



South African SDG  
Policy Support Initiative

**Interim Report**  
April 2021



South African  
**SDG** Policy Support  
Initiative

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# 1. Background and Objective

In April 2020 The Presidency of the Government of South Africa, the German Government (through GIZ) and the University of Pretoria's SA SDG Hub entered into a partnership to help the country attain the Sustainable Development Goals.

With South Africa committing itself to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as encapsulated in the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there has been a need to localise and find expression of the goals within the Government's development plans - The National Development Plan, The Medium-Term Strategic Framework and the Government of South Africa's Sixth Administration's seven priorities.<sup>1</sup>

In order to fast-track South Africa's attainment of the SDGs in the context of the country's development plans, there is a need to generate relevant and timely evidence and extensive research and analytical capabilities. This needs to be supported by an information platform and a mechanism to connect academic experts and research teams with the Presidency and Government policy makers, based on the Presidency's areas of interest.

The Policy Support Initiative acts as this coordinating mechanism bringing experts from academia together with The Presidency to support evidence-informed policy decision making. Building on the South African SDG Hub's objective to connect South African policymakers with the best and most relevant South African research related to the SDGs, the SDG Policy Support Initiative aims to draw such expertise from across the 26 public universities and translate this into a useable format for policy makers. Consequently, the Initiative offers a chance for academics to influence policy-making, contribute to the development state, and help attain the Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa.

## 2. Partners

The South African SDG Policy Support Initiative is a tripartite partnership between the Government of South Africa, led by The Presidency, the German Government (assisted by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and the South African SDG Hub hosted at the University of Pretoria.

The Policy and Research Services Branch in The Presidency leads the project, sets the priorities areas and informs the Initiative of The Presidency's needs. This is led by Mr Lawrence Matemba (Acting Head of the Policy and Research Services in The Presidency), supported by Ms Pulane Kole (Chief Policy Analyst in The Presidency (Policy and Research Services)) and Mr Jan Magoro (Senior Policy Analyst in The Presidency (Policy and Research Services)).

The Government of Germany provides financial and technical support to facilitate the creation of Initiative. The GIZ Adviser attached to the project, and their SDG Initiative Project Manager, is Dr Volker Moenikes.

As host of the national SDG knowledge facility, the University of Pretoria (UP) hosts the SDG Policy Support Initiative. The Coordinator of the project is Dr Dominique Mystris, a Senior Researcher at the SA SDG Hub.

<sup>1</sup> The seven priorities are: a) capable developmental state and a social compact; b) Investment in people: education, skills revolution and health; c) Economic transformation and job creation; d) Social wage; e) Spatial Integration, human settlement and local government; f) Social cohesion and safety and security; and g) A better Africa and world.



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## 3. Interim Achievements

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the Initiative's planned activities and outcomes. The planned in person events were rethought as hosting in person events was prohibited, and The Presidency's priorities shifted to deal with the unprecedented crisis. Nevertheless, the Initiative has undertaken a number of activities:

### A. Call for proposals

A call for proposals was sent out in July 2020 to all public universities requesting existing knowledge, or near completed research, to provide insight into the attainment of the SDGs in the context of COVID-19 and highlight the policy approaches needed to mitigate the pandemic's impact. The focus of the call was based on five of The Presidency's priority areas: Agriculture (SDG2), Education, Training and Development Practices (SDG 4), Health and Social Welfare (SDG 1 and SDG 3), Local Government (SDG 11 and SDG 16) and Public Service Productivity (SDG 16).

