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THE IMPACT OF SOUTH AFRICA'S GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY (GNU) ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Nakisani Munyai (student Number: 19009798), declare that the thesis entitled ''*The Impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the Implementation the National Development Plan 2030*" hereby submitted by me for the degree of Master of Administration at the University of Venda has not been previously submitted for a degree in this university or any other institution, and that it is my work, written and submitted by myself, and all references material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature: MN ..... Date: .....

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my mother, Miss Azwihangwisi Rejoice Munyai; my late Grandmother, Miss Tshavhungwe Tshisevhe Munyai; my daughters, Bono Munyai and Muano Munyai; and the rest of my family.

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. The study investigated how political stability, inclusive governance, and cross-party collaboration within a GNU contribute to the successful implementation of the long-term development goals of the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP). Focusing on key areas such as infrastructure, economic growth, social welfare, and governance reforms, the study analysed and assessed the potential of a GNU to foster consensus-driven policymaking and address national challenges. By reviewing case studies and assessing the alignment of political and developmental agendas, this study provided insights into how a GNU can strengthen institutional capacity, enhance policy coherence, and accelerate the achievement of the NDP 2030 objectives. This study employed qualitative research and a desktop method to collect data. The researcher employed this method because data was collected from government reports, policy documents, legislation, and gazettes to provide a historical and institutional context for the study. The researcher conducted a detailed secondary data analysis, organising it into thematic categories through thematic content analysis. This method of data analysis involved a systematic process for identifying patterns and themes, resulting in a comprehensive compilation of final themes. This study also provided explicit conclusions and recommendations for strengthening the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 under South Africa's Government of National Unity.

The major findings of the study emerged from the research objectives, and were as follows:

- The establishment of the Government of National Unity (GNU) has created a cooperative governance framework that enhances policy alignment and provides a structured platform for advancing the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. However, its effectiveness is constrained by ideological differences and governance inefficiencies.
- Persistent political contestation and weak inter-party cooperation within the GNU undermine policy coherence, weaken decision-making processes, and limit coordinated efforts required for the effective implementation of the NDP 2030.

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- The GNU faces significant challenges, including ideological clashes, institutional fragmentation, weak coordination, and leadership deficits, which collectively hinder the effective and sustained implementation of the NDP 2030 despite its potential as a unifying governance mechanism.
- Existing frameworks such as the GNU Statement of Intent and the Medium-Term Development Plan 2024–2029 provide strategic initiatives that strengthen policy coherence, institutional coordination, and multi-sectoral collaboration to support the realisation of the NDP 2030.
- Strengthening state capacity, fostering whole-of-society partnerships, enhancing local government integration, and ensuring strong political leadership are critical strategies necessary to improve the implementation of the NDP 2030 within the GNU framework.

Aligned with these major findings, the recommendations for this study are as follows:

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- Institutionalise a "GNU NDP Technical Buffer" consisting of non-partisan subject matter experts embedded in each Ministry to ensure that technical NDP milestones remain consistent, even if the political leadership of the Ministry rotates between different parties. This buffer will function as a ring-fenced unit of senior career technocrats and sector experts, permanently appointed under the Public Service Act No 103 of 1994, to insulate the administrative machinery from political turnover. For practical implementation, the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) shall secure these experts on long-term, merit-based contracts tied directly to NDP targets. Under the Public Finance Management Act No 1 of 1999 (PFMA), this unit will legally lock pre-approved infrastructure procurement pipelines and budgets. This mechanism will ensure that, when a ministry's executive leadership shifts among coalition partners, future administrations will not be able to dismantle or disrupt ongoing developmental programs for partisan gain unilaterally.
- Implement a Ministerial Portfolio Performance Dashboard accessible to the public, which tracks NDP 2030 indicators specifically by Ministry, creating a competitive yet transparent environment where individual members of the executive must prove their delivery efficacy to the public. This dashboard will be established as an open-access digital tracking platform managed independently by the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency. To align strictly with Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution, the platform will monitor the operational output of specific national ministries rather than political parties, tracking real-time metrics against the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP*)* 2024-2029. The Presidency will utilise this unassailable data for objective executive evaluations, forcing sitting ministers to remain anchored to their state delivery mandates. Ultimately, this mechanism will transition public evaluation away from a polarised, partisan lens and will empower the electorate with empirical data to measure portfolio efficacy ahead of future democratic cycles.

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- Establish Joint-Portfolio Implementation Task Teams that force Ministers from different departments to co-sign on projects that cross-cut departments (e.g., Energy and Environment), preventing isolated successes and ensuring a unified approach to the NDP's structural reforms. Exercising executive authority under Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution, the President shall mandate the establishment of these cross-departmental units under the Public Service Act No 103 of 1994 to enforce horizontal integration across split-portfolio mandates. These task teams will be formally integrated into the existing Cabinet Cluster system to coordinate macro-developmental projects where interdependent functions, such as the Just Energy Transition, span multiple ministries. To enforce compliance, the National Treasury will structurally tie departmental funding allocations under the Division of Revenue Act No 2 of 2025 (DORA) directly to the co-signed achievement of these joint milestones. This statutory framework will break down institutional fragmentation and will legally prevent any individual minister from utilising departmental veto power to cause gridlock or stall national structural reforms.
- Develop a provincial GNU alignment Clause in the District Development Model, requiring that provincial and local governments with different political compositions than the national GNU must adhere to a standardised "NDP Service Level Agreement" to prevent political sabotage of national projects. This clause will be enacted as a standardised, legally binding intergovernmental mechanism under the Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) Framework Act to manage vertical governance friction. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) shall mandate that all Provincial Growth and Development Strategies and Municipal Integrated Development Plans embed this agreement. This contractual tool will legally compel sub-national spheres, regardless of their local political or coalition composition, to execute national infrastructure blueprints. Consequently, it will insulate national developmental targets from localised political sabotage, ensuring uniform implementation of NDP 2030 across all three spheres of government.

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- Introduce a Legislative Sunset Review for all new GNU policies, where any policy that deviates from the NDP 2030 roadmap must undergo a mandatory public impact assessment by the National Planning Commission before being enacted. This mechanism will serve as a statutory brake on evaluations, preserving long-term macro-policy coherence amid competing coalition interests. Parliament will legislate that any new draft policy, White Paper, or major amendment originating from a GNU must trigger a mandatory compliance audit if it alters established NDP targets. The National Planning Commission (NPC) shall conduct an independent public impact assessment, which must be tabled before the relevant Parliamentary Portfolio Committee and Cabinet before voting. This review process will prevent temporary, short-term political concessions between coalition partners from quietly diluting or derailing long-term national developmental goals.
- Formulate a conflict-resolution Secretariat within the Presidency specifically for NDP deadlocks, utilising independent mediators to resolve policy disagreements between GNU partners that threaten to stall critical infrastructure or energy transitions. This body will be formally established as a permanent, non-partisan dispute-clearinghouse located within the executive support structures of the Presidency. The Secretariat will utilise independent constitutional experts and professional mediators to resolve high-stakes policy deadlocks that threaten to paralyse national infrastructure or economic transitions. It shall operate within a strict, legally mandated, time-bound arbitration window, relying on empirical performance data from the DPME rather than political compromises. This institutionalised mechanism will guarantee governance stability and will ensure that executive ideological friction does not stall progress toward national development objectives.

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- Legislate an NDP Alignment Audit under the Public Finance Management Act No 1 of 1999 (PFMA) for all departmental Annual Performance Plans (APPs) to prevent short-term policy shifts from subverting long-term macro-targets. This audit will function as a compulsory compliance mechanism enforced by the National Treasury during the annual national budgeting cycle. In practice, the Auditor-General of South Africa shall incorporate an "NDP Alignment Score" into the standard audit framework. National Treasury will utilise this statutory audit to withhold or delay funding allocations to any GNU ministry whose strategic budget allocations or operational performance plans deviate from the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029 outcomes. This financial and legal check will compel future administrations to prioritise long-term development targets over immediate, localised political adjustments.
- Establish a National Social Compact Forum under the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) Act No 35 of 1994 to repair and institutionalise multi-stakeholder developmental collaboration formally. This statutory forum will be structured as a permanent, high-level negotiating chamber within the existing NEDLAC architecture to bridge the gap between state organs and external economic actors. Under this framework, the Presidency shall convene quarterly structural dialogues to bind social partners to shared, quantifiable benchmarks for infrastructure and employment. The Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME) will formalise these commitments into legally binding pacts. This mechanism will insulate national economic transformation initiatives from coalition instability and will restore public and investor confidence through structured, non-partisan public-private delivery channels.
- Enforce a Merit-Based Local Government Professionalisation Directive under the Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act No 3 of 2022 to eradicate political patronage in sub-national administration. This directive will be enacted as a binding regulatory code issued by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) to govern administrative appointments. The regulation shall render it illegal for any municipal council or local coalition to appoint administrative staff, municipal managers, or technical directors who do not possess pre-certified professional competencies. The Public Service Commission will exercise strict oversight to veto irregular, politically driven appointments. This statutory mechanism will restore administrative capacity, protect local-level infrastructure spending pipelines, and accelerate the municipal-level rollout of the NDP 2030 roadmap.

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• **Keywords: Government of National Unity, Impact, Implementation, and National Development Plan 2030.**

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CHAPTER: 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The study focused on the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 aims to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality, and build a sustainable and inclusive society in South Africa (National Planning Commission, 2012). It outlines a comprehensive set of objectives to be achieved by 2030, including improvements in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and governance. The NDP serves as a long-term roadmap for the country's socio-economic development. (Faluyi, 2023). The Government of National Unity (GNU) was established after the end of apartheid in 1994, bringing together a broad range of political parties to govern South Africa (ACCORD, 2024). The GNU is seen as an essential part of the country's early democratic transition (Landsberg, 2023, and Southall, 2010). The GNU model was historically instrumental in South Africa's transition to democracy and has since evolved. The 2019–2024 South African government has increasingly emphasised inclusive governance. This concept echoes the principles of the GNU through the National Planning Commission (NPC), which oversees the implementation of the NDP (NPC, 2012).

In a context where different political parties must work together, the GNU model allows for balancing differing viewpoints and political ideologies to arrive at unified solutions that can be implemented across the country (Mokgale, 2020). This is especially important for the NDP, which requires broad political buy-in to achieve its long-term vision. The GNU model advocates cooperative policymaking, in which diverse political groups contribute their expertise to advance the NDP's goals (Beukes, 2021). The political commitment to a unified approach can help create effective policy frameworks for key areas such as education, infrastructure, and healthcare, as proposed by the NDP (Mokgale, 2020). This study investigated the advantages and limitations of this governance model in the context of the National Development Plan: 2030. The study draws lessons from international, regional, and local case studies in which a government of national unity has been employed to drive national development, offering valuable insights for policymakers seeking to maximise the potential of a GNU in South Africa. Through this analysis, the study

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examined the broader discourse on governance and national development. It provided recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the NDP 2030 and ensure it leads to sustainable and inclusive growth.

1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa was formed following the historic 1994 democratic transition, bringing together diverse political parties to ensure stability and inclusivity (Smith, 2022). The need for a GNU arose from negotiations between the African National Congress (ANC), the National Party (NP), and other political stakeholders to prevent conflict and foster a peaceful transition to democracy (Mokoena, 2023). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993 laid the groundwork for this arrangement, allowing parties with at least 5% of the vote to participate in the executive government (Ngcobo, 2024). While the original GNU was a historical product of the post-apartheid settlement, in modern terms, its underlying principles of collaboration and unity continue to resonate in the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP).

The contemporary GNU in South Africa, established after the 2024 general elections, consists of multiple political parties that formed a coalition to address governance challenges and maintain national stability (Pillay, 2025). As of the 2024 national elections, the African National Congress (ANC) obtained 40.18 per cent of the total vote, representing a decline of 17.32 percentage points from the 57.5 per cent it secured in the 2019 national elections. This watershed outcome was largely attributed to shifts in voter behaviour, with a notable proportion of the electorate redirecting its support to the uMkhonto WeSizwe (MK) Party. The Democratic Alliance (DA) received 21.8 per cent of the vote, thereby maintaining its existing level of electoral support. Significantly, the MK Party emerged as one of the three largest parties in the National Assembly, surpassing the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) with 14.58 per cent of the vote. Parallel to governance restructuring, South Africa adopted the National Development Plan (NDP) to address long-term economic and social challenges (Radebe, 2021). According to Muasabi and Ludidi (2024), on 14 June 2024, the GNU, which at the time comprised the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), and the Patriotic Alliance (PA), published its Statement of Intent for the 2024 Government of National Unity. This occurred shortly before the election of the Speaker,

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Deputy Speaker, and President during the first sitting of the Seventh Parliament. The GNU, formed in 2024, was intended to revive the spirit of cooperation and consensus-based politics associated with the 7th administration. However, notable distinctions existed between the 1994 and 2024 GNU arrangements. Firstly, the 1994 GNU was constitutionally mandated under the Interim Constitution, which required the inclusion of political parties that secured 20 or more seats in Parliament within the national executive. In contrast, the 2024 GNU lacked an explicit constitutional provision compelling such inclusion. Secondly, the 1994 GNU emerged during South Africa's democratic transition, a period marked by heightened political instability, widespread violence, and the urgent task of restructuring deeply divided social, political, and economic systems. While the 2024 GNU was formed amid severe socio-economic challenges, the prevailing conditions were not comparable in scale or intensity to the crisis confronting the country in 1994. The 1994 Government of National Unity (GNU) was established to promote inclusivity, reduce political tensions, and lay the foundation for democracy by uniting former adversaries, including the African National Congress, National Party, and Inkatha Freedom Party. In contrast, the GNU formed after the 2024 elections reflects a different political context, where no single party secured an outright majority. This resulted in a coalition government comprising the ANC, Democratic Alliance, Inkatha Freedom Party, and smaller parties, marking a new phase of power-sharing aimed at ensuring stability and strengthening accountability (Mafumo, 2024; Ragolane & Khoza, 2024; Phakathi, Ngwenya & Nene, 2025).

The NDP was officially adopted in 2012, but its implementation has continued to evolve in response to shifting economic conditions (Zulu, 2023). The primary objectives of the NDP include reducing poverty, improving education, and fostering economic growth to create a more equitable society (Mbatha, 2024). The decision to adopt the NDP was driven by the need to establish a coherent framework for sustainable development and economic transformation in South Africa (Koena, 2022). In recent years, revisions to the NDP have been proposed to align with the evolving global economic landscape and domestic priorities (Mthembu, 2019). The government has recognised the need to accelerate job creation, enhance infrastructure development, and ensure social stability through policy adjustments (Alexkor SOC Ltd, 2024). The alignment of the NDP with the GNU's policies remains a crucial factor in achieving national development goals (Motsoeneng, 2024). The pursuit of national development requires a stable and inclusive political

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framework capable of effectively implementing long-term strategies and policies. In many countries, especially those with a history of political instability or division, a Government of National Unity (GNU) is often proposed to promote national reconciliation and ensure broad-based governance (Beukes, 2024). The GNU model brings together diverse political parties, often from opposing factions, to form a coalition government with the shared objective of addressing national challenges and promoting social cohesion. In the context of South Africa, the Government of National Unity was first realised post-apartheid, when the African National Congress (ANC), the New National Party (NNP), and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) came together to establish a peaceful and inclusive political environment for the nation (The Presidency, 2024). This collaborative governance framework became a symbol of political stability, a vital facilitator of the country's transition to democracy (Zulu, 2023).

One of the key national initiatives that exemplifies the vision of inclusive and sustainable development is the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, which outlines the strategic goals and developmental targets for South Africa by the year 2030 (Nagle & Clancy, 2019). The NDP aims to tackle critical issues such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment by fostering economic growth, improving infrastructure, enhancing human capabilities, and promoting social equity. The NDP 2030 requires a coordinated effort across all sectors of society, along with effective governance, to achieve its objectives. The plan is heavily reliant on political will, public-private partnerships, and an institutional framework capable of formulating and implementing policies that support the country's long-term vision (Nagle & Clancy, 2019).

The formation of a GNU is particularly relevant in this context, as it can play a significant role in ensuring the NDP's goals are implemented. Political unity within a GNU allows for greater consensus on national priorities and ensures that diverse interests are represented in the policymaking process (Van der Merwe, 2023). This unity can foster cooperation across political parties, ensuring a more stable and efficient approach to governance. By working together, political parties can help overcome past divisions and create a sense of collective responsibility for the country's development (Ngcobo, 2024). However, the effectiveness of a GNU in advancing the NDP 2030 depends on several factors. These include the ability to maintain political harmony within the unity government, the capacity to develop and implement inclusive policies that benefit all citizens, and the commitment to long-term planning despite short-term political pressures

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(Makgale, 2020: 6). Furthermore, the effectiveness of the GNU in realizing the NDP's goals also depends on its ability to address systemic challenges such as corruption, inadequate service delivery, and institutional inefficiencies (Dlamini, 2024).

Several countries, such as Sudan (2019-2021), Lebanon, Afghanistan (2014-2021), and Italy (2021-2022), have experienced GNU formation and offer valuable insights into how this model may work in the South African context. Countries such as Kenya (2008-2013) and Zimbabwe (2009-2013), as well as power-sharing governments in post-conflict settings, have used the GNU model to stabilise their political environment and implement national development plans (Mukherjee & Robinson, 2022). By examining their experiences, South Africa can identify both the potential benefits and pitfalls of a GNU in achieving the ambitious goals of the NDP 2030 (Mukherjee & Robinson, 2022). In recent years, the South African government has recognised the importance of fostering political cooperation to ensure the successful implementation of the NDP (Berryman, 2019). According to Alexiadou and Hoepfner (2019), the role of the GNU in this regard is increasingly seen as vital, especially as the country continues to grapple with socio-economic challenges such as high unemployment rates, poverty, and an unequal education system. The success of the NDP hinges on the government's ability to mobilise resources, build capacity in key sectors, and effectively implement policies that address these challenges.

1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 serves as South Africa's strategic blueprint for eliminating poverty, reducing inequality, and driving inclusive economic growth. It envisions a capable, developmental state that is people-centred, accountable, and responsive. However, since its adoption, the NDP has encountered persistent implementation challenges rooted in state governance limitations, weak institutional capacity, poor service delivery, and policy inconsistency (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2014: 79). The recent formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU), intended to stabilise the political landscape and promote inclusive governance, introduces a new layer of complexity. While the GNU offers opportunities for broader representation, political pluralism, and potential consensus on national priorities, it also carries significant risks (Greyling, 2014; Majid et al., 2019). These include ideological clashes among coalition partners, policy incoherence, governance inefficiencies, institutional fragmentation, and diminished strategic leadership (PSC, 2017; Tshishonga, 2024). The dynamics of coalition

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governance often result in decision-making gridlock, where party interests supersede national objectives, further weakening the implementation of long-term development plans, such as the NDP (Maphunye, 2014; Koma; Meyer et al., 2016). Despite the challenges described by Tshishonga (2024), Kuhlmann and Wollmann (2019), the implementation of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 within the framework of the current Government of National Unity (GNU) still faces several significant challenges, such as policy disagreements among coalition partners, political instability, ideological conflict and fragmentation, poor decision making, economic policy incoherence and inappropriate allocation of funds to developmental projects.

This study is concerned that the current challenges within the Government of National Unity (GNU) may worsen existing governance and coordination problems rather than resolve them, thereby hindering the effective implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. This study investigates whether internal conflicts, policy fragmentation, and political instability within the GNU are likely to further hinder the realisation of the NDP's strategic objectives. The study aims to identify mechanisms that could strengthen or assist the GNU in realising the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 of South Africa, ensuring that its formation becomes a vehicle rather than a barrier for the effective implementation of the NDP. The emerging GNU model in South Africa remains vulnerable to instability, ideological conflicts, and a lack of cohesion among governing parties. These challenges raise critical questions about a GNU's ability to effectively implement the NDP 2030's key pillars, such as economic transformation, social development, and the building of a capable state. This study is conducted to develop a framework to strengthen or assist the GNU in fully implementing the NDP 2030.

1.4. AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aims to investigate the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, to develop a framework to assist in the realisation of NDP implementation within the GNU.

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1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the impact of the Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030.
- To examine how political dynamics and inter-party cooperation within the Government of National Unity influence governance processes and decision-making in relation to the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 of South Africa.
- To investigate challenges facing the GNU in the implementation of NDP.
- To identify initiatives in place to realise the implementation of NDP 2030 in the GNU
- To recommend strategies to enhance the implementation of the NDP 2030 through the GNU.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What impact does the Government of National Unity (GNU) have on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030?
- How do the political dynamics and inter-party cooperation within the GNU influence governance processes and decision-making in achieving the goals of the NDP 2030?
- What are the challenges facing the GNU in the implementation of NDP 2030?
- What initiatives can be put in place to realise the implementation of NDP 2030 in GNU?
- What strategies can be recommended to enhance the effectiveness of the GNU in ensuring the successful implementation of the NDP 2030?

1.7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant because it illuminates how political pluralism and power-sharing arrangements can both enable and obstruct long-term development goals. By examining how ideological divisions, policy inconsistencies, and governance inefficiencies within the GNU affect the coherence and implementation of NDP initiatives, this study helps pinpoint structural weaknesses in the GNU's governance and policy coordination. The study will reveal how decision-making paralysis and institutional fragmentation undermine strategic planning and erode public confidence in state capacity. This study will offer practical recommendations to improve the management of diverse political interests, proposing frameworks for enhanced collaboration, accountability, and consensus-building that align coalition parties around the NDP's priorities. Government officials, policy-makers, and parliamentary committees will benefit from these

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insights as they work to streamline legislative processes and foster a more unified approach to national development. Moreover, development agencies, civil society organisations, and academic researchers will gain a deeper understanding of the conditions under which coalitions translate political compromise into sustained socio-economic outcomes. By providing a detailed case study of coalition governance in South Africa, this research will also contribute to broader debates on democratic stability and multi-party cooperation. It will equip stakeholders at provincial and national levels with evidence-based strategies to mitigate the risks of fragmentation, ensuring that the GNU serves as a catalyst rather than a barrier to the NDP 2030's vision of inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and institutional reform.

This research will also provide recommendations for mechanisms to mitigate challenges within the GNU, such as policy misalignment and political fragmentation. It will explore how strategic collaboration within the GNU can enhance accountability, transparency, and nation-building efforts. Furthermore, this study will play a pivotal role in strengthening democratic governance by demonstrating how the GNU can foster inclusive decision-making and institutional resilience. By providing a structured approach to managing political diversity within a single government, this research will offer guidance on ensuring that governance under the GNU remains focused on long-term national objectives rather than short-term political interests.

1.8. DELIMINATION OF THE STUDY

This study focused on the impact of the Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of selected priorities within the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 in South Africa. It examined how coalition dynamics, inter-party cooperation, and institutional governance structures within the GNU influence the strategic execution of national development goals, particularly in governance reform, economic transformation, and institutional capacity. The study's geographical and institutional focus is national. However, it will draw on insights from national, provincial, and local government levels to understand how decisions and power-sharing arrangements within the GNU affect implementation outcomes across multiple layers of governance. Key institutions under investigation include the Presidency, Cabinet, Parliament, and relevant national departments, as well as their interactions with provincial and municipal delivery systems. The temporal scope is delimited to the period beginning in 2024, following the

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establishment of the GNU, and extending through the early years of its implementation. The study will not comprehensively examine the entire NDP 2030 but will focus on targeted aspects most sensitive to political and governance dynamics under coalition rule. While the study may reference public opinion where relevant, it will primarily rely on official documents, Government and institutional reports, Academic and policy literature, and political stakeholders involved in or affected by the NDP implementation process under the GNU.

1.9. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

This section defines the operational concepts used in this study. The following concepts will be defined in logical terms:

1.9.1. Government of National Unity

A Government of National Unity is formed when a single party is prohibited from governing independently, often due to election outcomes or crisis-induced diversity. Unlike traditional coalition governments, the Government of National Unity prioritises integration and national reconciliation (Kuhlmann, 2019). The Dullah Omar Institute (2024) defined a GNU as a coalition comprising the majority of political parties and interests represented in the legislature. Such governments are formed to bring together the broadest possible spectrum of political interests in response to a crisis. GNUs are formed to achieve national interests such as nation-building, social order, and peace and stability. This study defined GNU as a collective governance arrangement in which multiple political parties, often with differing ideological perspectives, form a coalition to address national challenges, promote stability, and ensure inclusive decision-making.

1.9.2. Impact

According to Weiss (2018), the impact will be defined as tangible changes resulting from the implementation of policies and programs measured through both qualitative and quantitative indicators. On the other hand, Bovens (2021) defines impact as the influence that public policies exert on institutional arrangements, government structures, and community dynamics, thereby transforming government practices. This study defined impact as the extent to which the government of national unity contributes to community well-being, including social cohesion, civic engagement, national stability, and accountability.

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1.9.3. Implementation

According to Hill and Hupe (2014), implementation is the execution of decisions made by policymakers, including the formulation of policies, the allocation of resources, and the monitoring of progress to ensure the intended goals are achieved. Similarly, Sabatier and Weible (2019) defined implementation as a complex, multi-actor process that requires effective planning, resource allocation, and continuous evaluation to ensure policy success. This study defined implementation as the process through which the Government of National Unity (GNU) translates the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 into tangible actions, policies, and programs within the Vhembe District. It involves allocating resources, coordinating among government structures, and executing strategic initiatives to foster economic growth, social transformation, and sustainable development. Effective implementation requires strong governance, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement.

1.9.4. National Development Plan: 2030

According to the National Planning Commission (2020), the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 is a long-term strategic framework designed to address South Africa's socioeconomic challenges by promoting sustainable economic growth, reducing inequality, and improving service delivery through inclusive governance. As defined by Stats SA (2021), the NDP 2030 is a developmental blueprint that integrates economic transformation, governance reforms, and social cohesion initiatives to achieve a prosperous and equitable society. This study defined the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 as a comprehensive long-term strategy aimed at addressing South Africa's socio-economic challenges through collaborative governance, policy integration, and inclusive decision-making.

1.10. ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Background of the Study

This chapter presented the introduction, background of the study, problem statement, aim of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, definitions of operational concepts, and the organisation of the study.

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CHAPTER 2: Literature Review:

This chapter presented a review of the relevant literature on the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. It examined the conceptual framework and key provisions underpinning the Plan, thereby providing a foundation for critical analysis. The discussion encompassed the introduction and overarching vision of the NDP 2030, the progress made toward achieving its principal targets, the proposed implementation phases, and the major critiques of the Plan.

CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Perspective

This chapter provided an analysis and insights into the central focus of the study, namely the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. It did so by examining the various conceptual foundations of the Government of National Unity and assessing how it could be better positioned to influence the realisation of the NDP's objectives. The chapter specifically critiqued and provided an overview of the establishment, challenges, and overall impact of the GNU on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030, as well as South Africa's governance approach within the complexities associated with the GNU in advancing the Plan's goals.

CHAPTER 4: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the research design and methodology the researcher will employ in conducting this study. This chapter unravelled the research design, research methodology, study area, study population, sampling method and sampling size, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 5: Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

This chapter provides an analysis and interpretation of the gathered secondary data, including the existing literature on the formation of coalition governments, government gazettes, secondary documents, government legislation, and other relevant secondary sources, as will be justified in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6: Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusions

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This chapter presented the study's key findings and provided recommendations on the impact of coalition governments on promoting good governance. This chapter also provided mechanisms to address challenges associated with GNU, guidance on the GNU framework, and recommendations on how future researchers should tread and guide related studies.

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CHAPTER: 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter of this study provided an introduction and background, along with a problem statement. This chapter will present a literature review of the concept of the National Development Plan 2030. This was done by studying the conceptual overview and provisions within which the critique and analysis of the National Development Plan 2030 are found, including its introduction, vision, progress towards achieving the NDP's principal key targets, the proposed phases of NDP 2030, and the critics of this plan. This chapter explored relevant sources on the comprehension of the government of national unity and assessed how it impacts the realisation of the National Development Plan goals. The chapter began by outlining theoretical and legal provisions relevant to the research. From this point, the study provided a conceptualisation of the National Development Plan 2030 and the government of national unity. The conceptualisation of these two concepts entailed principles of inclusive governance, national development strategies, and frameworks for government of national unity aimed at collaborative policymaking.

2.2 THE FORMULATION AND INTRODUCTION OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Thwala (2023: 41) asserts that since 1994, South Africa has achieved significant milestones, including the creation of a powerful base for democratic governance and expanded access to essential services such as education, healthcare, water, electricity, housing, and social protection for communities previously marginalised under Apartheid. According to the OECD Economic Survey: South Africa (2025), despite advances made, the country continues to face persistent developmental challenges. The National Planning Commission (2023) stated that a more democratic model was followed in the initial phase, allowing individual sectors and departments to formulate plans aligned with their specific mandates. Central coordination, when present, was facilitated through the State of the Nation Address (SONA) and the Programme of Action (PoA), which were overseen at the core of government. One of the key policies is the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, whose development process in South Africa can be outlined as follows:

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In 2009, during his State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Jacob Zuma introduced the New Growth Path (NGP), a policy framework designed to stimulate faster economic growth and address poverty, unemployment, and inequality (Republic of South Africa, 2009). As South Africa continued to grapple with the legacy of apartheid, the focus gradually shifted towards a more strategic and long-term planning approach. This shift led to the adoption of the National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030, supported by the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) as its five-year implementation vehicle (NPC, 2011). By 2012, the NDP had been endorsed as the country's primary blueprint for economic transformation and sustainable growth, offering a comprehensive analysis of the structural challenges that must be addressed to achieve the Vision 2030 goals (NPC, 2012). The National Planning Commission's Diagnostic Report (2011) identified nine interrelated challenges that continue to obstruct South Africa's developmental progress. Among these is the chronic problem of unemployment, as too few people are absorbed into the labour market. This is compounded by the persistently inadequate quality of school education, especially within Black communities, which entrenches inequality and constrains the country's human capital base. Infrastructure poses another significant barrier, as much of it is either poorly located, inadequate to meet the needs of citizens, or under-maintained, thereby limiting both economic growth and access to essential services (Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, 2011: 3). These shortcomings are closely tied to enduring spatial divides that hinder inclusive development, leaving many communities geographically and economically marginalised. Arguably, the OECD's Economic Survey (2025) argues that the economy's over-reliance on resource-intensive activities further undermines its sustainability, particularly in light of global pressures. At the same time, the public health system struggles to meet demand and maintain a consistent quality of care, leaving substantial portions of the population underserved. Nyane (2023: 20-25) posits that the broader public services face similar weaknesses, often characterised by uneven quality and inefficiency across provinces and municipalities. In addition to the above, Lacher (2021) is concerned that the prevalence of corruption exacerbates these structural weaknesses, diverting much-needed resources away from developmental objectives and eroding public trust in governance institutions. The National Planning Commission's Diagnostic Report (2011) emphasised that South Africa remains a divided society, with historical inequalities continuing to shape access to opportunities, weaken social

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cohesion, and perpetuate economic exclusion. These diagnostic findings served as the cornerstone of the National Development Plan (NDP), which was designed to address each of the nine challenges systematically. A report by Sulla and Zikhali (2018) indicated that the NDP set out long-term strategies to expand employment, raise the quality of education, modernise infrastructure, and bridge spatial divides. It also emphasised the importance of diversifying the economy, strengthening healthcare and public service delivery, combating corruption, and fostering unity in a society still fractured by inequality. Broom (2023) argued that the NDP was crafted as a direct response to these structural impediments, with the ultimate aim of achieving inclusive growth, reducing poverty, and building a more equitable society by 2030. According to the National Planning Commission (2012), the main goals of the National Development Plan (NDP) are to reduce unemployment, end poverty, and close the inequality gap (NPC, 2012). To achieve these goals, the plan focuses on ensuring that all share in economic growth, enhancing people's skills and abilities, building a stronger, more capable state, and promoting good leadership and partnerships across society (National Planning Commission, 2011; Republic of South Africa, 2012).

According to Maemu (2023:28), the National Development Plan (NDP) aims to achieve several key objectives by 2030. It seeks to bring South Africans together, regardless of race or social class, around a shared programme to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality. A World Bank report (2018) highlights that one of the NDP's focuses is to boost economic growth, promote exports, and create an economy that generates more employment opportunities. The World Bank 2022 Country Climate and Development Report emphasises the development of critical capabilities for both individuals and the country, including skills, infrastructure, social security, strong institutions, and partnerships at both national and international levels. The National Planning Commission (2023) maintains that the National Development Plan further aims to build a capable and developmental state, supported by strong leadership throughout society. This underscores the importance of prioritising the use of existing coordination mechanisms to guide and strengthen the integration of sustainable development initiatives (OECD, 2016: 69). As the custodian of the NDP and given its strategic position at the centre of government, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation is well placed to champion policy coherence between the NDP and the 2030 Agenda. National Planning Commission (2023: 8) emphasised that government functionaries are expected

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to work collaboratively to address the nation's challenges and achieve the NDP's long-term vision for South Africa.

2.3 THE VISION OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICA

The National Planning Commission (NPC) highlighted nine major challenges facing South Africa in its 2011 Diagnostic Report. These included persistent unemployment, weak education and infrastructure, an unstable economy, inadequate and poor-quality healthcare and public services, elevated levels of corruption, and deep social inequality (Zarenda, 2013, & NPC, 2012). In response, the government adopted the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030 in 2012 as the country's long-term socio-economic roadmap to address these ongoing issues (NPC, 2012). Pietersen (2023: 465) argued that the National Development Plan provides South Africa with a long-term strategic policy framework intended to promote inclusive economic growth, reduce poverty, and address inequality through coordinated national development. Khambule (2024: 3) stated that the NDP sets out an unobstructed vision and practical goals to address the social, economic, and environmental challenges confronting South Africa. Kanjere (2015) found that its priorities are centred on four focus areas: rural economic development, social protection, regional and international relations, and community safety. The NDP Review (2020) emphasises that the central aim of the NDP is to ensure that all South Africans enjoy a decent standard of living by reducing poverty and inequality. This involves improving access to housing, clean water, electricity, sanitation, infrastructure, quality healthcare, social protection, jobs, quality education, and safety and security. Achieving this vision requires strong state intervention, targeted investments, and broad social transformation (Swartz, 2019; Shava & Maramura, 2017; Hendriks *et al*., 2012; NPC, 2012). Shava & Maramura (2017) and Ramoroka (2013) are of the view that the success of the NDP depends on uniting citizens, unleashing their collective potential, growing an inclusive economy, and strengthening state capacity and leadership to tackle the complex challenges facing the nation (Shava & Maramura, 2017; Ramoroka, 2013; NPC, 2012).

Similarly, Shava & Maramura (2017) and Ramoroka (2013) argue that the National Development Plan (NDP) was introduced with the central aim of addressing inequality, poverty, and unemployment. According to the NDP Review (2020), the NDP takes a holistic approach by

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addressing all areas of society and providing guidance on how the government should advance each sector to meet the needs of all South Africans. At its core, the National Planning Commission (2011) highlights that the NDP seeks to guarantee that every citizen enjoys a decent standard of living and a life of dignity. Kanjere (2015) further states that the plan envisions transforming South Africa into a prosperous, fair, and sustainable society. It serves as a roadmap for overcoming current challenges while also creating opportunities that will secure long-term well-being and shared prosperity. According to the National Planning Commission: Reforming the South African Government Planning System (2015), the achievement of these goals depends on the effectiveness of their implementation. The NDP has been implemented in phases to ensure that the long-term plans of all national departments are aligned with its objectives (Kanjere, 2015). Swanepoel (2022) notes that measuring NDP implementation is a complex process that involves multiple stakeholders, including government, the private sector, civil society, and international partners. Successfully conducting the NDP requires a multifaceted approach that includes strategic planning, strong institutional frameworks, and continuous monitoring and evaluation (DIRCO 2013:16).

According to Rafa and Schuenemann (2013:6) and Ndeke (2013: 46), the philosophy and strategy behind the National Development Plan (NDP) are based on the idea of developing a nation's capabilities to achieve human development and inclusive prosperity. Rooted in the broad consultative process that shaped its drafting and eventual adoption by Parliament, the NDP should be seen as a shared roadmap for all South Africans (NPC, 2023). It is meant to guide, motivate, and empower the nation in its collective developmental journey. Van Nieuwkerk (2013:18) asserts that the NDP emphasises the strengthening of several critical capacities to achieve its goals. These include human capabilities, such as education, skills, and health, which are essential for personal and societal growth. It also highlights physical capabilities, especially the creation and maintenance of strong social and economic infrastructure to support development. In addition, the Plan calls for improved institutional capabilities, which relate to how effectively government and its agencies, including state-owned enterprises, deliver services and drive growth (Ambe & Badenhorst, 2012). Similarly, Sulla and Zikhali (2018) contend that financial capabilities are a key enabler, enabling economic participation while reducing inequality and poverty.

