



**SOUTH AFRICA**  
**2019 VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR)**  
**OPENING STATEMENT**

***“We can in fact change the world and make of it a better place.”***

**Nelson Mandela**

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 signalled the universal commitment of the world’s leaders together to confront challenges that must be successfully overcome if humankind is to survive on this planet. From our own experience as South Africans, we fully appreciate the significance of a common cause that unites diverse people to successfully defeat even the otherwise most intimidating of human challenges and adversity. For it was with similar solidarity and support from the international community that South Africa was freed from the yoke of apartheid in 1994. Apartheid was an atrocious, anti-human and anti-development political system that the world, through the United Nations declared a crime against humanity, and whose scars still linger in the socio economic fabric of now democratic South Africa.

South Africa’s first Voluntary National Review (VNR) is testimony to the national commitment to the full and integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 – “Our future, make it work, was adopted in 2012, as South Africa’s development loadstar and roadmap. It predated the 2015 adoption of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 - “The Africa we want”. The NDP has a 74% convergence with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and prioritises job creation, the elimination of poverty, the reduction of inequality and growing an inclusive economy by 2030.

Recognizing the interconnectedness of these complementary aspirations and developmental agendas, South Africa has recently established a national coordinating mechanism for national engagements and reporting on the 2030 Agenda, the AU’s Agenda 2063 and the Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), in alignment with the NDP. This national coordinating mechanism will ensure that national resources are optimally deployed, together with international support, the provision of public sector finance, technology and capacity building which are required for successful integrated implementation of these development agendas.

This first review will assist all South Africans in understanding the impact of policies and programmes towards realising sustainable development and the considerable developmental challenges that remain. Although sustainable development objectives are integrated into government planning systems and processes at national, provincial and local level, much more needs to be done to ensure that all national stakeholders are more effectively engaged in delivering on the ideal of providing a better life for all.

Despite the significant progress that South Africa has made on its developmental journey since the advent of democracy in 1994, the country remains amongst the most unequal societies in the world. Achieving the SDGs is therefore in South Africa's best interest as the country pursues the vision of the Constitution of a united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous nation, at peace with itself and the rest of the world.

As part of our efforts in this journey, access to free education for children from poor households has been expanded, and over 9 million children attend no-fee schools. Support for early childhood education has been significantly increased, and every South African child will be provided with digital workbooks and textbooks on a tablet device over the next six years. Individuals benefiting from the social protection system have significantly increased from 3 million in 1994 to 17,5 million in 2018. South Africa has the biggest anti-retroviral treatment programme in the world with more than 4.5 million people on regular treatment.

Major strides have been made in addressing gender inequalities since 1994. Legislative frameworks have been developed aimed at ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls. Representation of women in national parliament has increased from 25% in 1994 to 41% in 2016, further increasing to 44% following 8 May 2019 national election.

The newly elected His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa recently appointed a Cabinet of which 50% are women. Initiatives to mainstream youth empowerment are underway, including to reduce the barriers to youth employment.

Wider access to affordable and reliable energy is a prerequisite for broad-based economic development in South Africa with due regard to the imperative for a just transition to a low carbon economy. Domestic and international implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Paris Agreement is critical. Legislation and policies have been adopted, including the introduction of a carbon tax, to address climate change and to enhance the country's ability to adapt the ongoing environmental changes. South Africa is among the pioneers in adopting Green Economy strategies.

Significant progress has been made in harnessing science, technology and innovation to contribute towards addressing poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa, guided by the Ten-Year Innovation Plan, the National Research and Development Strategy aligned to the NDP.

In implementing an innovation agenda for inclusive development, South Africa continues to harness innovative technology solutions to improve access to basic services, such as safe drinking water, sanitation and electricity.

While South Africans can rightly derive inspiration from the progress that has been made under the democratic dispensation, government is conscious of the challenges that persist, and of new ones that emerge.

The country is still plagued with the growing disparity in wealth and the concomitant inequality that feeds into social discontent. Despite targeted policies and legislation, discrimination and gender-based violence against women and children persist.

Regular national, provincial and local elections provide all political role-players with the opportunity to engage communities on the country's development trajectory as well as on the implementation of the NDP and SDGs.

In this regard, as this maiden VNR has highlighted deepening progress and making headway against our challenges requires a more enhanced stakeholder engagements and partnerships and where necessary, social compacts. As South Africa looks ahead to 2030, it seeks to build on the solid progress achieved and the strong policy, legislative and planning foundation, consolidating and expanding the many areas where public and private resources have been invested with positive results.

South Africa looks forward to a successful journey to 2030!



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