We received thirty applications from academics based at thirteen of the twenty-six universities. Four applications were chosen for development:

1. Prof Stephan de Beer and Prof Jannie Hugo (University of Pretoria)  
**Street Homelessness: Lessons from COVID-19 on collaboration, innovation and acceleration to navigate pathways out of homelessness**
2. Prof Michael Cross and Prof Emnet Tadesse Woldegiorgis (University of Johannesburg)  
**Mitigating the Challenges of Epistemic Access Among South African Higher Education Institutions in the Face of the Covid-19 Pandemic**
3. Prof Mcebisi Ndletyana (University of Johannesburg)  
**Improving Policy and Practice of Communal Service Delivery**
4. Dr Heidi van Deventer (Stellenbosch University)  
**Investigation into the Effectiveness of Tadalafil in the treatment of COVID-19**

**Proposal 1** has been developed to the standard required by The Presidency. Currently, The Presidency is engaging with the relevant government departments to bring them and the proposal authors together.

**Proposal 2** has been submitted to The Presidency after amendments requested from the initial feedback received. We are waiting to hear back from The Presidency regarding next steps.

**Proposal 3** received the initial feedback. While a deadline of end of February was agreed with the author, he has since been delayed in completing the research. We have

discussed this with The Presidency colleagues who are happy for the report to be submitted in June/July. Unfortunately, **Proposal 4** is not being pursued anymore. The author initially withdrew due to insufficient patient numbers. Despite efforts to address this challenge, in early 2021 The Presidency decided not to take it further because Government's priority is now on vaccinations instead of treatment given the rapid rate of research related to treatment already being done globally. This was communicated to Dr van Deventer.

### B. Government Powers and Functions Project

At the request of The Presidency, we provided an overview of the three spheres of government's (National, Provincial and Municipal) areas of competence as per Schedule 4 and 5 of the Constitution. Working together with Dr Onkgopotse Madumo and Dr Tyanai Masiya from the University of Pretoria's School of Public Management and Administration the work was submitted at the end of September 2020.

The feedback received from The Presidency was positive. Additionally, they noted there is the potential to take this work further in future, including to collaborate with other academic experts from outside of UP.

### C. Mapping Exercise and designated contact person across all public universities

As the Initiative is national in focus and acts as the coordinating mechanism, there is a need to identify a contact person within each university to help facilitate access to the necessary experts in the country. This person will be a crucial link ensuring any requests the Initiative receives from The Presidency are directed to the relevant expert within their university. By adopting such an approach, the Policy Support Initiative strives to provide an inclusive and transparent process through which experts are identified.

Through Prof. Anton Ströh's office, a request to nominate a contact person was sent to each universities' Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research. To date we have received responses from fifteen universities. Further efforts to contact the outstanding universities will be made in the coming months.





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## D. Peer Reviewer

In March 2021, The Presidency approached the Initiative for assistance in identifying an academic expert for a synthesis evaluation of state capacity, focusing on Director-Generals and Heads of Departments, as a means to strengthen state capacity in SA. The evaluation report is to be done by the Developmental, Capable and Ethical State Division of the Human Sciences Research Council. The Peer Reviewer will help to ensure the quality of the evaluation and provide an independent expert review.

Mindful of the Initiative's national mandate and inclusive approach, Prof. Lisa Thompson from the University of the Western Cape has been identified to perform this task. The work will be for a maximum of ten days to be completed by the end of June/early July 2021.

## 4. Internal Research

In addition to The Presidency requested activities, the Initiative's Senior Researcher Dr Vandudzai Mbanda undertook research which aims to enhance the understanding on how academia can positively contribute to policy making. Dr Mbanda submitted two reports.

One on how academic institutions and research bodies contribute to policy making and the other focuses on Bridging the gap between academia and policy. These will be used to create a resource the Initiative can draw on to assist the academics it engages with, as well as the wider academic community, to understand the policy making environment. Furthermore, it will contribute to the working methods of the Initiative as the reports include best practices.

Multiple challenges exist to South Africa attaining the SDGs by 2030, particularly in terms of policy implementation. The COVID-19 related lockdown and government initiatives have highlighted the gaps between policies and their implementation, or lack thereof.

Consequently, Dr Mbanda has produced a systematic literature review on local governance and issues of policy implementation in South Africa. This overview provides insight into the current hurdles to policy implementation, which the Initiative hopes to address in its work.