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According to Gillwald et al (2020), the National Development Plan (NDP) envisions a capable and developmental state that serves as the driving force behind South Africa's socio-economic transformation. This vision entails a professional, merit-based, and accountable public service capable of effectively coordinating policy implementation and delivering high-quality services to all citizens. The NDP emphasises that such a state must not only be efficient in administrative performance but must also be developmentally oriented, proactively addressing poverty, inequality, and unemployment through evidence-based policies and integrated governance mechanisms (National Planning Commission, 2012). A capable state, according to the NDP (2012), is underpinned by strong institutions, ethical leadership, and a skilled bureaucracy committed to the public good. Public servants must possess both technical competence and moral integrity to ensure that state resources are used transparently and efficiently. Furthermore, the NDP highlights the importance of intergovernmental coordination, where all spheres of government, including the national, provincial, and local, work collaboratively to align policies and programmes with the broader developmental agenda (TIPS, 2018).

Chandler (2014:5) argues that addressing South Africa's core challenges of poverty and inequality requires raising the living standards of all citizens to the minimum levels set out in the National Development Plan (NDP). As Van der Berg et al. (2020) noted, achieving this goal involves a combination of policy, legislative, and institutional interventions, alongside improvements to physical environments that enable people to access a wide range of social and economic opportunities. These opportunities must be matched with investments in human capabilities, supported by an effective social wage that provides access to quality education, skills development, healthcare, and social protection. According to Cawe and Benjamin (2020), strengthening these institutional, physical, and human capabilities is expected to lead to higher employment and increased earnings. At the same time, faster economic growth will expand opportunities for all and generate the resources necessary to sustain development. To make this cycle effective, the NDP advocates a paradigm shift that intentionally links institutional, social, and economic reforms, ensuring they work together rather than in isolation (Accenture, 2018). According to Aliber, Mabhera, and Chikwanha et al (2017), the Plan proposed an integrated development model that recognises the roles, responsibilities, and actions of multiple actors. Central to this model are strong leadership, an effective government, and an engaged and active citizenry. The NDP

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envisions itself as a unifying framework that provides a common focus for coordinated action across all sectors and communities of South African society, ensuring that development efforts are strategic, inclusive, and mutually reinforcing (Fedderke & Mengisteab, 2016).

To realise its vision of a capable and developmental state, the National Development Plan (NDP) outlines several interlinked strategic priorities designed to enhance governance, institutional efficiency, and public sector professionalism (Kumo, 2017). These priorities are not merely administrative adjustments but form the foundation for transforming the state into an agile, accountable, and development-oriented institution. First, the NDP calls for stabilising the political-administrative interface, ensuring a clear separation between political leadership and administrative functions (National Planning Commission, 2013). This distinction is critical for protecting the integrity of the public service, reducing political interference in operational decisions, and promoting continuity in governance irrespective of political transitions (National Planning Commission, 2012). Ambe and Badenhorst (2012:242) contend that stable administrative leadership enables long-term policy implementation and institutional memory within government departments. Second, the Plan emphasises the need to make public service and local government administration careers of choice. This involves creating an environment that attracts and retains talented professionals by providing competitive remuneration, structured career progression, and continuous learning opportunities (Go *et al.,* 2013:6 & Ndeke, 2013:46). A motivated and competent civil service is central to realising developmental goals and delivering high-quality services to citizens (Public Service Commission, 2021).

Thirdly, the NDP identifies the importance of developing technical and specialist professional skills within the public sector (Ndeke, 2013: 46). South Africa's developmental challenges require expertise in areas such as infrastructure planning, public finance management, data analytics, and innovation policy. Investing in targeted training and professional development programmes can enhance the state's capacity to design and implement complex developmental initiatives effectively (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2020). Fourth, there is a call to strengthen delegation, accountability, and oversight across all spheres of government. Clear lines of authority, well-defined performance targets, and robust monitoring systems are necessary to ensure transparency and efficiency (Geib & Swenson, 2013: 5). Enhanced oversight mechanisms,

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including the role of Parliament, the Auditor-General, and Chapter 9 institutions, play a crucial role in enforcing accountability and combating corruption (OECD, 2022).

Fifth, the NDP underscores the need to improve interdepartmental coordination. The Department of Performance Management and Evaluation highlighted that fragmentation across government departments often leads to policy duplication and resource inefficiencies (Pietersen, 2023: 470). Strengthening horizontal coordination through integrated planning and information-sharing systems can promote policy coherence and ensure that developmental programmes are aligned with national priorities (National Treasury, 2020). Sixth, the Plan aims to support and strengthen local government, recognising municipalities as the frontline of service delivery and local economic development. Strengthening local governance requires building administrative capacity, improving fiscal management, and fostering partnerships with communities and private actors to promote inclusive development (Masiya & Chigwata, 2024: 94). Lastly, the NDP calls for the realisation of the developmental potential of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). SOEs are envisioned as strategic instruments for industrialisation, infrastructure development, and innovation. However, governance failures and financial mismanagement have constrained their effectiveness. Reforming SOEs to operate transparently, efficiently, and in alignment with national priorities is critical for leveraging their full developmental role (Mokoena & Ntim, 2023).

2.4 PROGRESS TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

Looking at the period from 2012 to 2022, which marked the first ten years of the NDP, the following discussion examines whether South Africa is on track to meet the development goals set out in the plan (DPME (2022) Policy Framework for Integrated Planning). The South African Government General Procurement Guidelines (2013:16) acknowledged that the analysis focuses on three key areas: parliamentary oversight, accountability in state-owned enterprises, and service delivery problems in local government. According to Go, Moyer, Rafa & Schuenemann (2013:6), the developmental state refers to a unique model of state-led development that relies on active government intervention in the economy. According to Gumede (2022), the state is guided by a developmental ideology and uses its administrative power, skills, and resources to promote economic growth and development. This approach contrasts with the free-market theory, which assumes that markets can regulate themselves and limits the state's role (Pietersen, 2023: 464).

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Pietersen (2023: 470–471) stresses that South Africa has failed to implement its policies to address ongoing social problems. This lack of proper implementation dates back and has contributed to growing service delivery backlogs and challenges, which, in turn, have serious negative effects on the country's democracy (Tebele, 2016). After 1994, South Africa introduced several major development policies to guide its transformation landscape (Berliner, 2016). A GNU can mitigate the risks associated. These included the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in 1994, Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) in 1996, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) in 2006, and, more recently, the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2012. According to Naidoo (2021), the RDP focused on addressing urgent social and economic challenges, such as housing shortages, unemployment, poor healthcare and education, and the general economic decline. Vesely (2015) contends that GEAR was introduced to stabilise and strengthen the economy during the transition period. According to Birkland (2015), the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) sought to accelerate economic growth while ensuring wealth was more fairly distributed. The NDP, on the other hand, aims to build consensus and drive efforts to reduce unemployment, inequality, and poverty significantly (Madzivhandila, 2014). In fact, Turnpenny (2015) states that South Africa's development policies were created with good intentions to address the nation's many challenges. However, the lack of visible progress raises the question of whether the problem lies not in the policies themselves but in how they were conducted. As Mpya (2020) argues, well-written policies do not automatically lead to positive development outcomes if they are not effectively implemented. In fact, the main reason behind the failure of these otherwise sound policies has been poor implementation (Padayachee, 2017). Because of this, many South Africans continue to doubt the government's ability to achieve its developmental goals, as the ongoing obstacles reflect weaknesses in turning policy goals into real, practical progress. This situation places additional pressure on policymakers to create stronger strategies that can guide and manage resources more effectively. The key lesson from this experience is that poorly implemented or poorly designed development policies can have long-lasting negative effects for both the state and its citizens (Mpya, 2020). According to Tebele (2016) and Kanjere (2015), the challenges and failures in implementing policies in South Africa can be linked to several common factors.

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In some cases, Abedian (2018) states that policies are based on unrealistic social ideals that do not align with reality. Von-Holdt (2010) argues that other policies collapse because there are no proper incentive structures to encourage individuals to support or drive their implementation. Overall, Von-Holdt's ideational argument is that political interests and power struggles often interfere, while the highly politicised nature of certain policies limits their ability to bring about real change. Another challenge is that some policies pursue multiple, and sometimes conflicting, goals that are not clearly defined. Makgetla (2017) states that insufficient capacity and resources further undermine success, while limited consultation with affected stakeholders often creates resistance during implementation. Additionally, some policies are too complex for frontline staff to understand and apply effectively. In many cases, there are no clear processes or guidelines to guide their implementation (Malatjie et al., 2024: 1-12). Finally, certain policies are built on assumptions that market forces will naturally improve and that enough revenue will be available to fund the programmes. These assumptions often prove false (Mosala, Venter, & Bain, 2017). Madzivhandila (2014) explains that these challenges create an implementation gap, which is the growing difference between what policies set out to achieve and what is actually accomplished. While South Africa has many well-designed policies, the lack of a clear plan of action to implement them remains a serious weakness. Odongo and Kyei (2018) argued that governments should focus on creating realistic policies rather than aspirational ones that ignore the actual social and economic context. Instead of serving the interests of the elites, policies should represent and prioritise the needs of people experiencing poverty. This means placing greater emphasis on pro-poor policies that directly assist low-income or unemployed people and aim to reduce poverty and other deep-rooted socio-economic challenges. The NDP recognises that poor policy implementation is the main reason behind South Africa's slow development (NPC, 2012). Fedderke and Mengisteab (2016) provide that the NDP notes that the country often moves from one quick-fix policy to another without rigorously evaluating the success or failure of previous policies. This reflects the government's failure to learn from experience. When one policy does not work, a new one is introduced without examining how the first could have been better implemented.

2.5 PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE TARGETS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030

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Although the democratic government made notable gains in employment, poverty reduction, and economic growth during the first decade up to 2008, this progress has since slowed down (Dutta & Lanvin (eds), 2020). While there have been pockets of success in public investment and service delivery, the key social and economic indicators suggest otherwise. Since the global fiscal crisis of 2008/09, South Africa has at best experienced stagnation and, at worst, signs of a weakened economic capacity (World Bank, 2024: 18–21). According to Mondliwa and Roberts (2018), South Africa has, over the past decade, shown clear warning signs of drifting into a dangerous downward spiral. According to the South African Government General Procurement Guidelines (2013:16), Governance gaps, once confined to administrative shortcomings, have now deeply affected the very processes of raising and distributing public resources. The country has moved beyond a simple crossroads, and reviving the economy from stagnation now appears to be a less daunting task compared to the broader crisis at hand (PovcalNet, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this decline, striking an already fragile economy and exposing its vulnerabilities (OECD, 2023:15–19). A study by Programme of Action (POA) in 2017 acknowledged that a toxic mix of factors continues to drive this vicious cycle: declining investment levels, shrinking tax revenues, and escalating debt service costs that consume public funds, leaving little room for development-oriented spending. According to Orthofer (2016), employment opportunities are dwindling, while poverty and inequality continue to rise. This convergence of economic stagnation and social decline underscores the urgent need for bold interventions to restore confidence, stimulate investment, and redirect resources toward inclusive growth and development. Khambule (2024) argued that achieving the goals of the National Development Plan (NDP) requires more than a vision. It calls for inclusive economic growth, strong social protection systems, investment in human development, and the building of a capable and accountable state. In addition, the success of the plan depends on the active participation of all stakeholders, government, business, labour, and communities working together through a genuine social compact. Strong leadership and consistent political will are critical to advancing the plan (NPC, 2012).

However, in the seven years following the adoption of the NDP in South Africa, the pace of progress has been far slower than expected (International Labour Organisation, 2018). Recognising this, the National Planning Commission (2020) conducted a detailed assessment to understand better why the outcomes had not met the initial expectations. The review highlighted

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that while the NDP emphasises the importance of effective implementation, this has not translated into meaningful improvements in the daily lives of South Africans. One of the biggest gaps was that the NDP, while comprehensive in vision, did not provide a detailed and rigorous roadmap for implementation (NPC Diagnostic Report, 2011). According to the National Planning Commission (NPC) Ten-Year Review of the National Development Plan (2023), the plan's broad strategies lacked sufficient practical detail. This weakness was notable because the Commission's Diagnostic Report (2011) had already identified poor policy implementation and weak partnerships as the main reasons behind South Africa's slow development since 1994. The NDP itself recognised that "doing things differently" was essential to breaking away from old cycles of underperformance (NDP, 2012). It called for immediate action and a paradigm shift in how development was approached. A review by the National Planning Commission (2019) contends that while the plan received broad support across society at the time of its launch, that support did not translate into collective action. The anticipated strong social compact, meant to unite South Africans behind the plan, never fully materialised (Stats SA, 2017b). As a result, the NDP has struggled to generate the momentum needed to meet its ambitious targets by 2030.

One of the biggest challenges facing the National Development Plan (NDP) has been the inability of different sectors of society to put the country's broader interests above their own (Stats SA, 2015a). Madzivhandila and Malatjie (2024: 115–120) posit that a lack of trust between government, business, and labour has made it difficult to build the cooperation necessary for real progress. According to Witte and Burger (2024), political and ideological disputes within the state have also shifted attention away from the NDP, which was meant to serve as the central guiding framework for development. As a result, South Africa has fallen short on many of the interim targets that the plan envisioned. The study by Stats SA (2019b) reveals that unemployment, poverty, and inequality remain widespread, while crime and violence, especially against women and children, continue to cause social hardship and fuel negative public sentiment. The private sector has grown increasingly hesitant and withdrawn, with low levels of confidence in the future (Makhaya & Roberts, 2014). This has limited investment and job creation, further stifling growth. At the same time, the deep economic, social, and spatial inequalities inherited from apartheid continue to undermine South Africa's competitiveness and weaken its human potential (African Development Bank, 2018). Lannoy De et al. (2018) argue that many people are deprived of the

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skills and opportunities needed to participate fully in the economy, leading to persistent low productivity, high unemployment, and entrenched inequality. Even areas that were seen as early opportunities for progress, such as infrastructure, have been poorly managed and neglected(Watermeyer & Phillips, 2020). According to Kumo (2017), instead of being engines of growth and transformation, State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) have become a drag on the economy. On the other hand, Spaull (2018) maintains that widespread corruption, affecting both public and private sectors, has further deepened the crisis, making it harder for the state to fulfil its developmental role. The weakening of state institutions, mismanagement in the public service, and poor support for small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) have eroded the government's capacity to implement the NDP effectively (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Rising debt levels and declining confidence in governance have compounded the problem. Zikhali and Precious (2018) posit that as a result, poor service delivery and a slow, unevenly growing economy are reducing the social wage and undermining social cohesion. Instead of moving towards the inclusive, transformative society envisioned in the NDP, South Africa finds itself battling systemic challenges that weaken both development and national unity (Turok & Visagie, 2017).

According to Goldin and Reinert (2012), since the adoption of the National Development Plan (NDP), South Africa has struggled with a lack of strong political will and leadership to drive its implementation. Without the necessary inspiration and coordinated action, the country has fallen behind on many of the vision and targets set for 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2023:30–35). This gap underscores the urgent need for a course correction to realign with the NDP's original vision. Moving forward, a practical and well-defined implementation strategy is required, one that focuses directly on addressing the most critical challenges (DPME, 2017). Key among these priorities is strengthening the state and its institutions so that governance and service delivery can be restored (National Planning Commission, 2023:52–55). Hendrickse (2023) argued that this involves taking firm steps to professionalise the public service, stabilise leadership and management structures within government, and ensure fiscal sustainability. A study by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2014) found that the fight against corruption is equally important, as it continues to weaken confidence in both the state and the broader economy. The 7th administration of government has already begun to tackle some of these pressing issues (The Presidential Employment Stimulus, 2024). According to the Stats SA (2025), these initiatives provide an

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important foundation on which to build. The 2023/24 annual review of the 6th Administration of South Africa maintains that what is now required is renewed urgency and a decisive effort to re-energise the implementation of the NDP. This must be guided by strategic coherence, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for government, business, labour, and other social partners, as well as stronger accountability mechanisms (The Forum of South African Directors General, 2019). Only then can the country move closer to realising the inclusive growth and development that the NDP envisioned for 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2019).

South Africa has made certain advances in addressing its developmental challenges. However, assessments by the National Planning Commission (NPC) in 2019 and 2020 revealed that the core obstacles identified in the Diagnostic Report (June 2011) remain unresolved. The pace of transformation has been slower than envisioned, and the country has not moved significantly closer to fulfilling its Constitutional commitment to dismantle the structural legacy of apartheid and build a more prosperous, inclusive society (South Africa's presidency, 2025). The Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) (2024-2029) has identified that, in some respects, the situation has even deteriorated, with evidence of regression in critical areas such as poverty reduction, inequality, and employment creation. Poverty and inequality remain at the heart of South Africa's persistent socio-economic crisis, limiting the potential for sustainable growth and undermining social cohesion. As noted by the National Planning Commission (2023: 46-49), these challenges highlight the gap between the NDP's aspirations and the reality of its implementation.

To confront these entrenched problems, the NDP outlines a set of broad apex priorities designed to serve as a foundation for transformative change (National Development Plan, 2012). The National Planning Commission (2012: 24-43) contended that these priorities focus on stimulating inclusive economic growth, reducing inequality, strengthening human capabilities through education and healthcare, expanding social protection, and fostering unity among all sectors of society. The proposed measures aim to tackle the structural roots of underdevelopment while creating opportunities that can lift citizens out of poverty and restore confidence in the state's ability to deliver meaningful change (Onwuegbuchulam, 2024:261–278). Bhorat, Rooney, and Steenkamp (2022: 12–18) maintain that the first measure needed is to raise employment by accelerating economic growth. Creating more jobs is seen as the most effective way to reduce

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poverty and inequality, while also ensuring the economy becomes more inclusive and sustainable (Khambule, 2024). The second priority focuses on strengthening human capabilities through investments in education, skills development, innovation, and social protection (Van Broekhuizen, Van der Berg, & Hofmeyr, 2016). On the other hand, Van der Berg, Gustafsson and Malindi (2020) argue that the government should equip citizens with the knowledge and skills required to participate meaningfully in the economy, while also providing a safety net that shields the most vulnerable from falling deeper into poverty. The third priority highlights the importance of building the state's capability to function as a developmental and transformative force (Programme of Action (POA, 2017). A capable state is essential for effective policy implementation, efficient service delivery, and the creation of an environment that encourages growth, investment, and social cohesion. Together, these three priorities form the foundation of the NDP's vision to reduce inequality, eliminate poverty, and place South Africa on a path towards sustainable and inclusive development (National Planning Commission, 2012: 24–43).

It is essential to assess South Africa's progress against the goals outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP) during its first seven years of implementation, commencing in 2012. This study specifically examines performance in key areas, including poverty reduction, inequality, and unemployment. It is worth noting that the study does not alter or rewrite the NDP itself. Instead, it assesses the progress made so far, recognising that only a four-year period remains before the 2030 deadline. The National Planning Commission (2023: 12-21) also acknowledged that significant shifts have taken place since the adoption of the NDP. These include demographic changes, shifts in domestic and international politics, and the emergence of new challenges (StatsSA, 2017). Global dynamics have also played a role. The rapid rise of digital technologies has disrupted traditional industries. In contrast, changes in the global political economy, such as the rise of inward-looking policies in major economies and the prolonged trade tensions between the United States and China, have created uncertainty for national development strategies (Rodrik, 2024:14–29). In addition, the escalating impact of climate change continues to affect communities, the environment, and the economy, demanding urgent adaptation (IPCC, 2023: 37–52). The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) adds another layer of complexity, bringing both risks of job displacement and opportunities for innovation, growth, and improved service delivery (Schwab, 2021: 83–101).

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2.5.1 Poverty Eradication

The National Development Plan (NDP) aims to eradicate poverty in South Africa by 2030, building upon the progress achieved during the early 2000s (National Planning Commission, 2012). Between 2019 and 2021, the country recorded a notable escalation in poverty levels due to severe pandemic-related shocks, with the upper-bound poverty headcount rate surging by seven percentage points up to 63% during the peak containment period (Stats SA, 2024). While absolute numbers levelled off in 2022, prolonged macroeconomic stagnation worsened financial pressures, pushing the total number of people living in absolute poverty up to approximately 23.2 million citizens (Stats SA, 2025). According to the National Poverty Lines framework, the threshold required to afford a basic food basket, known as the Food Poverty Line (FPL), was adjusted from R561 per person per month in 2019 to R760 by 2023, before climbing to R796 by mid-2024 due to escalating food and energy costs (Statistics South Africa, 2024:1–8). Consequently, despite expanded systemic reliance on social relief mechanisms to cushion households, approximately 37.9% of the national population remained trapped below the lower-bound poverty line by the close of this cycle (Statistics South Africa, 2025: 6–15). The concept of a social wage, within the broader framework of social protection, has played a vital role in alleviating poverty during this period (Patel, 2022: 214–228). The macroeconomic terrain under the Government of National Unity (GNU) remains structurally defined by volatile cost-of-living adjustments that directly affect vulnerable segments of the national population. According to the baseline records of Statistics South Africa (2024: 1), the Upper-Bound Poverty Line (UBPL), the official threshold used to track individuals who cannot afford essential non-food commodities alongside basic nutritional intake, was initially catalogued at R1 634 per person per month. As global inflationary pressures and food-pricing supply shocks accelerated across subsequent data-tracking cycles, this money-metric safety margin required systematic methodological updates. To maintain statistical tracking alignment with real-world consumption patterns, (Statistics South Africa, 2026: 1) published its updated rebased metrics, adjusting the upper-bound line to a definitive R2 846 per person per month in May 2025 prices. From a broader developmental perspective, scholarly analysis indicates that this shifting economic environment has driven more than half of the national population into absolute money-metric vulnerability. Matyana and Mpofu (2026: 295) argued that structural deprivation remains highly racialised and gendered, as severe gaps in localised economic architectures ensure that Black African and Coloured women continue to face the highest statistical probability of

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collapsing below this newly rebased upper-bound threshold across historically resource-constrained provinces.

Statistical evidence indicates that the government has achieved measurable success in reducing asset poverty and enhancing the living standards of ordinary South Africans through a comprehensive mix of social services (Millennium Development Goals, 2015; National Development Agency, 2019). According to Stats SA (2017), evidence indicates that the social wage has had a substantial positive effect on quality of life. According to the Spatial Disparities Report (2018), the multidimensional poverty headcount declined from 17.9% in 2001 to 8.0% in 2011, and further to 7% in 2016. Spatial disparities also persist. On the one hand, Stats SA (2023) contends that approximately one-third of urban households belong to the poorest 40% of all households, compared with 57% in the former homelands. Migration from rural to urban areas has contributed to poverty reduction between 2008 and 2014; about 385,000 South Africans were lifted above the poverty line through urban migration (Turok & Visagie, 2017). Nevertheless, this shift has simultaneously increased the number of poor people residing in urban areas. The availability of services and employment opportunities plays a pivotal role in alleviating poverty (Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies, 2017). Providing essential services is more effective and cost-efficient in urban areas, where infrastructure and human resources are concentrated (World Bank, 2018). According to the National Planning Commission (2018), urban agglomerations serve as key drivers of employment creation by bringing businesses, workers, and service providers into proximity, enabling more efficient infrastructure development and delivery. South Africa's eight metropolitan municipalities collectively contribute approximately 57% of the national economy, generate about half of all formal and informal employment, and are home to 40% of the country's population (Stats SA, 2017). According to Stats SA (2018), between 2015 and 2017, 60% of new jobs were created in these metropolitan regions, which continue to attract significant levels of in-migration as people seek better economic opportunities. In low-income communities, a limited number of wage earners often support multiple dependents, leaving their incomes stretched thin (Visagie, 2017). Therefore, reducing the cost of living for low-income households is a crucial component of any poverty eradication strategy (National Planning Commission, 12019). Notably, food expenditure accounts for around 30% of total spending among the poorest 40% of households (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2025). Shepherd (2012) posits that insufficient food

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production relative to demand has constrained poverty reduction efforts, particularly as food prices increased by 35% in real terms between 1999 and 2015.

The country does not yet have a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, although several measures have been implemented to address poverty (Sulla, Victor, Zikhali, & Precious *et al,* 2018). While multiple programmes have shown positive impact, there is a need to consolidate these efforts into a single, coherent national anti-poverty strategy (South African Presidency, 2025). According to the Presidency of the 7th Administration (2025), integrating existing initiatives such as social wage interventions into a unified social protection system can significantly enhance efforts to reduce poverty and promote employment. The key focus areas should therefore prioritise actions that directly contribute to lowering poverty, inequality, and unemployment, as outlined below:

- Poverty Reduction through Municipal Infrastructure and Service Delivery: Efforts to reduce poverty must prioritise expanding both the coverage and quality of basic service delivery, with a particular focus on upgrading municipal management and preventing failures in critical infrastructure. According to the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2024: 14), achieving equitable access to water, sanitation, and electricity requires addressing localised governance instability and maintaining asset life cycles. This shift ensures that service delivery directly serves as a social wage multiplier, buffering households against economic shocks.
- Targeted Township Investment and Suburban Strategic Densification: Addressing spatial inequality requires a dual approach that actively corrects historic under-investment while optimising existing well-located infrastructure. As noted by Harrison and Todes (2024: 89), former township and homeland areas continue to experience severe structural disadvantages, requiring dedicated localised industrialisation strategies and township economic activation. Concurrently, former white, Indian, and coloured suburbs present significant opportunities for strategic densification. Implementing localised zoning reforms in these well-located spaces increases the social wage by giving lower-income citizens proximate access to existing, high-standard health and educational resources (Turok & Visagie, 2025: 42).
- Alleviating Unemployment through Spatial Alignment and Public Sector Partnerships: To successfully reduce unemployment, government interventions must directly combat the

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persistent "spatial mismatch" that confines job seekers to peripheral areas far from urban economic hubs. Research by the Human Sciences Research Council (2025: 112) shows that bringing people closer to economic opportunities through affordable housing drastically reduces job-seeking costs and increases employment access. Under the 7th Administration directives, this spatial reallocation is actively paired with expanded public employment initiatives, including revamped versions of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) (Presidency, 2025). Furthermore, the GNU prioritises partnerships with the private sector to scale up Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and deploy targeted technical and vocational training to bridge localised skills gaps.

2.5.2 Reducing Inequality

South Africa continues to face one of the most severe income inequality challenges in the world, as reported by both the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (2019). The National Development Plan (NDP) set a target to reduce the Gini coefficient, a key measure of income inequality, from 0.69 in 2010 to 0.60 by 2030. However, progress has been slow, as the Gini coefficient tends to shift gradually over time (National Development Plan 2030, 2012). Between 1994 and 2006, inequality worsened significantly, with the coefficient increasing by approximately 0.05 points. Although millions of South Africans were lifted out of extreme poverty between 2006 and 2015, the gains were disproportionately captured by higher-income groups with greater access to skills and assets (Willman et al, 2019). While inequality declined slightly between 2006 and 2009, improvements have since stagnated. The NDP (2012) envisioned that the share of income accruing to the bottom 40% of the population would rise from 6% in 2010 to 10% by 2030. However, by 2015, it had only reached 8.3%. Recent data from South Africa's Voluntary National Review Report (2019) confirms that income distribution remains highly polarised, leaving South Africa among the most unequal nations globally and struggling to build broad-based human capabilities.

Compared internationally, South Africa’s inequality remains exceptionally stark, with the income share of the top 10% relative to the bottom 60% presenting a severe structural imbalance. According to Statistics South Africa (2026), the persistent nature of economic disparities continues to characterise the country as a profound outlier in global distribution metrics. Historically, the top

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10% received an alarming portion of total income, far exceeding global averages. Data models published by Czajka and Gethin (2025) indicate that the top 10% of South African earners capture 70% of total pretax national income. In direct contrast, recent metrics published by Statistics South Africa (2026) reveal that the combined income shares of the middle and lower groups (deciles 5-6 and 1-4, respectively) have not shifted meaningfully. Meleshchuk and Schauer (2026) demonstrate that the bottom 60% of the population collectively survives on less than 10% of aggregate national income, emphasising a deeply skewed income distribution cemented by structural economic segregation and lack of informal job absorption. Although early policy documents, such as the National Development Plan, omitted explicit targets for net wealth redistribution, this area requires urgent attention. Empirical findings by Chatterjee, Czajka, and Gethin (2022) reveal unparalleled levels of asset concentration, showing that the top 10% of South Africans own 86% of the nation's total wealth, while the top 1% alone holds 55% of all national assets. As macroeconomists like Piketty (2020) note, even in developed economies, the bottom half of the population typically owns around 5% of total wealth. However, contemporary data analysed by McKeever (2024**)** shows that South Africa's middle class holds an exceptionally small share of national wealth, a structural pattern that stands out uniquely even among highly unequal societies. This situation poses serious concerns for sustainable socio-economic transformation and intergenerational upward mobility. Recent reports by Statistics South Africa (2026) indicate that while self-perceived wealth indicators show slight shifts, the vast majority of citizens state that their income falls short of everyday needs, underscoring the urgent need for structural policies that promote inclusive growth and equitable wealth distribution.

2.5.3 Reducing Unemployment

The failure to sustain job creation at the levels projected by the National Development Plan (NDP) can be attributed to a combination of structural constraints, macroeconomic volatility, and governance inefficiencies (Public Employment Programmes, 2020). South Africa’s economic growth has remained below the 5% threshold envisioned by the NDP, averaging only about 1.5% between 2015 and 2020 (National Treasury, 2020). This sluggish growth has directly undermined employment expansion, as most of the jobs created were concentrated in low-productivity and informal sectors rather than in high-value industries capable of supporting long-term economic transformation (World Bank, 2021). Moreover, persistent energy supply challenges, policy

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uncertainty, and declining business confidence have further constrained private-sector investment, a critical driver of the job creation envisaged in the NDP (OECD, 2022). The manufacturing and mining sectors, once central to South Africa's employment landscape, have experienced stagnation. In contrast, the services sector has absorbed most new entrants into the labour market, often under precarious or low-wage conditions (Statistics South Africa, 2023).

According to the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (2018), the mismatch between skills supply and labour market demand has also deepened unemployment, particularly among youth. The NDP recognised education and training reform as a cornerstone for achieving inclusive growth, yet implementation has been uneven. Despite the expansion of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and the promotion of entrepreneurship programmes, many graduates still face barriers to entering formal employment due to inadequate practical skills and limited workplace experience (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2021). Furthermore, the NDP's reliance on broad macroeconomic targets rather than adaptive, evidence-based labour-market interventions has limited its responsiveness to changing economic conditions. According to Seekings and Nattrass (2019), South Africa's structural unemployment is driven not merely by economic cycles but by deep institutional and social inequalities that constrain labour absorption and participation. As a result, even when GDP growth has occurred, it has not been accompanied by proportionate job creation (Genesis Analytics, 2020a). Mengisteab (2016) contends that South Africa's employment composition over the past decade illustrates a structural regression from productive sectors toward service-oriented and low-value employment. The downturn in industrial output accelerated deindustrialisation, reversing earlier gains in manufacturing employment (Department of Public Works & Infrastructure, 2020). The Department of Trade and Industry in South Africa laments that, before the 2008 global financial crisis, the manufacturing sector played a significant role in employment generation; however, by 2017, its share of total employment had declined from 14% to 11%, resulting in approximately 306,000 jobs lost. This contraction mirrors weak output performance, reflecting limited competitiveness, inadequate investment in industrial upgrading, and persistent energy constraints (BER Survey, 2017Q4).

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Historically, South African manufacturing output exhibited profound inertia between 2008 and 2015, expanding at an average annual rate of 0.5%. This growth rate fell significantly behind peer emerging economies, which achieved much higher annual average growth rates, including Turkey (5.6%), Egypt (3.3%), Malaysia (2.7%), Thailand (2.0%), and Mexico (2.0%). While these baseline figures highlighted early structural vulnerabilities, contemporary empirical evidence indicates that the growth gap between South Africa and its global peers has widened. Longitudinal industrial data analysed by Bhorat, Steenkamp, and Rooney (2024) demonstrate that the domestic manufacturing sector has failed to transition to a high-growth trajectory, remaining constrained by deep-seated domestic headwinds. According to Statistics South Africa (2025), any brief post-pandemic production rebounds have been short-lived, with localised input shocks leading to flat or contracting annualised output volumes across major divisions such as basic iron and steel, and chemical manufacturing. This sustained stagnation contrasts sharply with other emerging markets. As argued by Andreoni, Tregenna, and Mondliwa (2024**)**, while competing developing nations capitalised on global supply chain realignments and regional trade integration to bolster factory outputs, South African industrial growth was fundamentally choked by systemic domestic constraints. Bell (2025) observed that rising administered prices, severe municipal infrastructure decay, and persistent freight rail and port logistics blockages have elevated the cost of doing business, neutralising the competitive advantage of a depreciated currency. Consequently, contemporary industrial statistics confirm that South Africa's manufacturing sector remains trapped in a low-growth equilibrium, underscoring an urgent need for targeted infrastructure rehabilitation and re-industrialisation policies.

The comparative stagnation of the secondary sector underscores South Africa's systemic de-industrialisation and its compounding dependence on service-based employment. As analysed by Allen and Asmal (2024), while the tertiary sector continues to absorb the largest share of net employment, a substantial portion of this growth is concentrated in informal or low-skilled services. These service positions typically offer lower productivity and highly constrained wage-growth potential relative to traditional manufacturing jobs, thereby limiting aggregate household income growth. Concurrently, the small business sector, widely designated by the National Development Plan (NDP) as a primary vehicle for employment generation, has continually failed to scale up. Longitudinal data analysed by Tregenna and Mondliwa (2025) reveal that the SMME

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contribution to total employment has not recovered from its historical drop, remaining heavily constrained by a highly concentrated corporate landscape that limits market entry for smaller enterprises.

This stunted enterprise development is directly tied to worsening domestic operational hurdles. According to McKeever (2024), the growth of small, medium, and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) continues to be severely impeded by a restrictive regulatory environment, systemic credit rationing by formal banking institutions, and fragmented business development support networks. Furthermore, Statistics South Africa (2025) highlights that contemporary microeconomic pressures, including rising municipal infrastructure failures and high logistics costs, have deeply exacerbated these long-standing operational constraints. These overhead costs disproportionately burden smaller firms compared to large corporations. Consequently, rather than acting as an engine of inclusive economic transformation, the SMME sector remains survivalist, undermining long-term employment creation and downward wealth redistribution. This contraction has weakened the labour market's capacity to absorb new entrants and widened inequalities between large formal enterprises and small informal operators. Employment patterns also remain highly gendered and generationally uneven (Department of Small Business Development, 2020). Women's labour-market participation is consistently lower, with only about 37% of working-age women employed, compared to 50% of men (Statistics South Africa, 2022). This disparity is linked to structural gender inequalities, occupational segregation, and unequal access to economic opportunities. Similarly, youth unemployment, particularly among those aged 15 to 24, has remained persistently high at around 50%, reflecting limited pathways from education to employment and weak labour market absorption capacity (Thomas, 2017). These trends collectively illustrate the widening disconnect between the NDP's inclusive-growth aspirations and actual labour-market outcomes. The sustained erosion of manufacturing employment, the underperformance of small business development, and entrenched demographic disparities demonstrate that economic transformation remains incomplete (Thomas *et al,* 2017).

2.6 Critiques of the National Development Plan 2030

The National Development Plan (NDP) was introduced with the primary objective of eradicating poverty and reducing inequality in South Africa by the year 2030 (South African Government,

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2012). Achieving these goals requires harnessing the collective energy and potential of all citizens, fostering an inclusive and sustainable economy, enhancing institutional capacity, strengthening state capability, and cultivating effective and ethical leadership (NPC, 2011). Twalo (2026) argued that the legacy of apartheid is a system that systematically excluded and marginalised the majority of democratic South Africa, which inherited profound structural inequalities, widespread poverty, and elevated levels of unemployment. In response to these deep-rooted challenges, the government formulated the NDP as a comprehensive, long-term strategy encompassing 14 key outcomes, each with specific targets and objectives (National Development Plan, 2012). Collectively, these outcomes are designed to promote social and economic transformation, advance equity, and place the nation on a sustainable path towards shared prosperity by 2030 (Witte and Burger, 2024).

The objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) draw inspiration from and build upon the foundations laid by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which guided South Africa's policy framework in 1994 (Diagnostic Report, 2011). These objectives remain central to the vision articulated in the 2012 National Development Plan (NPC, 2019). The government's enduring commitment to poverty reduction is reflected in its economic policy framework, particularly through the equal share formula, which allocates payments across tiers of government and includes a poverty-related component to promote redistribution (MTSF Medium-Term Strategic Framework, 2014-2019). However, this approach has faced significant challenges due to fluctuating economic growth and, in recent years, persistently sluggish growth (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Despite these constraints, the government's planning frameworks continue to uphold the vision of achieving the NDP's 2030 goals (Presidency of South Africa, 2024). The Plan remains anchored in its core objectives: reducing poverty, narrowing inequality, and tackling unemployment through targeted programmes such as public works initiatives, anti-poverty campaigns, and large-scale infrastructure development projects (Modise, 2024: 89-104). However, as the National Planning Commission (2024) observed**,** the NDP has struggled to meet its intended targets, with many of its commitments experiencing stagnation or slow implementation, raising concerns that the Plan's transformative vision is gradually fading from the centre of national focus.

