SDGs in South Africa. In particular, we focus on five broad types of actors, and their respective roles and responsibilities regarding the implementation of the SDGs. Furthermore, we discuss the linkages within and between these types of actors, highlight existing gaps, and, in the paper's conclusion, indicate where and how stronger linkages could contribute to South Africa's implementation of the SDGs.

Unless referenced otherwise, the information presented in this section is based on our stakeholder engagements or our own interpretation of the data that was collected.

5.1 The United Nations

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

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

issues” (United Nations, 2016). The HLPF is also the central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the SDGs (United Nations, 2016). South Africa participates in the HLPF through the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).

In terms of monitoring and reporting, the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG -SDG) was formed to develop an indicator framework for the goals and targets. The UN High Level Group (HLG) for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity Building for Statistics is tasked with providing strategic leadership on the SDG implementation process, as well as statistical monitoring and reporting. A key initiative to achieve the HLG’s task focuses on improving data and statistics to help governments track progress towards achieving sustainable development. This initiative is being led by the Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) on Data Revolution. StatsSA represents South Africa on both the HLG and the IEAG.

The UN has a number of agency offices within South Africa, all of which play an important role in terms of working with stakeholders and partners in the country to implement initiatives aimed at making progress toward the achievement of specific SDGs. These initiatives are conducted in partnership with government, municipalities, civil society organisations, as well as science councils and universities.

5.2 The South African Government

Government institutions, by virtue of their governance and implementation mandates, have a critical role to play in implementing the SDGs in the South African context. All line departments of the South African government are planned to form part of a proposed National Working Group. The purpose of this group, and particularly the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) as its proposed convenor, will be to ensure a coordinated and integrated national effort towards the domestication, implementation and international reporting of the SDGs. This includes the coordination of an integrated follow-up and review process as well as an extensive stakeholder participation exercise, which will include civil society, business, academia and a range of non-state actors. A major challenge in this regard is that nearly two years after the SDG agenda came into force, the National Working Group has not been officially established, and the core government departments have not decided which of them will take the lead in the implementation of the SDGs in South Africa.

In terms of partnerships, some of the key challenges include a lack of partnerships within and between the national, provincial and local levels of government; as well as between government and a number of actors that have a critical contribution to make towards achieving the SDGs. Government reportedly also finds it difficult to develop the appropriate mechanisms and know-how to establish such partnerships. There is also a need for awareness-raising across government structures and society about the SDGs and their alignment to the NDP. Finally, there is a need for government to play a catalytic role in attracting private sector financing for implementation of the SDGs.

5.3 Civil Society

Civil society organisations (CSOs) work to advance the common interests of society, and are well-positioned to play a key role in SDG implementation. They can provide a link between communities

and other key stakeholders. In the context of the SDGs, CSOs in South Africa operate in a variety of ways and have linkages to and collaborate with different organisations, including international and regional agencies, government, and business.

Although the work of CSOs generally contributes to achieving the objectives of specific SDGs, linkages between CSO activities and the SDGs are not always stated explicitly. Some CSOs unequivocally state the alignment of their activities to specific SDGs, while others do not explicitly allude to the SDGs, despite their work clearly being aligned to specific SDGs. CSOs that explicitly state the alignment of their work to specific SDGs open up opportunities for collaboration and partnerships on SDG work, as they are easily identifiable by organisations doing similar work. CSOs that have a policy of working with government play a key role in facilitating government-civil society cooperation. The resultant government-CSO partnerships can facilitate learning and skills sharing, as well as awareness-raising about the SDGs among diverse stakeholder groups, because both government and CSO networks are required to reach people at different levels.

Where partnerships between CSOs and government are weaker, this can create challenges for SDG implementation, in that there is limited access to the skills, networks and regulatory authority that either party would have brought to such partnerships. In addition, there is a need for partnerships between CSOs and the private sector. Structural transformation, such as changes in the relative importance of different sectors and activities of an economy over time, is core to SDG implementation, and business has a critical contribution to make towards such transformation. Inclusive partnerships between CSOs and business can facilitate awareness about SDGs, resource mobilisation and financial investments into SDG implementation.

5.4 Business

The private sector has a significant role to play towards the alignment and implementation of the SDGs, especially considering that industry and business activities are a key driver of both socio-economic development, and of impacts on social and ecological resources. Business, therefore, has a dual function: firstly, to play its part in addressing global development challenges, and secondly, to grow and harness the opportunities that have arisen in terms of “greening” the economy. Ultimately, the active involvement of businesses is a prerequisite for South Africa to achieve the SDGs; in that they have the ability to create sustainable, productive and decent employment; economic prosperity; resilient infrastructure; and innovation that creates sustainable growth and opportunities for all (IHRB, 2015; WBCSD, 2016).