### Achievements and Lessons Learned

Despite the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic created for the Policy Support Initiative's planned activities, we were nonetheless successful in various areas. The call for proposals was the first attempt by the Initiative to engage with the wider academic space and all partners were happy with the response received. The other activities detailed in the Interim Achievements section above are further evidence of our success in adapting to the COVID related challenges.

Through our work in bringing together academics and policy makers, the differences in approaches and gaps in understanding each other's needs became evident. This has been key in shaping the Initiative's future planned activities.

From these lessons we are exploring ways to: strengthen ties amongst all universities with the Policy Support Initiative; raise awareness of the Initiative amongst relevant stakeholders; increase awareness of the needs of policy makers; and identify ways to translate academic research into useable formats.



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## 5. Next Steps and Way Forward

In November 2020, during the bilateral negotiations between South Africa and Germany, both countries agreed to support the Policy Support Initiative for a longer three-year programme to commence in October 2021 to September 2024.

As a result of this decision, the GIZ conducted an appraisal mission in February interviewing a number of government, academic and civil society stakeholders to identify the current project's strengths and weaknesses. Their recommendations touched on how the Policy Support Initiative could be further developed to address the need of The Presidency, including a proposed structure for the Initiative's mechanism. While the proposed mechanism still needs formal agreement by both the South African and German Governments, the initial indication from all three partners is that it is an acceptable proposal.

The initial financing agreement between UP and GIZ concluded in March 2021. Yet, due to the COVID-19 related changes in activities funds remain. On the advice of the GIZ Advisor Mr Moenikes, an extension request has been submitted to continue developing the Initiative until the end of September 2021, after which the three year project will start.

At the request of The Presidency, and based on our experience to date and the GIZ appraisal mission's recommendations, the focus of the Initiative's work until end of September 2021 will not be on sourcing new research, with the exception of specific requests from the Presidency.

Instead, we will focus on the structure of the mechanism by capacitating the Initiative's Secretariat, further developing

the SDG Hub's database (which will act as the repository utilised by the Initiative) and capacitating the Presidency's Policy and Research Services Unit.

To meet this object, some of the key activities planned include:

- Working with the Presidency to identify the most appropriate way to translate academic research into a usable format for The Presidency and other Government departments;
- Developing the Hub's database through appointing Artificial Intelligence and computer technology experts;
- Engaging the services of a procurement specialist to ensure legal compliance of the Initiative's activities and working methods;
- Developing further the mapping exercise, including Initiative generated research into alignment of the individual SDG indicators with the National Development Plan and Medium-Term Strategic Framework; and
- Building relations with the other 25 public universities and raising awareness of the Initiative amongst academia.

The underlying objective is to have a functioning Policy Support Initiative and mechanism by October 2021.

*Prepared by Dr Dominique Mystris, Senior Researcher SA SDG Hub*





<b>1</b> NO POVERTY 	<b>2</b> ZERO HUNGER 	<b>3</b> GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 	
<b>4</b> QUALITY EDUCATION 	<b>5</b> GENDER EQUALITY 	<b>6</b> CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION 	<b>7</b> AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY 
<b>8</b> DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	<b>9</b> INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 	<b>10</b> REDUCED INEQUALITIES 	<b>11</b> SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 
<b>12</b> RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION 	<b>13</b> CLIMATE ACTION 	<b>14</b> LIFE BELOW WATER 	
<b>15</b> LIFE ON LAND 	<b>16</b> PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS 		



## South African SDG Policy Support Initiative



South African  
SDG Hub



ALBERT  
LUTHULI  
LEADERSHIP  
INSTITUTE



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Economic and  
Management Sciences

Fakulteit Ekonomiese en Bestuurswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Disaense tša Ekonomi le Taolo

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In partnership with:



german  
cooperation

DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



THE PRESIDENCY  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA