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Progress report on key international agendas in Southern Africa

With a particular focus on the Sustainable Development Goals in Southern Africa

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SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

1. With less than five years remaining to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, Africa is at a decisive moment. While important advances have been achieved in several areas of sustainable development, progress has been uneven and increasingly constrained by overlapping economic, environmental and geopolitical shocks. Escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, disruptions to maritime trade routes, volatility in energy and food prices, growing trade tensions and tariff-related uncertainties, as well as tightening global financial conditions, continue to affect economic recovery and development prospects.
2. In Africa, these challenges have compounded long-standing structural constraints, including limited economic diversification, infrastructure deficits, relatively low levels of productivity and technology adoption, and continued dependence on external financing. The 2026 Africa Sustainable Development Report (ASDR) notes that financing constraints, climate shocks, rising debt vulnerabilities and institutional capacity gaps continue to slow implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 across the continent.
3. Against this backdrop, Southern African countries face an urgent need to accelerate SDG implementation while strengthening resilience to emerging economic and geopolitical risks. This report does not merely describe the progress achieved, but also seeks to identify the main structural constraints, emerging risks, and opportunities to accelerate SDGs implementation. The report combines evidence from the Sustainable Development Report 2026 (SDR 2026), the Africa Sustainable Development Report 2026 (ASDR 2026), and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

1.2 OBJECTIVES

4. The present Report on the Implementation of Regional and International Agendas and Other Special Initiatives in Southern Africa aims to assess progress towards the achievement of the SDGs in Southern Africa; review national experiences and lessons emerging from Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs); examine key development and financing challenges; identify areas where accelerated implementation is required; and propose policy recommendations to accelerate progress towards Agenda 2030.

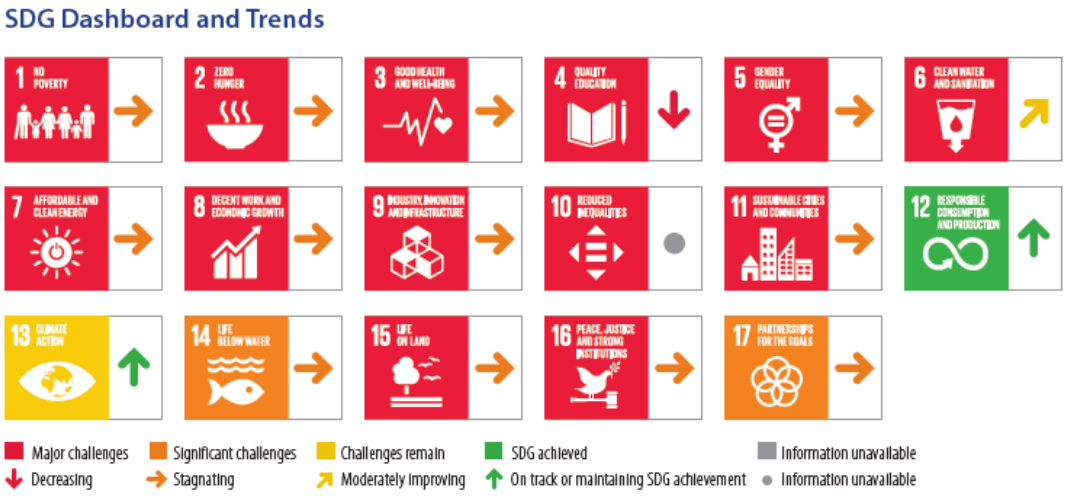
SECTION 2. COUNTRY ANALYSIS

5. **Angola** ranks 156th out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026 with a score of 52.4, indicating that significant challenges remain across the SDGs. While the country has demonstrated relative strengths in environmental sustainability and climate-related areas, progress remains uneven across goals. Angola has demonstrated relatively stronger performance in areas related to sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG 13), compared with several other SDGs, although significant challenges remain across the broader SDG framework. Separately, Angola's 2025 VNR highlights ongoing government

initiatives related to environmental governance, sustainable natural resource management and climate resilience. (Government of Angola, 2025).

6. The 2025 VNR further highlights Angola's efforts to strengthen economic diversification and regional integration through strategic infrastructure and connectivity investments. A notable example is the Lobito Corridor, which is expected to enhance regional trade, improve transport connectivity and facilitate access to international markets for Angola and neighbouring countries. Beyond its economic significance, the Corridor has the potential to contribute to multiple SDGs by supporting employment creation, infrastructure development, regional value chains and inclusive economic growth. The initiative reflects Angola's growing emphasis on leveraging infrastructure as a catalyst for sustainable development and structural transformation.

7. As for the good practice, Angola has in recent years witnessed notable progress in improving urban infrastructure and housing in Angola. In 2021, only about 38 percent of the urban population had access to formal housing and adequate infrastructure, but by 2024, this figure had increased to approximately 45 percent, reflecting substantial investments in the construction of new urban centres and housing projects. To further support access to housing, the government has introduced new regulations, including Notice 9/2023 by the National Bank of Angola (Banco Nacional de Angola, BNA), which establishes special regimes for housing and construction loans, thereby facilitating finance for the purchase and construction of property. Complementary decrees regulating sale prices and rents of publicly funded housing have also made the housing market more accessible to low- and middle-income citizens (Government of Angola, 2025).