The National Development Plan (NDP) emphasises the development of critical capabilities required to transform South Africa's economy and society (DPME, 2022). Recognising the

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complexity of national development, the Plan is structured around six interrelated pillars that collectively guide its implementation (NDP, 2012). These include: uniting all South Africans around a shared vision to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality; fostering active citizenship to strengthen development, democracy, and accountability; accelerating economic growth through increased investment and higher labour absorption; enhancing the capabilities of both individuals and the state; building a capable and developmental state that delivers effectively; and promoting strong, ethical leadership across all sectors of society to collaboratively address national challenges (Swanepoel, 2022). According to the National Planning Commission Review (2018), the National Development Plan (NDP) continues to address South Africa's three overarching challenges: inequality, unemployment, and poverty, which remain persistent issues. Recognising the multidimensional nature of these challenges, the NDP adopts a multisectoral and comprehensive approach, complemented by targeted interventions where necessary (Sulla & Zikhali, 2018). Policymaking for national development operates within an increasingly complex environment. The World Bank (2023) identifies four major global challenges projected for 2040: financial crises, climate change, technological disruptions, and disease. In light of the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa must anticipate and mitigate the potential impacts of these challenges on its development planning and policy implementation landscape (Kidd, Wapling, Schjoedt, Gelders, Bailey-Athias, Tran, & Salomon *et al*, 2019).

In 2018, the second National Planning Commission (NPC) conducted a review of the first eight years of the National Development Plan (NDP) implementation. The review assessed South Africa's performance against the NDP's core objectives of reducing poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Stats SA, 2022). The findings revealed that the country had underperformed on most of the Plan's key targets. Contributing factors included a deteriorating policy environment, leadership challenges across various sectors of society, weak coherence in implementing the NDP, and overall poor execution, further compounded by an unstable regional and global context (NPC, 2018). The review concluded that the NDP's vision and priorities had not been fully realised during the interim phase. Below are some of the review's specific findings:

- Economic growth remained stagnant, with the economy often in recessionary territory.
- Poverty levels were rising, while inequality persisted and showed a slight change over time.

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- Unemployment continued to increase amid weak economic performance, disproportionately affecting women and youth (MTBPS, 2020).
- Service delivery deteriorated, and combined with labour market challenges, this negatively impacted the provision of the social wage to the poorest households.
- Spatial inequality continued to pose significant challenges.
- Despite these setbacks, notable progress was made in social protection, particularly through expanded access to cash grants, health services, education, shelter, and basic services for poor households.

Overall, the outcomes and quality of the NDP's objectives require substantial improvement. The review identified several challenges that threaten constitutional democracy, disproportionately affect the most impoverished populations, and undermine the effective functioning of the state (National Treasury, 2022). These challenges include the following:

- Government and key state institutions have weakened, with poor public service performance and declining societal trust and confidence.
- The distinction between political and administrative functions has become blurred.
- Corruption is systemic, affecting both the public and private sectors.
- The government faces severe fiscal constraints, with state-owned enterprises (SOEs) contributing significantly to these limitations.
- Crime, including gender-based violence, remains persistently high, with incidents often marked by extreme brutality.
- Political leadership failed to prioritise the NDP following its adoption, resulting in weak advocacy and limited championing of the Plan (NDP Review, 2020). These and other factors contributed to South Africa's failure to achieve the NDP targets during the first eight years of implementation.

2.7 IMPLEMENTATION PHASES OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030

The process of prioritisation and sequencing is structured into three broad phases:

2.7.1 Critical steps to be taken in 2013 to unlock implementation

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First, critical steps were to be undertaken in 2013 to unlock implementation. During this phase, actions included implementing programmes that did not require additional resources or lengthy lead times, identifying key initial steps necessary to facilitate implementation, preparing the 2014–2019 Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) as the first five-year foundational phase of the NDP, strengthening implementation in areas where existing policies were underperforming, and conducting focused dialogues to address obstacles to effective execution (Msukaligwa Draft Revised Integrated Development Plan, 2023/24).

2.7.2 2014-2019 planning cycle

Second, the 2014–2019 planning cycle was envisaged as the first in a series of five-year cycles designed to advance the objectives of the NDP (National Planning Commission, 2012: 432–434). This cycle was intended to serve as a critical foundation, with corresponding planning processes at the local government level playing an equally significant role (Harrison & Todes, 2021:212–228).

2.7.3 2019-2024 and 2024-2029 planning cycles

Third, the 2019–2024 and 2024–2029 planning cycles were designated for the initiation of the remaining NDP activities (National Planning Commission, 2019). These phases were to build on the achievements of earlier cycles and be guided by systematic reviews of performance and outcomes.

2.8 SOUTH AFRICA'S HIGHLIGHTS OF SUCCESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030

The following section discusses how South Africa is performing relative to the NDP's overall principal targets.

2.8.1 Economy

The National Development Plan projected that South Africa would need to sustain average economic growth of approximately 5.4% per annum and create around 11 million additional jobs by 2030 to eliminate poverty and substantially reduce inequality (National Planning Commission,

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2012: 26–30). These objectives relied on a comprehensive approach that included fostering positive investor sentiment, developing well-located and well-maintained infrastructure, improving educational outcomes, promoting a healthier population, and maintaining a robust social safety net, all of which depended on a capable state and effective governance. Given that many of these conditions were not fully realised, the economy underperformed during the period under review (Bhorat, Cassim & Tseng, 2023: 31-47). An analysis of progress towards the NDP's overarching objectives indicates that outcomes achieved since the Plan's adoption have fallen short of expectations and required targets (National Planning Commission, 2020).

Between 2012 and 2021, South Africa's economic growth averaged only 0.99% per annum, with per capita GDP declining in five of those years. This underperformance has contributed to rising poverty and limited improvements in overall employment, with unemployment reaching 33.9% (South African Reserve Bank, Quarterly Bulletin, 2022). The economy remains trapped in a low-growth cycle, with average growth lagging the 1.4% population growth rate, resulting in declining average incomes. GDP per capita fell from R80,191 (constant 2015 prices) in 2013 to R74,907 in 2021 (SARB, 2022). To meet the NDP's target of 5.4% average annual GDP growth, investment would need to reach 30% of GDP by 2030. However, between 2012 and 2019, gross fixed capital formation averaged only 19.6% of GDP, reflecting declining private investment, slower government spending, and reduced capital expenditure from state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This declining trend persisted from 2018 to 2021, with investment averaging just 14.7% of GDP, comprising 9.9% from private investment and 4.1% from the public sector. The slow investment growth is attributed to a deteriorating economic outlook, policy uncertainty, and reduced investment from both the government and SOEs, as highlighted by Fedderke (2022: 285–304).

World Bank Group (2018) laments that during the period under review (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic compelled the South African government to make difficult policy decisions aimed at restoring macroeconomic stability, addressing the health and socioeconomic crises, stimulating economic growth, and promoting inclusivity. Consequently, in October 2020, the government introduced the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP). The ERRP sought to implement immediate measures to support economic recovery amid COVID-19, while simultaneously rebuilding and expanding the economy to ensure long-term sustainability,

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resilience, and inclusivity (NPC Annual Report, 2022). Furthermore, the pandemic created opportunities to advance long-standing reforms identified in the 2018 World Bank report. However, these reforms were delayed for several years to address systemic weaknesses that had hindered effective governance (Department of Health 2021/2022 Annual Report). According to the IMF World Economic Outlook (2022), the post-COVID-19 period has been marked by a partial recovery in economic growth, with GDP rebounding and export levels increasing, largely driven by the mining sector. However, this improvement has been primarily attributable to elevated global commodity prices, which inflated export values, rather than to significant increases in mining production (MTBPS, 2022). Persistently stagnant output levels can largely be explained by structural and infrastructural constraints, particularly in rail, port, and energy systems, as well as by bureaucratic delays that have hindered mining expansion (MTSF Mid-term Review, 2019-2024). Furthermore, emerging indications that commodity prices may be normalising present a potential risk, as this could lead to declining export revenues and, consequently, reduced tax receipts in the future (CSIRA, 2022).

The NDP recognises that South Africa has a relatively large youth population and, as such, the development of young people's human capabilities must be central to the realisation of the goals of the Plan (NDP, 2012: 18). The NDP states that young people should be involved in building a transformative and capable state to eliminate poverty, unemployment and reduce inequality in South Africa (NDP, 2012: 61). The plan proposes that greater educational, entrepreneurship and economic opportunities need to be generated for young people as a way to redress the inequalities of the past (NDP, 2012: 24). Aspirations for a better future for young people is a theme that runs throughout the NDP Vision 2030. The transition from childhood to adolescence and from youth to adulthood is a time of tremendous growth and potential; however, it is also marked by considerable risk (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). Hence, the development from childhood to adulthood is characterised by change, uncertainty, mobility, and adaptation. Young people's capabilities, time, and effort must be channelled into productive work if South Africa's development is to be realised (Marginalised Groups Indicator Report and Stats SA, 2019). Economic inclusion among South African youth remains a persistent challenge in the post-apartheid era. According to Leibbrandt and Shipp (2018), the National Development Plan (NDP) establishes ambitious objectives to reduce unemployment to 14% by 2020 and further to 6% by

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2030, with the achievement of these targets largely contingent upon the effective utilisation of the country's "youth bulge." Despite the creation of approximately 1.3 million jobs in the period following the 2008 global financial crisis, individuals aged 15 to 24 were disproportionately affected, losing about 335,000 jobs between 2008 and 2012, with little evidence of meaningful recovery thereafter (NDP, 2022).

2.8.2 Social

The National Development Plan (2012) is strongly informed by the capabilities approach. It adopts a developmental perspective that emphasises the expansion of human capabilities through education, skills development, innovation, and social protection as central to broader development outcomes. In conjunction with increasing employment through accelerated economic growth and strengthening state capacity, these components are envisaged to drive economic and social transformation (SADHS, 2016). According to Tomlinson, Kleintjes, and Lake (2022: 15-24), Such capabilities are supported by a social protection floor that encompasses social assistance, housing, public transportation, and access to basic services, among other provisions. This review indicates that although progress has been recorded in several areas of the social sector, the pace of advancement has been slow, with instances of regression, thereby placing some of the 2030 targets at risk. The principal challenges include the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, weaknesses in prioritisation, poor sequencing of program interventions, and limited coordination and collaboration among government departments and between government and civil society (Marmot et al., 2022: 223-231). The recommendations proposed in this section, if implemented in the short to medium term, have the potential to improve social, educational, and health outcomes in the medium term and to alter South Africa's long-term development trajectory. Social support components are inherently interconnected and operate within a broader economic and governance context (Van den Berg, Gustaffson, & Malindi, 2020).

The National Development Plan 2030 (2012) advances comprehensive proposals concerning children, addressing nutritional needs before and after birth, mortality, and social support through social assistance, healthcare, and education, spanning from the critical first 1,000 days of life to secondary schooling. Infant mortality risk is greatest during the first month of life, and South Africa continues to face a high neonatal mortality rate of 12 deaths per 1,000 live births. Although

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the Integrated Nutrition Programme, led by the Department of Health, predated the NDP, its inclusion in the Plan has reinforced its significance, with its components playing a crucial role in child nutrition since 2012. The programme targets children under six years of age, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women, and, in addition to providing micronutrient supplementation and food fortification, it promotes optimal feeding practices, including exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, appropriate complementary feeding, and growth monitoring. While the NDP advocates improved nutrition, it does not stipulate specific targets. The 2016 South African Demographic and Health Survey reported persistently high under-five stunting at 27%; however, more recent evidence from the Thrive by Five Study (2022), triangulated with the National Income Dynamics Study, indicates that stunting among children aged four to five is approximately 6% (Van der Berg, Giese & Bridgman, 2022).

Two key interventions, the Child Support Grant (CSG) and the National School Nutrition Programme, have been central to the 20-percentage-point reduction in child hunger rates between 2002 and 2020 (Department of Basic Education, 2021: 34–48). Access to the CSG expanded substantially during the first decade of the National Development Plan, reaching nearly 13 million children, while by 2019, the National School Nutrition Programme was serving more than 9 million learners across approximately 20,000 schools. Beyond providing meals, the programme also delivers nutrition education, deworming services, and micronutrient supplementation to learners in schools in quintiles 1 to 3. Although social grants constitute a vital safety net for many households, a key limitation is that the value of the Child Support Grant remains well below the food poverty line and has therefore been insufficient to significantly reduce stunting. South Africa's persistently high unemployment rate further weakens the impact of social grants, as grant income is often shared among multiple household members. An additional challenge is the disproportionate concentration of children in deep rural areas and in impoverished informal settlements characterised by overcrowding and limited access to basic services (QLFS Q:1 2023, Stats SA). Approximately 30% of children live in households without adequate access to water. In comparison, 21% lack adequate sanitation, increasing vulnerability to infections such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, which, in turn, undermines nutritional outcomes (Southern Centre for Inequality Studies, 2022). A further cross-cutting concern is that the National Development Plan does not clearly designate institutional champions for many of its recommendations on food system

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governance, including the critical roadmap to ensure food and nutrition security for children and mothers.

Evidence from international assessment data indicates that while the quality of schooling in South Africa has improved relative to other middle-income countries, these gains have been achieved from a very low baseline (World Bank Group 2018). Covid-19 and Barriers to Participation in Education (2020) laments that some of this progress may have been undermined by COVID-19-related disruptions. With regard to Bachelor-level passes, the education sector had already exceeded the National Development Plan target of 190,000 set for 2024, achieving 256,031 Bachelor-level passes (36.4%) by 2021 (General Household Survey, Stats SA, 2018). South Africa's non-contributory social assistance targets vulnerable groups across their lifecycle and spends 3.31% of the country's GDP on reducing both poverty and inequality, South Africa provides seven social grants, viz. the Older Persons Grant (previously called the Old Age Grant), War Veterans Grant, Disability Grant, Grants-in-Aid, Foster Care Grant, Care Dependency Grant, and the CSG (SASSA Annual Report, 2021).

The National Development Plan clearly affirms the central importance of education, training, and innovation to South Africa's future development (UNICEF, 2022). According to the NPC (2020), the Plan addresses a broad spectrum of educational domains, including early childhood development, basic education, and post-school education and training, as well as their systemic challenges. Any assessment must consider both the contextual constraints and the interconnections among these challenges. Although the National Development Plan underscores the importance of high-speed broadband access for all schools as a means of advancing digital inclusion, the necessary mechanisms to expand technology and innovation in schools, prepare young people for the labour market, and enhance opportunities for distance education in the university and college sectors remain inadequate(Post-School Education and Training Monitor, 2021). This shortcoming reflects a broader national challenge: the failure to finalise key enabling strategic programmes, such as broadband connectivity initiatives, SA Connect, digital broadcasting migration, and the reduction of communication costs. Such enabling infrastructure lies largely outside the direct control of the education and training system (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2025).

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2.8.3 Governance

The National Planning Commission Review (2020) laments that governance of the country includes the effective functioning of the state; the development of leadership at all levels within a developmental state; the role of an active and engaged citizenry; institutional planning; the challenges of crime and corruption; social cohesion and nation-building; spatial justice; inequality; and broader transformation. South Africa's development outcomes depend on the existence of a capable, ethical, and developmental state, and it requires a public sector protected from undue political interference, with public servants empowered through adequate authority, experience, and institutional support to effectively perform their duties (National Planning Commission, 2013). According to the DPME MTSF Mid-Year Report (2021), confidence in institutions serves as an indicator of progress toward building a capable, ethical, and developmental state. As a proxy for the government's effectiveness in fulfilling its responsibilities, available estimates point to a significant need for improvement across both public and private institutions. The broader political environment also influences business conditions, with state efficiency and the quality of political leadership being key factors (Stats SA, 2018). According to the South African Reserve Bank (2022) and Climate Index (2020), although the general political climate in 2020 was perceived as less restrictive to business than in 2019, it remained a substantial constraint.

The National Development Plan (2012:407) sets out a vision of a developmental state capable of driving South Africa's development. It identifies a set of overarching actions aimed at building a capable and developmental state, including stabilising the political–administrative interface; positioning the public service and local government as attractive career paths; developing technical and specialist skills; strengthening delegation, accountability, and oversight; improving coordination across departments; proactively enhancing relations between national, provincial, and local spheres of government; strengthening local government; and clarifying the governance of state-owned enterprises (Mncube & Mubangizi, 2024). Although progress in implementing these actions has been gradual, a significant milestone was the Cabinet's approval of the National Framework Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Sector in October 2022. The Framework identifies the conditions required to improve efficiency, performance, accountability, and service delivery. It emphasises a professional, skilled, competent, and ethical public service committed to serving citizens, thereby institutionalising merit-based human resource practices in line with the

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NDP's vision for a developmental state within a democratic system (Gustafsson & Taylor, 2022). Ultimately, this embeds merit-based practices within the state's human resource systems by giving effect to the NDP's recommendations on the nature of the public sector required to advance a developmental state agenda within a democratic system of governance (NDP Diagnostic Overview, 2011: 23).

Progress has also been made in finalising key legislative measures, including the Public Service Amendment Bill (2023), the Public Administration Management Amendment Bill (2023), and the Public Service Commission Bill (2022). These instruments give legislative effect to the NDP's recommendations and support the professionalisation of the public service to strengthen state effectiveness across all spheres of government. In addition, amendments to the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000), signed into law by the President in October 2022, set an important precedent by, among other measures, prohibiting municipal officials from holding party political office (Presidency of South Africa, 2023). This is expected to significantly enhance governance at the local level, where state capacity is currently weakest. According to the Zondo Commission (2018) and the Presidency (2022), state-owned enterprises (SOEs) remain a major weakness in the post-apartheid state. The Auditor-General's 2021/2022 audit outcomes revealed serious challenges, particularly at Eskom, South African Airways, Denel, and Alexkor, with only two of the 20 key SOEs achieving clean audits. Efforts to address these challenges include the establishment of the Presidential State-Owned Enterprises Council to provide expert guidance on reforming SOEs as drivers of development. In line with the NDP, both the Auditor-General's report (2021/22) and the Framework emphasise the need to depoliticise SOE board appointments and ensure that positions are filled based on merit and appropriate qualifications.

Given that enhancing state capacity is critical for tackling unemployment, poverty, and inequality, the implementation of the Framework should be accelerated, particularly as several of its proposals do not necessitate legislative changes, new policies, regulations, or ministerial directives (National Planning Commission, 2012). In contexts where the state's institutional capacity is insufficient, even well-designed policies and interventions are unlikely to achieve their intended social and economic outcomes (South Africa's SDGs Baseline Report, 2017). Efforts to strengthen state capacity and improve service delivery have been consistently undermined by low productivity,

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corruption, inefficiency, sabotage, leakage, and a lack of accountability (Review of National Development, 2022).

Over the past several years, multiple interventions have been undertaken to streamline, align, and formalise South Africa's planning system, including:

- The adoption of the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2012, which represented a shift in national planning by introducing a commitment to long-term visioning and strategic planning for the country.
- The release of a discussion document by the National Planning Commission (NPC) in 2015, titled Reforming the South African Government Planning System, followed by a 2018 concept note on the institutionalisation of planning in South Africa.
- The enactment of the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (2013) was designed to address the enduring spatial inequalities resulting from apartheid-era planning practices.
- In March 2022, the Cabinet adopted the National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF), which builds upon the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) and serves as a strategic instrument to guide spatial development planning at the national level.
- The introduction of the District Development Model (DDM), designed to refocus service delivery and strengthen implementation through well-coordinated and coherent One Plans that integrate planning across the three spheres of government.
- The launch of the new Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2019–2024, which outlines the government's seven priorities aimed at achieving the goals set out in the National Development Plan (NDP) and fulfilling the electoral mandate.
- The adoption of the Integrated Planning Policy Framework in 2022; and
- The drafting of the National Development Planning Framework Bill, intended to institutionalise planning at the national level, with tabling in Parliament anticipated in the latter half of 2023.

These reforms are intended to establish a coherent planning system aligned with long-term developmental objectives, ensuring that government plans are integrated and coordinated to enhance service delivery to citizens (DPME, 2022). They also aim to promote coordination and prioritisation across government institutions, thereby facilitating the achievement of the

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developmental goals articulated in the National Development Plan (NDP, 2012). National Planning Commission (2020) laments that this approach is closely linked to the broader imperative of building a capable and effective state. According to the MFMA (2017), notwithstanding gradual enhancements in the planning framework and its functional processes, development outcomes have remained significantly below anticipated levels. This underperformance can be ascribed to a multiplicity of interrelated factors, including policy and institutional incoherence; limited state capacity to effectively prioritise, sequence, and implement plans; the effects of state capture and corruption; insufficient alignment, coordination, and collaboration with non-state partners; as well as the impact of both international and domestic shocks(MTSF Mid-term Review 2019-2024).

2.9 Chapter Summary

The literature review explored the impact of South Africa's GNU on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. The review highlighted the concept of the National Development Plan 2030. This was done by studying the conceptual overview and provisions within which the critique and analysis of the National Development Plan 2030 can be found; this included its introduction, vision, progress towards achieving the NDP's principal key targets, the proposed phases of NDP 2030, and the critics of this plan. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical framework, analysis and the implications of the government of national unity on the implementation of NDP 2030.

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CHAPTER 3:
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter discussed the introduction and formulation of the NDP 2030, along with the key targets the plan aims to achieve by 2030. This chapter aims to provide analysis and insights into the study's focus: the impact of South Africa's government of national unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. This will be done by examining the various conceptual backgrounds of the government of national unity and how it can be better positioned to realise the NDP goals. The key focus of this chapter is to critique and provide an overview of the establishment, challenges, and overall impact of the government of national unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 in South Africa and on South Africa's governance approach in the complexities of the GNU in realising the National Development Plan 2030.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For this study, the researcher has identified the network governance theory.

3.2.1 The Network Governance Theory

This theory presumes that governance occurs within a network of interdependent political actors who collaborate to achieve common objectives. Political actors operate within established structures, where trust, mutual dependencies, and shared responsibilities shape decision-making. In the context of a Government of National Unity (GNU), parties engage in cooperative governance to maximise collective development outcomes while maintaining their political interests (Provan & Kenis, 2020). When political parties participate in a GNU, they seek to leverage networked relationships to enhance policy coherence, improve resource mobilisation, and foster inclusive governance. The study employed the relevance of this theory to comprehend and examine the effectiveness of collaborative governance structures in achieving the National Development Plan. The ability of political parties to engage in structured, trust-based networks is essential for policy implementation and democratic stability to achieve the NDP 2030. However, coordination challenges, power asymmetries, and conflicting interests may hinder the

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effectiveness of the GNU, leading to inefficiencies and governance fragmentation. This has, in some cases, led dominant political actors to exert disproportionate influence, potentially weakening the ethos of good governance. This theory is relevant to this study because a well-functioning GNU can help realise the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, particularly by fostering multi-stakeholder engagement, accountability, and sustainable development.

3.2.2 The Relevance of the Network Governance Theory to this Study

The theory of Network Governance, which focuses on the role of interdependent actors working collaboratively within a decentralised governance structure, is highly relevant to the study of the Government of National Unity (GNU) and its role in realising the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (Provan & Kenis, 2020). According to Mthembu (2023: 27), a GNU brings together multiple political parties and stakeholders to share power, requiring a high degree of coordination, trust, and resource-sharing to ensure effective governance. Network Governance Theory helps explain the complexities of intergovernmental cooperation and the roles of diverse actors in policy implementation (Dlamini, 2022: 45-67). Network governance theory models the interactions within a GNU as a structured network where political parties, government institutions, and civil society collaborate to achieve the National Development Plan. Based on the Network Governance Theory, this study will analyse how the Government of National Unity (GNU), as a coalition of interdependent political actors, facilitates or hinders the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. The theory provides a lens to examine the extent to which political parties and stakeholders within the GNU engage in collaborative governance, policy coordination, and shared decision-making to achieve national development goals. It is particularly suited to this study, as it captures the complexities of coalition governance, highlights the importance of trust-based networks and mutual accountability, and explains how fragmented or poorly structured networks can lead to policy incoherence, governance inefficiencies, and weak service delivery. Thus, Network Governance Theory offers a robust analytical tool for assessing the effectiveness of the GNU in driving the NDP 2030 agenda through inclusive, coordinated, and accountable governance practices.

Tapscott (2025: 14) posits that GNU often necessitates policy coordination across multiple levels of government and with various stakeholders who may have competing priorities. In network

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governance terms, this is seen as a collaborative governance model, where actors must align their strategies, share decision-making responsibilities, and ensure that development initiatives are implemented equitably (Cameron, 2025: 82). The ability to coordinate policies and leverage shared expertise is essential for driving economic growth, reducing inequality, and delivering essential public services. In the context of the GNU, the distribution of development resources, such as infrastructure investments, social welfare programs, and economic opportunities, requires careful negotiation and transparent decision-making processes (Khoza & Mokoena, 2022: 78-102). Effective governance under a GNU depends on its ability to strengthen institutional networks, enhance policy coordination, and ensure inclusive participation from various actors. The Network Governance Theory provides valuable insights into the functioning of coalition governments by analysing how governance networks operate, how power dynamics shape policy implementation, and how collaboration can drive national development (Sibanda, 2021: 15-38). A GNU that successfully leverages network-based decision-making, fosters inclusivity, and ensures equitable policy implementation is more likely to achieve the objectives outlined in NDP 2030 (Baloyi, 2023: 89-112). For this study, the discussion of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 objectives has been limited to four primary objectives: fostering an economy that will create more jobs, improving the quality of education, building capabilities, and enhancing social protection. These objectives served as the focal points for assessing and investigating the subsequent impacts of the Government of National Unity on South Africa's long-term developmental trajectory.

3.3 THE IMPACT OF SOUTH AFRICA'S GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 is South Africa's long-term strategic blueprint aimed at eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030 through inclusive economic growth, capable institutions, and responsive governance (National Planning Commission, 2012:4). It envisions a state that is developmental, accountable, and people-centred. According to the National Planning Commission (2022), the effective implementation of the NDP requires coherent leadership, consistent policy application, and institutional stability. These factors are intricately tied to the country's political landscape. The National Planning Commission (2024) released an advisory specifically for the 2024–2029 Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP). It noted that

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the emergence of a Government of National Unity (GNU), especially in the post-2024 electoral context, introduces a complex political environment that has the potential to both enable and hinder the realisation of the NDP's objective. Coalition or unity governments are, by nature, characterised by ideological diversity, shared governance responsibilities, and often, fragile consensus-building processes (Bochsler & Juon, 2021; Orhan, 2023). Kotze (2023: 9) is of the view that these dynamics have been discussed in broader literature on coalition governance globally, and to a limited extent, in South African contexts.

According to Ludidi (2024), the current GNU is not primarily a conflict-resolution mechanism but rather a platform for bringing willing stakeholders together to collectively address South Africa's prevailing challenges. The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2024) further argues that, given the integrated nature of the country's governance system, the 2024 GNU is likely to influence multiple dimensions of national development. These include governance encompassing state functionality, developmental leadership, institutional planning, social cohesion, spatial justice, and the fight against crime and corruption; the economy, particularly in advancing the National Development Plan's goals of reducing poverty, inequality, and unemployment through sustained growth and job creation; and the social sphere through the development of human capabilities via education, skills development, innovation, and social protection as central drivers of inclusive development.

3.3.1 Improving the Quality of Education

According to Van der Berg, Gustafsson, and Malindi (2020: 26), the National Development Plan (NDP) recognises education as both a fundamental human right and a critical instrument for promoting social cohesion in a society shaped by the inequalities of colonialism and apartheid. Grarube (2025: 11) argues that the NDP further emphasises education's central role in economic development, describing it as the most significant investment a country can make. This aligns with the National Planning Commission's (2012) assertion that education is essential for eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, achieving sustained economic growth of approximately 5.4%, and lowering unemployment to 6% by 2030. According to the Presidency Strategic Plan 2025–2030, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has developed its Strategic Plan 2025–2030 and Annual Performance Plan 2025/26 within the context of the Government of National Unity (GNU) formed

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after the highly contested 2024 national and provincial elections. The Presidency of South Africa (2025) is of the view that the DBE must prioritise initiatives that directly enhance learning outcomes. The Action Plan Towards the realisation of Schooling 2030 states that extracurricular and enrichment programmes continue under the GNU. The 7th Administration emphasises aligning all initiatives with its core mandate of delivering quality education that equips learners for meaningful societal and economic participation. This approach reflects the GNU's broader commitment, as outlined in its Statement of Intent, to invest in people through education and skills development.

Following the May 2024 national elections and the transition to the 7th Administration under a Government of National Unity (GNU), the Department of Basic Education (DBE) aligned its priorities with the National Development Plan and the Medium-Term Development Plan by focusing on improving education outcomes, strengthening skills development, and promoting social cohesion and nation-building (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2025: 85). In 2025, the African Union released the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-2035 (CESA), in pursuit of the objectives of this strategy, the Department of Basic Education is advancing universal access to early childhood development through subsidies and modernised management systems, while placing increased emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase to ensure learners read with comprehension (African Union, 2025: 17). This includes the continued provision of mother tongue-based Home Language and Mathematics workbooks. Wills and Koppensteiner (2024:77) contend that the DBE is prioritising the implementation of the three-stream model in the Further Education and Training phase to broaden learners' subject choices and enhance career pathway options. Within the context of the Government of National Unity (GNU) and prevailing fiscal constraints, the Department of Basic Education has prioritised strengthening system quality across the education continuum from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. Central to this approach is enhanced support for teachers and school leadership to achieve improved learning outcomes, alongside sustained efforts to ensure safe and conducive school environments (Mohohlwane, 2023:14).

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The Department of Basic Education's Review of Progress in the Basic Education Sector revealed that between 2024 and 2025, progress in the education sector has reflected a strategic shift from expanding access to improving quality, in alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (Department of Basic Education, 2024a: 38). Findings from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2025: 18) revealed that the 7th Administration is focusing on strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy within the DBE, advancing digital integration, and expanding technical and vocational education pathways. Key developments include the implementation of the BELA Act, which formalised the move toward compulsory Grade R, and targeted interventions to address early-grade reading challenges identified by the Progress Department of Basic Education's Review of Progress in the Basic Education Sector (2024/25). Trends in the International Mathematics and Science Study (2025: 20) revealed that efforts to bridge the digital divide have accelerated through initiatives to expand access to devices and connectivity, particularly in rural and township schools. Gustafsson (2023: 42) has expressed a strong interest in repositioning Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions to support industrialisation through expanded enrolment and a shift toward occupational qualifications. McKinsey and Company (2024:15) posits that complementary pro-poor policies, including the continuation of the No-Fee School Policy and the National School Nutrition Programme, have supported equitable access and learner well-being. As explained by Claasen (2025: 38), infrastructure initiatives such as the SAFE programme and the Education Infrastructure Grant have further improved school facilities and reduced sanitation backlogs.

According to the South African Council for Educators 2024, the GNU's priorities include expanding vocational and technical training to align the education system with the economy's needs. By prioritising skills development, the 7th Administration seeks to prepare learners for participation in the formal labour market (Janari, 2024). This demand-driven approach aims to ensure that students acquire the competencies required to succeed in an increasingly dynamic global economy. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) data for 2025 indicate a substantial improvement in Grade 9 mathematics performance in 2024; however, the findings also highlight critical issues that require urgent attention. According to the 2024 School Monitoring Survey, significant performance disparities persist across provinces, with Limpopo and the Eastern Cape consistently underperforming. This suggests that these provinces remain

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underserved and resource-constrained, which, in turn, reflects broader challenges related to teacher quality and systemic capacity within the education sector. The survey further reiterates a concerning trend identified in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study in 2023, which found that 76% of Grade 4 learners are unable to read for meaning in any language.

According to the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (2025: 85), the 2024 Government of National Unity (GNU) Statement of Intent outlines nine key priorities, including economic growth and investment in education, skills development, and healthcare. Overall, these priorities closely align with those of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. The Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP), released in early 2025, builds on these priorities and emphasises the need for a capable, ethical, and developmental state to improve service delivery, including education. It places particular focus on early childhood development, reinforcing South Africa's 2030 strategy introduced by the Department of Basic Education in 2023 (Department of Basic Education, 2023a: 10). The Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP), through its three strategic priorities, aligns with the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the priorities of the Government of National Unity (GNU), with a strong emphasis on developmental outcomes as part of a broader economic strategy to address prevailing socio-economic challenges (Operation Vulindlela, 2024). Jakuja (2024: 11) put forward that over the next five years, the GNU seeks to advance three core priorities: promoting inclusive growth and job creation, with a target of increasing economic growth to above 3.5% and reducing unemployment to 27.5% through the creation of at least 4 million jobs; reducing poverty and addressing the high cost of living to foster a more equal and socially cohesive society; and building a capable, ethical, and developmental state to ensure effective service delivery and a safe, secure environment. Within this framework, the Department of Basic Education primarily contributes to poverty reduction and cost-of-living challenges, while also supporting inclusive growth and the development of a capable state, thereby intersecting with all three strategic priorities. Its focus areas include improving education outcomes and skills, as well as strengthening social cohesion and nation-building. The 2023/24 audit report of the Department of Basic Education noted that to achieve the goal of quality basic education for all, the following key institutional outcomes were identified to be pursued over the five years, namely:

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- effective governance and administration.
- improved access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes.
- enhanced learning outcomes.
- improved infrastructure.
- greater inclusivity in curriculum implementation.
- strengthened teacher capacity and
- professionalism, and enriched learning experiences.

Evans and Hares (2021) and Akkari (2022) contends that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) committed to advancing Priority 3 of the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2020–2025 which includes education, skills and health through five key outcomes: improving school readiness among children; ensuring that 10-year-old learners in publicly funded schools read for meaning; better preparing youth for further education and the world of work beyond Grade 9; equipping school leavers to contribute to a prosperous and equitable South Africa; and enhancing school infrastructure and learning environments to support effective teaching and learning. Wills (2023b: 14) and Koppensteiner (2024: 20) are of the view that progress has been recorded against the Council of Education Ministers' (CEM) cardinal sector priorities, which underpin the development of a quality and efficient education system and contribute to long-term structural improvements in the country's education and training architecture. In this context, the DBE has prioritised strengthening curriculum relevance to equip learners with sustainable skills and competencies that support transitions to employment, higher education, and entrepreneurial opportunities (Department of Basic Education, 2024a: 38). Giese et al, 2022 explained that to support this objective, the draft South African Competency Framework was developed in 2022 through extensive public consultation involving educators, learners, government officials, academics, civil society, labour, business, School Governing Body associations, and youth. The Framework informs the integration of competencies across five key levers for change: curriculum policy, teacher development, the learning environment, assessment, and learning and teaching support materials, thereby promoting competency-based curricula aligned with future societal and economic needs. The first critical priority of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) was the strengthening of Early Childhood Development (Department of Basic Education, Annual Performance Plan 2023/24). In this regard, the Department conducted the National Census of Early

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Learning Programmes, covering 42,420 ECD centres across the country. According to Katherine and Colin (2024:16), the Census highlighted significant access challenges. It informed the development of a publicly planned, coordinated, and funded mixed ECD provisioning model grounded in principles of access, equity, redress, inclusivity, efficiency, and quality.

Kotze (2024:42) also explained that the second priority focused on strengthening the curriculum through the implementation of skills- and competency-based learning aligned with the demands of a changing world. According to Mary (2025:4), the DBE undertook a strategic shift from a predominantly academic curriculum to a more varied and inclusive approach through the introduction of the Three-Stream Curriculum Model (TSCM). Kotze (2024: 44-46) is of the view that this reform introduced vocational and occupational streams, thereby expanding pathways toward the attainment of the National Senior Certificate (NSC), enhancing learner choice, and promoting diverse learning experiences relevant to the 21st-century education and skills landscape. Furthermore, the third priority, according to Gwarube (2025: 2), is centred on the delivery of school infrastructure through the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG), supplemented in some provinces by equitable share allocations. Martin (2025: 18) has stated that, through this initiative, the DBE and Provincial Education Departments replaced schools built with inappropriate materials and improved access to water, sanitation, and electricity. Capacity-building programmes were also offered to DBE officials, and School Governing Bodies demonstrated improved effectiveness.

3.3.2 An Economy that will Create More Jobs

According to the South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin (2022), for South Africa to realise the overarching objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP), namely eradicating poverty and reducing inequality and unemployment by 2030, the economy would need to grow at an average rate of 5.4% per annum over two decades, alongside the creation of approximately 11 million new jobs (Matyana & Mthethwa 2024: 31). These targets were premised on a comprehensive developmental approach that includes fostering positive investor confidence that aims to drive investment in key sectors such as agriculture, mining, and services, ensuring well-maintained and strategically located infrastructure, a supportive and sustainable economic policy environment, and inclusivity and poverty reduction, all underpinned by a capable state and sound

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governance practices. Matyana (2024: 33) argued that, in pursuit of these targets, the NDP aims to achieve a GDP growth rate exceeding 3.0% by 2029, with the intention of reducing unemployment to below 28.0% by the end of the term. This strategic priority was to be realised through nine key outcomes across critical sectors of the economy over five years. These included the expansion of employment and work opportunities; the accelerated growth of strategic industrial and labour-intensive sectors; the creation of an enabling environment for investment alongside enhanced competitiveness through structural reforms; increased infrastructure investment, access, and efficiency; improved energy security supported by a just energy transition; expanded trade and investment; the development of a dynamic science, technology, and innovation ecosystem to stimulate growth; the establishment of a supportive and sustainable economic policy environment; and the advancement of economic transformation through the equitable inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in pursuit of a more just society. Davis and Williams (2025: 114) posit that initiatives and interventions had already been initiated across several of these areas, with the adoption of GNU under the 7th Administration.