A number of international organisations have defined the case for the more active engagement of business with the SDGs. These organisations, which include the UN Global Compact, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), have specifically highlighted how business activities align with the SDGs, and the benefits that alignment with and reporting on the goals would have for businesses.

The UN Global Compact, GRI and WBCSD have regional affiliates within South Africa, and therefore offer services that are relevant to South African businesses. Similarly, large international businesses either based in South Africa or with offices in the country are showing signs of commitment, through either their corporate social responsibility initiatives and/or their product and service offerings, to play an active role in contributing towards achieving the SDGs.

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

Currently, there is an apparent lack of formal relationships and partnerships between business and government; and between business and civil society. While public-private partnerships are nothing new, the SDGs and specifically SDG17 calls on each country to investigate ways to more actively stimulate and strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships.

5.5 Science and academia

At a broad level, the scientific and academic community contributes to the SDGs through training, skills development, research, development and innovation. This role is explicit in the context of SDG 9, with its focus on enhanced research and development (R&D), technology development, and research and innovation; particularly in developing countries (UN, 2017). For the purposes of this paper, the overview of the scientific and academic landscape focuses on the country's universities and research councils, many of whom undertake R&D that is very much aligned with the SDGs. In addition, the educational and training function of universities is critical to building the human capital, skills and expertise required for South Africa to implement the SDGs.

In terms of partnerships with other role-players; education, training and research are funded from a variety of sources; including government, business, and international funding agencies (including the UN). In addition, numerous research institutes within universities perform a critical function in supporting the country's move towards the SDGs by facilitating work across university departments and linking the scientific and academic community to other groups in society (e.g. governmental decision-makers, civil society, and business). The role of such institutes typically goes beyond research, education and training to include raising awareness and informing governmental policy agendas.

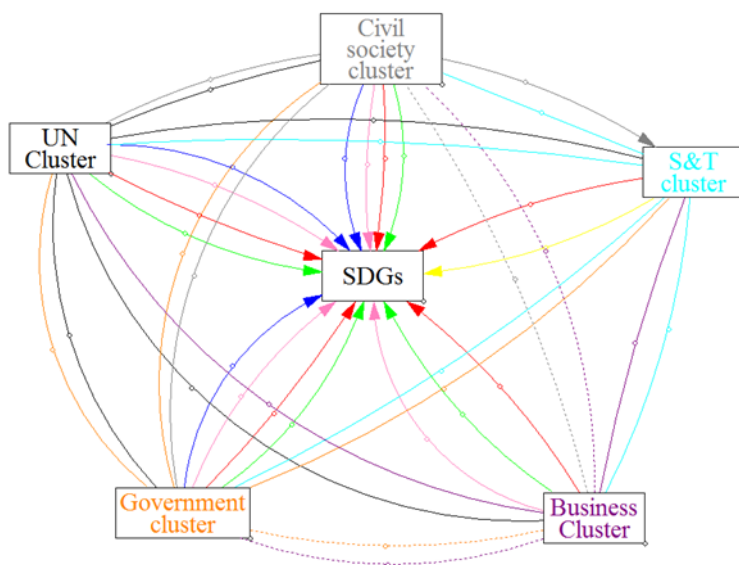
5.6 Summary of existing linkages between the actors

Figure 1 provides a summary of existing linkages between different types of actors of relevance to the SDGs in South Africa. Our research suggests that, in many cases, relationships already exist between the relevant actors to address the development priorities highlighted in both the SDGs and the NDP (depicted by the solid lines in Figure 1). However, the relationships between government and business, and between business and civil society, are generally considered to be weak (depicted by the dotted lines). This conclusion is a generalised summary made based on the commentary from government departments, businesses and civil society organisations. During our interviews, government officials noted on a more than one occasion that public-private partnerships were a challenge and that interventions would be required to strengthen relationships. Similarly, civil society organisations highlighted that while some very prevalent civil society and business relationships do exist, civil society can have a significantly greater impact on society and the environment if there were more opportunities for relationships with business.