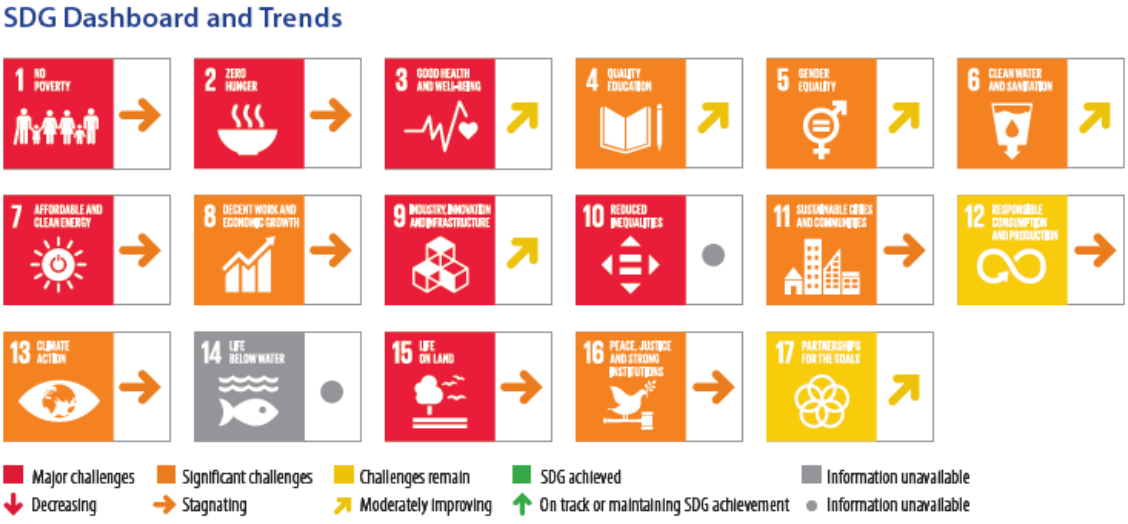


8. **Botswana** ranks 112th out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026 with a score of 64.6. Although the country remains off track on several SDGs, it performs relatively better than many countries in Southern Africa. This relatively favourable position can be associated with decades of investment in public institutions, social services and development planning. The country's

development trajectory has been supported by relatively strong governance systems and a commitment to integrating sustainable development objectives into national planning frameworks. At the same time, challenges remain in achieving inclusive growth, reducing unemployment, particularly among young people, and diversifying the economy beyond traditional sources of growth.

9. Botswana has taken important steps to strengthen the financing architecture for sustainable development through the development of an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF). The INFF seeks to align public and private financing flows with national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals by improving policy coherence, resource mobilization and financing effectiveness. The framework represents a comprehensive approach to addressing SDG financing gaps and provides a platform for mobilizing domestic and international resources. By linking planning, budgeting and financing processes, the INFF supports evidence-based decision-making and promotes greater accountability in the implementation of sustainable development policies.

10. Botswana has also continued to prioritize economic diversification and competitiveness as key elements of its national development agenda. The Africa Sustainable Development Report 2026 also highlights Botswana's relatively high share of medium- and high-technology manufacturing. Based on the latest available observation reported in the ASDR, medium- and high-technology manufacturing accounted for approximately 26 per cent of manufacturing value added, among the higher shares recorded across the selected African countries. (AU, ECA, UNDP, 2026). Economic diversification nevertheless remains an important national development priority, alongside employment creation and inclusive growth (Government of Botswana, 2022).



11. **Eswatini** ranks 133rd out of 169 countries in the Sustainable Development Report (SDR) 2026, with an SDG Index score of 59.0, indicating that important development challenges remain despite notable progress in selected areas. While the country continues to face constraints related to poverty reduction, inequality and employment creation, its performance has been supported by sustained investments in health, social protection and gender equality. According to the 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR), Eswatini has made substantial progress in health-related outcomes and gender equality. Significant gains include reductions in under-five mortality, improvements in maternal and reproductive health services, continued progress in combating HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, as well as increased women's representation in decision-making positions. The VNR also highlights the expansion of social protection programmes and targeted interventions aimed at reducing vulnerability among women, children, older persons and people with disabilities. These efforts may help explain the country's relatively stronger performance in several social-sector SDGs.

12. Findings under SDG 3 revealed that under 5 mortality rates declined from 104 per 1 000 to 41 per 1 000 live births and an increase in the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel from 88.3 percent to 98.6 percent. Also, remarkable progress was made in combating HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria. The HIV incidence among adults aged 15-49 declined from 1.36 per cent in 2016 to 0.85 per cent according to the 2025 VNR, while TB incidence decreased from 398 to 350 per 100,000 population between 2016 and 2023 despite the positive progress, there are remaining challenges such as shortage of drugs in health facilities which is an area being prioritized for reforms and the increase in the number of deaths associated to non- communicable diseases. One of the most notable achievements highlighted in Eswatini's 2025 VNR is progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. In 2023, the country launched the National Gender Policy (NGP) which provides guidance and tools for stakeholders and institutions in all sectors to mainstream and advance gender equality and equity (Government of Eswatini, 2025).



13. **Lesotho** ranks 145th out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026, with an SDG Index score of 54.9, indicating that substantial challenges remain across the SDGs. The SDR results suggest that significant acceleration is needed, particularly in addressing persistent poverty, unemployment and human development challenges. According to the 2025 VNR, Lesotho has reaffirmed its commitment to the principle of *Leave No One Behind* through initiatives aimed at improving social inclusion and strengthening support for vulnerable groups. The VNR highlights progress in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, including the operationalization of the Persons with Disability Equity Act (PDEA) of 2021 and the establishment of the Persons with Disability Advisory Council (PWDAC) in 2025. These measures reflect growing attention to equity and social protection, which may help explain the country's relatively stronger performance in selected social-development indicators despite broader implementation challenges.

14. A key message emerging from the VNR is that youth unemployment remains the country's most pressing development challenge. The Government declared youth unemployment a national disaster for the period 2025-2027 in order to mobilize resources and accelerate interventions. The review also identifies high poverty rates, food insecurity and weak economic growth as important obstacles to SDG implementation. Despite progress in social inclusion and protection, limited financing, insufficient implementation capacity and uneven political support continue to constrain development outcomes. The VNR further emphasizes the need for stronger economic transformation, expanded employment opportunities, enhanced social protection systems and improved national data and monitoring systems. In response, Lesotho has adopted a resilience-focused strategy. Key interventions include the establishment of a national social registry, development of special economic zones (SEZs), and implementation of the SDG Investor Map. Youth-focused reforms include revamping the tertiary bursary scheme and launching leadership and civic engagement programmes. Climate and disaster resilience efforts are being scaled up through the Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2020–2030), with investments in early warning systems and decentralised preparedness structures (Government of Lesotho, 2025).