To realise the target of 5.4% average annual GDP growth, the National Development Plan (NDP) sets a benchmark of increasing investment to 30% of GDP by 2030. However, recent trends suggest that progress toward this goal remains constrained. According to the National Treasury (2024), the ratio of nominal Gross Fixed Capital Formation to GDP declined from 14.9% in 2023 to 14.5% in 2024. This contraction was driven by a 3.7% decline in real capital expenditure, particularly from the public sector and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), while private-sector investment recorded only marginal growth. The slow pace of investment expansion aligns with findings from the NDP Review (2023), which attributes the decline in private-sector investment to a weakening economic outlook, policy uncertainty, and reduced capital spending by government and SOEs. Crucially, the 2024 formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) introduces a transformative variable into this investment landscape. (Silke, 2025: 408). Silke (2025: 408) further posits that the long-term sustainability of this investment recovery depends on translating these initial improvements into substantive policy reforms and large-scale capital implementation. Atradius Group (2024: 3) suggests that the GNU serves as a critical driver for stabilising policy and restoring the business confidence necessary to transition from marginal growth to the substantial private sector participation required by the NDP. While the report by Parsons (2025:

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1) reflects a pre-GNU contraction, the emerging political consensus is expected to act as a catalyst for structural reforms in energy and logistics, potentially pivoting the investment-to-GDP ratio back toward the 2030 target.

Despite these constraints, emerging institutional reforms under the Government of National Unity (GNU) signal incremental progress. A 2025 report by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group noted that while the GNU has contributed to improved investor sentiment, tangible advancement toward achieving the NDP 2030 targets remains uneven, with notable momentum emerging in infrastructure and logistics. In this regard, the 2025 Budget Review positions the South African government as a central coordinating mechanism for large-scale projects aimed at unlocking R100 billion in financing. Complementary initiatives, such as the implementation of the Logistics Roadmap by the National Logistics Crisis Committee, including the opening of rail and port capacity to private operators, align with key NDP structural reform priorities. Furthermore, improved energy stability, evidenced by over 240 consecutive days of uninterrupted power supply by late 2024/early 2025, has created a critical enabling environment for renewed private sector investment. According to Ackerman (2025:1), the simplification of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) regulations in the 2025 Budget further signals an institutional shift toward leveraging private capital to support both social and economic infrastructure development. According to Rodrik and Stiglitz (2024), a central policy priority had been the expansion of existing economic activity and employment through the removal of regulatory and structural barriers to investment, alongside the creation of a supportive enabling environment. This approach was to be pursued while safeguarding workers' rights and promoting broader participation by historically marginalised groups. Such a strategy was required to respond to evolving economic realities. Rodrik and Stiglitz (2026: 93) contend that technological advancements have rendered manufacturing increasingly capital-intensive and less labour-absorbing, thereby weakening the effectiveness of traditional industrialisation pathways historically followed by many developing countries. Consequently, while replicating the growth trajectories of industrialising economies in East Asia was no longer fully feasible, South Africa's economy was recognised as possessing distinctive strengths and comparative advantages that could be leveraged within a context-specific growth strategy.

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According to Statistics South Africa (2026), mining production expanded by 0,1% in 2025 compared with 2024. South Africa also generated 231,066 gigawatt-hours of electricity, which is 2,0% lower than in 2024. Krugel & Viljoen (2026: 12) state that large manufacturers employed 77,8% of their available resources to produce goods, which is lower from 79,1% in November 2024. This survey also found that South African hotels recorded an occupancy rate of 61,6% in November 2025, the highest since 2019 (64,4%). At the core of this, this survey further indicated that tourists arriving in South Africa increased by 8,4% from 920,147 in December 2024 to 977,165 in December 2025. Based on analyses by the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) and PwC South Africa (2025) covering the period from 2024 to mid-2025, the South African banking sector had sustained its longstanding structural characteristics of high concentration, strong profitability, and institutional resilience, continuing trends observed since 2001.

Supporting these findings, Krugel (2026: 5) notes that in the broader economy, the volume of goods transported via road and rail increased by 2.2% in October 2025. Municipal expenditure also recorded growth, rising by 5.4% in the September 2025 quarter compared to the corresponding period in September 2024 (Operation Vulindlela, 2024). Furthermore, capital expenditure on new assets within the formal business sector increased by 12.6% in the third quarter (Q3) of 2025 relative to the second quarter (Statistics South Africa, 2026: 2). According to the World Bank (2024: 67), twelve years after the National Development Plan (NDP) proposed a strategy aimed at increasing economic growth to 5.4% to address South Africa's three primary developmental challenges: poverty, inequality, and unemployment, such levels of growth had remained unattained. Persistent poverty, high unemployment, and stark inequality continued to pose significant threats to social cohesion (Parsons, 2025: 2)**.** In response to these enduring challenges, the country required bold and coordinated structural interventions capable of transforming the economy and generating the resources necessary to improve the livelihoods of all citizens (Bhorat, 2026: 115). These interventions were expected to foster conditions conducive to inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Consequently, an average growth rate of at least 2.6% had been targeted by 2027, with projections indicating an increase to above 3.0% by 2029 to meaningfully reduce unemployment and enhance the well-being of the majority of South Africans.

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To address the persistent decline in investment and achieve the target growth rates of 2.6% by 2027 and 3.0% by 2029, the Government of National Unity (GNU) has implemented several bold interventions (Presidency, 2025). These focus on structural transformation, infrastructure delivery, and crowding in private capital. Jammine (2025: 4) explains that between 2024 and early 2026, several structural reforms and investment-driven interventions were implemented to enhance economic competitiveness and infrastructure delivery. The implementation of the Electricity Regulation Amendment Act 38 of 2024 marked a significant shift toward establishing a competitive electricity market. By early 2026, the National Transmission Company of South Africa (NTCSA) had operationalised its Market Operator licence, thereby enabling multiple entities to participate in electricity trading within a more open market structure (Operation Vulindlela Q3 & Q4 2024 Progress Report). Similarly, in December 2024, the government released a Network Statement that permitted private rail operators to access the state-owned freight rail system for the first time (Transnet Network Statement, 2024). According to a report by Havenga (2025: 14), eleven private operators had been approved across forty-one routes, with full operationalisation anticipated by 2028/29.

According to Ackerman (2025: 1), to address the estimated R2 trillion infrastructure gap, the government adopted a blended finance approach that leveraged both public and private sector resources. Amendments to National Treasury Regulation 16, which came into effect in June 2025, simplified the approval process for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and introduced a framework for unsolicited infrastructure proposals (MTBPS, 2024). Furthermore, Matabane (2025: 3) reports that the National Treasury launched its first Sovereign Infrastructure Bond during the 2025/26 fiscal year, targeting a minimum of R15 billion to finance priority infrastructure projects. Institutional reforms were also undertaken through the reconfiguration of the Budget Facility for Infrastructure (BFI) into a centralised gateway that reviewed large-scale projects exceeding R1 billion quarterly to accelerate project readiness (Jacobsberg, 2025: 2). Sectoral interventions were introduced to strengthen institutional capacity and service delivery. The National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency (NWRIA) Act was passed in late 2025, with the agency scheduled to be fully established in April 2026 to oversee bulk water infrastructure investments. In response to municipal financial distress, an Inter-Ministerial Committee was established to address the R94.6 billion municipal debt burden, alongside the introduction of conditional grants that required

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municipalities to partner with private technical firms to support water and sanitation infrastructure repairs (National Treasury: Local Government Revenue and Expenditure Report, Q4 2023/24*)*. In April 2025, a Digital Transformation Roadmap was launched, prioritising the transition from green ID books to a digital identity system with remote authentication capabilities to improve government efficiency.

According to the Infrastructure South Africa (ISA) Annual Performance Plan 2024/25, progress was also evident in direct investment and infrastructure implementation. By late 2024, eighty-two Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs) were under construction, while forty-six were in procurement stages. Projects valued at R22.5 billion across the water, energy, and transport sectors were projected to be completed in 2025. The Presidential Employment Stimulus will be expanded in late 2026 to strengthen the alignment between income support mechanisms and long-term employment pathways, particularly for youth (Presidential Employment Stimulus: Fourth Year Review 2024 *&* Presidency, SONA 2026). Additionally, renewable energy deployment accelerated through the mobilisation of over USD 13 billion in international climate finance under the Just Energy Transition and the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP). By early 2026, installed renewable energy capacity exceeded 10.6 GW, with the total large-scale renewable market having reached 15 GW in 2024 and projected to increase to 18.18 GW by the end of 2026 (Operation Vulindlela Q3 & Q4 2024 Progress Report).

Tracy (2025: 12) notes that the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 identifies increased economic growth and expanded employment as the two primary enablers in addressing South Africa's developmental challenges. Imraan (2026: 45) posits that the country continues to confront a persistent triple challenge of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, which the GNU must now address through a unified policy framework. Supporting this view, Dawie Roodt (2025: 8) argues that, beyond longstanding divisions rooted in geography, race, and education, the COVID-19 pandemic further deepened disparities between those integrated into the economy through employment and those excluded due to chronic structural unemployment. According to Statistics South Africa (2024), the private sector accounted for approximately 88% of employment in the country, underscoring the importance of enabling business growth as a key strategy for reducing unemployment. Achieving this required a substantial increase in investment. Bernard (2026: 1)

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noted that the NDP had set a target for gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) to reach 30% of GDP by 2030, with public sector investment contributing 10% of GDP. Casey (2025: 1) posits that reaching this level of fixed investment is essential to significantly accelerate South Africa's economic growth, though current levels of approximately 15% remain well below this benchmark. Supporting this, Mhlanga (2025: 2) argues that while the target remains a critical goal for the GNU, the country must bridge the substantial gap between present investment and the 2030 objective through accelerated public-private collaboration

According to the National Planning Commission (2012: 169), structural reforms and complementary growth measures were recognised as necessary to promote sustainable employment. The Presidency (2025) laments that efforts to enhance inclusive growth were therefore complemented by direct investment in job creation through public employment programmes and related initiatives. These interventions were designed as counter-cyclical measures to generate short-term employment opportunities, with their significance expected to diminish as market-driven employment expanded. Kate (2026: 5) notes that since its establishment in October 2020, the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) has created earning opportunities for more than two million participants through various programmes. Initiatives such as the Social Employment Fund, the Basic Education Employment Initiative, and the National Youth Service had demonstrated measurable impact and were consequently institutionalised and scaled up (Krugel, 2026: 5). According to the Presidency (2025), over the five-year term, the government had set a target of creating six million employment opportunities. Significant potential for job creation was also identified within small businesses and the informal sector. National Youth Development (2025) notes that government support was extended across the entrepreneurial spectrum, from informal enterprises to high-growth, technology-driven start-ups. Karikari (2025: 1) is of the view that to foster a dynamic start-up ecosystem, South Africa leveraged its existing strengths, including high-quality broadband infrastructure, well-developed capital markets, and a strong skills base. This was supported by efforts to create an enabling environment that attracts venture capital and encourages start-up founders to establish and expand their operations within the country (Small Business Development, 2025).

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The Presidency of South Africa, during the State of the Nation Address 2026, noted that in the third quarter of the 2025/2026 budget year, the Republic of South Africa made great progress, unlocking earning opportunities for young people through the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention. The target for the period of 2020 to 2025 was to have at least 5 million young people in the National Pathway Management Network and access services to help them grow their employability and pursue different opportunities (Nkontwana, 2025: 2). Young people are supported to access 1.5 million temporary earning opportunities, including work-based placement, work-integrated learning opportunities, and paid service opportunities (Kabengele, 2025: 12). Waseem (2025: 25) contends that that 500 000 young people engaged in sustainable earning opportunities through workforce development programmes. The actual progress for the period from 2020 to date is that over 5.7 million young people are registered and accessing opportunities through the National Pathway Management Network (Presidential Youth Employment Intervention Q3 2025/26 Progress Report). To date, young people have been supported to access over 2.36 million temporary earning opportunities, including work-based placements, work-integrated learning, and paid service opportunities. This is a work in progress, and is receiving evaluations, and tracing studies have already commenced (Presidency, 2026).

According to Nonceba (2025: 4), other components of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) included demand-led skills development, enabling local ecosystems to facilitate self-employment and enterprise opportunities, and revitalising the National Youth Service (NYS) (PYEI Quarterly Progress Report, 2025). Karen (2024: 7) has expressed that the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) provided funding for several PYEI components and directly delivered public employment opportunities for young people. At the same time, the National Pathway Management Network (NPMN) supported the implementation of PES programmes. Through the NPMN, young people secured 294,530 earning opportunities. In the third quarter of the budget year, 255,620 earning opportunities were accessed through the SA Youth platform. In contrast, a further 38,910 earning and learning opportunities were secured through the Employment Services of South Africa (Margaret, 2026: 12). Additionally, workplace experience opportunities were expanded for 11,297 young people. During the same period, the Youth Employment Service (YES), a private sector-led initiative, placed 8,829 young people in workplace experience opportunities across various sectors of the economy (Mmamohau &

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Thulisile, 2024: 1). In line with scaling the work opportunities for the youth, the Department of Higher Education and Training further facilitated the placement of 2,468 young TVET learners and graduates into workplace experience opportunities (Presidency, 2025).

Progress in the revitalisation of the National Youth Service (NYS) has shown significant momentum; Urban-Econ Development Economists (2024: 13) report that Phase 4 of the programme recruited 34,368 young people, including an additional 1,971 recruits during the third quarter. Similarly, Stuart (2025: 11) is of the view that this expansion is critical for large-scale impact, noting that across all four phases, the NYS has placed a cumulative 132,784 young people in paid service opportunities. In alignment with these service-led efforts, support for youth entrepreneurship has been strengthened; Waseem (2026: 22) highlights that the National Youth Development Agency provided 6,724 financial and non-financial enterprise support opportunities in the third quarter alone. Complementing these efforts, the National Skills Fund (2025: 3) introduced the Jobs Boost Outcomes Fund as a R300 million mechanism. Riyaadh (2025: 1) views this as a breakthrough, as the Fund's pay-for-performance model incentivises implementation partners to ensure both formal employment and sustained job retention for young people

The Presidency of South Africa (2026) notes that between November 2025 and January 2026, the Fund entered its final delivery and verification phase, marked by a rapid increase in verified three- and six-month sustained employment outcomes. Similarly, Ebrahim (2026: 2) is of the view that the disbursement of over R220 million to implementation partners based on confirmed three- and six-month job retention demonstrates the fund’s effectiveness, particularly among historically excluded youth. In alignment with this focus on outcomes, final milestone verifications were scheduled to conclude by March 2026 to inform a larger expanded phase. Complementing these broader financial mechanisms, innovative pathways into growth sectors were piloted through specialised initiatives; Property Point VC (2025: 8) highlights how their candidate property practitioner certification combined accredited training with workplace placements to lower historical barriers to entry. This view is shared by the Industrial Development Corporation (2025: 14), which noted that such programs, funded through the NPMN Innovation Fund, are essential for unlocking demand-led opportunities. Ultimately, as the Presidency (2025) suggests, the

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Innovation Fund's role in testing new pathways into emerging sectors remains a key pillar in the country's strategy to evolve its youth employment ecosystem.

3.3.3 Building Capabilities

In his July 18th, 2024, address to Parliament, President Ramaphosa emphasised that achieving inclusive growth and job creation requires a capable government that performs both direct and indirect roles in the economy. The direct roles are executed through major state-owned enterprises (SOEs), while indirectly, the government influences economic activity through key regulatory and fiscal instruments. Calland (2024: 3) is of the view that this framing signifies a "pragmatic pivot," where the state acknowledges its limitations while asserting its role as an economic catalyst. Similarly, Bhorat and Steenkamp (2025: 114) argue that this dual role is essential for addressing structural unemployment, as the government must balance direct infrastructure investment with fiscal policies that incentivise private sector participation. This perspective is shared by Gumede (2024: 9), who points out that the "direct and indirect" framework is a strategic attempt to depoliticise SOE management while maintaining state oversight over essential services. According to Jonathan (2024), a professional and competent state is therefore essential for the effective functioning of the economy and the overall well-being of its citizens. On the other hand, Nathan (2024) argues that an immediate challenge lies in the declining performance of the local government sphere, which remains critical due to its responsibility for delivering basic services to communities. When this sphere fails to provide and sustain constitutionally mandated services, both citizens and the economic and social institutions upon which they rely are adversely affected. Local governments in South Africa continue to confront severe institutional and financial constraints that hinder effective service delivery; Makhaye and Subban (2024: 1) are of the view that rural municipalities, in particular, suffer from inadequate financial resources and limited human capital, which undermines their developmental mandate. Similarly, Kgobe (2025: 5) argues that the collision of administrative and political interests negatively affects local governments' ability to meet NDP targets, necessitating a clear stabilisation of the political-administrative interface. In alignment with the National Development Plan's vision, Hassan et al. (2026: 19) emphasise that positioning public service as a career of choice and developing technical specialist skills are essential for building a capable state. This perspective is shared by the National

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Planning Commission (2023: 39), which explicitly outlines the need for improved interdepartmental coordination and a clarified governance framework for state-owned enterprises as critical pillars for national progress. Ultimately, as contemporary scholars highlight, fostering proactive collaboration across national, provincial, and local spheres remains the cornerstone of achieving the 2030 developmental objectives.

The National Assembly's approval of the Public Service Commission Bill on 18 March 2025 is identified by Madzivhandila (2026) as a definitive step in embedding a "service-oriented culture" within the South African state. Similarly, Kanyane (2025: 5) is of the view that this legislation is the "linchpin" for professionalisation, as it formally separates political interests from administrative duties by establishing a secretariat independent of the Department of Public Service and Administration. In alignment with this reform, Madonsela et al. (2024: 11) argue that the Bill's mandate to insulate appointments from political interference is essential for restoring public trust, particularly within the embattled local government sphere," where service delivery has been most compromised. This perspective is shared by researchers at the Public Affairs Research Institute (2025: 3), who point out that the Bill empowers the PSC not only to monitor but also to actively enforce the merit principles of Section 195 of the Constitution, thereby ensuring that competence rather than affiliation dictates the leadership of public institutions.

The institutionalisation of ethical governance in South Africa reached a critical threshold by early 2026; Reddy (2026: 1) observes that achieving 93% compliance in mandatory lifestyle audits for senior management represents a definitive shift toward administrative integrity. Silke (2026: 3) is of the view that this transparency, highlighted in the 2026 State of the Nation Address, is essential for rebuilding investor confidence in the public sector. In alignment with these accountability measures, the state's digital modernisation has accelerated; Nshakira-Rukundo (2025: 8) argues that the "MyMzansi" platform and the new Digital Identity system are pivotal for reducing "frictional costs" in accessing social grants and driver's licences. Complementing these digital shifts, the National State Enterprises Bill introduces a centralised management model that Kanyane (2025: 5) describes as a linchpin for the financial sustainability of public entities. Esselaar (2025: 12) points out that the Bill's framework is designed to bridge the gap between operational efficiency and rigorous state oversight, finally addressing the structural governance failures of the

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past decade. According to the National Framework Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Sector (approved by cabinet in October 2022), a central registry for disciplinary cases was established to prevent officials implicated in misconduct from being re-employed elsewhere within the public sector; Somadoda (2026: 14) posits that this registry is the primary mechanism for ending the recycling of corruption that has historically plagued the civil service. The Presidency's Annual Performance Plan 2025/26 stated that the National School of Government (NSG) had implemented approximately 80% of the National Framework as of early 2026 and was progressing toward full operationalisation. Reflecting on this progress, Thokozani (2025: 112) observes that while the 80% implementation rate is a notable milestone for the Seventh Administration, the transition from training to actual ethical practice remains the final hurdle. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) continue to represent a significant vulnerability within the post-apartheid state, as highlighted in the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture; Gumede (2025: 9) contends that without the structural protections promised in the National State Enterprises Bill (introduced in 2024), these entities remain susceptible to the same capture patterns identified by the Zondo Commission. The Auditor-General's audit outcomes for the 2021/2022 financial year reflected persistent governance and financial management challenges across major entities, including Eskom, South African Airways, Denel, and Alexkor, with only 2 of the 20 key SOEs receiving clean audit outcomes.

Despite the above challenges, progress has been made in certain sectors. According to PRASA's 2025/26 Corporate Plan, 34 of the country's 40 rail corridors were restored, improving the safety and affordability of public transport while simultaneously enhancing economic opportunities for small businesses operating along rail networks. Institutional rebuilding has also been evident in revenue administration. During the 2025 financial year, SARS achieved its highest-ever revenue collection, amounting to R2.3 trillion (Bhorat, 2026: 18). Effective public governance and integrated development planning are essential for improving service delivery and ensuring that government resources are utilised to meet developmental priorities (Munzhedzi, Phago & Mubangizi, 2022). Abedian (2026: 2) contends that these developments reflect both the ongoing structural weaknesses within SOEs and the simultaneous efforts to rebuild institutional effectiveness within key components of the state. Naidoo (2025: 45) is of the view that these reforms institutionalise meritocracy within the state's human resource practices and give practical

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effect to the recommendations of the National Development Plan regarding the type of professional public sector required to drive a developmental state within a democratic governance framework.

According to the MTDP 2024-2029, the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) outlines strategies to build a capable, ethical, and developmental state. Central to this vision is the professionalisation of the public service alongside the cultivation of an ethical and collaborative institutional culture. The NDP identifies eight priority areas where targeted action on state capacity is essential:

- Stabilising the political–administrative interface,
- Developing technical and specialist professional skills,
- Strengthening delegation, accountability, and oversight mechanisms, and
- improving interdepartmental coordination.
- The need to reinforce local government capacity,
- Clarify the governance framework of state-owned enterprises,
- Adopt a proactive approach to strengthening relations across national, provincial, and local spheres of government,
- And position careers in public service and local government administration as attractive and viable career paths.

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2025) noted that under the 7th Administration of the Government of National Unity (GNU), the National Framework Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Sector has transitioned from a policy concept to an operational mandate. A primary pillar of this progress is the legislative fast-tracking of the Public Service Amendment Bill and the Public Administration Management Amendment (PAMA) Bill, both of which reached critical milestones in late 2024 and 2025 (The DPSA 2024/25 Annual Performance Plan). These bills provide the legal authority to decouple administrative functions from political interference by clearly defining the roles of Executive Authorities versus Accounting Officers, a shift codified in the GNU Statement of Intent (2024) under "Principle 9," which mandates a non-partisan, merit-based public service. To enforce meritocracy, the GNU has implemented strict competency-based entry requirements. As of the 2024/25 Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA)

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Annual Performance Plan, all Senior Management Service (SMS) positions now require a certain minimum of an NQF Level qualification. This is supported by the mandatory Pre-entry Executive Induction Programme (Nyukela), which ensures that no individual is appointed to a senior role without verified leadership competencies, effectively ending the era of purely political appointments as highlighted in the National School of Government (NSG) 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. Addressing the "revolving door" of corruption, the 7th Administration has operationalised a Central Disciplinary Register. According to the Public Service Commission (PSC) Quarterly Bulletin (2024), this registry contained over 12,000 records by mid-2024, tracking officials who were dismissed or resigned pending disciplinary action. By the time of SONA 2026, the President confirmed that this system had been expanded to include local government and public entities, ensuring that disgraced officials cannot be re-employed elsewhere in the state. This intervention is legally anchored in the Public Service Amendment Act, which prohibits the re-employment of dismissed individuals for a specified period (Presidency, 2025).

Furthermore, the GNU has prioritised administrative stability by extending the tenure of Directors-General (DGs) and Heads of Department (HoDs). The DPSA Directive on Human Resources Management (2024) allows for contract extensions of up to 10 years, subject to rigorous performance reviews. This move is designed to ensure that the state's administrative leadership remains intact across political cycles, providing the continuity needed to execute long-term infrastructure and economic goals. This progress was reaffirmed in the 2025 Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS), which linked these governance improvements to a projected R27 billion saving through the rationalisation of redundant state functions.

The audit findings of the Auditor-General of South Africa (AG) for the 2024/25 financial year indicated that the process of appointing members to the boards of state-owned enterprises should be depoliticised to ensure that appointments are based on merit and appropriate qualifications. This position is aligned with the principles of the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP). Furthermore, the Auditor-General’s report on local government audit outcomes, released in May 2025, reveals that of 257 municipalities, only 41 obtained clean audits. In line with the commitment made at the end of the 2023/24 financial year, when the audit quality target was not achieved, an improvement was recorded, with an 82% quality rating achieved in the 2024/25 financial year.

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According to Motebang (2021), strengthening state capacity remains central to addressing unemployment, poverty, and inequality. The National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) Review of 2023 highlighted that poor productivity, corruption, wastage, sabotage, and systemic leakages, alongside weak accountability, continue to undermine efforts to build an effective state and improve service delivery. Persistent unevenness in state capacity contributes to inconsistent performance across local, provincial, and national spheres of government and remains a significant challenge. While the imperative of building a capable state remains an overriding priority in the post-state capture period, this does not necessitate delaying the implementation of key developmental interventions. Progress toward goals such as ending load-shedding, expanding the small, medium, and micro-enterprise (SMME) sector, addressing nutritional poverty, and restoring water supply infrastructure must proceed concurrently with broader state-building efforts (The Presidency Strategic Plan 2025-2030).

According to Aneri (2025), South Africa continues to refine and implement its planning system to address spatial injustice, economic disparities, and administrative fragmentation. The focus shifts from the initial adoption of framework legislation, such as the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) of 2013, towards active implementation, the institutionalisation of planning processes, and the codification of development practices. Key interventions include the implementation of the Expropriation Act No. 13 of 2024, signed into law in early 2025, which provides a formalised and constitutional legal pathway for land reform by replacing outdated 1975 legislation and enabling accelerated land acquisition in the public interest as part of broader spatial transformation. According to Kariuki (2025), the drafting of the Equitable Access to Land Bill and the Rural Development Bill forms part of the 2025–2029 Strategic Plan of the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development, aimed at strengthening land tenure systems and advancing spatial integration. Progress is also being made towards finalising the Development Planning Framework Bill, which builds on the 2022 Policy Framework on Integrated Planning and seeks to codify planning integration across the national, provincial, and local spheres of government. Amendments to the Planning Profession Act are underway to enhance regulatory oversight and align professional planning practice with contemporary developmental challenges (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 30-Year Review Report of South Africa's democratic governance).

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President Ramaphosa, in his February 12th, 2026, noted that from 2024 onwards, intensified efforts focus on the operationalisation of the National Spatial Development Framework 2022-2050, particularly through aligning municipal and provincial Spatial Development Frameworks with its vision of a coordinated “one country, one map” approach. Furthermore, the National Treasury advances the integration of strategy-led budgeting through Built Environment Performance Plans (BEPPs), ensuring that capital investment aligns with spatial priorities, especially within metropolitan integration zones. These reforms are reinforced through the development of the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029, which guides the 7th Administration’s agenda towards building a capable, ethical, and developmental state, including the implementation of structural reforms under Operation Vulindlela that influence land use planning, energy systems, and infrastructure development (National Treasury, 2025).

3.3.4 Social Protection

The Government of National Unity (GNU) has approached social protection through a multidimensional poverty lens, focusing on preserving the social wage amid fiscal consolidation. Patel (2025: 114), a preeminent scholar on social development, posits that the 7th Administration’s commitment to the Basic Income Support (BIS) pathway represents a significant policy shift, moving beyond the temporary nature of the SRD grant to create a permanent institutional fixture for those aged 18 to 59. This transition is viewed by Graham (2026: 22) as a critical "capability enhancer," as the administration has successfully linked these transfers to the "SA Youth" platform to ensure that social protection acts as a bridge to economic activity rather than a terminal welfare state. Furthermore, Noble (2025: 5) is of the view that the GNU's decision to maintain social spending at roughly 12% of GDP despite intense pressure from the Democratic Alliance for tighter fiscal controls demonstrates a pragmatic consensus on the social floor required to prevent civil unrest. In the realm of basic services and the "social wage," the 7th Administration has intensified the rollout of the Free Basic Services (FBS) policy to indigent households. Camerer (2026: 1) maintains that the effectiveness of this social protection pillar is now being measured through "outcome-based audits" rather than just expenditure tracking, a move she argues is essential for restoring the integrity of municipal delivery systems. Building on this accountability shift, Ngwato

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(2025: 45) observes that the GNU's National Human Settlements Development Grant has been repurposed to prioritise the "informal settlement upgrading" programme. She posits that providing secure tenure and basic sanitation in situ serves as a more rapid and transformative form of social protection than the slow-paced delivery of traditional RDP housing. Additionally, Pillay (2026: 7) contends that the professionalisation of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) leadership in 2025 has been the primary driver in reducing the R4 billion annual loss to "ghost beneficiaries," effectively redirecting those funds back into the child support grant system. The 7th Administration has also mainstreamed "innovation" as a core component of its social protection framework by finalising the Digital Identity (Smart ID) initiative for all children. Aboobaker (2025: 18) is of the view that this digital integration is the technological spine of the MTDP 2024–2029, as it ensures that no child is excluded from the school nutrition programme or healthcare due to a lack of documentation. Ultimately, as argued by May (2026: 1), the GNU's ability to achieve the 2030 targets for poverty reduction hinges on this coordinated state model, where social assistance, digital inclusion, and infrastructure security are no longer treated as separate mandates but as a singular, integrated developmental strategy.

3.4 THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL DYNAMICS AND INTER-PARTY COOPERATION WITHIN THE GNU IN RELATION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NDP 2030

President Ramaphosa's remarks during the announcement of the election results on 2 June 2024 emphasised that South Africans expect their leaders to collaborate in addressing the nation's needs (Presidency, 2024). This statement effectively set the stage for what would follow. Just a few days later, on June 5, 2024, the African National Congress (ANC) National Working Committee (NWC) affirmed its stance that all political formations should prioritise the interests of the country and its citizens. The committee further emphasised the need to build national consensus around a form of government capable of advancing South Africa's future. As a consequence, on June 6, 2024, the African National Congress (ANC) National Executive Committee (NEC) declared its intention to invite other political parties to join in forming a Government of National Unity (GNU), viewing this as the most practical path to advance the country (Madia & Modise, 2024). Beukes (2024)

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contends that this promptly steered the country toward a new, more inclusive model of governance, choosing this route over the expected formation of a narrow two-party coalition.

Coalitions and coalition governments are not a recent development in political systems. They have long existed across central, eastern, and western Europe, resulting from political fragmentation and the use of proportional representation electoral systems (Jolobe, 2025: 54-68). While parties sometimes meet the threshold to elect representatives, this voting system often leads to a fragmented parliament, making coalition governments a practical solution. Scholars agree that the origins of coalition governments can be traced to Europe (Zweni, Faku, & Yan, 2025). According to Nhengu and Murairwa (2020), a Government of National Unity (GNU) is a specific form of coalition government designed to include all major political actors within the governing structure. Nhengu and Murairwa (2020) highlighted four key components of a GNU: (i) political transition, (ii) inclusive participation, (iii) respect for human rights, and (iv) adherence to the rule of law. At its core, a GNU is built on the principles of power-sharing, national unity, and inter-party cooperation.

Kadima (2014) and Gautam and Schreiber (2018) contend that coalition governments typically emerge due to two central dynamics. Firstly, they form when multiple political parties agree to collaborate, thereby limiting the influence of any single party within the governing alliance. This cooperation is usually necessary when no party secures a clear majority in an election (Masuabi & Ludidi, 2024). Secondly, such arrangements arise precisely because no single party has achieved an outright majority, prompting two or more parties to unite to form a functional government. Coalitions require political parties to collaborate in pursuit of the public good. Booysen (2025) argued that such alliances can promote national unity and inter-party cooperation. Additionally, they offer financial advantages, particularly when formed before elections. These benefits may include shared campaign expenses, increased access to public funding, and the potential for greater political influence through the distribution of government positions and resources tied to electoral success (Khoza, 2024). It is commonly accepted that political parties participate in elections primarily to gain control of the government. However, Law (2018) notes an ongoing academic debate over whether coalitions are created to increase or consolidate political power. Coalitions bring together diverse political parties to collaborate in serving the interests of the citizens. They

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enable parties that might typically be seen as opponents to unite on contentious issues for the greater good of the country. By fostering dialogue, consultation, and the exchange of ideas, coalitions help replace harmful antagonism with constructive cooperation (Gumede, 2024).

Coalitions encourage collaboration among political parties to serve the public's interests (Habib, 2025). They enable parties often seen as rivals to come together on divisive matters for the nation's collective benefit (Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection, 2025). Through promoting communication, consultation, and the exchange of ideas, coalitions help move away from destructive opposition toward constructive dialogue. According to Beukes (2024), in a country as deeply divided as South Africa, the Government of National Unity (GNU) serves as an example of how historically fragmented racial and ethnic groups can come together. This arrangement enabled South Africans from diverse backgrounds and political perspectives to trust the government and feel that their views were represented (Kadima, 2014).

As established by Mngomezulu and Phetha (2025), a Government of National Unity, as a form of coalition government, is grounded in three key perspectives:

- forming a broad political front
- the office-seeking theory
- the policy-seeking theory

The primary motivation for participating in such a government is to gain access to public office, exercise state power, and influence or determine policy decisions (Ihembe & Onwuzuruigbo, 2025). The central theoretical premise of a Government of National Unity (GNU) is that it arises from political necessity. In such contexts, various stakeholders, including political parties, are brought together to achieve national stability and establish a functional state. This often occurs when no single party secures a clear majority in an election (Ndou, 2022: 33). Similarly, Knowles (2021: 35) argues that coalitions are primarily formed to foster political stability and ensure effective governance. However, Knowles (2021:37) also cautions that while a GNU may promote stability in cases of hung parliaments or fragmented local municipalities, it can also result in weak governance, characterised by a lack of accountability, corruption, and administrative inefficiency.

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Beukes (2021: 69) posits that beyond political stabilisation, GNUs can enhance the state's role in social coordination. In such arrangements, political leaders and state institutions can serve as mechanisms for organising societal interests for several reasons. First, a GNU encourages cooperation based on shared goals rather than the individualism inherent in market systems (Southall, 2024). Second, decision-making within a GNU tends to be more adaptable, making it better equipped to manage uncertainty, complexity, and so-called "wicked problems." Third, politics within a GNU can function as a coping mechanism in an unpredictable world (Gumede, 2025). And fourth, politics under a GNU can move beyond mere resource distribution, facilitating a broader process of social production in which diverse societal interests are united around a common purpose (Marwala, 2024).

National unity plays a critical role in nation-building (Chang, Zizan, & Amran, 2013). Governments of National Unity are particularly valuable in creating space for political parties to set aside their differences and work collaboratively toward building democratic and inclusive societies (Shopola & Munzhedzi, 2025). The central focus is on fostering unity and directing collective efforts toward achieving the country's national goals, while addressing and reducing societal divisions (Kariuki, Reddy, & Wissink, 2022). At the outset of forming a Government of National Unity, leaders must therefore take key steps,

- starting with a mutual acknowledgement that the nation is deeply divided and politically polarised (Manyama, 2023).
- identify the underlying issues contributing to societal divisions, and
- determine national priorities aimed at addressing and resolving the root causes of those divisions (Beukes & De Visser, 2021).
- and roll out programmes designed to foster social cohesion.

Knowles (2021:87) highlights several key opportunities that a Government of National Unity (GNU) can offer. These include: (i) the promotion of good governance through effective leadership, (ii) sustainable and high-quality service delivery, (iii) the establishment of political stability, and (iv) the cultivation of a citizen-focused government. The last point is further reinforced by Ndou (2022: 69), who notes that a GNU can enhance public engagement and participation, resulting in more responsive social services and stronger oversight mechanisms

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through institutional checks and balances. Gumede (2024) is of the view that the Government of National Unity (GNU) is, in itself, a sound and effective model of governance, particularly when viewed through the lens of the policy-seeking theory of coalition formation. In this context, this study will argue that a GNU represents a more inclusive form of coalition, in which multiple political parties come together around a shared commitment to implementing clearly defined national objectives, as is the case with National Development 2030.

3.5 CHALLENGES FACING THE GNU IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030

The National Development Plan 2030 (2012) has long been positioned as South Africa's guiding framework for eliminating poverty, reducing inequality, and achieving inclusive economic growth. Scholars and policy analysts such as Chigova (2021) and Kuhlmann and Wollmann (2014) have consistently highlighted systemic governance weaknesses, such as limited institutional capacity, poor service delivery, and policy inconsistency, as critical obstacles to the plan's effective implementation. Similarly, reports by the Public Service Commission (2017) highlight weak coordination, fragmented implementation mechanisms, and a lack of accountability across government tiers as persistent hindrances to the NDP's progress. Simelane and Nkwatle (2024:4) contend that the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU), which seeks to unify divergent political entities under a single governing political banner, introduces both potential and peril. The GNU could promote inclusive governance, consensus-building, and national unity. On the other hand, a growing body of academic and policy discourse warns that the GNU model often leads to policy incoherence, decision-making paralysis, and internal ideological conflicts (National Planning Commission. (2012). These dynamics undermine effective governance and make long-term planning, such as implementing the NDP, particularly challenging. Despite these insights, limited empirical research exists that specifically examines how the GNU, as a coalition governance model, directly affects the practical implementation of the NDP 2030. Much of the existing scholarship treats the challenges of the GNU and the NDP as parallel concerns rather than interlinked phenomena (Cilliers & Louw, 2013). Mabotha (2025) argued that there is a scarcity of studies offering practical mechanisms or governance frameworks to enhance the GNU's capacity to deliver on the NDP's strategic goals.

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While there is considerable theoretical discussion on the challenges faced by the GNU and the implementation weaknesses of national development plans in general, there remains a notable gap in research that directly addresses key areas critical to South Africa's current political and developmental context (Mabotha & Ngcamu, 2024). According to Alexiadou and Hoepfner (2019), limited attention has been given to analysing the direct relationship between internal Government of National Unity (GNU) dynamics, such as ideological divisions, policy fragmentation, and decision-making paralysis, and their specific impact on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. Furthermore, the existing literature lacks context-specific, actionable strategies or models to strengthen political cooperation within the GNU, thereby enabling more effective execution of long-term developmental agendas (Martin & Vanberg, 2020).

The 2023 review of the National Development Plan 2030 highlighted that the plan sets out a long-term agenda to address South Africa's persistent triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment by 2030. Marumo (2024: 11) laments that the country remains significantly off course, with most of its key targets having been missed, thereby necessitating urgent and coordinated interventions to restore progress. Central to this recovery is the need to move the economy onto a higher, more inclusive growth trajectory, underpinned by increased investment (Shava and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2025). Within this context, the Government of National Unity under the 7th Administration confronts a complex set of structural constraints, including energy insecurity, logistics inefficiencies, skills shortages, economic concentration, and regulatory misalignment. Butao (2025: 112) observes that the prevailing political climate, insufficient demand, and limited availability of skilled labour continue to rank among the most significant constraints to economic expansion. As noted by the Department of Trade and Industry (2018), corruption erodes good governance and weakens public trust in state institutions. It also discourages entrepreneurship and fair participation in economic opportunities, particularly in public procurement processes, where perceptions of patronage and favouritism undermine transparency and inclusivity (Mkhize et al, 2025: 6). The DTI (2025) identified corruption as the most problematic factor affecting the ease of doing business in South Africa, followed by crime, theft, and government instability. High levels of criminal activity deter potential investors and undermine economic growth prospects.

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According to the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029, one of the fundamental principles agreed upon by the ten political parties in the Statement of Intent of the Government of National Unity (GNU) under the 7th Administration is the commitment to building state capacity through the establishment of a professional, merit-based, corruption-free, and developmental public service. This commitment also includes restructuring and strengthening state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to ensure they effectively contribute to achieving national development goals. Reddy (2026: 1) observes that within this context, the effective performance of local government remains essential for the delivery of social services and the stimulation of local economic development under the 7th Administration. These challenges stem from factors such as weak governance practices, financial mismanagement, instability in the political-administrative interface, and corruption, all of which collectively hinder the ability of local government to fulfil its developmental mandate (Langa, 2026: 1).

Yuri, in her Business Report (2025), noted that the Government of National Unity (GNU) continues to face significant challenges in implementing the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, largely due to extensive ideological differences among coalition partners, sluggish economic growth, and persistent infrastructure constraints. Van Aardt (2026: 1) observes that structural limitations, such as fiscal pressures, high unemployment levels, and the slow pace of policy reform, further complicate the attainment of the NDP's targets by 2030. In light of these challenges, Omar (2025: 1) is of the view that Political and ideological divergences within the GNU, particularly tensions between the African National Congress and the Democratic Alliance, continue to impede cohesive policy formulation and the implementation of reforms. Zondi and Ehiane (2025) contend that to overcome these hurdles, the state must transition to a more collaborative, citizen-centric governance model that prioritises transparency over political patronage. Furthermore, Matimolane (2026: 1) adds that corruption, specifically within essential sectors like water provision, functions as a systemic barrier that perpetuates insecurity and directly contradicts the goals of a developmental state. These divisions, especially regarding labour market flexibility and the restructuring of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), often delay decision-making processes and limit reform momentum. In his presentation to the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection, Jeenah (2025) characterised the Government of National Unity (GNU) as

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oversized and technically inefficient, thereby constraining its ability to deliver tangible legislative outcomes. He observed that the GNU's Statement of Intent lacked detailed policy direction and clear mechanisms for dispute resolution. Nonetheless, notable achievements included the adoption of the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029 and consensus around its three strategic priorities. Ultimately, as argued by the Dullah Omar Institute (2024), the GNU has continued to face policy disagreements on key legislative matters such as the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (BELA), the National Health Insurance Bill (NHI), and the Expropriation Act, thereby testing its capacity to implement coherent and unified policies. Mahlakoana et al. (2025: 1) highlighted several domestic political dynamics shaping the governance landscape. These included ongoing budget contestations that underscored the need for consensus to pass a GNU-aligned budget, as well as a growing retreat of citizens from formal political participation, as reflected in the outcomes of the 2024 elections. At the same time, the proposed National Dialogue was identified as presenting an opportunity for renewed citizen engagement and the potential resurgence of civil society influence, provided that meaningful outcomes were achieved. The Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2025) pointed out that additional trends included the strengthening of right-wing political movements in line with global patterns, the continued resilience of institutional oversight mechanisms such as the judiciary and independent bodies, and persistent inconsistencies in state capacity across government departments.

According to Statistics South Africa (2025), economic stagnation, with growth rates remaining below 1%, constrains the country's ability to generate employment and revenue necessary to meet the NDP's developmental objectives. Mondi (2025: 5) is of the view that Inflation for 2025 was the lowest in 21 years. The Financial Stability Review by the SARB (2025) highlighted that infrastructure and energy challenges further exacerbate this situation, as the underperformance of major SOEs such as Eskom and Transnet continues to restrict productivity and economic expansion. Building on this concern, Butao (2025: 112) posits that Fiscal constraints also play a critical role, as rising debt-to-GDP ratios limit government capacity to invest in essential infrastructure and social programmes envisioned in the NDP. According to the Action SA 2025 Report, institutional weaknesses within the state remain another major obstacle, as capacity limitations hinder effective policy implementation. Dumisani (2026: 3) is of the view that the absence of clearly defined implementation frameworks has undermined progress, with critics

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noting that the original NDP lacked a detailed execution mechanism. The Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2025) laments that the GNU has also faced criticism for failing to establish measurable performance indicators to guide implementation and track progress toward achieving the NDP's goals.

A massive portion of South Africa's Black population continues to face severe poverty, unemployment, and inequality (Francis & Webster, 2019). On 17th February 2026, the statistician-general, Mr Risenga Maluleke, reported in his address that the official unemployment rate decreased by 0,5 percentage points to 31,4% in the fourth quarter compared to the third quarter of 2025. This is further supported by the Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Survey, which pointed out that there were 172,000 fewer people unemployed in the fourth quarter than in the third quarter in 2025, approximately 3,5 million out of 10,3 million (34,0%) young people aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education, or training. According to Rautenbach (2022), the current government has failed to meet South African citizens' expectations regarding the delivery of basic services and necessities. The South African Presidency (2025) laments that, given the current political reality of a Government of National Unity, the South African government needs a renewed commitment to achieve the goals set out in the National Development Plan 2030. This study aims to explore the concept of a government of national unity as an alternative approach in South Africa, in light of this context. Swanepoel (2022) argues that insufficient progress toward the targets set out in the National Development Plan (NDP) can be attributed to a combination of systemic, institutional, and governance-related factors. The most critical overarching issue lies in the implementation of the Plan itself, specifically, the degree to which its strategic objectives have been translated into actionable, coordinated, and measurable programmes across all spheres of government (Cilliers & Camp, 2013). The Diagnostic Report of the National Planning Commission (2011), which served as the foundation of the NDP, had already identified recurrent problems of policy non-implementation and the absence of broad-based partnerships as major impediments to South Africa's developmental progress. Despite the adoption of sound policies since 1994, their practical execution has often been inconsistent, fragmented, or undermined by weak institutional capacity and poor intergovernmental coordination (NPC, 2011).

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The envisioned paradigm shift, which required a fundamental transformation in the way the state designs, coordinates, and evaluates development programmes, has not been fully realised (Awuah, 2019). Marumo (2024: 11) maintains that the theory of change underpinning the NDP, which calls for integrated planning, evidence-based decision-making, and active citizen participation, has failed to manifest in everyday governance practice. Instead, implementation has often reverted to traditional, top-down administrative approaches, characterised by siloed planning and limited interdepartmental cooperation (Confederation of South African Trade Unions, 2013). The NDP strongly advocated for "doing things differently," emphasising innovation, inclusivity, and adaptive governance mechanisms as essential to achieving Vision 2030 (NPC, 2020). However, the persistence of bureaucratic rigidity, uneven accountability systems, and political interference in administrative processes has constrained the state's capacity to pursue this transformation (Gorelick et al., 2024: 1). The lack of coherent monitoring and evaluation frameworks further weakens policy feedback loops, making it difficult to assess progress and adapt strategies in response to emerging challenges (Mpya, 2020).

Despite the NDP's comprehensive vision and initial nationwide support, its implementation has been severely constrained by the absence of sustained political will and the inability to establish a cohesive social compact among key stakeholders (Nene, 2014). While the Plan was widely endorsed across society upon its adoption in 2012, this early momentum dissipated as competing interests and institutional fragmentation undermined the collective effort required to drive long-term developmental change (National Planning Commission, 2020). The challenges confronting implementation are deeply rooted in the failure to align political leadership, administrative capacity, and societal commitment around a shared developmental agenda. Shava and Maramura (2017) assert that the NDP required not only technical coordination but also strong political stewardship to unify government departments, the private sector, labour unions, and civil society under a common vision for transformation. However, in the years that followed, political and ideological contestations within the state and across governing institutions weakened policy coherence and eroded focus on strategic priorities (Seekings & Nattrass, 2015). A key factor in this stagnation has been the erosion of trust between government, business, and labour core constituencies whose collaboration is essential to achieving inclusive growth and employment creation (Tebele, 2016). The inability of these sectors to place the national interest above sectoral

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interests has hindered the development of sustainable partnerships, leading to fragmented implementation efforts (UNDP, 2015). Simultaneously, the growing public distrust of the state, fuelled by corruption scandals, governance failures, and service delivery shortcomings, has further constrained participatory development and weakened the legitimacy of government-led initiatives (Thijm, 2021). Moreover, the absence of strong political leadership to champion the NDP and rally social partners behind its objectives has perpetuated divisions within the political-administrative system. Instead of fostering unity of purpose, policy direction has often been shaped by short-term political considerations rather than the long-term developmental imperatives articulated in the NDP (National Planning Commission, 2015). The NDP's vision was premised on the notion that inclusive collaboration across all sectors of society could help overcome the historical and structural fault lines within South Africa's political economy. However, policy incoherence, fragmented coordination, and the absence of decisive leadership have collectively hindered progress toward this goal (National Planning Commission, 2020).

Effective implementation of the NDP, as the National Planning Commission (NPC) previously advised, depends on collective action across government, rooted in adaptive learning and coordination (National Planning Commission, 2019: Talanoa Dialogue). However, the current institutional landscape remains highly bureaucratised, fragmented, and lethargic, impeding coherent delivery (Mondliwa & Roberta, 2018). This study calls for a streamlined institutional model that enhances accountability, ensures visible leadership at the centre of government, and deepens partnerships with social actors, especially business and organised labour. According to the Medium-Term Development Plan 2024-2029, the call for a course correction in the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) directly aligns with the current political context of South Africa's Government of National Unity. The GNU presents a renewed opportunity to overcome the very structural and institutional weaknesses that have historically undermined the NDP (Presidency, 2024). As a multi-party governance arrangement, the GNU is premised on principles of collaboration, inclusivity, and collective decision-making, values that mirror the NDP's original vision of a social compact between government, business, labour, and civil society (Simelane & Boikanyo, 2024). By fostering cooperative governance and shared accountability, the GNU can function as a corrective mechanism to address the capacity deficits, policy incoherence, and bureaucratic fragmentation highlighted in past reviews (Cassaza & Chulu,

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2016). Its inclusive structure offers a platform for rebuilding trust among social partners, a key missing element that previously constrained NDP implementation (Presidency, 2025). Through the GNU, there is potential to institutionalise the NDP across all spheres of government by ensuring stronger policy coordination, clearer lines of oversight for implementation, and a more deliberate alignment between national priorities, budget allocations, and developmental outcomes. This model reinforces the notion that achieving Vision 2030 is not solely a state-driven mandate but a collective national enterprise requiring distributed leadership, mutual accountability, and coordinated implementation (Chanda et al., 2024). In this context, the 7th Administration represents both a political and institutional opportunity to reset the developmental trajectory envisioned in the NDP, translating the principle of "course correction" into actionable governance reform (Maseko & Mhlanti, 2024). If effectively managed, the GNU can transform South Africa's fragmented implementation environment into a cohesive network of policy actors, thereby restoring credibility to the NDP as the country's overarching framework for sustainable and inclusive development (Zulu 2024; The Presidency's Strategic Plan for 2025-2030).

Furthermore, the institutionalisation of the NDP within all spheres of government and state-owned entities has been weak, with limited alignment between planning frameworks, budgets, and macroeconomic policies (NDP Review, 2020). While the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) was introduced to operationalise the NDP, its impact has been nominal (Thomas, 2017). The NPC's envisaged role as a facilitator of social compacting and stakeholder alignment has similarly not materialised effectively, further weakening collaborative governance structures (NDP Review, 2020). The insights from the NPC's 2015 Planning Discussion Paper remain deeply relevant to South Africa's current governance context under the Government of National Unity (GNU). Nhlabathi (2018) contends that the GNU, by its nature, presents an institutional opportunity to redefine the national planning landscape and to overcome the historical weaknesses identified in the country's planning system. The establishment of a collaborative, multi-party governance structure provides a renewed platform for creating a state-led yet society-driven planning approach, as envisioned in the NDP and reinforced by the NPC's earlier recommendations (Schaefer, 2018).

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The GNU's inclusivity aligns with the call for a participatory and integrated planning system that unites government, civil society, business, and local communities in co-producing developmental outcomes (Law & Calland, 2018). By leveraging its broad political base, the GNU can promote coherent planning across all three spheres of government, ensuring that provincial development plans, municipal integrated development plans (IDPs), and national strategic frameworks are synchronised under a common developmental vision (Chindoga, 2019). Furthermore, the GNU's emphasis on cooperative governance provides an enabling environment for institutionalising legislative and procedural reforms that strengthen alignment among planning cycles, expenditure frameworks, and performance systems (Martin & Vanberg, 2020). The GNU can build on the initiatives already sponsored by the NPC, such as the National Spatial Development Framework and the process to align the national budget with NDP priorities to ensure that planning becomes a transformative instrument, not a mere compliance exercise. In this regard, the GNU can function as a catalyst for revitalising developmental planning, transforming it from a bureaucratic function into a dynamic, evidence-based, and purposeful process(Calland, 2016). By fostering stronger technical capacity, clearer coordination mechanisms, and active public participation, the GNU can bridge the persistent gap between planning and implementation, thereby restoring the NDP's role as the central pillar of South Africa's long-term development trajectory(Law & Calland, 2018).

Despite notable initiatives aimed at strengthening South Africa's planning and implementation capacity, several efforts have stalled or lost momentum, in part due to administrative transitions associated with the current seventh administration (Ndletyana & Nomarwayi, 2016). Key initiatives, such as developing legislation to integrate long-term planning and aligning the national budget with the NDP, require renewed focus within a strategic, holistic framework to support the building of a capable and developmental state (NPC, 2017). In response to persistent weaknesses in intergovernmental coordination, President Cyril Ramaphosa introduced the District Development Model in 2019 (Presidency, 2019). The DDM seeks to enhance integration between planning and implementation across the national, provincial, and local spheres, thereby addressing one of the longstanding structural bottlenecks that undermine the NDP's effective execution (COGTA, 2020). The NPC has also advocated and piloted innovative delivery mechanisms to accelerate NDP implementation through collaborative governance (NDP Review, 2023). One prominent example is Operation Phakisa, modelled on Malaysia's "Big Fast Results"

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methodology. This initiative aimed to enhance planning implementation by fostering cooperation between government departments and key stakeholders, while introducing rigorous supervision, accountability, and speed of execution (DPME, 2022).

Evaluations by the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME) identified several constraints: insufficient political will and ownership; bureaucratic blockages; misalignment of the pilots with broader government planning processes; and inadequate budgetary support (National Evaluation Plan, 2020-2025). The evaluation recommended that full ownership and leadership by the President is essential to enforce accountability, drive delivery, and restore the initiative's intended impact (DPME, 2022). These experiences underscore the importance of sustained political commitment, clear leadership, and institutional alignment in ensuring that innovative delivery mechanisms fulfil their intended purpose (Desai & Acton, 2023). Bradshaw & Breakfast (2019) complement this view by stating that they also highlight the potential for the Government of National Unity (GNU) to function as a coordinating and stabilising framework, where diverse actors, including government, civil society, and the private sector, can collectively sustain long-term developmental initiatives. By embedding such initiatives within a network governance approach, the GNU can help overcome historical bottlenecks, align implementation with strategic objectives, and strengthen South Africa's capacity to achieve the NDP's Vision 2030 (Wissink & Reddy, 2022: 23-44).

3.6 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY

The legislative framework of South Africa provides the supreme legal environment within which the Government of National Unity (GNU) must operate. The foundational basis for these operations is established as follows:

3.6.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996

Beukes (2024) observed that South Africa had entered an era of multi-party governance across all three spheres of government. This shift was anticipated to necessitate adjustments to the existing governance framework to support cooperative and stable governance across national, provincial, and local spheres (Simelane & Boikanyo, 2024: 4). Masuabi and Ludidi (2024) argued that the Government of National Unity (GNU), formed in 2024, appeared to have been intended to revive

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the spirit of cooperation and consensus-driven politics associated with the GNU established under the Interim Constitution. However, they highlighted several key distinctions between the two formations. The 1994 GNU was constitutionally mandated, allowing political parties with 20 or more parliamentary seats to have representation in the Cabinet; in contrast, the 2024 GNU lacked a comparable constitutional foundation. Furthermore, the earlier GNU was constituted during South Africa's democratic transition and operated within a context of persistent political uncertainty and threat (Khoza, 2024). In South Africa, the 2024 Government of National Unity (GNU) operates within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996. Ludidi (2024) contended that one of the GNU's founding principles is a commitment to uphold the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in their entirety, implying that participating parties must reach a consensus to avoid pursuing policies that would necessitate constitutional amendments during the current term of governance. Furthermore, the GNU's adherence to principles such as nation-building, social cohesion, unity, non-racialism, and non-sexism underscored its broader objective of fostering inclusion and cooperative governance.

Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act no. 108 of 1996 mandates local government to provide democratic and accountable governance within communities. This obligation promotes good governance by empowering local authorities to ensure the delivery of public services in an environmentally sustainable manner, foster social and economic development, promote a safe and healthy environment, and encourage meaningful participation by communities and civil society organisations. This constitutional mandate aligns directly with Chapter 13 of the National Development Plan 2030, which aims to build a capable and developmental state by professionalising local government, ensuring it remains resilient to political instability while effectively fulfilling its developmental responsibilities. *Section 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996* defines the structure of government as comprising national, provincial, and local spheres that are distinct, yet interdependent and interrelated. These spheres are obligated to uphold constitutional principles and conduct their functions in accordance with the Constitution, which serves as the supreme law of the Republic.

Furthermore, the values and principles governing public administration, *as articulated in Section 195 of the Constitution 1996,* emphasise integrity within the public sector and seek to promote a

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resilient and responsive governance system. South Africa functions as a constitutional state, with the Constitution providing the foundational framework for all legislation and guiding the interaction among the different spheres of government. Within the context of coalition governance, the significance of constitutionalism is particularly pronounced, as it safeguards democratic principles and the rule of law while ensuring a balance of power among diverse political actors. The Constitution, widely regarded as one of the most progressive globally, plays a critical role in coalition settings by reinforcing democratic values, promoting accountability, ensuring institutional stability, facilitating conflict resolution, enabling effective governance and policy implementation, and fostering an inclusive and participatory democratic order.

3.6.2 The Local Government: Municipal Structures Amendment Bill, 2024

The Local Government: Municipal Structures Amendment Bill 2024 aims to establish a legislative framework for assessing and managing coalition governments within municipalities. It introduces mechanisms intended to mitigate governance challenges associated with coalition arrangements, thereby strengthening stability and enhancing service delivery through improved governance practices. This legislative objective reflects the broader principles underpinning the 2024 Government of National Unity (GNU), which emphasise stable, merit-based governance and a shift from majoritarian "winner-takes-all" politics towards collaborative and consensus-driven administration to safeguard continuity in service delivery (Booysen, 2024). The challenges experienced by coalition governments, including political instability, shifting alliances, policy gridlock, and difficulties in achieving consensus, highlighted the need for a comprehensive framework to manage coalition governance at the local level effectively. Furthermore, persistent issues such as weak governance and administrative capacity, financial mismanagement, and declining public trust and legitimacy reinforced the urgency of establishing such a framework. At the time, the governance of coalition dynamics was guided by amendments to the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act of 1998. The amended legislation served as a formal mechanism to regulate coalition governments and mitigate the governance challenges associated with their formation and operation.

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3.7 STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THE NDP 2030 TARGETS UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY

In the absence of a coherent social compact around advancing the National Development Plan (NDP) or even a shared framework for implementation and monitoring, it has been difficult to evaluate the respective contributions of the private sector, organised labour, and civil society toward achieving the country's developmental objectives (NPC, 2015). The fragmentation of accountability and the lack of a unified implementation mechanism have weakened the collective drive needed to realise the NDP's vision (Rogan, 2016). Local Government Professionalisation Social Compact (2023) laments that, to correct this trajectory, a broad and functional social compact must be established, grounded in mutual trust, transparency, and a strong accountability chain within government and across society. This compact should be underpinned by clearly defined roles for each sector and a commitment to shared national priorities, ensuring that all leaders are held accountable for outcomes rather than intentions (Parliament of South Africa Annual Report, 2021/22). Furthermore, the challenge of inadequate legislative oversight and the persistent blurring of lines between party and state must be confronted decisively, as these factors continue to erode institutional integrity and public trust. The leadership of the current seventh administration has undertaken efforts to address long-standing institutional and developmental challenges that have hindered the effective implementation of the National Development Plan (South African Government, 2026).

President Cyril Ramaphosa (2025), addressing the persistent challenges of poverty, unemployment, and the rising cost of living, which he described as unacceptable, unveiled a 10-point plan aimed at reigniting economic growth, accelerating job creation, and restoring developmental momentum (ANC NEC, 2025). The first intervention focuses on using electricity tariffs and investment in transmission infrastructure to drive economic activity. This includes introducing preferential electricity tariffs for energy-intensive sectors such as ferrochrome, manganese, and steel, as well as expanded investment in energy transmission. The second intervention seeks to accelerate the recovery of the freight and logistics sector (Presidency, 2025). This will be achieved through the implementation of Transnet's recovery plan, increased private sector participation in rail and port operations, and the upgrading of key export corridors to enhance efficiency and competitiveness. The third intervention involves rebuilding South Africa's

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chrome and manganese industries to restore industrial capacity and secure export growth (DTIC, 2025). The fourth intervention prioritises strengthening the state's capacity to manage large-scale infrastructure projects (Presidency, 2025). This aims to address persistent delays caused by weak institutional capacity and fragmented coordination, ensuring that major projects are bankable, efficiently implemented, and completed. The fifth intervention focuses on promoting local economic development and investment in local infrastructure, with a particular emphasis on townships, rural areas, and small towns (Growth Agenda for Inclusive Nation-building, 2025). To achieve this, municipal local economic development (LED) technical units will be established and integrated into the District Development Model (DDM), linking local infrastructure expenditure to industrial policy priorities (COGTA, 2020). The sixth intervention highlights labour activation initiatives and the expansion of public employment programmes (The Presidency Strategic Plan 2025-2030, 2025). This includes a large-scale expansion of the Presidential Employment Stimulus and related programmes, alongside reskilling initiatives targeting industrial sectors and the development of artisan and apprenticeship pipelines to meet labour market demand. The seventh intervention seeks to expand SMME support and increase investment by development finance institutions to stimulate entrepreneurship and job creation (Presidency, 2025).

The eighth intervention focuses on enabling the growth of provincial economies beyond major metropolitan centres (MTBPS, 2024). This will involve the revitalisation of industrial parks, alignment with special economic zones and corridor development plans, and targeted support for labour-intensive sectors such as agro-processing, light manufacturing, cannabis, and textiles. The ninth intervention aims to accelerate trade diversification by expanding South Africa's trade partnerships, strengthening participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers. This will include introducing an emergency industrial support package for sectors affected by increased tariffs and scaling up exports to BRICS nations and other strategic markets (ANC Economic Transformation Committee, 2025). The tenth and final intervention ensures effective budget and macroeconomic coordination across the government. This includes developing a sustainable budget negotiation strategy within the context of the Government of National Unity (GNU), aligning fiscal, monetary, trade, and industrial policies, and mobilising development finance institutions and pension funds for productive investment (The Presidency, 2025). Khumalo (2025) argues that innovative financing mechanisms

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will also be developed to fund catalytic infrastructure projects that promote inclusive growth and structural transformation. These efforts provide a solid foundation for clarifying the roles and responsibilities of state actors and social partners, thereby strengthening coordination, accountability, and overall governance performance (Institute for Economic Justice, 2025).

The government must place deliberate emphasis on prioritising vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and persons with disabilities who continue to experience the highest levels of poverty and inequality (Coetzee, 2014). Verwey (2025) contends that reducing the widening gap between the rich and the poor must remain central to national policy efforts, building upon existing social wage policies and measures that support inclusive growth and social protection. Furthermore, the government must improve the quality, efficiency, and impact of public spending through more effective planning, streamlined institutional arrangements, and sound procurement systems. Enhancing competition, productivity, and innovation within the economy is equally critical, particularly in light of a constrained fiscal environment and the likelihood of modest national budget growth over the medium term (Makhaya & Roberts 2014: 1-29). By reinforcing accountability, improving spending efficiency, and advancing inclusive development, South Africa can move closer to achieving the transformative goals envisioned in the NDP's Vision 2030 (Madzivhandila, 2014). The central focus of development efforts must be on actions that directly reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment. This requires prioritising the expansion and improvement of basic service provision, particularly by enhancing the coverage, quality, and reliability of essential infrastructure. Strengthening the delivery of basic services, including water, sanitation, energy, housing, and transportation, remains critical to improving the quality of life and fostering inclusive growth (Morris, 2025). Equally important is improving the quality of the physical and social environments in which people live and work. Creating safer, more liveable, and integrated communities will help address spatial and social inequalities that continue to define South Africa's development landscape (Gumbi & Goko, 2025). Expanding access to social infrastructure and economic opportunities can significantly reduce inequality, promote social cohesion, and enable all citizens to participate meaningfully in the country's economic and social transformation (National Treasury, 2025).

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Reducing unemployment requires a deliberate focus on expanding access to economic opportunities and ensuring that people live in well-located areas where they can easily access work, businesses, and livelihood opportunities (Hall, 2018). Urban planning and spatial development must therefore support greater mobility, integration, and inclusivity to dismantle the historical and structural barriers that limit participation in the economy (OR Tambo School of Leadership, 2025). A critical component of a renewed economic consensus involves building and strengthening agreement around a common vision for a just transition, one that advances the shift towards a climate-resilient, sustainable economy and society (DPME, 2016). This transition must be inclusive, protecting vulnerable communities while promoting green innovation and sustainable industrial growth. At the same time, it is essential to engage proactively with the technological transitions driven by digitalisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Developing clear, adaptable pathways to manage these environmental and technological shifts is crucial to ensuring long-term resilience, competitiveness, and equitable participation in South Africa's evolving economy (World Bank, 2017).

According to the DPME (2023), the South African Government must focus on a limited number of clear, overarching priorities centred on building an inclusive economy, a capable nation, and a capable state. Mathebula (2015) contends that every intervention under the NDP should be evaluated based on its tangible impact in eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, and creating sustainable employment opportunities. Meyer and Venter (2014) argue that to ensure meaningful progress, implementation must be systematically monitored and evaluated through a well-designed measurement framework. Katramiz and Okitasa (2021: 3) further state that, acknowledging the limitations of the government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), the NPC has undertaken the development of a more precise and outcome-oriented framework that directly aligns with the NDP's proposals and desired developmental impacts. This refined approach will enable clearer tracking of progress and accountability across all sectors. Furthermore, the NPC underscores the importance of advancing this work through a strengthened, social partnership-based implementation model, one that mobilises collaboration among government, business, labour, and civil society. Such a unified approach will enhance ownership, coordination, and the collective drive necessary to realise the NDP's vision of an equitable and prosperous South Africa by 2030 (Cilliers & Camp, 2019: 5).

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In this regard, the current state of the Government of National Unity (GNU) offers a strategic opportunity to rebuild societal trust and foster a renewed social compact (Presidency, 2025). By bringing together diverse political, social, and economic actors under a shared governance framework, the GNU can advance collaborative mechanisms that align state priorities with those of business, labour, and communities (Naidoo, 2021). Such a model promotes network governance, in which accountability, consultation, and coordination are embedded in institutional practice, helping realign South Africa's developmental trajectory with the transformative ambitions of the NDP's Vision 2030 (Mokgosi, Shai & Ogunnubi, 2017: 37-57).

According to Nhengu and Murairwa (2020), the National Planning Commission (NPC) asserts that South Africa must, now more urgently than ever, confront its structural and developmental challenges decisively and build a renewed national consensus around the economy. Achieving this requires a unified vision and a shared commitment to the transformative objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP, 2012: 7). However, the South African National Review (2019) stipulates that persistent political and ideological contestations within the state and governance structures have long undermined the unity of purpose and sustained focus necessary for effective implementation of the Plan. According to the NPC (2020), for the NDP to be actionable, measurable, and achievable, it must move beyond aspirational commitments toward practical execution, guided by political alignment and institutional coherence. According to the President's Strategic Plan (2020-2030), the success of the NDP depends not only on sound policies but also on the collective political will and ownership of its implementation across all sectors of society. Without these, the Plan risks remaining a visionary document rather than a living framework for transformation. In this context, the Government of National Unity (GNU) presents a timely opportunity to overcome political fragmentation and establish a cohesive governance framework. By uniting diverse political parties under a shared developmental agenda, the GNU can cultivate the stability, trust, and joint accountability needed to translate the NDP's goals into concrete outcomes (Ndou, 2022). A unified government structure enhances policy coherence, eliminates duplication, and strengthens institutional coordination, ensuring that all actors work towards a common purpose: the realisation of inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development envisioned in the NDP's Vision 2030 (NPC, 2012).

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The NPC (2012) laments that improving the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) requires a renewed and strategic approach during the seven-year implementation phase. At the same time, the National Planning Commission (2020) indicates that while the government must remain the principal champion and driver of the Plan, all sectors of society must recognise themselves as active stakeholders in its implementation. One of the NDP's greatest strengths lies in its ability to reflect the collective aspirations of South Africans across sectors, industries, and communities. However, a major gap has been the limited popularisation of the NDP beyond state structures (Van Wyk, 2020; Strategic Plan 2020-2025). Although many of the NDP's goals are not on track to be realised by 2030, the NDP review (2020) calls upon the nation to unite in accelerating progress towards achieving as many of these objectives as possible. At the heart of Vision 2030 is the imperative to build a capable nation anchored on capable people, strong and effective institutions, and an inclusive economy driven by broad-based participation. This vision underscores a sustainable, inclusive, and responsive development trajectory that responds to the needs and aspirations of all South Africans (NPC, 2022). According to Stats SA (2022), the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a significant postscript to the National Planning Commission's (NPC) review, which was in its concluding stages as the pandemic took hold both globally and nationally. According to Statistics South Africa (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic has further illuminated the structural weaknesses in implementation capacity and socio-economic resilience, reinforcing the urgency of revitalising the NDP's implementation framework.

This study establishes a prioritisation and focuses framework that organises the National Development Plan (NDP) around apex priorities reflecting the country's most pressing challenges. It further identifies key implementation areas that, if effectively addressed, could fast-track progress towards achieving the Plan's developmental objectives. South Africa, like many other nations, is emerging from a deep socio-economic and governance crisis, a challenge that demands a collective national effort to overcome (Reddy, 2021). Within this context lies a critical opportunity to mobilise all political parties and sectors of society to unite behind the shared vision of realising the National Development Plan (Nzewi, 2024: 2). The notion of a Government of National Unity (GNU) presents a strategic platform for fostering political cohesion, aligning diverse interests, and consolidating collective will around the implementation of the NDP (Gathii,

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2019: 68-70). Such unity of purpose can serve as the foundation for rebuilding state capacity, restoring public trust, and accelerating progress towards the country's long-term developmental goals (Presidency, 2025).

3.8 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE IMPACT OF GNU IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NDP 2030

As noted in the 2026 State of the Nation Address delivered by Cyril Ramaphosa, the Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa has demonstrated early empirical evidence of positively influencing the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, particularly through fostering improved economic sentiment and accelerating critical infrastructure reforms. Parsons (2026: 2) maintains that the GNU effect has effectively broken the cycle of low business confidence, which he posits as a fundamental requirement for the infrastructure-led growth envisioned in the NDP. Steenhuisen (2026) is of the view that the country's economy had shown signs of recovery, recording four consecutive quarters of positive GDP growth. He further indicated that the GNU had achieved two consecutive primary budget surpluses, which contributed to stabilising national debt and improving credit ratings. Field (2025: 118) is of the view that while these primary surpluses provide fiscal breathing room, their long-term impact on the NDP depends entirely on whether this capital is redirected toward green energy and water security. Steenhuisen (2026) advocated accelerated economic liberalisation and greater private-sector participation, noting that initiatives such as Operation Vulindlela had yielded progress in the energy and port sectors. In light of this, Nel (2026: 4) argues that the Economic Inclusion for All Bill serves as a vital counter-proposal to existing frameworks, seeking to shift the focus from elite enrichment to a merit-based system that protects the integrity of public procurement.

Additionally, he emphasised the importance of merit-based public sector appointments to strengthen accountability and reduce corruption. Madzivhandila *et al.* (2024) argued that the GNU's commitment to meritocracy is the only pathway to repairing the broken municipal service delivery model. The 2025 Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) indicated a slightly improved fiscal trajectory, and the formation of the GNU triggered immediate positive reactions in financial markets. Furthermore, Matshego (2026: 1) contends that the Johannesburg Stock Exchange's strong gains reflect a structural rerating of the South African economy by global

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investors. According to the Presidency (2026), the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI) facilitated nearly 295,000 earning opportunities for youth during the third quarter of the 2025/26 financial year. Ultimately, as highlighted by Moerane (2025: 9), the revitalised National Youth Service (NYS) has successfully transitioned from a temporary stimulus measure into a durable pathway for youth to enter the formal economy, aligning with the NDP's 2030 employment mandates.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an analysis of the theoretical framework underlying the study's focus: the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. It examined the various conceptual backgrounds of the GNU and assessed how the government could be better positioned to influence the realisation of the NDP goals. The chapter critically reviewed and provided an overview of the establishment, challenges, and overall impact of the GNU on NDP 2030 implementation, as well as South Africa's governance approach within the complexities of coalition government. Key areas of focus included the influence of political dynamics and inter-party cooperation within the GNU on NDP 2030 implementation, the challenges the GNU faced in advancing the NDP, the legislative and policy frameworks guiding the GNU, strategies employed to achieve NDP targets under the GNU, and empirical evidence supporting the GNU's impact on the implementation of the NDP 2030

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CHAPTER: 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter was to provide the research methodology employed in the study on the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. Research is the study of a particular topic to gather more information, discover existing gaps, and create new knowledge through the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to answer critical questions (Corpuz-Abenoja, 2025: 1). This section presents the research design and methodology that the researcher followed in this research study. This section will also present the study area, the study population, sampling approaches, data collection and data analysis instruments, and ethical considerations (Silverman, 2006: 37).

4.1.1. Research Paradigm

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), a research paradigm is the set of shared beliefs and agreements among scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed. Similarly, Pretorius (2021) defined a research paradigm as a set of beliefs about reality and knowledge acquisition, encompassing ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Research is grounded in various philosophical paradigms, each offering a distinct perspective on knowledge and inquiry. These paradigms include positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, critical theory, pragmatism, post-positivism, feminism, and postmodernism, each shaping how researchers understand reality and generate knowledge. While multiple philosophical paradigms guide social science research, this study will adopt the critical theory research paradigm. This paradigm is particularly relevant because it seeks not only to understand and interpret social phenomena but also to critique and transform them. The critical theory paradigm focuses on issues of power, political dynamics, power relations, and political structures, all of which are central to investigating how a government of National Unity shapes or potentially hinders the implementation of the NDP 2030.

The choice of the critical theory paradigm for this study is informed by the research topic, which examines the relationship between the internal dynamics of the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the implementation of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. This

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research explores how political ideologies, institutional arrangements, and coalition governance shape the implementation of developmental policy. The critical paradigm goes beyond understanding or interpreting a phenomenon; it seeks to challenge existing power dynamics and advocate for transformation. A critical approach will allow the researcher to explore whether the GNU genuinely advances these goals or merely maintains the status quo under the guise of unity. Furthermore, the critical paradigm encourages the researcher to reflect on structural barriers, ideological conflicts, and systematic contradictions. It provides the analytical tools to critique how government structures, such as the GNU, can either empower or marginalise certain groups in a society. By situating the study within this paradigm, the researcher can evaluate not only the technical effectiveness of implementation but also the ethical and political implications of governance decisions. This paradigm will help reveal whether the GNU supports the kind of inclusive development the NDP envisions or compromises those goals in the name of political compromise.

4.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Creswell (2014: 23), a research design is a researcher's strategy for addressing research questions or evaluating the validity of two phenomena. McCombes (2019) defines a research design as a strategic framework that outlines how a study is conducted to answer specific research questions. The present study employed the explanatory and case study research designs. According to Stebbins (2020:5), explanatory research design is a form of social research that investigates an unknown or poorly understood phenomenon to gain new insights, formulate problems more precisely, or develop hypotheses for further study. Explanatory research is also defined by Babbie (2021:90) as a research approach that seeks to explore a topic or issue when there are few or no earlier studies to refer to, to develop an understanding or frame future research. The explanatory research design was used in this study because it provides the flexibility needed to investigate the evolving nature of the Government of National Unity (GNU) and its alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, a relatively recent and under-researched topic in the South African context.

The second research design is the case study design. According to Yin (2018:15), a case study research design is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-

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life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not evident. Case study research is also defined by Creswell and Poth (2021:98) as a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a real-life, bounded system (a case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information.

A case study design was used to explore the implementation and impact of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa, with a focus on its alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. This design was suitable for investigating complex governance dynamics like political stability, policy outcomes, and institutional interactions in real-world settings, generating rich insights for national development discourse. The study aims to expand the existing literature, both theoretically and practically, and to contribute to the government's efforts to achieve the National Development Plan 2030.

4.3. RESEARCH METHOD

A research method is the methodical and rational approach employed to guide and pilot research. It provides the researcher's approaches and modes of data collection, analysis, and explanation to address the research questions or test the hypotheses (Burns & Grove, 2010: 581). According to Creswell and Creswell (2023:5), a research method refers to the specific procedures used in the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, tailored to align with the philosophical assumptions and the nature of the research problem. A qualitative research method was used in this research study.

4.3.1. Qualitative Approach

According to Creswell (2014: 31), qualitative research is the process of understanding a social problem by constructing a complex, holistic picture modelled with words, reporting detailed views of participants, and being conducted in a natural setting. A qualitative method was also defined by Busetto (2020: 128-135) as the study of the nature of phenomena, entailing their quality, different manifestations, and the context in which they can be viewed, but excluding their range, frequency, and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect. There are three main reasons why the qualitative approach was applied in this study, and they are as follows:

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4.3.1.1. Applicability

The applicability of the research conclusions is the criterion for assessing external validity. Research is considered applicable when its findings can apply to perspectives beyond the study situation. This allowed the study to generate nuanced qualitative insights into coalition governance dynamics that could be practically applied by future multi-party administrations managing long-term macro-economic frameworks.

4.1.1.2. Credibility

Credibility is the criterion for evaluating the trustworthiness or intrinsic validity of qualitative research. A qualitative research study is considered credible when its conclusions or outcomes are supported by sufficient explanations of the context and are recognisable to the public who share the same view. This was achieved through extensive document analysis of official state records, legislative agreements, and policy briefs produced during the Government of National Unity's administrative timeline.

4.1.1.3. Consistency

For this chapter, consistency of the outcomes is the standard for assessing reliability. This should not be taken to mean that the same outcome would be available in other phenomena, but that, provided the same data, other researchers would gather comparable patterns.

4.4. STUDY AREA

A study area is a distinct administrative or environmental boundary set apart for thematic data evaluation in a scientific report (Ncube & Olagoke, 2022: 15). Chisale (2024: 78) defines a study area as the pre-selected local government territory or spatial community where baseline variables are tracked to isolate regional development patterns. According to Du Plessis and Van Niekerk (2014:12), a study area is the specific geographical region selected for conducting a research project. In this study, the research focus will be on local, provincial, and national-level investigations, with South Africa as the primary study area. This selection is informed by the national scope and political structure of the Government of National Unity (GNU), as well as its potential impact on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. Given that

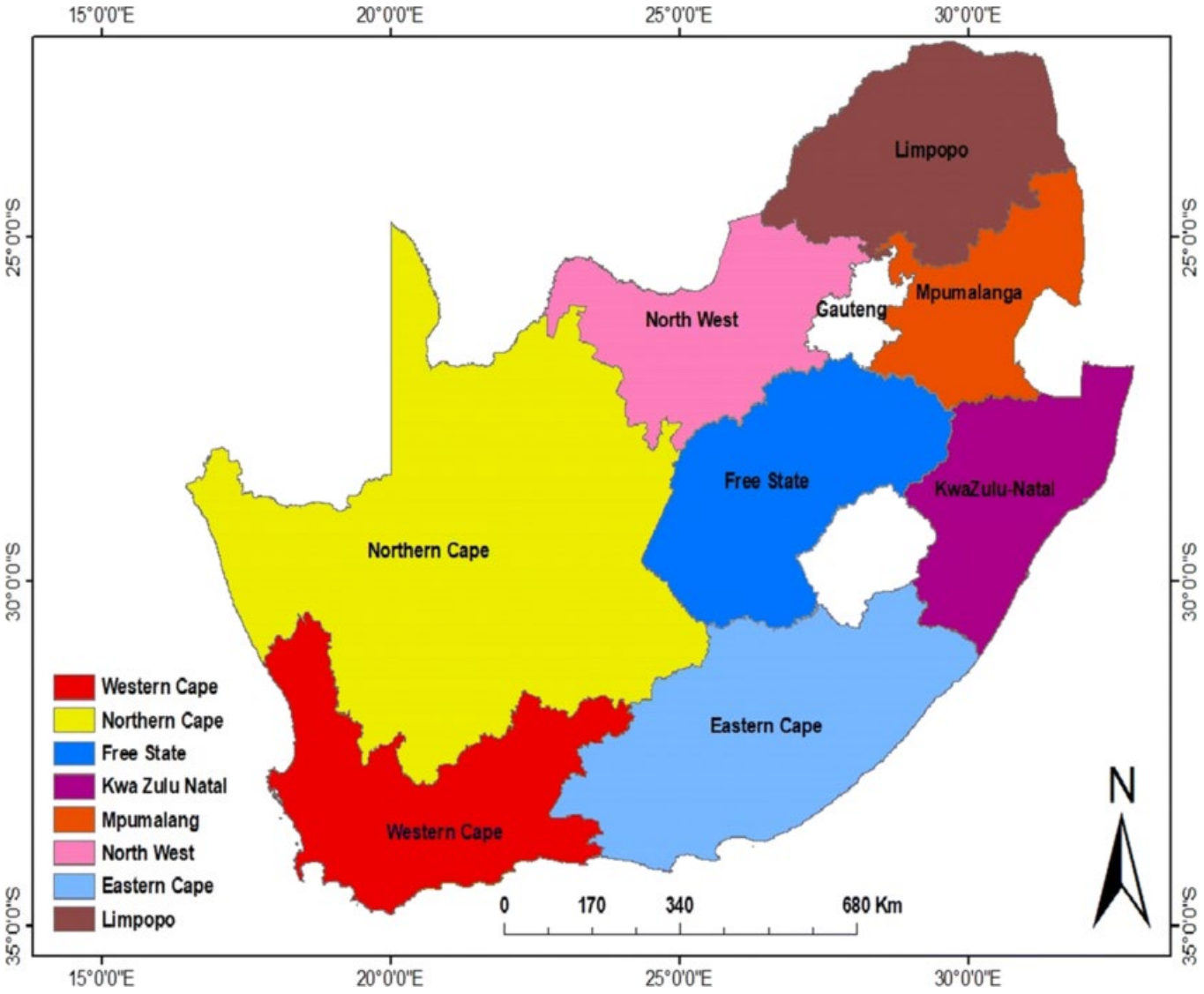
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the GNU operates at the highest level of political governance and influences national policy, a countrywide approach is necessary to capture the full complexity of the relationship between coalition governance and development implementation. South Africa is a constitutional democracy located at the southern tip of the African continent. It comprises nine provinces, each with varying levels of administrative capacity and socio-economic development.

The country has a multi-tier government system, with power shared among national, provincial, and local spheres of government. Since adopting the NDP in 2012, the South African government has aimed to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. However, the effective realisation of the plan remains uneven, influenced by national political dynamics, intergovernmental coordination, and institutional leadership. By focusing on South Africa as a whole, this study is positioned to critically examine and investigate how the internal political workings of a GNU, such as ideological divisions, coalition negotiations, and power-sharing arrangements, affect policy consistency and developmental progress at the national level. The choice of South Africa as the study area aligns with the overarching aim of understanding how high-level political structures influence long-term planning and governance outcomes across the country.

Figure 4.1: Map of the study area showing key settlements of the Republic of South Africa

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Source Map: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-South-Africa-showing-different-provinces-of-South-Africa_fig2_352998401

4.5. POPULATION OF THE STUDY

Population refers to the entire group of individuals, institutions, or entities that share common characteristics and form the primary focus of a research investigation. It serves as the foundation upon which researchers aim to draw meaningful conclusions and generate valid, generalisable insights (Garg, 2016: 3-5; Sileyew, 2020: 51). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014: 129), a population is defined as the total aggregation of individuals, groups, organisations, or elements that meet specified criteria and to which the findings of a study are intended to apply. In

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the context of this desktop research, the population comprises institutional and political entities involved in implementing the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 under the Government of National Unity (GNU). This includes national-level governance structures such as the Presidency, Cabinet, Parliament, and relevant national departments, particularly those tasked with driving priority areas of the NDP, such as governance reform, economic transformation, and institutional capacity. Additionally, provincial and municipal institutions may be examined to the extent that their actions reflect national-level policy directives and political coordination under the GNU.

This study does not involve direct interaction with individuals or stakeholders; rather, the population is conceptual and institutional, focusing on how these actors and governance mechanisms are reflected in existing literature, official documents, policy reports, and media commentary. This approach aligns with the principles of desktop research, which relies on the systematic review and analysis of secondary data sources to generate insights. The relevance of this population lies in its significant role in shaping the strategic direction, coordination, and execution of national development priorities under a coalition government arrangement. By focusing on these entities, the study sought to analyse how political dynamics and governance structures within the GNU influence policy coherence, decision-making, and the implementation of selected components of the NDP 2030. The analysis of this institutional population supports the broader objective of the study, which is to generate theoretically grounded and contextually relevant insights into the challenges and implications of coalition governance in the South African developmental state.

4.6. SAMPLING

According to Creswell & Creswell (2018: 150), sampling is the statistical process of selecting a representative group from the population under study, enabling researchers to infer about the entire population while working with a manageable portion. Etikan and Bala (2017: 215-217) further define sampling as the process of selecting a subset of individuals from a population to estimate the characteristics of the population as a whole, especially when it is impractical or impossible to study the entire population. Through sampling, researchers can ensure the study remains feasible while maintaining the relevance and generalisability of the findings. The researcher used a non-probability sampling method.

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4.6.1 Sampling Method

According to Silverman (2024:115), a non-probability sampling method is a non-randomised collection protocol designed to intentionally gather data from specific, information-rich sources rather than achieving statistical representativeness. Chisale (2026: 317) defines a non-probability sampling method as an exploratory qualitative tool in which researchers select specific, information-rich entities because no comprehensive or usable statistical frame exists for a uniform lottery selection. The researcher used a purposive sampling method.

4.6.1.1. Purposive Sampling Method

Palinkas et al. (2015) define purposive sampling as the intentional selection of participants based on their knowledge, relationships, or experience relevant to the subject under study. Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016: 2) define purposive sampling as a non-random technique in which researchers rely on their judgment to select participants most likely to provide valuable and relevant data for the study. In this study, purposive sampling allowed for the targeted review of specific texts, such as government policies, academic studies, and organisational documents, that directly addressed the research questions. This approach increased the efficiency of the research process by focusing only on materials that offered substantive contributions to the analysis. Purposive sampling ensured that the data collected was not only relevant but also rich in context, supporting a deeper understanding of the research problem.

4.7 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection methods are the techniques or procedures researchers use to gather information from various sources to answer research questions, evaluate hypotheses, or solve problems (Gorib, 2024: 130). Sekaran and Bougie (2016) define the data collection method as the process of gathering information from various sources. These methods can vary depending on the type of data (qualitative or quantitative), the research design, and the discipline in which the research is being conducted. The study used document analysis and secondary data collection. This included existing literature, government gazettes, government legislation, and previous and new reports, as justified in this study. Morgan (2022: 64) defines document analysis as a systematic process for

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reviewing written and physical documents to extract meaning, gain a foundational understanding, and develop empirical knowledge regarding the study problem. It is a qualitative research approach, and it informs examination and clarification of information to draw meaning, gain comprehension, and show empirical knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 96). Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves the critical examination and interpretation of existing textual materials, such as reports, policy documents, official records, and media publications, to extract meaningful patterns, contextual insights, and relevant themes aligned with the research objectives (O'Leary, 2014). The researcher used document analysis to investigate historical trends, verify data from other sources, and triangulate findings through non-intrusive means. It is a methodical process of reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic documents to uncover meaning, gain understanding, and draw conclusions (Dalglish, Khalid & McMahon, 2020: 14-25).

Data was also collected through the use of secondary data. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2020: 15). Merriam and Tisdell (2020:38) define a case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system, serving as a comprehensive qualitative framework to examine complex social units and policy environments over time. Through this case study design, these textual materials were systematically organised into a localised archival database. This allowed the researcher to isolate relevant policy clauses, cross-reference shifting political directives, and map out documented instances of institutional friction or alignment. By restricting the collection strictly to these officially published records, the researcher successfully gathered deep, stable, and non-reactive qualitative evidence necessary to evaluate the structural impact.

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Flick (2023) defines data analysis as the classification, categorisation, and textual manipulation of linguistic materials to make statement-driven interpretations about a bounded system. Data analysis involves rationally selecting data to address the research problem at hand, guided by research aims. Data analysis is the process of systematically examining, transforming and interpreting data using analytical and logical techniques to generate meaningful information and support conclusions (Alem, 2020). The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse data. Nowell

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(2017) defines thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis is also defined by Clarke and Braun (2021) as a foundational method for qualitative analysis that involves actively identifying patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset that are important to the description of a phenomenon and aligned with the research questions. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, themes, and key insights in the qualitative data. This approach systematically coded the qualitative data, categorising themes related to governance efficiency, policy implementation, and NDP progress under the GNU. This approach allowed for a rich, in-depth understanding of how the GNU influences governance, service delivery, and developmental progress in line with the National Development Plan 2030 goals. Creswell (2014) outlines the following seven (7) steps for conducting data analysis:

4.8.1. Data Preparation

Data preparation is an essential step in the data analysis process. It entails organising, cleaning, and transforming raw data into a format suitable for analysis. Data preparation was the foundational phase in which the raw documentary data were compiled, organised, and cleaned into a standardised format for thematic analysis. The researcher curated a dedicated digital repository of primary and secondary documents, including the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 policy framework, mid-term government review reports, and published public administration case studies tracking multi-party governance. The cleaning process involved auditing each text file for structural completeness, legibility, and relevance to the research objectives. The researcher excluded irrelevant sections of documents, such as highly technical financial appendices or unrelated department rosters, to maintain a tight analytical focus on governance and policy implementation.

4.8.2. Data Exploration

Data exploration entails analysing and visualising data to understand the characteristics and relationships between variables. This step involves using descriptive statistics, data visualisation techniques, data profiling, data quality checks, and correlation analysis to identify patterns and potential issues in the data. Data exploration was conducted directly on the finalised text database

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to gain deep familiarity with the material and identify surface-level patterns before formal coding. The researcher did not approach this speculatively; instead, the dataset was explored through multiple close readings of case studies.

4.8.3. Theme Generation

Theme generation entails grouping similar codes to create overarching themes that capture the main ideas in the data. This step helps reveal critical patterns in the data, making it easier to draw insights and conclusions. Theme generation was conducted using an inductive, bottom-up approach, ensuring that the resulting analytical categories emerged purely from the empirical documents rather than being copied from existing scholars. The researcher began by performing line-by-line open coding of the policy papers and case studies, assigning descriptive, operational labels directly to the documented phenomena.

4.8.4. Interrelating Themes

Interrelating themes refers to the exploration of relationships among themes generated during data analysis. It entails scrutinising how the distinct themes identified are interconnected and how they work together to create a broader understanding of the data. Interrelating themes was practically achieved by mapping the direct structural connections, dependencies, and causal pathways between the generated themes. The researcher re-interrogated the texts to determine how broader political compromises directly generated specific administrative outcomes. By mapping these overlaps and creating a clear conceptual hierarchy, the researcher moved beyond an isolated list of findings to produce a cohesive qualitative narrative demonstrating the precise operational mechanics of the GNU's impact on the NDP.

4.8.5. Searching for Alternative Explanations

Searching for alternative explanations is a crucial step in data analysis. It entails exploring different interpretations of the data and considering alternative hypotheses that may emphasise the observed results. Searching for alternative explanations was a rigorous validation protocol that the researcher used to deliberately challenge preliminary analytical assumptions and eliminate confirmation bias. When early document reviews suggested that GNU political friction was the

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sole cause of sluggish NDP implementation targets, the researcher systematically searched the dataset for negative cases, conflicting data, or rival explanations. This process successfully revealed documented evidence that policy disagreements among coalition partners, political instability, ideological conflict and fragmentation, poor decision making, economic policy incoherence and inappropriate allocation of funds to developmental projects were frequently cited in independent reports as primary disruptors of the NDP. By evaluating these alternative structural variables against the political friction narrative and explicitly documenting them in the analysis, the researcher ensured a balanced, objective, and deeply nuanced qualitative output.

4.8.6 Testing Emergent Understanding

To ensure accuracy and reliability, testing emergent understanding entails assessing the initial conclusions or assumptions drawn from data. To verify the accuracy and reliability of the qualitative findings within a desktop design, the researcher subjected the emergent understandings to rigorous data triangulation and source auditing. Because this study lacked primary human participants for member-checking, verification was achieved by cross-validating findings across distinct documentary streams. Furthermore, the thematic interpretations were audited against established theories of public policy implementation to confirm that the observed organisational behaviours aligned with recognised structural patterns. This deliberate triangulation process confirmed that the generated themes and interrelated structures were deeply grounded in verifiable institutional records, successfully validating the credibility of the final insights.

4.8.7 Interpretation

This is the last step in the data analysis process. It entails drawing essential insights and conclusions from the data to inform decision-making. Interpretation is vital because it converts raw data into meaningful information that guides actions or informs strategic decisions. Interpretation was executed as the final synthesising phase, where the raw documentary data was transformed into deep, actionable insights that directly addressed the study's core research objectives. The researcher looked beyond mere summaries of policy texts to decode the broader socio-political meaning of the interrelated themes. This transformed the qualitative documentary data into a meaningful, authoritative framework capable of informing future national strategic planning and public policy design under the government of national unity.

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4.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Resnik (2020: 12) defines ethical considerations as the principles and guidelines that researchers must follow to ensure the dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of participants throughout the research process. Similarly, Bryman (2016) describes ethical considerations as a set of moral principles that guide researchers' conduct when interacting with participants, ensuring respect, fairness, and responsibility. Ethical issues were strictly adhered to when conducting this study. The ethical considerations respected in this research study are as follows:

4.9.4. Permission to Conduct the Study

The researcher was given the letter by the University of Venda to request permission to conduct a study at the Vhembe District Municipality. The researcher only employed the ethical value of getting permission to conduct the study, since this is desk research; the other ethical considerations mentioned are irrelevant to this research.

4.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology for examining the Government of National Unity's impact on the National Development Plan 2030, adopting a critical theory paradigm to analyse political power dynamics. It detailed a qualitative approach utilising a combination of explanatory and case study research designs to explore contemporary governance within a real-world context. Finally, the chapter justified the methodology, operationalised the desktop research process, and confirmed the ethical considerations used to ensure an objective, comprehensive study.

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CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology, including the data-collection method used in this study to examine the impact of South Africa's government of national unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. The data collected focused on examining the impact of the Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, with particular attention to political dynamics, inter-party cooperation, governance processes, and decision-making. It further explored the challenges confronting the GNU in implementing the NDP 2030, as well as the initiatives and strategies that can be introduced to enhance the effectiveness of the GNU and ensure the successful realisation of the NDP 2030 objectives.

This chapter presents and analyses secondary data drawn from official government policies and strategic documents, implementation progress reports, legislative and parliamentary data, independent analytical data, and socio-economic data at the national level, in the context of the 2024 political shift toward policy execution under the seventh administration. The data analysed and presented in this chapter respond to the research questions and align with the research

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objectives articulated in Chapter One (1) of this study. Furthermore, the data utilised in this chapter are drawn from secondary sources, as described in Chapter Three (3).

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE ANALYSED DOCUMENTS

The analysis of the Government of National Unity's (GNU) impact on the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 is grounded in a systematic review of secondary data sources. In the context of the period 2024 to 2026, this research study prioritises data that capture the transition from a single-party dominant executive to a multi-party coalition, focusing specifically on how this shift has influenced policy implementation towards the realisation of the National Development Plan 2030. To ensure the validity of the research study, the secondary data is categorised by document demographics, which describes the origin, purpose, and authority of the sources. According to this research study, the data corpus will be organised into the following pillars:

5.2.1 Pillar 1: Official Government (legislative and statutory) policy and strategic documents

- GNU statement of Intent (2024): Analyses the foundational consensus between parties to determine commitment levels to NDP 2030.
- Medium-Term Strategic Framework (2024-2029): This policy document, which was officially finalised and published by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in March 2025. This policy document refers to South Africa's government planning for the 2024-2029 period, guiding national priorities such as economic growth, job creation, and service delivery, aligning with the NDP 2030, focusing on fiscal consolidation and integrated government action. The Medium-Term Strategic Framework will analyse how the 7th administration is rebranding or re-prioritising current policies to align with the GNU's priorities while aiming to meet 2030 targets.
- Medium-Term Development Plan 2024-2029: The study thematically integrated the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029, which was formally approved by Cabinet on 26 February 2025 and officially released by the DPME on 31 March 2025. It aims to provide strategic direction for the 7th Administration in fulfilling the commitments outlined in the GNU's Statement of Intent and achieving the NDP's goals.

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- State of the Nation Addresses (SONA) & Budget speeches (2024-2025): This will evaluate shifts in resource allocation (budget votes) to identify if the GNU is funding or deprioritising NDP goals.
- Departmental Annual Performance Plans (APPs) and the Presidency Strategic Plan (2025-2030): Specifically, the Presidency and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) will review NDP 2030 milestones to see if they are being met.
- The Presidency Strategic Plan 2025-2030.

5.2.2 Pillar 2: Implementation Progress Report

- The 2020 NDP Review (2012-2019)
- National Planning Commission (NPC) Reviews and Reports: 10-year Review of the NDP findings and progress reports on NDP 2030 targets/goals (2012-2022).
- Sector-Specific Reports: Reports on Economic Growth and Transformation, governance, and State capacity reports, and Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) Just Transition Framework Reports.

5.2.3 Pillar 3: Legislative and Parliamentary Data

- Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) Minutes: Minutes from portfolio committee meetings where GNU Cabinet ministers discuss progress or bottlenecks in implementing NDP- related issues.
- Voting Records on key legislation: Analysis of how coalition partners (ANC, DA, IFP, etc.) vote on controversial bills that affect NDP implementation (e.g., NHI Bill, BELA Act)

5.2.4 Pillar 4: Independence Analytical Data

- Academic Articles and Research Papers: Peer-reviewed studies on coalition governance, consociational democracy in South Africa, and post-2024 policy shifts.
- Policy Briefs and Media Analysis: Analysis of the statement of intent by organisations that track the impact of the GNU on investor confidence, policy continuity, political stability, and service delivery.

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- Reports from institutions such as the World Bank, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), and the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), which analyse the state's capacity to implement the NDP 2030 targets/goals.

5.2.5 Pillar 5: Socio-Economic Data

- Statistics South Africa Reports: Employment data, poverty trends, and GDP growth figures to measure whether the GNU is achieving the economic goals set by the NDP.

5.3 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE COLLECTED DATA

This section analysed data from secondary sources and interpreted it using thematic analysis, guided primarily by the research problem and the study's objectives.

5.3.1 Impact of the Government of National Unity on NDP 2030 Implementation

Gautam (2018) notes that a coalition government consists of multiple political parties collaborating to reach consensus in decision-making, particularly in the formation of a government and in the formulation of public policies. According to Beukes (2024: 14), the Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa was established following the African National Congress's (ANC) failure to secure an outright majority to govern independently. According to Magubane (2024: 34), the decline in electoral support for the ANC necessitated the formation of a coalition, as the party would otherwise have continued to govern alone, as it had since 1994. Gumede (2024: 2) asserts that the current GNU does not primarily function as a conflict-resolution mechanism but rather as a political arrangement designed to bring willing partners together to collectively address the challenges facing South Africa. Mzangwe (2024: 18) indicates that from the outset, it is important to emphasise that the 2024 elections and their immediate aftermath exhibited the defining features of a stable and competitive constitutional democracy. The study of Weible et al. (2019: 81) demonstrates that coalition governments typically emerge in contexts where no single party secures an outright electoral majority. Such coalitions are often formed among parties that share a common set of beliefs and values, which serve to stabilise and sustain the partnership. Their findings further indicate that the absence of a decisive electoral winner significantly shapes

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governance arrangements at both the municipal and national levels worldwide (Weible et al., 2019: 89).

The elections were conducted freely and fairly; their outcomes were largely accepted by all political parties, including those that experienced significant losses, and governments were constituted at both national and provincial levels in accordance with constitutional provisions (Independent Electoral Commission, 2016). The electoral outcome indicated a departure from the long-standing dominance of a single governing party, suggesting the decline of a "winner-takes-all" political model in South Africa. This resonates with Matiwane's (2024) claims that the results of the 29 May 2024 national and provincial elections have placed the country on a new, though not entirely unfamiliar, political trajectory. Arguments have been put forward by Kariuki, Reddy, and Wissink (2022: 12) that while various forms of coalition governance characterised the early years of democracy at national and provincial levels, coalition arrangements later became largely associated with local government, as national and provincial governments were predominantly formed by a single party, mainly the ANC. At the national level, a Government of National Unity (GNU), comprising several political parties, has assumed office (De Visser, 2024: 3).

Madia and Modise (2024: 14) argued that the partners in the GNU have committed themselves to a set of shared priorities, including economic development, improved public service delivery, and strengthening state capacity. Simelane and Boikany (2024: 8) observed that the GNU's Statement of Intent provides a guiding framework for both the objectives to be pursued and the means through which they are to be achieved, with "unity" and "co-operation" serving as its defining principles. Mkentane (2024: 4) posits that the GNU has not yet been fully replicated at the subnational level of government. Kotze (2023: 112) asserted that experiences from other countries on the African continent and beyond that have implemented GNUs offer valuable lessons on conflict management, policy coordination, and the implementation of coalition programmes. Mngomezulu & Phetha (2025) stated that South Africa's own experience with a GNU under the Interim Constitution, as well as a provincial GNU in KwaZulu-Natal, is also instructive. These arrangements enabled the country and the province, respectively, to achieve stability and laid important foundations for peace, democracy, service delivery, and development. Beukes and de Visser (2024: 22) contended that, given the integrated nature of South Africa's system of

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government, the 2024 GNU will have significant implications for governance, intergovernmental relations, and public service delivery. The critical question, however, remains whether this impact will ultimately be positive or negative.

According to the 2024 Government of National Unity Statement of Intent (2024:3-4), parties to the Government of National Unity (GNU) have agreed that the 7th Administration should prioritise a set of strategic national objectives. Exploring these dynamic operational parameters, Mabotha (2024:19) detailed that these core benchmarks explicitly targeted promoting rapid, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth through fixed capital investment, industrialisation, job creation, economic transformation, livelihood support, land reform, infrastructure development, structural reform, fiscal sustainability, and the responsible use of national resources. Macroeconomic management is expected to support national development goals sustainably (Thusi, 2024: 52). Thwala and Vilakazi (2025: 11) demonstrated The GNU further commits to building a more just society by addressing poverty, spatial inequality, food insecurity, and the high cost of living; strengthening social protection systems; improving access to and the quality of basic services; and safeguarding workers' rights.

Mlambo (2025: 24) argued that the GNU should prioritise the stabilisation of local government, the promotion of effective cooperative governance, the appropriate allocation of responsibilities across spheres of government, and the review of the role of traditional leadership within the governance framework. Investment in human capital through education, skills development, and accessible, high-quality healthcare is also emphasised. Furthermore, the administration seeks to build state capacity by establishing a professional, merit-based, corruption-free, and developmental public service, alongside restructuring and strengthening state-owned entities to advance national development objectives (Sebola, 2024: 115). The GNU aims to reinforce law enforcement institutions to combat crime, corruption, and gender-based violence, while enhancing national security capabilities (Mohuba, 2025: 38). The parties should commit to an inclusive National Dialogue process involving political parties, civil society, labour, business, and other sectors to deliberate on these and other pressing national challenges. This process is intended to facilitate the development of a national social compact that will enable the country to realise the aspirations of the National Development Plan. Although the Government of National Unity is

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committed to the realisation of the National Development Plan 2030, various challenges are hindering this realisation. These challenges include ideological clashes among coalition partners, policy incoherence, governance inefficiencies, institutional fragmentation, and diminished strategic leadership, as noted by Tshishonga (2024).

5.3.2 Government Policy Instruments and Strategies under the Government of National Unity Over the Five-Year Planning Period

Masiya (2024: 14) noted that since the democratic breakthrough of 1994, South Africa has made considerable progress in building a non-racial, non-sexist, and unified society, alongside improvements in the quality of life for all its citizens. Netshidzivhani (2025: 22) observed that these efforts will be supported by governance policies that direct the day-to-day operations of the Government of National Unity. Chitiga-Mabugu (2025: 8) detailed that a key policy guiding the 7th Administration in advancing the objectives of the National Development Plan is the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029. In terms of institutional alignment, Kanyane (2025: 102) demonstrated that the primary aim of the MTDP 2024–2029 is to provide strategic direction for the 7th Administration in fulfilling the commitments outlined in the GNU's Statement of Intent and achieving the goals of the NDP. The National Development Plan (NDP) sets three primary targets for 2030: the elimination of poverty, a reduction of inequality to a Gini coefficient of 0.6, and a decrease in unemployment to 6% (Mokoena, 2024: 67). Venter (2024: 119) argued that employment is central to achieving these objectives and creating 11 million additional jobs between 2012 and 2030. To realise these ambitious targets, the NDP emphasises the need for sustained economic growth and structural economic transformation, setting a key enabling milestone of an average annual real GDP growth rate of 5.4% (Biyase, 2025: 44).

Daniel (2025: 8) stated that the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029 forms part of the broader national planning framework and is specifically focused on the 7th Administration. Ramokgopa (2026: 23) observed that its purpose is to position the country on a sustainable trajectory toward achieving its development objectives and to ensure continued progress. In pursuit of this aim, Mokgosi (2025: 15) clarified that the MTDP 2024–2029 draws on recent assessments

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of South Africa's developmental performance. The government has identified five strategic priorities for the next five-year period:

- fostering a dynamic and growing economy.
- building a more equitable society free from poverty.
- strengthening state capacity to deliver quality basic services to all citizens.
- ensuring a safe and secure environment.
- And promoting a cohesive and united nation.

To realise these objectives, the MTDP 2024–2029 outlines three cross-cutting strategic priorities to be implemented across the state:

- promoting inclusive economic growth and job creation.
- reducing poverty and addressing the high cost of living.
- and building a capable, ethical, and developmental state.

Strategic Priority 1: Drive inclusive economic growth and job creation

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME, 2025: 3) established that driving inclusive economic growth and job creation is identified as the apex priority of the 7th Administration. Reviewing these cross-cutting frameworks, the National Planning Blueprint (2025: 3) observed that all spheres of government, clusters, and sectors must prioritise interventions that promote faster, more inclusive growth. The MTDP 2024–2029 outlines nine key outcomes to advance this priority:

- Expanding employment and work opportunities.
- Accelerating the growth of strategic and labour-intensive industries.
- Creating an enabling investment environment through structural reforms and enhanced competitiveness.
- Increasing infrastructure investment, access, and efficiency.
- Strengthening energy security and advancing a just energy transition.
- Expanding trade and investment.
- Fostering a dynamic science, technology, and innovation ecosystem.
- Ensuring a supportive and sustainable economic policy framework.

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- And promoting economic transformation with the equitable inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

DPME (2026: 3) established that rapid, inclusive, and sustained economic growth is central to achieving the government's five strategic goals, as it generates employment, reduces poverty, and increases public revenue to support social expenditure. Inclusive growth further strengthens social cohesion and contributes to lower crime levels. The MTDP 2024–2029 Strategic Priority 1 prioritises job creation and aims to reduce unemployment to 6% by 2030. Tracing these execution metrics, the official Presidency Strategic Performance Update (2025) verified that since its launch in October 2020, the Presidential Employment Stimulus has generated earning opportunities for over two million people through diverse programmes while strengthening institutional innovation and systems development. To enhance overall impact, public employment programmes must be further expanded and reformed (Presidency, 2020). The government has maintained its support for the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI), whose central mechanism is SAYouth.mobi, a zero-rated digital platform designed to facilitate young people's progression toward sustainable livelihoods (Presidential Project Management Office Framework, 2025). The National Pathway Management Network Update (2025: 17) has confirmed that, to date, over 4 million unemployed youth have registered on the platform, with more than 1 million accessing learning and income-generating opportunities.

Strategic Priority 2: Reduce poverty and tackle the cost of living

Strategic Priority 2 is implemented through the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029, which identifies six key outcomes:

- Reduced poverty and improved livelihoods.
- Improved coverage of social protection.
- Enhanced access to affordable and quality healthcare.
- Improved education outcomes and skills development.
- Skills aligned to economic needs,
- And strengthened social cohesion and nation-building.

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According to the national upper-bound poverty line, approximately 30.3 million South Africans, representing 55.5% of the population, live in poverty, while 13.8 million (25%) experience food poverty (World Bank, 2020: 1). This highlights the need for an extensive social protection system to prevent destitution among more than half of the population (National Treasury, 2024: 11). The strategy for promoting inclusive growth is anchored in the continuation of structural reforms, the expansion and upgrading of network infrastructure, and the repositioning of state-owned enterprises (DPME, 2024: 11. Through extensive legislative, institutional, and policy reforms, Operation Vulindlela has addressed long-standing structural constraints, and this approach will be further strengthened and sustained. According to the NPC (2012: 24), substantially greater effort is required to meaningfully reduce poverty and accelerate progress toward achieving the goals of the National Development Plan. Universal access to quality healthcare is a core pillar of social protection, and the implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI), though complex, is identified as a key priority for the 7th Administration (DPME, 2024: 85).

Strategic Priority 3: Building a capable, ethical, and developmental state

This strategic priority focuses on building a capable, ethical, and developmental state through twelve key outcomes, including:

- Improved local government service delivery,
- Strengthened governance of public entities,
- A professional and ethical public service,
- Digital transformation,
- Social inclusion,
- Criminal justice reform,
- Enhanced border and cyber security,
- Community safety,
- Combating corruption and organised crime,
- Advancing foreign policy,
- Promoting peace
- And security in Africa.