It is, therefore, important to understand and address the obstacles to the formation of partnerships between government and business, and between business and civil society. For example, an initiative of the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa and the Business Trust (Castalia Strategic

Advisors, 2007), followed by Fombad (2014), investigated key challenges towards public-private-partnerships in the country³. The challenges that were documented in both these studies are of relevance and provide reasons as to why partnerships are relatively weak both between government and business, as well as between business and civil society. These reasons include: (Castalia Strategic Advisors, 2007; Fombad, 2014):

- A lack of policy direction and clarity from the highest levels of government with regards to what and why the need for public-private-partnerships in South Africa;
- Inconsistent commitment to public-private-partnerships in different departments of government and at different levels of government;
- Mistrust among government, business and civil society partners;
- A lack of time, resources and know-how to originate, promote, implement and support public-private-partnerships.



Blue: Negotiation; **Red:** Implementation; **Green:** Monitoring; **Pink:** Reporting; **Yellow:** Analysis/research/knowledge growth

Figure 1: Diagram depicting the roles of different types of actors in relation to the SDGs, as well as the relationships between the different types of actors

6. CONCLUSION

Within multiple spheres of decision-making, and through partnerships that arise in a range of contexts, South Africa has an opportunity to expedite its transition towards a sustainable and inclusive growth

³ The results of this study draw from interviews of 40 individuals working in senior positions within entities involved in public-private partnerships in South Africa. They included the private sector (investment banks, operating companies, construction companies, and transaction advisors), implementing agencies (line departments, provincial and municipal governments), and government agencies responsible for public-private partnerships (National Treasury and Municipal Infrastructure Investment Unit) (Castalia Strategic Advisors, 2007)

path, in which the SDGs are achieved in alignment with the country's own NDP. The country is already in a strong position in this regard, as each stakeholder grouping has a clear and specific role to play (Figure 2). The UN system provides governance and support from an international perspective, while it is primarily government's responsibility to provide an enabling socio-economic environment and to steer the transition. Citizens and civil society are encouraged to hold business, government and other leaders in society accountable for their actions (NDP, 2011). Through employing about three-quarters of the country's workers (NDP, 2011), the role of the private sector is critical to achieving the country's sustainable development agenda. Acknowledging that the profit motive is the primary driver of business, this sector also has a direct role to play in promoting the sustainability of the socio-economic and ecological environment in which it operates and on which it depends⁴ (NDP, 2011). Moreover, universities, science councils and other research institutes have a vital function to perform in ensuring that the country is equipped with the knowledge, skills and innovation base required to achieve the country's sustainable development priorities.

By unpacking the role and responsibilities of the different actors, we have determined that development objectives as defined by the SDGs and the NDP cannot be achieved unless there is integration and partnerships between the different role players (Figure 2). Each actor has a role to play that complements the role played by other actors, each of which is necessary in being able to achieve the SDGs. Achieving the SDGs requires the adoption of an integrated approach, which implies reducing the barriers created by institutional silos and strengthening sectoral and subnational coordination across implementing entities.

While most actors forming part of the groupings discussed in this paper are committed to achieving the development priorities articulated in the SDGs and NDP, a great need still exists to identify and establish mechanisms and platforms to support and encourage multi-actor and multi-cluster partnerships and to provide leadership and learning on successful partnership arrangements. An example for such a mechanism is a forum that facilitates coordination between the various actors around partnership-focused research directed towards the SDGs. Such a forum would provide an opportunity for improved collaboration and partnerships, not only to ensure complementarities and efficiency, but also to enable more multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research. Such a forum is in line with the recommendations of World Vision International and The Partnering Initiative, who suggest that multi-stakeholder platforms are essential mechanisms to leverage partnerships (World Vision International and The Partnering Initiative, 2016).

In conclusion, it is important to nurture and grow partnerships to streamline the SDGs. Partnerships between different actors could be facilitated and strengthened through the establishment and maintenance of functional formal platforms or networks through which the actors would interact, network and share experiences. Such platforms could be established at different levels (municipal, provincial, national) for ease of access to actors operating at different levels. We argue that any healthy relationship, be it between individuals, organisations or different groups of actors in society, is based on trust and confidence. Any partnerships that are established across the SDG actor spectrum, therefore, need to be accountable, as well as people- and planet-centred.

⁴ A study undertaken by PWC (2016) reveals that awareness of the SDG's among the business community is 87%, which is high when compared to the general population (28% of citizens are aware of the SDG's).



Figure 2: Diagram depicting the five actor clusters identified and detailing the key role each one has with regards to implementing the SDGs in South Africa

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