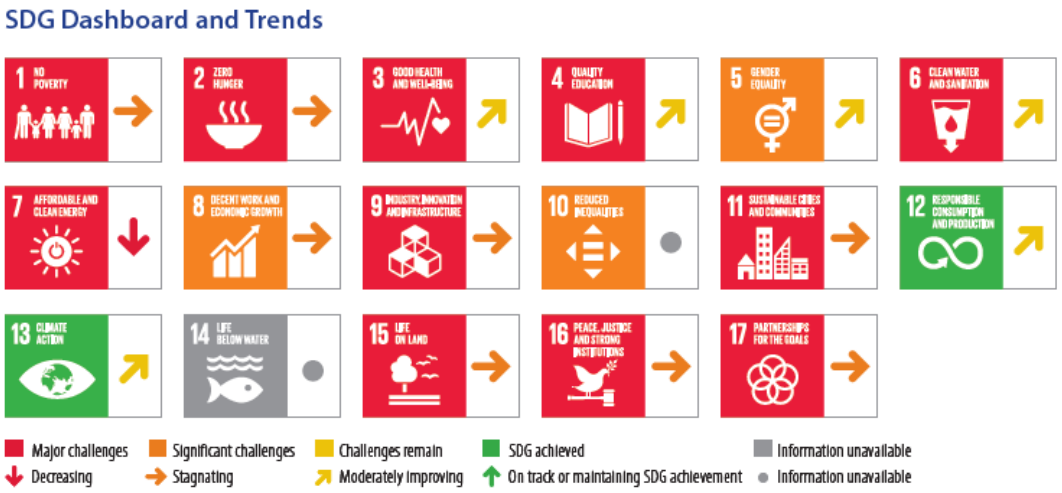
SDG Dashboard and Trends



15. **Malawi** ranks 140th out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026, with an SDG Index score of 56.5, indicating that substantial challenges remain in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite these challenges, Malawi has demonstrated commitment to integrating the SDGs into national planning and development strategies. Progress has been observed in selected health, gender and environmental indicators, supported by ongoing investments in social protection and community-based development programmes. However, the country's overall SDG performance remains vulnerable to recurrent climate shocks and structural economic constraints, which continue to slow progress across multiple goals.

16. Malawi has submitted third VNR this year. Major finding emerging from the VNR is that climate change has become one of the most significant barriers to sustainable development in Malawi. Recurrent droughts, floods and tropical storms, particularly the 2023 Cyclone Freddy have repeatedly disrupted agricultural production, damaged infrastructure and increased food insecurity. As agriculture remains a key sector for livelihoods and employment, climate-related shocks continue to have far-reaching consequences for progress across multiple SDGs. 84.2 percent of communities were affected by disasters in the past three years, with economic losses reaching USD 506.7 million in 2023/24 alone. To accelerate progress, the Government has placed climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, expanded social protection, and digital infrastructure at the core of its investment priorities.

17. The VNR also highlights persistent financing constraints, as major obstacles to SDG implementation. To improve domestic resource mobilization, Malawi has digitized tax administration through the Msonkho Online platform, has reviewed tax incentives to broaden the tax base, and has increased the Constituency Development Fund to empower local-level SDG investments. Public financial management and debt restructuring reforms continue to aim at restoring fiscal and debt sustainability, although significant macroeconomic and fiscal challenges remain. Malawi's 2023 IMF Extended Credit Facility arrangement automatically terminated on 14 May 2025 without a programme review being completed, underscoring the continued challenges in fiscal discipline, revenue mobilisation and external debt restructuring (IMF, 2025). To attract SDG-aligned private investment, the Government is developing a pipeline of bankable projects, strengthening the Public-Private Partnership framework, and leveraging blended finance instruments to de-risk strategic sectors such as renewable energy, agro-processing, and digital infrastructure (Government of Malawi, 2026).



18. **Mauritius** ranks 97th out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026 with an SDG Index score of 68.0, making it the highest-performing country among the member States of the ECA Sub Regional Office for Southern Africa. The country's relatively strong performance reflects decades of investment in human development, sound governance, social protection systems and economic diversification. This performance can be associated with sustained efforts to strengthen public institutions, improve access to social services and promote a more diversified economy. Nonetheless, the country continues to face challenges in ensuring long-term economic resilience, enhancing productivity growth and addressing environmental pressures associated with its small island developing State (SIDS) characteristics.

19. A key message emerging from Mauritius' VNR is the importance of building a resilient, inclusive and innovation-driven economy capable of responding to global economic and environmental shocks. The VNR highlights continued efforts to strengthen digitalization, innovation, public service modernization and environmental sustainability as critical pillars of national development. Particular emphasis is also placed on digital governance, skills development and leveraging technology as a catalyst for achieving the SDGs (Government of Mauritius, 2024). According to the ASDR 2026, Mauritius and South Africa have both transitioned from “high” to “very high” e-governance digital coverage according to UN DESA assessments, demonstrating institutional capacity alongside infrastructure development (AU, ECA, UNDP, 2026). These efforts may help explain Mauritius' relatively stronger performance across multiple SDGs compared with many countries in the subregion.

20. As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Mauritius is increasingly exposed to climate-related hazards, including floods, coastal erosion and extreme weather events. Recent years have witnessed a growing frequency of heavy rainfall events and flash floods, including major flooding incidents that affected Port Louis in January and April 2024. These disasters resulted in loss of life, infrastructure damage and disruptions to economic activities and education, highlighting the country's vulnerability to climate change. In response, Mauritius has strengthened its disaster risk management framework through the implementation of the

Land Drainage Master Plan, completed in 2022 with support from the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). The initiative seeks to reduce flood risks, protect citizens and critical infrastructure, and improve the country's capacity to respond to climate-related disasters. By May 2024, the Land Drainage Authority had identified 306 flood-prone areas and 58 high-risk flood-prone areas, providing an important evidence base for disaster preparedness and climate adaptation planning.



21. **Mozambique** ranks 153rd out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026 with an SDG Index score of 53.0, indicating that significant development challenges persist across multiple SDGs. Mozambique's SDG implementation continues to be affected by multiple and overlapping shocks. In addition to recurrent cyclones, floods and other climate-related hazards, conflict and insecurity in Cabo Delgado have contributed to displacement and humanitarian needs, disrupted livelihoods and access to basic services, and placed additional pressures on already vulnerable communities. These overlapping climate and security challenges complicate efforts to sustain development gains and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Nevertheless, Mozambique has demonstrated a strong commitment to integrating the SDGs into national development planning and policy frameworks. The country's development agenda increasingly recognizes the interlinkages between poverty reduction, climate resilience, social inclusion and economic transformation.