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Achieving the first two Strategic Priorities depends on a capable state with the vision, institutional strength, and implementation capacity required to realise national developmental objectives. DPME (2025: 5) observed that over the past decade, governance challenges have deepened due to widespread corruption, state capture, weakened policy and implementation capacity, patronage in senior appointments, and the loss of skilled professionals from the public service. The National Planning Commission (2011: 407) underscores that the national development plan should be led by a developmental state, with the strengthening of state capacity identified as a central prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Tracing these administrative caveats further, the NDP (2011: 408) cautioned that not all states are inherently viable, underscoring the need to build a capable and resilient state within a functioning democratic system. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs' Strategic Plan (2020–2025) highlights that the National Development Plan asserts the need for a strengthened, coordinated intergovernmental commitment to developing functional municipalities. This is essential for creating safe, healthy, and economically sustainable communities where citizens can live, work, and interact through active engagement across all spheres of government (Cooperative Governance Ministerial Directives, 2020: 13).

According to the DPME (2024: 101), efforts to enhance the quality of public services are implemented through interventions led by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the National School of Government (NSG). Leveraging its advanced infrastructure and strategic advantages, South Africa has the potential to become a significant player in the digital economy by generating employment in business process outsourcing and digital services, while fostering a dynamic ecosystem for high-growth digital start-ups (DPME, 2024: 28). Urgent and decisive action is required to enhance local government service delivery, as previous interventions, such as the Municipal Systems Improvement Grant (MSIG), Project Consolidate, and the Back to Basics (B2B) strategy have been fragmented, poorly coordinated, and largely ineffective (DPME, 2024: 95). Programs like the District Development Model (DDM) do not directly resolve municipal capacity or governance shortcomings. As outlined in President Ramaphosa's governance frameworks (2025), Strategic Priority 3 identifies targeted interventions to address local government challenges. Aligned with the NDP and the GNU Statement of Intent, the MTDP 2024–2029 identifies priority interventions to address South Africa's most pressing challenges over the

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next five years (Gondwe, 2026: 18). Zuma and Bester (2025: 103) have argued that enhancing state capacity is expected to drive economic growth, thereby increasing resources for expanding social protection and other forms of support.

5.3.2.1 The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME)

Booyen (2024: 12) noted that the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) after the 2024 general elections marked a significant milestone in the planning, budgeting, and implementation of government programmes. The collaborative governance model, comprising 10 political parties, led to the development and adoption of the GNU's Statement of Intent. Gumede (2024: 8) argued that the Statement of Intent emphasises inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and state capacity building, and serves as the foundation for the strategic priorities. The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) played a pivotal role in developing MTDP 2024–2029 (Maropene, 2025: 14). This five-year government plan directs focus on three strategic priorities: promoting inclusive economic growth and job creation, reducing poverty and addressing the high cost of living, and building a capable, ethical, and developmental state (Presidency, 2024). These priorities extend beyond policy objectives, forming a central part of the vision to improve the quality of life for all South Africans (Everatt, 2026: 33). Plaatjies (2025: 91) established that, through strengthened coordination, evidence-based planning, proactive interventions to address implementation challenges, and robust monitoring, evaluation, and research, the public benefits from the DPME's work. The Department's impact is articulated as achieving "improved national developmental outcomes, as envisioned in the National Development Plan (NDP, 2030), through the effective implementation of the MTDP 2024–2029 (Schreiber 2026: 77). According to the DPME (2023), significant responsibility is placed on state capacity and government performance to ensure the successful implementation of the National Development Plan. According to Chikane (2025: 62), the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan of the Presidency indicated that the country has progressed toward achieving the objectives of the National Development Plan's Vision 2030.

Daniel (2025: 85) put forward that the existing DPME monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems play a mutually reinforcing role in tracking progress toward the NDP's Vision 2030 triple goals and fostering a culture of effective M&E across government. By collaborating with all government

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departments, these systems support improvements in the country's overall developmental outcomes (Kganyago, 2025: 44). The DPME's 30-Year Review Report (2024: 45) produced a broad set of recommendations, identifying 26 high-priority strategic thrusts for planning toward 2030 and beyond. These included legislative and policy reforms, institutional restructuring, scaling up successful programmes, and introducing new initiatives (Mchunu, 2026: 12). Key interventions focused on revising the economic strategy to stimulate growth, reconfiguring government to improve service delivery, accelerating infrastructure development, strengthening industrial policy to increase employment intensity, and reforming state-owned enterprises (Naidoo, 2026: 19). According to the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Annual Report 2024/25, alignment between the NDP and the government of national unity is possible but uncomplicated. A key element in aligning these development plans is achieving policy coherence. The formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) offered a forward-looking framework, with its Statement of Intent committing to maintaining stability and peace, tackling the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, upholding constitutional democracy and the rule of law, and fostering an inclusive South Africa for all citizens. Gordhan and Bester (2025: 23) contend that the MTDP 2024–2029 aligns with the GNU's Statement of Intent and the NDP: Vision 2030 by articulating the Strategic Priorities of the 7th Administration. It specifies a programme of interventions and targets for the current government term, serving as a strategic response to the economic and social challenges confronting South Africans (Lodge, 2025: 47). Mathebula (2024: 15) is of the view that the review of the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2019–2024 and its planning methodologies prompted the transition to the MTDP 2024–2029. The review emphasised that medium-term plans should be more closely aligned with long-term development outcomes. Accordingly, the MTDP builds on the NDP's objectives while reflecting the GNU's electoral mandate.

The South African government's MTSF is essentially the NDP's implementor. A Medium-Term Strategic Framework 2025 can be seen as a five-year building block towards the vision and the goals of the country's long-term plan. According to the Presidency (2025), the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality and unemployment constitute the core mandate of the National Development Plan (NDP). Plaatjies (2025: 11) argued that, in line with this mandate, the 7th Administration, the Government of National Unity (GNU), prioritises rapid, inclusive, and

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sustainable economic growth and job creation as the primary means of achieving these objectives. The alignment between the GNU and the NDP 2030 goals can be defined as a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach, which is essential to the effective implementation and success of this plan. Habib (2024: 14) contended that the government cannot address developmental challenges in isolation; effective progress requires collaboration with social partners, including business, labour, and civil society. Kganyago (2025: 52) observed how the pursuit of rapid, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth and job creation under the MTDP 2024–2029 will therefore be achieved through strengthened partnerships among these stakeholders, accelerated structural reforms, continued efforts to build state capacity, improved performance of state-owned enterprises, and the creation of a safe and secure environment for citizens and businesses. The 7th Administration will sustain the momentum of reforms while advancing inclusivity, in line with the National Development Plan and the Statement of Intent. The effectiveness of any plan depends on the strength of its implementation mechanisms and the capacity to convert commitments into practical outcomes.

5.3.2.2 2025 ANC 10-Point Economic Action Plan

The 2025 ANC 10-Point Economic Action Plan, often linked to the "Growth and Inclusion" (GAIN) strategy, focuses on accelerating South Africa's economic growth, reducing unemployment, and improving infrastructure through state-led investment, private-sector partnerships, and institutional reforms. Key interventions include stabilising the energy grid, recovering freight logistics, and industrialising key sectors. According to Sekhampu (2025), the 10-point plan serves as a critical indicator of the nation's capacity for institutional self-correction. Its effectiveness is likely to be determined not by the sophistication of its formulation, but by the political will to adopt alternative modes of governance. South Africa's principal challenge is no longer a deficit of policy vision, but a lack of strategic alignment across institutions and spheres of government. Consequently, reform must move beyond symbolic commitments and be embedded as a sustained practice of effective implementation. This necessitates capable local government structures, a professionalised public administration, and a political culture that privileges competence and accountability over patronage-based affiliations. The 10-point plan serves as a barometer of the state's capacity for institutional renewal and corrective governance.

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Its success will depend less on the technical coherence of its design than on the existence of sufficient political resolve to govern in substantively different ways. In the contemporary South African context, the central constraint is no longer the absence of policy direction, but rather persistent misalignment across institutions and spheres of government. Naidoo (2026: 24) put forward that reform must transcend rhetorical commitments and be institutionalised as a consistent practice of effective implementation. Achieving this requires capable and functional municipalities, a professional and merit-based public administration, and a political culture that prioritises competence, accountability, and performance over patronage and factional loyalty (Sithole, 2026: 81).

Strategic Priority 3 of the Medium-Term Development Plan 2024-2029 addresses building a capable, ethical, and developmental state. Therefore, the existence of a professional and capable state is fundamental to effective economic functioning and to the overall well-being of citizens. This resonates well with the claims made by Sekhamphu (2025) that for the 10-point plan to have substantive significance, it must rebuild public trust in contexts marked by entrenched cynicism, establish policy coherence in place of institutional fragmentation, and reassert integrity where expediency has historically prevailed. Gumede (2024: 12) highlighted that the central challenge for government is therefore not merely to pursue reform, but to demonstrate convincingly the state's capacity to act in the public interest rather than in the service of narrow or self-serving agendas. While notable progress has been achieved over the past three decades, South Africa has made only limited advances in realising the aspirations of the NDP (Mathebula, 2024: 18). This shortfall reflects a persistent implementation gap, largely attributable to institutional weaknesses and inadequate coordination across government spheres. The declining performance of the state, together with the erosion of public service values, is further linked to a broader deterioration in social cohesion and an increasing prioritisation of individual interests over collective responsibility.

In addition, the Presidency will initiate the re-institutionalisation of the Policy Coordination and Advisory Service (PCAS) to strengthen policy coordination across government (Mapisa, 2025: 9). Langa (2024: 94) argued that the mandate of the PCAS will extend beyond the current functions of the Policy and Research Service (PRS), which are primarily focused on preparing Socio-

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Economic Impact Assessment System (SEIAS) reports. Lodge (2025: 51) observed that the PCAS will provide comprehensive policy support and strategic policy direction by clarifying policy priorities, ensuring coherence and consistency in policy application and implementation, and guiding continuous policy improvement across government.

According to the Presidency (2025), the overarching objective of the Presidency: Strategic Plan 2025–2030 is to reaffirm the Presidency as the centre of government. In line with the MTDP 2024-2029, the Presidency: Strategic Plan 2025–2030 outlines several targeted interventions, including strengthening the coordinating and oversight role of the Presidency; enhancing the mandate of the Public Service Commission (PSC) to oversee the appointment of senior managers and heads of state-owned enterprises; and building institutional capacity within the public service, alongside improved accountability and consequence management (Masiya, 2025: 13). Luthuli (2026: 14) contended that these interventions define the strategic focus of the Presidency during the Seventh Administration for the period 2025–2030. During this period, the Presidency will lead government-wide efforts working in partnership with civil society to foster national unity and social cohesion grounded in democratic values and human rights (Alexander, 2025: 25). Ndevu (2025: 64) observed how this vision aligns with President Cyril Ramaphosa's articulation of a South Africa that "works for all." The 2025–2030 period is particularly critical for advancing the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and related national and global development commitments (Fourie, 2026: 41). To this end, the Presidency will mobilise government, society, and international partners in pursuit of the Government of National Unity's overarching priorities, namely: driving inclusive economic growth and job creation; reducing poverty and addressing the high cost of living; and building a capable, ethical, and developmental state (Moeti and Maserumule, 2025).

The Presidency Strategic Plan (2025–2030) identifies four key outcomes to enhance the Presidency's organisational efficiency and effectiveness. These include:

- Strengthened leadership and oversight of government through strategic agenda-setting and direction of policymaking and implementation across all sectors.

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- Improved coordination of interventions through effective partnerships with social partners to accelerate progress towards NDP goals.
- Enhanced leadership in advancing South Africa's national interests internationally, particularly significant in 2025, when South Africa assumed the G20 Presidency with a thematic focus on solidarity, equality, and sustainability; and the establishment of a modernised, digitally transformed Presidency capable of delivering on its strategic objectives.

This departmental reorientation further entails a rank-agnostic investment in the human capital across all components of the Presidency, recognising that the conduct, skills, and professional commitment of its staff are central to extending the institution's influence nationally and globally (Kanyane (2025: 34). These initiatives are aligned with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) model of Centres of Government, which conceptualises the centre as a support structure for the highest level of the executive. As articulated by the OECD, an effective Centre of Government enables heads of government and ministers to make informed decisions by ensuring access to strategic, evidence-based, coherent, and coordinated policy advice (Schwella, 2026).

5.3.2.3 Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, 2020

The Presidency assumed a central role in leading and coordinating the implementation of the 2020 Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, which articulates South Africa's strategic response to the profound societal and economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This recovery is underpinned by targeted public and youth employment interventions, as well as the Operation Vulindlela programme, which implements structural reforms to stimulate economic growth and facilitate job creation.

According to the Presidency (2025), in executing its oversight and coordination mandate for economic recovery, the Presidency utilises a range of initiatives and mechanisms. Langa (2024: 55) put forward that the implementation architecture functioned across the following specific dimensions:

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- Social Compact: Facilitates collaboration among government, social partners, and economic stakeholders to promote sustainable economic growth and employment creation.
- Presidential Economic Advisory Council (PEAC): Provides expert research, policy guidance, and strategic advice to support economic expansion.
- Presidential Climate Change Commission (PCCC): Advances a low-carbon, green economy and promotes a just transition in line with sustainable development objectives.
- Presidential State-Owned Enterprises Council (PSEC): Oversees reforms within state-owned enterprises to enhance their contribution to economic recovery.
- Operation Vulindlela: A joint initiative with the National Treasury focused on implementing structural reforms and addressing bottlenecks to investment.
- National Energy Crisis Committee (NECOM): Implements the Energy Action Plan to end load shedding and ensure energy security.
- Presidential Employment Stimulus and Youth Employment Intervention: Addresses high unemployment rates, particularly among youth, through public investment.
- Inter-Ministerial Committees (IMC) on Water and Sanitation and IMC Service Delivery: Chaired by the Deputy President, these committees bring together key government actors to provide leadership and technical assistance in ensuring reliable delivery of basic services, particularly water and sanitation.
- IMC on Land Reform and Agriculture: Provides political oversight for the implementation of Cabinet decisions on land and agrarian reform, anti-poverty interventions, and seeks to enhance institutional coordination to accelerate land reform.
- Human Resource Development Council (HRDC): Oversees the review and repositioning of the government's Human Resource Development Strategy towards a skills-based, innovation-driven, and entrepreneurship-oriented framework. Naidoo (2026: 15) observed that the revised strategy is intended to function as a central driver of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan. In addition, the HRDC is responsible for coordinating, implementing, and monitoring social compacts to develop the critical skills required to support economic growth and labour market transformation.

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Through these coordinated efforts, the Presidency seeks to ensure a holistic and strategic approach to South Africa's economic reconstruction, combining policy guidance, institutional oversight, and multi-stakeholder engagement.

5.3.2.4 Energy Action Plan (EAP), 2022

Responsibility for implementing the Energy Action Plan will be transferred from The Presidency, where the initiative was originally conceptualised, to the Department of Energy and Electricity. This shift reflects a move towards institutional consolidation and sector-specific implementation. In response to South Africa's deepening energy crisis and escalating load-shedding, identified as a major constraint on economic growth, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced, in 2020, a comprehensive set of interventions aimed at ending load-shedding and ensuring long-term energy security. Central to these interventions was the establishment of the National Energy Crisis Committee (NECOM), comprising representatives from key government departments and Eskom. To ensure policy continuity and sustained oversight five years after its inception, NECOM continues to be chaired by the Director-General in The Presidency and reports to an Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by the President. This governance arrangement underscores the Presidency's ongoing strategic coordination role, even as operational responsibility is progressively transferred to line departments.

5.3.2.5 The President's delegations to the Deputy President

The Deputy President has been assigned eight key responsibilities by the President. These include:

- Promoting social cohesion, with particular emphasis on engagement with traditional leaders, Khoi-San communities, and military veterans (Alexander, 2025: 14).
- The Deputy President also provides leadership to the Human Resources Development Council (HRDC), facilitating collaboration between government and social partners to address critical skills shortages (Naidoo, 2026: 11).
- In addition, the Deputy President chairs the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), overseeing the country's coordinated response to HIV and AIDS (Fourie, 2026: 38)

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- A further responsibility involves supporting the President in the implementation of the District Development Model by enhancing coordination across all spheres of government to strengthen municipal performance.
- According to Ndevu (2025: 55), the Deputy President also chairs Cabinet committees responsible for governance, state capacity, institutional development, justice, crime prevention, and security.
- Furthermore, the Deputy President serves as the Leader of Government Business in the National Assembly in accordance with Section 91(4) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Masiya, 2025: 8).
- Additional responsibilities include leading government initiatives to accelerate land reform and agricultural support through improved coordination of programmes, as well as serving as the Special Envoy on South Sudan and undertaking peace missions on the African continent when required.

5.3.2.6 Just Energy Transition (JET)

The Just Energy Transition Implementation Plan (JET-IP) was developed by the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC), under the chairpersonship of the President, and was formally adopted in May 2022. The plan serves as a strategic framework to guide South Africa's transition towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy.

5.3.2.7 Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategy and the Master Skills Plan

The Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategy and the Master Skills Plan are provided with overarching strategic direction and leadership by The Presidency, ensuring their alignment with national development objectives (Mchunu, 2026: 12). Historically, the foundational iteration of the national Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (HRDS-SA) was formally established by the government in 2001, which was subsequently reviewed and updated into the comprehensive HRD-SA 2010–2030 framework Human Resource Development Council (HRDC, 2022: 5). Building on this institutional history, the contemporary Reconceptualised Human Resource Development Strategy (2025–2035) and its corresponding implementation blueprint, the Master Skills Plan (2025–2030), underwent two primary approval and launch phases under the 7th

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Administration to optimise national workforce readiness in response to technological transformations. The strategy and plan were formally approved by the HRDC on 5 November 2024 to legally initiate the coordinated "One Country, One Skills Plan" approach across state departments (HRDC, 2024: 1). Following this regulatory step, they were officially launched to the public and social partners by Deputy President Paul Mashatile on 16 April 2026 at the 5th HRDC Summit held at the Gallagher Convention Centre in Midrand, Johannesburg (The Presidency, 2026). These frameworks are designed to strengthen the country's human capital base and support inclusive economic growth. The HRD Strategy and the Master Skills Plan prioritise the following:

- Addressing skills imbalances by reducing the mismatch between labour market supply and demand.
- While ensuring that South Africa possesses the human resources required to meet its broader socio-economic needs.
- They further promote a culture of lifelong learning by advancing equitable access to education, training, and skills development opportunities.
- In addition, the strategies aim to enhance work performance and public service delivery through targeted training and reskilling initiatives, while recognising education and skills development as central to the eradication of unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

The Presidency also plays a coordinating role by facilitating collaboration across government departments and public institutions to ensure the effective implementation of the HRD Strategy and the Master Skills Plan, primarily through the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC).

5.3.2.8 The District Development model (DDM)

President Cyril Ramaphosa introduced the District Development Model (DDM) in 2019 as a governance framework aimed at strengthening coherence across government in planning, budgeting, and service delivery implementation (Department of Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs, 2023: 3). The model seeks to enhance the effectiveness of public services while addressing persistent socio-economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and inequality(Ledger, 2021: 4). The DDM is premised on collaborative governance involving all three spheres of government, as well as state-owned entities, to jointly plan, finance, and

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implement development programmes. It is operationalised across 44 district municipalities and eight metropolitan municipalities, which are designated as strategic development spaces (DCOGTA, 2023: 12).

The DDM is underpinned by two core processes: spatialisation and reprioritisation. Spatialisation entails translating development priorities into clearly defined geographic interventions, while reprioritisation involves systematically reviewing and adjusting plans and budgets to ensure responsiveness to emerging needs and constraints (Department of (Military Veterans, 2019: 2). According to the DPME (2026: 11), the DDM aims to improve performance, accountability, and coordination in service delivery and development outcomes, while strengthening municipal-level monitoring and oversight. Through the nationwide rollout of the DDM, the government seeks to enable municipalities to plan, budget, and implement projects more effectively, thereby fostering integrated governance and improved service delivery across all spheres of government (Parliament of South Africa, 2020).

5.3.2.9 National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS)

In his State of the Nation Address delivered on 11 February 2021, the President of the Republic of South Africa announced the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council (NACAC) (The Presidency, 2025: 24). According to Pillay (2025: 48), the Council is composed of representatives from civil society, the private sector, and academia. Cachalia (2025: 11) argued that it is mandated to advise the President on the effective implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy. The NACAC constitutes a critical institutional mechanism within the broader National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS), which is structured around six strategic pillars designed to address corruption through a comprehensive, coordinated, and multi-dimensional approach.

5.3.2.10 National Framework Towards Professionalisation of the Public Sector

The Cabinet-approved National Framework Towards Professionalisation of the Public Sector outlines the responsibilities of the Director-General in the Presidency, who is designated as the Head of Public Administration (HOPA) at the national level; in the provinces, this role is assigned

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to the Directors-General in the Office of the Premier (DPSA, 2022: 11). The national Head assists the President in managing the career incidents of Heads of Departments (HoDs) and serves as a mediator in stabilising the political-administrative interface (Schreiber, 2026: 5).

5.3.2.11 Opening of the Parliament Addresses

The Presidency holds primary responsibility for overseeing the effective implementation of the government's agenda, as articulated in the President's State of the Nation Address. According to a review conducted by the Policy and Research Services branch of The Presidency, the Address aligns with Sections 42(5) and 84(2)(d) of the Constitution, encompassing the communication of socio-economic progress, government priorities, and accountability to both national and international stakeholders. The Presidency is therefore centrally tasked with strategic coordination, resource allocation, and monitoring these commitments to ensure their effective execution.

On 18 July 2024, the President delivered the Opening of Parliament Address, formally marking the commencement of a new parliamentary cycle. In this address, the President underscored the importance of developing an integrated, comprehensive poverty-alleviation strategy to provide effective protection and targeted support to the most vulnerable segments of society.

According to the state of the nation address of 6 February 2025, which the political term covered by The Presidency Strategic Plan 2025–2030, the primary commitments are as follows:

- Promote Inclusive Economic Growth and Job Creation: Emphasising industrial reform, trade policies, particularly in green and digital economies, employment stimulus initiatives, and the economic inclusion of marginalised populations.
- Alleviate Poverty and Address the High Cost of Living: Encompassing interventions such as the expansion of early childhood development programs, enhancement of education quality, mitigation of healthcare gaps (including the implementation of the National Health Insurance), and provision of affordable housing.
- Develop a Capable, Ethical, and Developmental State: Focusing on professionalisation of the public service, digital transformation, anticorruption measures, crime prevention, and the alignment of foreign policy with national priorities.

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5.3.2.12 Operation Vulindlela

A critical determinant of the successful realisation of the National Development Plan is the strengthening of the state's implementation capacity. To advance this objective, the Presidency, in partnership with the National Treasury, established Operation Vulindlela as a mechanism to support the delivery of the government's key priorities (Presidency, 2025). Operation Vulindlela is designed to enhance execution by prioritising a focused set of reforms, deploying appropriate technical expertise, ensuring rigorous and continuous monitoring of progress, and enabling swift decision-making where necessary. During its first phase, Operation Vulindlela focused on structural economic reforms in the energy, logistics, telecommunications, and water sectors, as well as reforms to the visa system, given that these areas constituted binding constraints on economic growth (The Presidency & National Treasury, 2021: 3). Going forward, the scope of Operation Vulindlela will be broadened to include strengthening local government performance, accelerating digital transformation, and addressing spatial inequality. These expanded focus areas are regarded as essential to fostering faster, more inclusive, and sustainable economic growth.

Operation Vulindlela was established in October 2020 as a joint initiative between the Presidency and the National Treasury to accelerate structural reforms and address the binding constraints that impede South Africa's economic growth. The first phase of Operation Vulindlela prioritised reforms in five key areas:

- electricity,
- freight logistics,
- water,
- telecommunications,
- and the visa system

These reforms were selected for their significant potential to unlock investment, improve economic competitiveness, and stimulate job creation. Phase II of Operation Vulindlela constitutes a second wave of structural reform aimed at fostering more rapid, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth. While maintaining momentum in implementing reforms initiated during Phase I, the

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second phase expands the reform agenda to encompass new focus areas that address emerging and evolving economic challenges. Operation Vulindlela Phase II is guided by the same delivery-oriented framework developed during Phase I, with a continued emphasis on clear prioritisation, rigorous performance monitoring, and strengthened accountability to support effective execution.

Reform 1 Key Milestones: Electricity

- The Electricity Regulation Amendment Act (2024) came into effect on 1 January 2025, establishing the legislative basis for a competitive electricity market aimed at ensuring long-term energy security.
- In accordance with the amended legislative framework, the National Transmission Company of South Africa (NTCSA) has applied to the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) for a market operator licence.
- Initial projects under Bid Window 5 have reached commercial operation, with the Rietkloof and Brandvalley projects collectively adding 288 MW of new generation capacity and contributing to the mitigation of electricity supply constraints.
- Five preferred bidders, representing a combined capacity of 616 MW, have been announced under the third bid window of the Electricity Storage Investment Programme (ESIPPPP 3), with commercial operation anticipated by January 2028.
- On 3 March 2025, NERSA approved the National Wheeling Framework, introducing a standardised regulatory framework for third-party wheeling and enabling non-discriminatory, open access to the electricity network to promote competition and reduce electricity costs.
- A Ministerial Determination issued on 28 March 2025 authorised the procurement of 1,164 km of 400 kV transmission power lines and related infrastructure, creating a foundation for increased private sector participation in transmission investment.
- Draft Electricity Transmission Infrastructure Regulations were released for public consultation on 3 April 2025, enabling the Department of Electricity and Energy to initiate a request for proposals for the first phase of Independent Transmission Projects (ITPs) in November 2025.

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- The Electricity Distribution Industry (EDI) Roadmap is currently under development, outlining a reform pathway toward the establishment of financially sustainable and operationally efficient electricity distribution utilities**.**

Reform Area 2 Key Milestones: Freight Logistics System

- The Transnet Rail Infrastructure Manager (TRIM) was formally established as a standalone operating division within Transnet on 1 April 2025, with an independent management and reporting structure to support the separation of infrastructure management from operations.
- Following the publication of the Network Statement and the introduction of differentiated rail access tariffs in December 2024, TRIM opened access to the freight rail network for private train operating companies. A total of 98 access requests were received and are currently under review to determine slot allocations. Conditional slot awards, subject to the fulfilment of regulatory and contractual requirements, are expected to be announced by 15 August 2025.
- A Private Sector Participation (PSP) Unit has been established within the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) to accelerate and coordinate private sector involvement in logistics and transport infrastructure.
- A Request for Information (RFI) for private sector participation projects in the rail and ports systems was issued on 23 March 2025. The Department of Transport received strong market interest, with 51 responses relating to the iron ore and manganese corridor, 48 for the coal and chrome corridor, and 63 for the container and automotive intermodal corridor. These submissions span opportunities across bulk mineral lines, general freight, and intermodal logistics and will inform the PSP Unit's structuring of priority transactions.

Reform Area 3 Milestones: Water and Sanitation

- The Department of Water and Sanitation convened a two-day Water Indaba on 27–28 March 2025, which produced targeted resolutions to address persistent water service delivery challenges at the local government level. These outcomes will directly inform the

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development of the National Water Action Plan, currently being formulated with technical support from Operation Vulindlela.

- Substantial progress has been achieved in establishing the National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency (NWRIA). Enabling legislation is expected to be tabled to designate the NWRIA as a Schedule 2 public entity, facilitating its formal incorporation, the transfer of personnel, assets, and loan agreements from the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA), and the planned disestablishment of the TCTA by April 2026.
- A Project Steering Committee has been constituted to expedite the establishment of an Independent Economic Regulator for the water sector. The Committee is mandated to oversee the development of an implementation roadmap, the drafting of enabling legislation, and revisions to the existing regulatory framework to strengthen transparency, accountability, and regulatory effectiveness.
- The Water Partnerships Office (WPO) is supporting six metropolitan municipalities, and this includes eThekwini, Tshwane, Mangaung, Buffalo City, Nelson Mandela Bay, and Polokwane, in the implementation of performance-based contracts aimed at reducing non-revenue water. In addition, with support from the Infrastructure Fund, the WPO has secured funding from the Budget Facility for Infrastructure to implement a performance-based contract in the Phoenix, Inanda, Ntuzuma, and KwaMashu areas of eThekwini.

Reform Area 4 Key Milestones: Visa System:

- The Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS) was launched in February 2025 to streamline visa application processes for tour operators from China and India. Within its first three months of implementation, the scheme facilitated the issuance of more than 11,000 visas, with a significant proportion processed within hours, demonstrating early gains in efficiency and responsiveness.
- Under the first phase of the Trusted Employer Scheme (TES), qualifying employers were registered and accredited by March 2025. The scheme introduces a simplified and expedited visa process for major investors, characterised by reduced documentation requirements and standardised, accelerated turnaround times.

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- The Department of Home Affairs has developed an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system, which is scheduled to go live in September 2025. The ETA is expected to enhance South Africa's competitiveness as a global tourism destination by modernising entry processes and improving traveller experience.
- The Points-Based System for work visas has been fully implemented, establishing a more streamlined and flexible framework for the attraction and retention of highly skilled foreign professionals.

Reform Area 5 Key Milestones: Local Government

- A performance-based financing mechanism has been introduced through the Urban Development Financing Grant to incentivise institutional and financial reforms within metropolitan municipalities. This includes the ring-fencing of trading services, notably electricity and water, alongside the introduction of a minimum investment threshold requiring at least 56% of Urban Settlements Development Grant allocations to be directed towards trading services.
- Six metropolitan municipalities have submitted Performance Improvement Action Plans for the turnaround of their water and electricity utilities under the Metro Trading Services Reform Programme. These plans provide a structured pathway for the ring-fencing of trading services within the first year of implementation, with continued access to performance-based incentives contingent on demonstrable progress. The City of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni have initiated implementation by transferring billing-related functions to municipal entities to strengthen revenue collection and arrest the decline in service delivery and finances.
- A comprehensive review of the White Paper on Local Government has been initiated, with a discussion paper released for public consultation in May 2025. The review seeks to establish a resilient and fit-for-purpose local government system aligned with constitutional principles, with a revised White Paper anticipated by March 2026 following extensive stakeholder engagement.

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- In parallel, the National Treasury has commenced a review of the Local Government Fiscal Framework, focusing on the adequacy of fiscal baselines, the local government equitable share, revenue sufficiency, the two-tier system, and the mitigation of fiscal leakages.
- The Municipal Finance Management Act is also under review, with particular attention given to strengthening the National Treasury's role in the appointment of chief financial and accounting officers, as well as improving the enforcement of Municipal Minimum Competency Standards.

Reform Area 6 Key Milestones: Spatial Inequality

- The National Department of Human Settlements convened a Titling Symposium that identified systemic and institutional constraints impeding the issuance of title deeds, culminating in the development of an action plan to address the national title deed backlog.
- A comprehensive analysis of title deed data across all metropolitan municipalities and provinces has been completed to quantify the extent of the backlog and to identify state-owned properties eligible for expedited transfer processes.
- In collaboration with Operation Vulindlela, the National Department of Human Settlements is undertaking a redesign of the First Home Finance programme and developing a demand-side subsidy framework for affordable rental housing. The design phase of these initiatives is expected to be concluded by September 2025.

Reform Area 7 Key Milestones: Digital Transformation

- The Digital Transformation Roadmap was approved by Cabinet and formally launched in April 2025 by the Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, outlining a prioritised programme of initiatives to advance government-wide digital transformation over five years.
- A Digital Services Unit (DSU) has been established within The Presidency to coordinate, oversee, and support the implementation of the Digital Transformation Roadmap across government.

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- The Department of Home Affairs has enhanced its digital verification infrastructure to enable remote identity authentication with improved system reliability and reduced service disruptions, constituting a foundational step towards the establishment of a national digital identity system.

5.3.3 Political Dynamics and Inter-Party Cooperation within the Government of National Unity

According to Cheeseman (2019), political and ideological contestation in the state and governance of the country have made it difficult to achieve the Unity of purpose and focus required to undertake and sustain the implementation of the National Development Plan. The question this research study poses is whether the government of national unity can have political parties as one thing; in this way, there can be political will and ownership of various policies, since the structure of government will be unified. Ndevu and Muller (2018:187) note that the NDP 2030 acknowledges, in its chapter on local government, that party-political interference, weak decision-making, and politically motivated appointments have contributed to declining public servant morale and eroded public confidence in public sector institutions and municipalities. This observation aligns with the National Planning Commission's (2012) emphasis on the legislative obligation to support municipalities in delivering services within their jurisdictions. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) (2020) argues that the National Development Plan (NDP), particularly as it relates to local government policy, should be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets. SALGA raised awareness of NDP 2030 among political leadership and its members through platforms such as the National Members' Assembly and the SALGA Strategic Framework 2017–2022. While these efforts were largely successful in increasing awareness, they did not sufficiently translate into stronger commitment by local governments to align their actions with NDP objectives. SALGA further notes that local government plays a key role in promoting social and economic development and participatory, democratic governance; however, despite some progress, persistent and emerging challenges continue to accompany the evolving roles and responsibilities of developmental local government.

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The Presidency is strengthening and restructuring its oversight role to enhance whole-of-government coordination at both the policy formulation and implementation levels, while simultaneously providing strategic leadership and coherent direction across government departments. Coalition governments are often complex to establish and may require extended periods to achieve stability. Given South Africa's limited historical experience with coalition governance, this research study proceeds on the premise that the country's political leadership requires deliberate and sustained efforts, particularly political parties and their senior leadership, to draw on the extensive international experience systematically and established best practices of coalition politics. Such learning is essential to promote the effective functioning, durability, and constitutional compliance of coalition governments in the service of the electorate and the democratic mandate of South Africa's Constitution. According to Law and Colland (2018: 192), South Africa's Constitution is founded on the principle of multi-party democracy. The evolving electoral landscape has consequently created opportunities for opposition parties to access political power. Similarly, Sokani, Yende, and Thwala (2024) argue that while the evolving electoral landscape has created opportunities for opposition parties to access power, the formation of the 2024 Government of National Unity carries significant institutional risks. As argued by Fisher and Hobolt (2010), poor management of coalition arrangements in developing nations can lead to voter dissatisfaction and electoral backlash as parties struggle to reconcile their ideologically diverse mandates.

5.3.3.1 National Unity: Working together for the common good

Ihembe and Onwuzuruigbo (2025) argue that coalition arrangements enable political actors who are traditionally viewed as adversaries to cooperate on contentious issues in pursuit of the national interest. Such arrangements promote dialogue, consultation, and the exchange of ideas rather than adversarial, polarising political engagement. In deeply divided societies such as South Africa, where political competition is often shaped by racial and ethnic cleavages rather than ideology, international experience suggests that party collaboration can play a critical role in fostering national unity and social stability. Coalition governments contribute to national unity, social cohesion, and political dialogue. They also offer financial advantages, including the sharing of campaign costs in pre-election coalition arrangements (Joubert & Calland, 2025). Additionally, participation in coalition governance offers access to the economic benefits associated with

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holding public office, as well as increased public funding for political parties resulting from electoral gains (Kadima, 2014). According to Colland (2018), coalition arrangements enable medium and smaller political parties to enhance their public visibility and exercise influence beyond their electoral size by participating in government and acting as king-makers in hung legislatures. In the South African context, this dynamic has increasingly shaped patterns of governance and political bargaining.

There is substantial evidence, particularly within the African context, supporting the stabilising role of coalition arrangements. In South Africa, the post-1994 alliance between the National Party (NP), African National Congress (ANC), and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), formally constituted as a Government of National Unity, contributed significantly to the country's largely peaceful political transition. This constitutional arrangement fostered public trust by ensuring representation across diverse political and social groups. Similarly, the ANC–IFP coalition in KwaZulu-Natal between 1994 and 2004 is widely recognised for restoring stability and reducing political violence in the province (Kadima, 2014). Law (2018) contends that coalition arrangements can confer strategic advantages on smaller political parties by enhancing their influence and bargaining power in decision-making processes beyond what their electoral strength would ordinarily permit. On the other hand, Chaefer (2018) argues that coalition governments pose complex and sensitive political challenges for parties and their leadership. Although coalition arrangements offer significant potential benefits, they also entail considerable risks, and poor management may result in substantial political losses. Parties entering coalition arrangements often confront a trade-off between accessing the advantages of political office and preserving their distinct party identity (McMillan 2014: 187). Coalition governments are often regarded as less stable than single-party administrations (Müller & Miller 2005: 12). In contrast to single-party governments, which can act swiftly and decisively, coalition governments may experience delays in decision-making due to the need for extensive consultation and negotiation among diverse political actors (McMillan 2014: 202).

Empirical studies demonstrated a strong relationship between coalition agreements and the effective functioning of coalition governments, with comprehensive agreements significantly reducing conflict among partners (Moury & Timmermans, 2013: 118–119). Research in European

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contexts indicated that such agreements serve as reliable indicators of legislative agendas. For instance, Walgrave et al. (2006) highlight Belgium, where coalition agreements guided parliamentary priorities. Moury (2013) further finds that 68% of coalition agreement provisions in Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany were reflected in cabinet decisions, with overall adherence reaching 87%, and near-complete compliance observed in Belgium and Germany (Moury & Timmermans, 2013: 125).