22. Mozambique has submitted second VNR this year. A key message emerging from Mozambique's VNRs is the central role of resilience-building in sustainable development. The review highlights the significant impact of cyclones, floods and other climate-related shocks on livelihoods, infrastructure and social services. These recurring events have repeatedly diverted resources away from long-term development priorities and delayed progress towards several SDGs. The VNR also emphasizes the importance of strengthening local governance structures, improving coordination across institutions and expanding access to essential services. Particular attention is given to reducing poverty, promoting food security and enhancing resilience among vulnerable communities. These priorities reflect the need to

address both immediate development challenges and long-term structural vulnerabilities (Government of Mozambique, 2026).

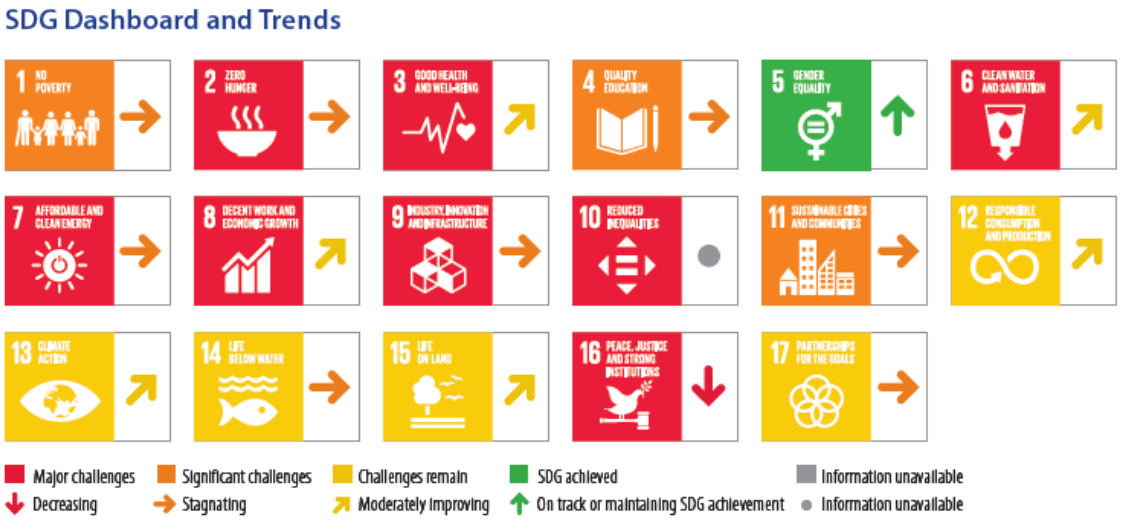
Good Practice: Mainstreaming the SDGs through National and Local Development Planning
One of the most notable practices highlighted in Mozambique's VNR is the integration of the SDGs into national and local planning instruments. Mozambique has enhanced to align the implementation of Agenda 2030 with its national development strategies and decentralization processes. In response to the need to adapt the SDGs to local realities, Mozambique has moved forward with SDG localization initiatives. These initiatives include promoting Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) at the provincial, district, and municipal levels. Through the localization of the SDGs, provincial and district governments have increasingly been encouraged to incorporate sustainable development priorities into local planning and budgeting processes.
This approach strengthens ownership of the SDGs at different levels of government and helps translate global commitments into concrete actions that respond to local development challenges. Mozambique has made efforts to integrate the SDGs into national and subnational development planning frameworks, providing an institutional basis for stronger policy coherence and localisation of Agenda 2030. However, the integration of the SDGs into planning frameworks should be distinguished from evidence of improved implementation, which would require further assessment of budget allocations, project delivery and service outcomes.



23. **Namibia** ranks 100th out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026, with an SDG Index score of 67.1, making it the second-highest performing country in Southern Africa after Mauritius. The country's relatively strong performance reflects sustained investments in governance, social development and environmental sustainability, supported by a long-term development framework anchored in Vision 2030 and successive National Development Plans. However, Namibia remains off track in several SDGs and continues to face challenges related to unemployment, poverty, climate vulnerability and economic transformation.

24. A central theme emerging from the 2024 VNR is the integration of sustainable development into national planning and financing systems. Namibia has embedded the SDGs in its national development architecture through Vision 2030, the Fifth National Development Plan (NDP5) and the preparation of NDP6. The review also highlights the launch of a Development Finance Assessment (DFA) as part of the country's broader Integrated National Financing Framework approach aimed at strengthening SDG financing and improving resource mobilization. The VNR further highlights investments in social protection, education, health care and climate action. Namibia has continued to strengthen programmes aimed at reducing vulnerabilities among poorer households while simultaneously investing in long-term economic transformation. These efforts may help explain the country's relatively stronger performance in the SDR compared with many other countries in Southern Africa.

25. A notable achievement highlighted in Namibia's 2024 VNR is its commitment to positioning itself as a regional leader in green industrialization and renewable energy. In 2024, Namibia launched Africa's first Green Hydrogen Service Station, leveraging its significant solar and coastal resources as part of a broader strategy to promote green growth and economic diversification. The country has also mobilized substantial environmental financing through the Environmental Investment Fund[1] and strengthened its capacity to attract climate-related resources from international partners. The initiative demonstrates how countries can leverage renewable energy and green industrial development to support sustainable growth while addressing climate change. Namibia's green hydrogen strategy is intended to support economic diversification, promote low-carbon industrial development and attract investment for sustainable development. These efforts position the country as an emerging example of how climate-related investments can contribute to broader development objectives (Government of Namibia, 2024).



[1] Over the past 12 years, the Environmental Investment Fund has raised over N$1.7 billion, averaging N$141.7 million annually, with projections to reach N$2.9 billion by 2030.

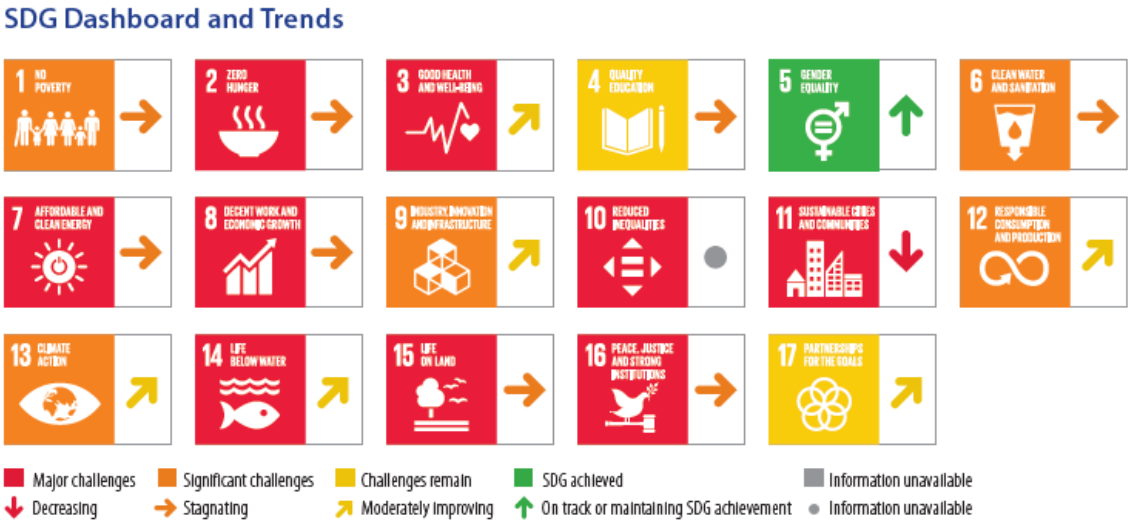
26. **South Africa** ranks 109th out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026, with an SDG Index score of 65.2, placing it among the stronger-performing countries in Southern Africa. However, the country's relatively strong institutional and policy frameworks have not yet translated into broad-based development gains. South Africa's latest completed VNR remains its 2019 report. The country presented updated VNR main messages at the 2025 HLPF, while its second full VNR is scheduled for 2027; this analysis therefore uses the 2025 Common Country Analysis as complementary sources, which provides the most recent assessment of the country's sustainable development progress and challenges. According to the 2025 CCA, South Africa continues to face deeply entrenched structural challenges, including the highest levels of inequality globally, persistently high unemployment, particularly among youth, poverty, governance weaknesses and infrastructure deficits. While significant progress has been made in expanding access to basic services such as electricity, water, sanitation, education and social protection, these gains are often undermined by unequal service quality, spatial disparities and implementation challenges at the local level. The CCA identifies inequality and social cohesion; human capital development and wellbeing; violence, crime, corruption and governance; and infrastructure and delivery deficiencies as the principal barriers to achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

27. A central message emerging from South Africa's development experience is that sustainable development requires not only sound policies but also effective implementation, coordination and financing. South Africa has aligned the SDGs with its National Development Plan (NDP), while the 2025 CCA identifies six acceleration pathways for advancing development outcomes: food systems; energy access and affordability; digital connectivity; education; jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. These priorities closely mirror the country's broader development agenda and reflect an effort to address interconnected challenges through integrated approaches. The analysis further highlights the importance of strengthening local governance, improving service delivery, mobilising innovative financing and ensuring that vulnerable populations are not left behind (Government of South Africa and United Nations Country Team in South Africa, 2025).

Good Practice: Using Global Leadership to Advance Sustainable Development

South Africa has demonstrated leadership beyond its national borders by leveraging its 2025 G20 Presidency to elevate African and Global South development priorities within global policy discussions. Under the Presidency theme *"Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability"*, South Africa placed issues such as disaster resilience, debt sustainability, financing for a just energy transition and inclusive growth at the centre of the G20 agenda. The Johannesburg Summit, the first G20 Summit ever held on African soil, provided an opportunity to advocate for development financing, climate action and more equitable global economic governance. Notably, South Africa also helped elevate clean cooking as a standing agenda item within G20 discussions through the launch of the G20 Clean Cooking Legacy Programme and related investment initiatives. This leadership illustrates how national development priorities can be translated into global action, linking domestic challenges such as energy transition, inequality and development financing with

broader African development objectives and the implementation of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. In doing so, South Africa reinforced its role as an important development leader for Africa and the Global South.



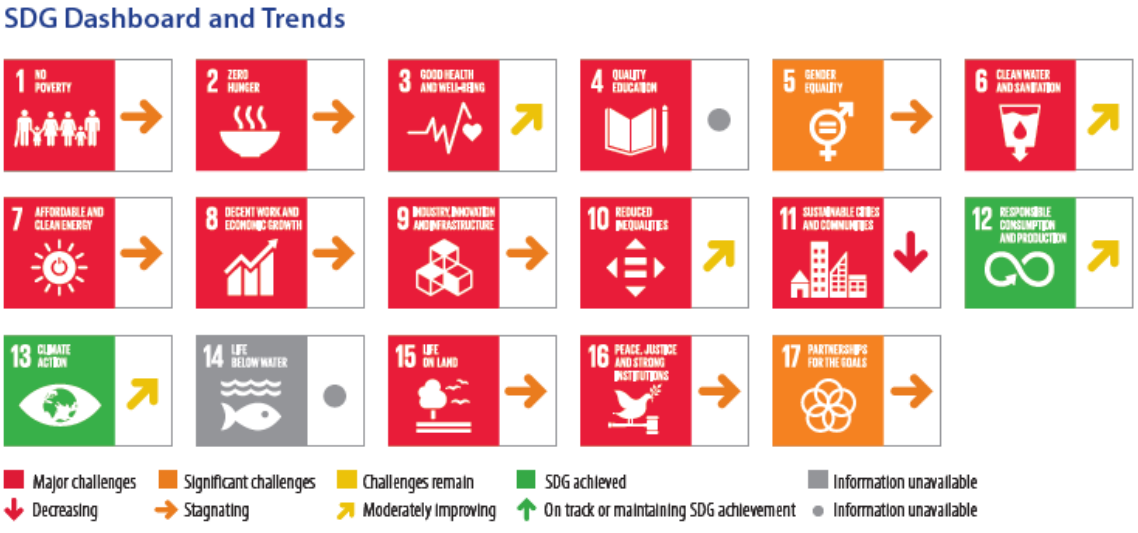
28. **Zambia** ranks 150th with an SDG Index score at 53.9, placing it among the lower-performing countries in the SDR 2026, reflecting persistent challenges in poverty reduction, human development outcomes and SDG implementation. While progress has been observed in selected sectors and recent debt restructuring has improved the debt outlook, Zambia continues to face significant constraints related to climate vulnerability, a high risk of external and overall debt distress, limited fiscal space, and gaps in SDG data systems. The 2023 VNR acknowledges that most SDG targets remain off track, partly due to the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, recurrent climate shocks and macroeconomic pressures. At the same time, Zambia has demonstrated a strong commitment to integrating the SDGs into national development planning through Vision 2030 and the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP), which serves as the principal framework for the implementation of Agenda 2030.

29. A consistent theme emerging from both the VNR and the Common Country Analysis is the need to strengthen resilience, implementation capacity and sustainable development financing. The review highlights how recurrent droughts, floods and climate variability have affected agriculture, energy generation, water resources and livelihoods, while high debt levels and limited fiscal space have constrained public investment. In response, Zambia has increasingly prioritized domestic resource mobilization, digital transformation, governance reforms and stronger local participation as key enablers of SDG implementation (Government of Zambia, 2023). According to the ASDR 2026, Zambia has strengthened domestic resource mobilisation through the Government Service Bus (GSB), which had onboarded 380 government services by 2025 and enabled real-time digital tracking of public transactions. The reform contributed to a sharp increase in non-tax revenue collection and improved

transparency and fiscal management, illustrating how digitalisation can support sustainable financing for development and accelerate SDG implementation (AU, ECA, UNDP, 2026).

Good Practice: Localising the SDGs through Decentralisation and the Constituency Development Fund (CDF)

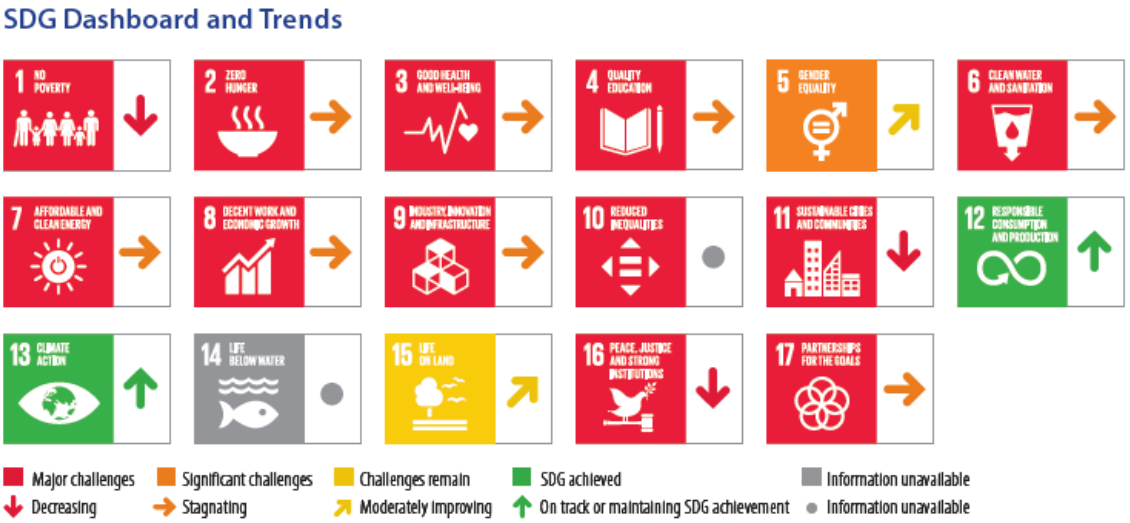
One of the most notable practices highlighted in Zambia's VNR is the effort to localise SDG implementation through decentralisation reforms and the expansion of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). The Government significantly increased CDF allocations to empower local communities to identify and implement development priorities that directly address local needs, including education, health, water and community infrastructure. The VNR emphasizes that achieving the SDGs requires action at subnational level and highlights the role of local authorities, communities and civil society as key implementation actors. Lessons emerging from Zambia's VNR and Lusaka's Voluntary Local Review (VLR) show strong political commitment to localisation, alignment between national and local plans, incorporation of SDG targets into local budgets and efforts to strengthen SDG monitoring systems. Building on its broader localisation agenda, Zambia has continued to strengthen subnational implementation of the SDGs through initiatives such Integrated Planning and Reporting Tool (IPRT) systems and local content frameworks is further contributing to enhanced local planning, monitoring and economic participation, helping to translate national development priorities into tangible outcomes at community level. These initiatives have expanded the institutional and financing mechanisms available for subnational SDG implementation, including through decentralised planning and the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). Zambia therefore provides an important example of how localisation can translate global commitments into tangible development action (Government of Zambia, 2023).



30. **Zimbabwe** ranks 138th out of 169 countries in the SDR 2026 with an SDG Index score of 57.2, reflecting persistent development challenges related to poverty, macroeconomic vulnerability and limited development financing. Despite these constraints, the country continues to demonstrate strong political commitment to sustainable development through the integration of the SDGs into national planning frameworks, including Vision 2030, the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the emerging National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2). While SDR 2026 shows deteriorating trends under SDGs 1, 11 and 16, indicating that significant challenges remain, the VNR highlights progress across several social and economic sectors. Coverage of social protection programmes increased from 61 percent in 2022 to 66 percent in 2023, while Zimbabwe has also made notable progress in maternal health, with the maternal mortality ratio declining from 614 in 2014 to 363 in 2022. Zimbabwe has also recorded improvements in education outcomes, with a primary school completion rate of 91 percent, alongside increasing participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions across Parliament, the public sector and local government. Progress in access to electricity and growing investment in renewable energy further demonstrate efforts to strengthen inclusive and sustainable development.

31. The 2024 VNR highlights Zimbabwe's efforts to strengthen SDG implementation through a structured governance and coordination framework that links national development objectives with Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. A distinctive feature of Zimbabwe's 2024 VNR is its strong emphasis on SDG localisation and multi-level implementation. Unlike many countries where localisation remains a policy objective, Zimbabwe incorporated Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) from several municipalities and rural district councils directly into the VNR process. The review also demonstrates a deliberate effort to align Vision 2030, Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 across national and subnational levels, strengthening coherence between planning, implementation and monitoring systems. This approach reflects growing recognition that SDG achievement depends not only on national policies but also on local ownership, accountability and citizen participation.

32. The localisation agenda is further reinforced by the inclusion of Provincial Consultation Findings in the annexes of the 2024 VNR, which document development priorities, achievements and constraints identified across different provinces. By systematically capturing local perspectives and implementation realities, the review provides a more comprehensive understanding of subnational SDG progress and helps ensure that regional disparities and place-based challenges are reflected in national planning and monitoring processes. This approach demonstrates a strong commitment to evidence-based and participatory SDG implementation, while strengthening accountability between national and local levels (Government of Zimbabwe, 2024).

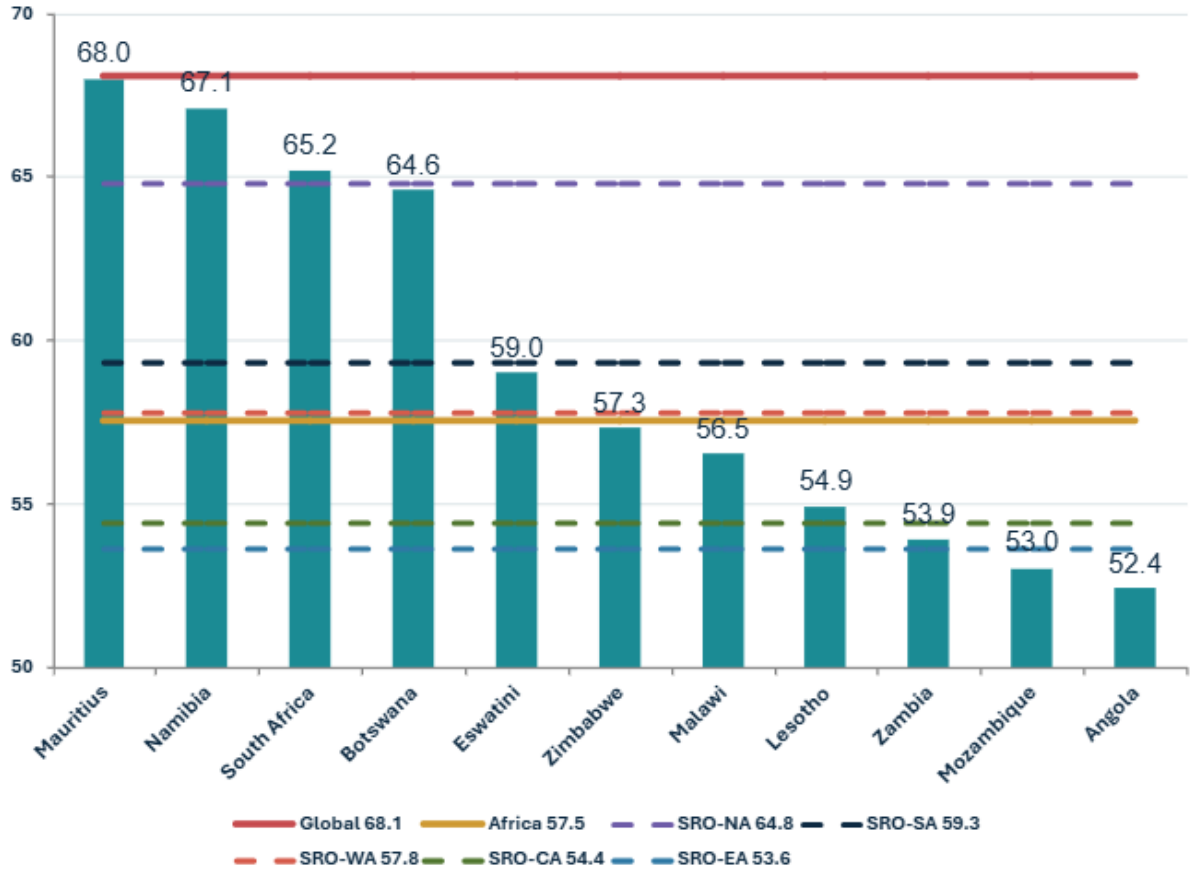


SECTION 3. REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

3.1 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SDG PERFORMANCE

Indicator	Result
Global average SDG Index Score (169countries)	68.1
Africa average SDG Index Score (51countries)	57.5
Southern Africa average SDG Index score (11countries)	59.3
Highest score in SRO-SA	Mauritius, 68.0
Lowest score in SRO-SA	Angola, 52.4
Score gap between highest and lowest in SRO-SA	15.6 points
Median country in SRO-SA	Zimbabwe, 57.3
Countries above SRO-SA average	Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Botswana
Countries below SRO-SA average	Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola

Comparison of SDG Index Scores: Global, Africa, ECA Subregions and SRO-SA member States (2026)[2]



Source: Author's calculations based on the Sustainable Development Report 2026 database

33. The analysis of SDR 2026 results indicates that Southern Africa continues to perform relatively well within the African context, although significant gaps remain when compared to global SDG performance. The average SDG Index score of the eleven Southern African countries stands at 59.3, which is higher than the African average of 57.5 and ranks second among the five ECA subregions, behind North Africa (64.8). However, the subregional average remains well below the global average of 68.1, highlighting the need for accelerated efforts to close the remaining implementation gap and strengthen progress towards Agenda 2030.

34. At the same time, SDG performance within Southern Africa remains uneven. Mauritius (68.0) records the highest SDG Index score in the subregion, while Angola (52.4) ranks lowest, resulting in a substantial gap of 15.6 points between the best and worst performers. Only four countries, namely Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Botswana, score above the subregional average, while the remaining seven countries fall below it. With Zimbabwe (57.3)

[2] Regional averages are unweighted arithmetic means of country-level SDG Index scores, using ECA subregional classifications. Countries without an SDR 2026 score are excluded from the calculation. Accordingly, the Africa average covers 51 countries; Libya, Equatorial Guinea and Seychelles are excluded due to unavailable scores.

positioned as the median performer, the findings suggest that although the subregion performs comparatively better than most African subregions, higher SDG performance remains concentrated among a limited number of countries, while considerable disparities persist across member States.

3.2 COMMON BOTTLENECKS AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES

35. The country assessments point to four interconnected structural bottlenecks that continue to constrain SDG implementation in Southern Africa: limited trade and transport connectivity; energy insecurity and fragmented energy infrastructure; insufficient economic diversification and regional value-chain development; and financing and investment constraints. These challenges reinforce one another: weak connectivity increases trade and production costs, unreliable energy constrains industrial activity, limited value addition reduces employment and investment opportunities, and financing constraints restrict the investments needed to address these gaps. Climate vulnerability, poverty and inequality further amplify these structural constraints and threaten the sustainability of development gains.

Trade and Transport Connectivity Constraints

36. Southern Africa continues to face connectivity constraints that limit the efficient movement of goods, services and productive inputs across national borders. Transport and logistics bottlenecks, inefficient border processes and gaps in trade infrastructure increase the costs of accessing regional and continental markets and constrain the ability of firms to participate effectively in cross-border production networks. These limitations also restrict the potential benefits of the AfCFTA, particularly for smaller economies and landlocked countries that depend heavily on efficient regional transport corridors. Strengthening transport connectivity and trade facilitation is therefore central to reducing trade costs, improving market access and enabling deeper regional economic integration.

Energy Insecurity and Infrastructure Vulnerability

37. Reliable and affordable energy remains essential for industrialisation, trade and the delivery of basic services, yet energy infrastructure and supply constraints continue to affect development across the subregion. Limited generation and transmission capacity, gaps in cross-border electricity connectivity and exposure of energy systems to climate-related shocks can constrain productive activity and increase vulnerabilities. Climate variability also affects hydropower generation, water availability, agriculture and food security in several member States, demonstrating the interconnected nature of energy, climate and development challenges. Greater regional energy integration, renewable-energy investment and climate-resilient infrastructure are therefore important for strengthening energy security while supporting sustainable economic transformation.

Limited Economic Diversification, Regional Value Addition and Employment Creation

38. Many Southern African economies continue to face limited productive diversification, insufficient value addition and persistent employment challenges. The subregion possesses significant mineral resources and renewable-energy potential, yet opportunities to connect these assets to regional processing, manufacturing and industrial value chains remain underexploited. Reliance on primary commodities can also expose economies to external price shocks while limiting domestic value creation and employment opportunities. Developing regional value chains, strengthening productive capacities and expanding mineral beneficiation and local processing could therefore enable member States to capture a greater share of value generated from the subregion's natural resources while creating more productive employment opportunities.

Financing and Investment Constraints

39. Financing constraints and limited fiscal space continue to restrict investment in infrastructure, productive sectors, energy systems and other SDG priorities. Several countries face debt vulnerabilities and competing expenditure pressures, while insufficient pipelines of bankable projects and investment constraints can limit the mobilisation of private capital. The challenge is therefore not simply to mobilise additional public resources, but also to improve the efficiency and credibility of public financial management, create enabling conditions for productive investment and mobilise financing for regional and cross-border initiatives.

Cross-Cutting Development Pressures

40. Relatively favourable SDG 13 performance in the SDR 2026 dashboard should not be interpreted as low climate vulnerability, as the assessment relies largely on emissions-related indicators. Many Southern African countries remain highly exposed to droughts, floods, cyclones and other climate-related shocks that affect infrastructure, agriculture, energy systems, food security and livelihoods. Climate vulnerability therefore remains an important cross-cutting development pressure, particularly as recurrent extreme events can damage infrastructure, disrupt energy and food systems, undermine livelihoods and place additional pressure on already constrained public finances. These impacts are further compounded by persistent poverty and inequality, which reduce the capacity of households and communities to absorb shocks, recover from crises and benefit from emerging economic opportunities. Climate resilience, social inclusion and the principle of leaving no one behind should therefore be mainstreamed across trade and connectivity, energy systems, productive transformation and financing interventions.

SECTION 4. PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR ACCELERATED SDG IMPLEMENTATION

Strengthen Trade and Transport Connectivity to Accelerate AfCFTA Implementation

41. Southern African countries should prioritise transport connectivity and trade facilitation as foundations for regional integration and SDG acceleration. At the national level, member States should strengthen domestic transport and logistics networks, modernise border and customs systems and improve digital trade infrastructure. Regionally, greater emphasis should be placed on efficient cross-border corridors, harmonised trade procedures and implementation of the AfCFTA to improve connectivity between production centres and regional and continental markets. Improved physical and digital trade connectivity can reduce trade costs, expand market access and create an enabling environment for stronger regional production networks, investment and employment.

Deepen Regional Energy Connectivity and Accelerate the Clean Energy Transition

42. Member States should strengthen energy security through greater regional power integration and investment in reliable, affordable and climate-resilient energy infrastructure. National efforts should focus on renewable-energy generation, resilient grids and enabling investment frameworks, while regional cooperation should expand cross-border interconnections, power pooling and coordinated investment in transmission infrastructure. Southern Africa's substantial renewable-energy resources, including solar, wind, hydropower and emerging green-energy opportunities, can support both climate action and industrial development when connected through efficient regional energy markets.

Build Regional Value Chains for Economic Diversification and Value Addition

43. Southern Africa should leverage its mineral wealth, productive capabilities and expanding continental market to build stronger regional value chains. National strategies should promote mineral beneficiation, local processing, technological capabilities, skills development and stronger participation of domestic firms in higher-value economic activities. At the regional level, countries should identify complementary production capabilities and develop cross-border value chains that connect mineral extraction and agricultural production with processing, manufacturing and regional markets. Greater value addition would help reduce dependence on primary commodity exports, support industrialisation and create productive employment, particularly for the region's growing youth population.

Mobilise Finance and Investment for Connectivity and SDG Acceleration

44. Closing Southern Africa's connectivity and productive investment gaps will require both stronger public financial management and greater mobilisation of productive investment. At

the national level, member States should strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, debt and fiscal management, project preparation and investment frameworks while protecting priority development spending. At the regional level, greater cooperation is needed to develop pipelines of bankable cross-border projects and mobilise development finance, climate finance and responsible private investment for transport, energy, digital infrastructure and regional value chains. Financing approaches should prioritise projects capable of generating economic and social returns while maintaining transparency, value for money and fiscal sustainability.

Cross-Cutting Enablers for Priorities

45. Effective implementation of the four priorities will require strong institutions, accountable governance, climate resilience, digital connectivity and reliable data systems. Member States should continue strengthening public-sector capacity, transparency, national statistical systems and local implementation mechanisms. Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) can complement these efforts by strengthening evidence-based monitoring, identifying implementation gaps and facilitating stakeholder participation, peer learning and accountability. Regional institutions can further support technical cooperation, interoperability and knowledge exchange across member States. Digital connectivity should be treated as enabling infrastructure across trade, finance, public administration and regional value chains, while climate resilience should be mainstreamed across the four priority areas to reduce the risk that climate-related shocks undermine development gains.

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