Timmermans (2003: 8) observed that coalition agreements typically encompass structural commitments, including decision-making and dispute-resolution mechanisms, the allocation of benefits, and, most critically, policy commitments that outline the coalition's policy agenda. Policy commitments are often the most contentious component, particularly when coalition partners lack ideological alignment. In cases where differences between partners are significant, these policy commitments tend to be deliberately vague to accommodate divergent positions. While broad and non-specific policy statements in coalition agreements can be advantageous by reducing conflict during formation, speeding up negotiations, and appealing to a wider electorate, these benefits are counterbalanced by significant drawbacks. Schaefer (2018) argues that coalition partners should endeavour to reach consensus on as many key policy issues as possible before assuming government, thereby strengthening the coalition's effectiveness and stability. In essence, vague policy agreements facilitate coalition formation but complicate subsequent implementation. In contrast, clearly defined commitments are more difficult to negotiate but enhance governmental efficiency and the practical implementation of policies. Coalition partners must therefore weigh whether their priority lies in easing formation or in ensuring effective implementation when finalising coalition agreements (Timmermans, 2003: 8). Timmermans (2003: 10) argues that although clearer policy commitments can facilitate the long-term implementation of coalition agreements, they do not in themselves guarantee the avoidance of conflict within coalition governments.

5.3.3.2 The role of GNU in the country's Political Dynamics and Party Cooperation relative to the Trajectory Envisioned in the 7th Administration

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Gumede (2024: 1) observes that South Africa's general elections, held on 29 May 2024, resulted in the formation of the Seventh Administration through the cooperation of multiple political parties. Marking a departure from the long-standing single-party majority system, the country transitioned to a unity government comprising parties from across the political spectrum. Building on this observation, Thusi and Mncwango (2024: 11) are of the view that, in the absence of an outright majority, this arrangement was formalised through a Statement of Intent signed on 14 June 2024. The Seventh Administration is unprecedented in South Africa's democratic history, reflecting a broad diversity of political perspectives and, consequently, a wider, at times divergent, set of policy positions among the participating parties. Reddy (2025: 1) maintains that the preamble of the Government of National Unity (GNU) Statement of Intent indicates that political parties that participated in the 2024 elections and secured representation in the national and provincial legislatures committed themselves to cooperation through a voluntary Government of National Unity. As argued by the Dullah Omar Institute (2024), the GNU (2024) framework provides for cooperation across both the executive and legislative branches of government. The Statement of Intent further affirms the parties' commitment to an inclusive National Dialogue process involving political parties, civil society, labour, business, and other key sectors to deliberate on critical national challenges. This process is intended to facilitate the development of a national social compact that enables the realisation of the aspirations of the National Development Plan (Maseko & Mhlanti, 2025: 8).

Mngomezulu & Phetha (2025) define a coalition government as an arrangement in which two or more political parties collaborate in parliament or government based on electoral outcomes, with the primary objective of exercising executive authority at a particular level of government. Similarly, Schreiber (2018) emphasises that coalition formation is predominantly a post-election process aimed at establishing a government when electoral results do not produce a clear majority. Such arrangements require sustained cooperation among participating parties to ensure governmental stability. Drawing on Gautam (2018) and Schreiber (2018), two key features of coalition governments emerge: first, they involve inter-party cooperation that limits the dominance of a single political actor; and second, they arise in contexts where no single party attains an absolute electoral majority, necessitating collective governance through coalition formation. The 7th Administration should act in the public interest.

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Policy commitment during the 7th Administration (2024-2029) in South Africa is characterised by continuity, with a stronger, more urgent focus on realising the National Development 20230. The 7th Administration has adopted the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024-2029 as its primary mechanism for driving the final phases of the NDP. Recognising past failures, the 7th Administration emphasises a speed-of-execution approach to make policies tangible in daily life. The MTDP 2024-2029 is designed to correct fragmentation, overreach, and weak execution of past approaches. Through the Presidency Strategic Plan 2025–2030, the Presidency is strengthening and reconfiguring its oversight role across government, with a particular focus on enhancing coordination at both policy formulation and implementation levels among government departments. In doing so, the Presidency seeks to provide coherent strategic leadership and direction to the state, underpinned by effective oversight, strategic coordination, and continuous engagement across the executive. The Presidency also carries transversal responsibilities, including policy development, coordination, and the delivery of high-quality public services to South Africans. In the 7th Administration, the Presidency seeks to strengthen governance through enhanced policy coherence, effective agenda-setting, strategic planning, and strengthened cross-departmental collaboration. Cabinet-level coordination mechanisms will be further reinforced to improve policy implementation and alignment across government. Consistent with the OECD's conceptualisation of the "Centre of Government," the Presidency is tasked with executing several core functions. These include coordinating policies across government to promote a whole-of-government approach, as well as ensuring that resource allocation and accountability frameworks are strategically aligned with national priorities. Such alignment is supported by adequate funding and clearly defined mandates to translate policy objectives into tangible outcomes. The Presidency, therefore, plays a central coordinating role in promoting policy coherence, which entails formulating clear, integrated, and unified policies and national plans.

According to Masuabi and Duduzile (2024), the Government of National Unity (GNU) established in 2024 may be intended to revive the spirit of cooperation and consensus politics characteristic of the GNU formed under the Interim Constitution. However, several key differences distinguish the two formations. First, the 1994 GNU was constitutionally mandated under the Interim Constitution, which entitled political parties holding 20 or more parliamentary seats to cabinet

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representation. In contrast, the 2024 GNU lacks a comparable constitutional foundation. Second, the 1994 GNU was established during South Africa's transition to democracy, a period marked by persistent threats of violence and social instability, as well as the immense challenge of restructuring society. While the 2024 GNU may have been formed amid severe socio-economic challenges, the scale and intensity of the crisis are arguably less profound than those faced in 1994.

According to Beukes and Moyo (2024), portfolio allocation in coalition governments is typically strategic to foster cooperation among coalition partners. Political parties seek to secure control over portfolios that enable them to advance the objectives articulated in their electoral manifestos. Furthermore, strategic portfolio allocation enhances internal oversight, promotes effective coordination among coalition partners, and mitigates the risk of ministerial drift. Consequently, the strategic allocation of ministerial portfolios plays a critical role in sustaining coalition stability and policy coherence. A foundational principle of the GNU is its commitment to uphold the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in their entirety, indicating that the coalition parties may have reached a consensus to avoid pursuing policies that would necessitate constitutional amendments during this term. The GNU's emphasis on nation-building, social cohesion, unity, non-racialism, and non-sexism further highlights its objective of fostering inclusion and cooperative governance. By adhering to these principles, the GNU seeks to unite diverse political parties in a collaborative effort to realise the aspirations enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

According to the 2024 GNU Statement of Intent, the GNU has committed to advancing nine strategic priorities to guide its governance and development agenda over the current term:

- Economic growth and development: Promote rapid, inclusive, and sustainable growth through industrialisation, job creation, fixed capital investment, structural reforms, fiscal sustainability, land reform, infrastructure development, livelihood support, and responsible management of national resources.
- Social justice and equity: Address poverty, spatial inequalities, food security, the high cost of living, social protection, service delivery, and the protection of workers' rights.

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- Local government and governance: Stabilise local government, strengthen cooperative governance, clarify responsibilities across spheres of government, and review the role of traditional leadership.
- Human capital development: Invest in education, skills development, and affordable, quality healthcare.
- State capacity and public service: Build a professional, merit-based, corruption-free, and developmental public service; restructure and enhance state-owned entities to meet national developmental goals.
- Law enforcement and national security: Strengthen agencies to address crime, corruption, and gender-based violence, and enhance national security capabilities.
- Parliamentary effectiveness: Improve Parliament's legislative and oversight functions.
- Social cohesion and nation-building: Promote democratic participation, unity, and common programmes against racism, sexism, tribalism, and other forms of intolerance.
- Foreign policy and international relations: Pursue policies based on human rights, constitutionalism, national interest, multilateralism, African Agenda 2063, South-South and North-South cooperation, and the pursuit of a just, peaceful, and equitable world.

Clause 11.5 highlights the GNU's intention to restructure state-owned entities as part of efforts to strengthen capacity and establish a professional, merit-based, and corruption-free public service. This initiative responds to the previous capture of entities such as Eskom, Transnet, South African Airways, PRASA, and Denel, which collectively resulted in estimated losses of R57 billion and reflected a pervasive culture of corruption. The restructuring process may reveal additional instances of malpractice, which, in accordance with Clause 8.7 of the founding principles outlined in the Statement of Intent, must be reported to ensure accountability and transparency. According to the Presidency (2024), the GNU consists of multiple political parties spanning the left-right ideological spectrum. It is expected that coalition partners will face inter-party conflicts during the governance cycle. Effective management of these conflicts, as well as the balancing of diverse interests, will require parties to reach consensus or make strategic compromises to resolve disputes and accommodate differences, thereby sustaining the stability of the coalition government. Clause 18 of the Statement of Intent stipulates that the GNU shall make decisions by consensus. Achieving consensus necessitates regular consultation, including on matters that would ordinarily fall within

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the exclusive prerogative of the President. Recognising the significance of consensus-based governance, Clause 13 provides for the convening of a Lekgotla (strategic session) to develop a common policy agenda, encompassing the policy priorities of the GNU.

According to the National Planning Commission (2018), the Lekgotla resolved that the remaining two and a half years of the five-year term be dedicated to restoring confidence in and ownership of the National Development Plan (NDP), while accelerating its implementation to address poverty and social inequality. To advance this objective, the Lekgotla prioritised the implementation of the NDP as a central strategic focus. To support effective implementation, the NPC identified 54 priority actions across the NDP's chapters and recommended their adoption by government, the private sector, and broader society. These priorities were selected based on their potential impact on the NDP's overarching goals of reducing unemployment, poverty, and inequality. To strengthen accountability and monitoring, specific performance indicators were developed for each priority, enabling periodic assessment of progress across sectors. As the country transitions into a new medium-term planning cycle, the NPC is committed to engaging with executive leadership, particularly the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, as well as other key stakeholders, to sustain momentum in implementing the NDP. The first Lekgotla was held on 13–14 July 2024 and informed the service delivery priorities articulated by the President in the State of the Nation Address (SONA) on 18 July 2024.

The President exercises powers conferred by the Constitution and legislation and serves as both Head of State and Head of the national executive, with executive authority vested in the office. Section 91(2) affirms the President's prerogative to appoint and dismiss the Deputy President and Ministers, as well as to assign their powers and functions. The Deputy President must be appointed from among members of the National Assembly. In contrast, the President may appoint up to two Ministers from outside the Assembly, with the remaining Ministers drawn from its membership. Clauses 14 and 17 of the Statement of Intent further indicate that the formation of the executive is a collective process requiring consensus-building, while simultaneously preserving the President's constitutional prerogative to appoint members of the executive. Clause 19 provides for circumstances in which consensus within the Government of National Unity (GNU) cannot be achieved. To ensure continuity of governance in such instances, the principle of *sufficient*

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consensus is invoked. Accordingly, a decision may be adopted if GNU parties representing at least 60 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly have reached an agreement. In contrast, dissenting parties may formally record their objections. Where the 60 per cent threshold is not attained, parties may refer the matter to the dispute resolution mechanism established under Clause 20 of the Statement of Intent. The sustainability of the 2024 GNU depends on mutual acceptance, the accommodation of divergent interests, and adaptability where required. Collectively, these provisions are designed to advance consensus-oriented governance through ongoing consultation, collective decision-making, and collaboration, thereby fostering a culture of cooperation within the GNU and supporting stable coalition governance.

Coalition governments typically establish coalition committees to oversee and coordinate the affairs of the governing alliance. Similarly, Clause 23 of the Statement of Intent provides for the establishment of the *GNU* Consultations Council. This body is mandated to facilitate consultation among GNU partners and to monitor progress in implementing the GNU's minimum programme. In doing so, the GNU Consultations Council strengthens oversight of the executive, which bears responsibility for executing the GNU programme.

5.3.3.3 The Twinning Mechanism as a Tool for Executive Coordination and Oversight

According to Beukes (2024: 69), The twinning mechanism was adopted in the formation of the cabinet In structuring the executive, the GNU opted for a breadth-over-depth approach by appointing deputy ministers from different political parties in critical portfolios such as the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, Ministry of Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Competition, Ministry of Social Development, Communications and Digital Technologies, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Development and Ministry of Finance. This twinning strategy for portfolio allocation ensures that representatives from different political parties in the GNU share responsibilities for developing and implementing policy within these ministries, enhancing oversight, communication, and collaboration to improve service delivery in these key areas. On 30 June 2024, the President of the Republic of South Africa announced the Cabinet for the seventh administration, following post-election negotiations held after the first sitting of Parliament on 14 June 2024. During these negotiations, the Democratic Alliance (DA) advocated for the Deputy President position and eleven ministerial portfolios, invoking Clause 16 of the

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Statement of Intent. The African National Congress (ANC), however, reaffirmed the President's constitutional prerogative to appoint the Deputy President, Ministers, and Deputy Ministers, underscoring the supremacy of the Constitution over provisions contained in the Statement of Intent. Ultimately, the DA was allocated six ministerial portfolios and six deputy minister positions.

According to the Independent Electoral Commission (2024), Gauteng Province has been governed by the African National Congress (ANC) since the 1999 provincial elections. However, in the 2024 provincial election, the party failed to secure an outright majority, obtaining 34.19 per cent of the vote, which translated into 28 of the 80 seats in the provincial legislature. This outcome marked a significant departure from previous electoral cycles in which the ANC governed the province with a majority mandate.

5.3.3.4 Shifts in Party Competition in KwaZulu-Natal Following the 2024 Provincial Elections

According to Simelane and Nkwatle (2024), the emergence of the Umkhonto WeSizwe (MK) Party significantly altered the electoral dynamics in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). In the 2024 provincial elections, the African National Congress (ANC) experienced a substantial electoral decline of 37.23 percentage points, losing 38 seats and securing only 16.99 per cent of the vote. While electoral competition in KZN had historically centred on the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the IFP did not substantially benefit from the ANC's decline, increasing its vote share by only 1.73 percentage points and gaining six additional seats compared to the 2019 provincial elections. By contrast, the MK Party emerged as the dominant electoral force, securing 45.35 per cent of the vote and 37 of the 80 seats in the provincial legislature. At the same time, the IFP and ANC obtained 15 and 14 seats, respectively. This pronounced shift in voter behaviour underscores the disruptive impact of the MK Party on the long-standing dominance of both the ANC and the IFP in the province, with implications that extend beyond the provincial arena into the national political landscape.

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5.3.4 NDP 2030 Perceived Changes in Implementation Progress and Pace under the Government of National Unity

The National Development Plan (NDP) identifies poverty and inequality as South Africa's two primary developmental challenges, with their resolution by 2030 forming its central objective. To achieve this, the NDP sets three overarching goals: eradicating poverty, reducing income inequality, and lowering unemployment. It further outlines specific targets, including reducing unemployment to 6% through the creation of 11 million jobs, achieving an average annual GDP growth rate of 5.4%, increasing investment to 30% of GDP, improving labour force participation to 65%, expanding public employment programmes to reach 2 million people, simplifying regulations to support small enterprises, establishing a sustainable low-carbon economy, promoting equitable low-carbon transitions, addressing constraints in the mining sector, advancing mineral beneficiation, and strengthening national institutions for science, technology, and innovation. South Africa has entered the 7th Administration, a Government of National Unity, against the backdrop of the National Development Plan (NDP), which seeks to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030.

5.3.4.1 10 Year Review of the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission)

In 2023, the National Planning Commission conducted a ten-year review of NDP implementation and issued recommendations to strengthen progress towards 2030. The Commission maintains that these goals can be achieved through mobilising societal energies, fostering inclusive economic growth, building capabilities, strengthening state capacity, and promoting leadership and partnerships across society. Furthermore, Katramiz and Okitasar (2021) argue that NDP 2030 offers a platform for advancing sustainable development in national policymaking by aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), enabling countries to prioritise domestic needs while incorporating the global sustainable development agenda.

At the same time, the National Planning Commission (2020) emphasised that local governments play a critical role in developing and maintaining basic service infrastructure, which is central to achieving the NDP's goals. Inequality has remained high and persistent, with the legacy of apartheid continuing to constrain South Africa's human potential. The NDP review notes progress

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in key social sectors, including education, health, and social protection. Social grants have expanded to mitigate poverty and inequality, notably through the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Education outcomes have improved modestly, driven by better access to learning materials, enhanced learner assessment, and clearer pedagogical guidance for teachers. In the health sector, despite ongoing challenges such as HIV and TB trends, significant gains have been made in life expectancy and reductions in infant mortality. State capacity has declined rather than improved, posing a significant obstacle to achieving the NDP's objectives. According to Stats SA (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to widespread job losses, exacerbating South Africa's already high levels of unemployment and poverty. The pandemic also exposed deep-seated global challenges, including insufficient social protection, weak public health systems, limited health coverage, structural inequalities, environmental degradation, and climate change.

The South African Reserve Bank (2024) noted that the 30-Year Review provides multiple recommendations to accelerate programme implementation, particularly to advance the inclusion and empowerment of women, youth, and people with disabilities. While relevant legislation and institutional frameworks exist and key programmes have gained momentum, further improvements require adequate resourcing, enhanced coordination to reduce duplication and increase efficiency, and the expansion of successful initiatives through partnerships with non-state actors to promote a more inclusive society. In addressing remaining challenges, the NDP 10-Year Review emphasised four strategic priorities: fostering an inclusive economy, strengthening state capacity, institutionalising planning, and enhancing international partnerships and trade. These priorities are embedded within the core components of the MTDP 2024–2029. The MTDP 2024–2029 emphasises that the government will prioritise key actions to advance NDP objectives, focusing on improving the quality and efficiency of public spending through enhanced planning, robust procurement, and increased competition and productivity. Given that government expenditure is expected to grow modestly over the medium term, fiscal policy alone will be insufficient to mobilise the necessary investment, highlighting the critical role of private capital in supporting public development goals.

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The NPC's review (2023) highlighted that, although the NDP has been largely state-centric, there is an increasing need for closer collaboration between the state, the private sector, and civil society to support sectoral investment and innovation. The review further called for recalibrating efforts to address these pressing challenges. Post-apartheid South Africa experienced low and uneven growth, averaging 2.4% GDP (1994–2022), with a shift from manufacturing to services and a continued reliance on the primary sector; mining remained a major contributor to GDP despite declining employment. Agricultural production and employment initially declined following the removal of historic protections, but have since recovered through higher-value export crops. In 2022, agriculture employed 814,518 people, nearly double mining's workforce, despite contributing less to GDP (R450.2 billion). The NDP aims to raise public sector infrastructure investment to 10% of GDP, funded through tariffs, PPPs, taxes, and loans, with a focus on transport, energy, and water (De Beer, 2022). Investment declined after 2008 due to the global financial crisis but rebounded in 2022–2023, reaching 15.2% of GDP in 2023. To meet NDP targets by 2030, public investment must reach 10% and private investment 20% of GDP, with the National Treasury budgeting R943.8 billion for public infrastructure through 2027.

Household consumption rose from R1,355 billion in 1994 to R3,097 billion in 2023 (constant 2015 prices), yet extreme inequality persists: in 2021, the top 10% earned 65% of income and owned 86% of wealth, while the bottom 50% earned 6% and held negative wealth. Wages, a key source of household income, declined sharply during COVID-19 and had not recovered by 2023. The DBSA and World Bank estimate that R4.9–R6.5 trillion in infrastructure investment (2–3% of GDP annually) is required between 2022 and 2030 to close the SDG gap. The NPC indicates that R4.5–R5 trillion will be needed to support the energy transition, water security, and digital transformation, achievable only through blended public-private investments, with public funds leveraging private capital at a 1:10 ratio. The DBSA and World Bank estimated that R4.9–R6.5 trillion in infrastructure investment (2–3% of GDP annually) is required between 2022 and 2030 to close the SDG gap. The NPC indicates that R4.5–R5 trillion will be needed to support the energy transition, water security, and digital transformation, achievable only through blended public-private investments, with public funds leveraging private capital at a 1:10 ratio. According to the South African Reserve Bank (2024), South Africa's trade patterns have evolved significantly since 1994. While the relaxation of apartheid-era trade barriers boosted overall exports, manufacturing

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remained largely resource-based, with structural transformation limited to sectors supported by industrial policy, such as vehicle manufacturing. Merchandise trade continues to be dominated by mineral exports, while fuels, renewable energy equipment, cellphones, and pharmaceuticals lead imports. Vehicle parts and assembled vehicles are the only other top-ten traded items, with the ten largest exports totalling R734 billion of R1,843 billion and imports R584 billion of R1,879 billion (SARS, 2024).

One of the most notable trends in South Africa's labour market over the past three decades has been the rapid expansion of the labour force, from 11.3 million in 1994 to 28.3 million in 2023. Although employment numbers grew steadily, this was insufficient to absorb the rising labour supply, leading to faster growth in informal-sector employment. Even within the formal sector, access to certain employment benefits has declined, while partial and precarious employment has become more widespread. According to the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (2024), South Africa's unemployment rate reached 31.9% in 2023, among the highest globally, as many people remain excluded from the labour market. Young people classified as NEETs and less-skilled individuals face prolonged job-search challenges. Although approximately 2 million jobs were lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, total employment recovered to pre-pandemic levels of 16.7 million by the third quarter of 2023. According to the Bureau for Economic Research Assessment Report (2021), South Africa aims to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, achieve an average economic growth of 5.4%, and lower unemployment to 6% by 2030. Education, training, and innovation are identified as central to achieving these objectives (NDP: 296–297).

According to the South African Revenue Service (2024), South Africa's medium-term fiscal outlook remains constrained by rising borrowing costs and interest rates, which increasingly absorb budgetary resources. Public debt increased substantially following the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, rising from R627 billion (23.6% of GDP) to R5.26 trillion (74.1% of GDP), with debt-service costs now consuming 21.6% of revenue. The National Treasury aims to stabilise debt at 75.5% of GDP by 2025/26, with debt-service costs expected to peak at 21.7% of revenue before gradually declining. Population dynamics play a critical role in shaping South Africa's long-term socio-economic and political outcomes, influencing labour markets, service delivery, infrastructure capacity, and food security. Census 2022 shows that the population

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grew from 51.7 million in 2011 to over 62 million in 2022, significantly exceeding NDP projections, largely reflecting improved control of HIV/AIDS. The population is expected to reach nearly 66 million by 2030. According to Statistics South Africa (2024), Gauteng is now the most populous province, Black Africans remain the dominant population group, and females constitute a slight majority. Although the growing working-age population presents a potential demographic dividend, South Africa has not fully realised this benefit due to skills deficits and high youth unemployment, which stands at 44%, well above the national average.

South Africa has achieved near-universal access to compulsory schooling, with attendance among children aged 7–15 reaching almost 99% in 2023, alongside steady growth in adult educational attainment. The proportion of individuals aged 20 and above with at least a Grade 12 qualification increased substantially, supported in part by the expansion of no-fee schools, which now serve the majority of learners. Despite these gains, school non-attendance persists among some children aged 7–18, driven by academic challenges among boys and financial and household responsibilities among girls. Early childhood development (ECD) has expanded significantly, improving school readiness, although access remains unequal due to socio-economic disparities. Participation rates for children aged 0–5 increased markedly between 2006 and 2019, and this trend was reinforced by the transfer of ECD oversight to the Department of Basic Education in 2022. Educational attainment beyond basic schooling has also improved, with higher completion rates for Grade 12 and post-school education; however, unemployment remains high among those without matric or with matric only, compared to substantially lower rates among graduates. Growth in higher education enrolments, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds, has been driven by expanded NSFAS funding, which has played a key role in widening access and reducing intergenerational inequality. Nevertheless, concerns remain regarding the alignment of post-school education, especially within universities and TVET institutions, with labour market needs and critical skills demand.

According to Maluleka (2024), South Africa inherited a highly fragmented and unequal healthcare system in 1994, characterised by multiple racially and territorially segregated health departments, an underdeveloped primary healthcare system, and a dominant hospital-centred model alongside a substantial private sector. The transition to a unified public health system was further

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complicated by deep socio-economic inequalities, with poorer Black communities facing infectious diseases and inadequate basic care. In comparison, wealthier White communities experienced conditions associated with affluence. Statistics SA (2020) laments that these structural challenges were intensified by the rapid emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic during the early democratic period, which overwhelmed the health system, sharply reduced life expectancy, and left many children orphaned before effective treatment became widely available. Over the past three decades, significant progress has been made through institutional reforms, including the introduction of National Health Insurance and the comprehensive management of HIV/AIDS, which represent one of the most consequential health-sector achievements of the democratic era. Despite these advances, poverty remains closely linked to limited employment opportunities, with social grants continuing to provide income support to about half of South African households. Poverty disproportionately affects women, children, and youth, with high levels of multidimensional deprivation among children, particularly African children and those living in female-headed households (Statistics SA, 2023).

5.3.4.2 Strategic Plan 2025-2030

The National Development Plan (NDP) identifies the expansion and maintenance of electricity, water, transport, and telecommunications infrastructure as central to South Africa's medium- and long-term economic growth and social development. It set an investment-to-GDP target of 30 per cent, with one-third to be financed by the state. However, investment performance has consistently fallen short of this target. Gross fixed capital formation averaged 19.6 per cent of GDP between 2012 and 2018, declining further to 14.7 per cent between 2018 and 2021, largely due to reduced private investment, constrained government spending, and lower capital expenditure by state-owned enterprises (Statistics South Africa, 2023: 15–27). Although investment showed a modest recovery in 2022, it remains significantly below pre-pandemic levels, with private investment accounting for the bulk of the shortfall. In response, the National Infrastructure Plan 2050 (NIP, 2050), gazetted in 2022, seeks to strengthen infrastructure planning and guide expenditure across key sectors, including energy, freight, water, and digital infrastructure. Achieving the NDP's objectives of average annual GDP growth of 5.4 per cent and reducing unemployment to 6 per

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cent by 2030 is therefore contingent on accelerated infrastructure investment, structural reforms, and sustained, investment-led growth.

To create an enabling environment for the full realisation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, the South African government has implemented a range of targeted programmes. Central among these is Operation Vulindlela (OV), established in 2020 as a joint initiative between The Presidency and the National Treasury to accelerate structural economic reforms. OV aims to address binding constraints to growth, remove regulatory barriers, and promote inclusive economic development. Since its inception, Operation Vulindlela has delivered notable outcomes, including regulatory reforms to facilitate private investment in electricity generation and promote a more competitive energy market, the conclusion of a long-delayed spectrum auction to unlock investment in the telecommunications sector, and the review of the work visa system to attract critical skills and investment. In addition, OV has supported over one million participants through the Presidential Employment Stimulus and associated programmes, demonstrating its role in advancing employment creation and economic reform in support of the NDP's objectives.

- Further initiatives under OV include the establishment of the National Pathway Management Network, with over four million young people registered on the SA Youth platform by June 2023 (The Presidency, 2023), and legislative reforms to create a transport economic regulator, implement energy sector reforms, and establish a national water resources infrastructure agency. Social protection measures under OV have also been substantial, with the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant reaching over 11 million unemployed adults at its peak and lifting three million people out of poverty. At the same time, more than five million workers were supported through the Temporary Employer/Employee Relief Scheme (TERS) during the COVID-19 pandemic, preventing further job losses (Minister of Employment and Labour, 2022). OV has also guided long-term structural investments, including the development of the Comprehensive Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET-IP), which has mobilised over $10 billion in collaboration with various partners (JET Project Management Unit, 2024), targeted investments in water infrastructure to secure water supply, and the creation of a world-class logistics system to support export growth. Collectively, these interventions underscore OV's multifaceted

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approach to removing growth constraints, fostering inclusive development, and driving structural transformation in alignment with the NDP's vision. Phase 2 of Operation Vulindlela focuses on revitalising cities, advancing digital infrastructure, and strengthening local government service delivery. Presidential task teams in eThekwini and Johannesburg address key challenges, including infrastructure, service delivery, economic growth, and financial stability, and promote coordinated action across government and private stakeholders.

Other programmes introduced by the government entail:

- One notable example is the Presidential Investment Drive, launched by President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2018 to mobilise substantial investments and revitalise the national economy. Over five investment conferences, the initiative secured pledges totalling over R1.5 trillion, surpassing its initial target of R1.2 trillion (SAIC, 2025). Building on this success, the President has set an ambitious target of attracting a further R2 trillion in investments by 2028. The programme seeks to address pressing challenges such as the electricity crisis and to promote growth in strategic sectors, including renewable energy and infrastructure development.
- The Just Energy Transition (JET), anchored by the $8.5 billion Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) with the European Union, United States, United Kingdom, and other international partners, seeks to reconcile climate action with economic equity. It focuses on renewable energy, green hydrogen, electric vehicles, and critical mineral processing, potentially creating over 25,000 jobs by 2030, while also retraining coal workers, rehabilitating mines, and diversifying local economies. Coal plant closures could displace 30,000–50,000 workers, requiring robust social safeguards and targeted youth skills development, particularly in solar technology, grid management, and green construction. Achieving a low-carbon transition depends on coordinated action across government, civil society, and international partners, ensuring inclusivity, mitigating social and economic risks, and positioning South Africa as a green industrial leader in Africa.
- The Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) and the Presidential and Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI): South Africa's unemployment rate has remained elevated between

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2020 and 2025 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing economic challenges. By the fourth quarter of 2024, the unemployment rate stood at 31.9%, a marginal decline from 32.1% the previous quarter, while the expanded unemployment rate, including discouraged workers, remained at 41.9% (Stats SA, 2025). Youth unemployment (ages 15–24) slightly improved to 59.6%, yet overall employment levels remain below pre-pandemic figures.

- To address these challenges, the Presidency implemented targeted employment initiatives, including the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) and the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI). Launched in October 2020 as part of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, PES has created over 1.7 million work and livelihood opportunities, representing a 42% increase since inception. The PYEI expanded youth placements from 250,000 in 2020 to nearly 400,000 by 2024. In 2025, it, alongside the National Pathway Management Network, further supported youth employment, providing 234,000 job opportunities and registering over 5.64 million young people. Given that youth (ages 15–35) constitute roughly 40% of South Africa's 60 million population, these interventions remain critical to reducing unemployment, fostering skills development, and promoting inclusive economic growth.

Building on these initiatives, the 7th Administration also aims to strengthen anti-corruption reforms. Key priorities include fully implementing all 60 actions outlined in the State Capture Commission's response plan, establishing an independent Office of Public Integrity, and reinforcing the National Prosecuting Authority's independence.

5.3.4.3 The 2024 NDP Indicators and Targets Report

The 2024 NDP Indicators and Targets Report provides a comprehensive analysis of South Africa's progress towards realising the NDP vision 2030. According to this report, the National Development Plan (NDP) aims to reduce unemployment and inequality and, ultimately, eradicate poverty. The achievement of these objectives is premised on inclusive economic growth, the strengthening of human capabilities, the expansion of social protection, the establishment of a capable and developmental state, and the provision of effective leadership. The NDP further underscores the critical importance of coordination across the three spheres of government,

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including the national, provincial, and local, as a prerequisite for building an effective state in South Africa. In addition, the successful implementation of the NDP depends on the active and sustained participation of all sectors of society.

In 2021, the National Planning Commission (NPC) developed the National Development Plan (NDP) Implementation Framework to provide clear, decisive guidance for achieving the Plan's established targets. The framework articulated the strategic priorities necessary for realising the objectives of the NDP and identified critical actions requiring immediate implementation. Its overarching aim was to establish a coherent and robust national planning system that could be actively utilised by all spheres of government, social partners, and key sectors of society. Although the framework was anchored in the government's leadership role in implementation, it underscored the necessity of a comprehensive measurement and monitoring mechanism beyond the guiding principles alone. In response, the NPC introduced the NDP Implementation Tracker, a dashboard that monitors progress against specific NDP targets, goals, objectives, and indicators. Recognising the impracticality of tracking all indicators, the tool prioritises those measures that most effectively reflect progress towards the NDP's overall goals and objectives, based on the availability and reliability of relevant data. While the District Development Model provides a framework for integrated planning and coordinated implementation within defined spatial contexts to maximise developmental impact, the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029 forms a central component of South Africa's broader development planning architecture aimed at realising national priorities.

While the National Development Plan (NDP) articulates a comprehensive and ambitious development agenda, South Africa continues to face several persistent challenges that undermine progress towards its objectives. Key constraints include:

- Widespread corruption and mismanagement, as highlighted by the findings of the Zondo Commission, which exposed systemic governance failures within the state.
- Enduring institutional weaknesses, particularly within state-owned entities such as Eskom and South African Airways, remain insufficiently resolved, with their ongoing financial instability adversely affecting economic performance and broader development outcomes.

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- Entrenched bureaucratic inefficiencies and regulatory obstacles continue to impede effective policy implementation and service delivery (Fourie, 2015).

In assessing the broader socio-economic context in which these challenges unfold, the World Vision Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (2021), supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), provides a comprehensive measure of poverty across three key dimensions: health, education, and standards of living. As South Africa advances towards the realisation of a more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive society, the 2024 National Development Plan (NDP) Indicators and Targets Report underscores the importance of integrated planning, evidence-based policymaking, and adaptive governance. These elements are critical for ensuring effective responses to persistent structural constraints and to emerging challenges arising from global economic shifts, climate change, and domestic socio-economic pressures. Through a systematic assessment of the NDP's sector-specific targets, including health, education, employment, infrastructure, and social security, the report evaluates policy interventions that have yielded positive outcomes while simultaneously identifying gaps that continue to impede optimal progress.

In October 2022, the Cabinet adopted the National Framework Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Sector as a strategic instrument to guide the development of a capable and developmental state; however, its implementation has yet to be fully realised. The Framework adopts a broad conceptualisation of professionalisation as an intervention aimed at institutionalising state capacity and enhancing institutional capability in order to optimise public value. Effective implementation of the Framework depends on addressing delays in finalising the legislative reforms needed to formalise certain aspects of its provisions. With respect to the institutionalisation of planning in South Africa, a range of interventions have been undertaken over recent years to streamline, align, and codify the national planning system. These efforts have sought to improve coordination across government institutions and ensure the appropriate prioritisation of development objectives in support of the goals of the National Development Plan (NDP). Nevertheless, the Ten-Year Review of the NDP, published in 2023, concluded that incremental improvements in the functioning and maturity of the planning framework have fallen short of expectations. This underperformance has been attributed to multiple interrelated factors,

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including policy and institutional incoherence; limited state capacity to prioritise, sequence, and execute plans; the effects of state capture and corruption; misalignment of planning cycles and horizons across the three spheres of government; weaknesses in coordination and partnerships with non-state actors; and the impact of both international and domestic shocks.

5.3.4 Assessing the Potential Impact of the Government of National Unity on Governance

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 identifies poverty and inequality as South Africa's central developmental challenges and positions the eradication of these challenges by 2030 as its core objective. To achieve this, the NDP sets three overarching goals: eliminating poverty, reducing income inequality, and lowering unemployment. According to NPC (2012: 119), South Africa's targeted outcomes include reducing unemployment to 6% by creating 11 million jobs, sustaining average annual GDP growth of 5.4%, increasing investment to 30% of GDP, expanding labour force participation, and strengthening public employment programmes. The Plan further emphasises regulatory reform to support small enterprises, the transition to a sustainable and equitable low-carbon economy, the development and beneficiation of the mining sector, and the strengthening of national capacity in science, technology, and innovation. According to the NDP 2030, addressing South Africa's key developmental challenges depends primarily on two enablers: fostering higher economic growth and expanding employment opportunities. According to the Voluntary National Review Report (2024), South Africa's development progress continues to face significant challenges, primarily arising from misalignment across planning frameworks since the advent of democracy in 1994. A key manifestation of this challenge is the lack of a clearly defined, coherent implementation framework for the National Development Plan (NDP).

According to the Msukaligwa Draft Revised Integrated Development Plan 2023-2024, the effective implementation of the NDP requires its translation into manageable phases supported by detailed programme planning. Success further depends on consolidating broad stakeholder support, building trust and confidence among key role-players, strengthening public sector capacity, streamlining reporting and coordination mechanisms, and ensuring consistent and coherent communication. The Voluntary National Report (2024) outlines the core implementation

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principles guiding the realisation of the National Development Plan (NDP). The effective implementation of the Plan depends on building unity in action through the following principles**:**

- Broad ownership: Sustaining the NDP's wide societal support requires inclusive engagement across all levels of implementation, enabling diverse stakeholders to contribute skills, resources, and expertise.
- Continuous capacity building: Capacity development must be treated as an ongoing process across all sectors, with particular emphasis on strengthening the capability and developmental orientation of the state.
- Policy consistency: Long-term transformation depends on stable leadership and coherent, evidence-based policy implementation, with changes introduced cautiously to maintain alignment with the Plan's long-term objectives.
- Prioritisation and sequencing: Implementation will be phased, prioritising actions that unlock subsequent reforms, have long-term systemic effects, improve existing policy implementation, or require consensus-building, capacity development, and clarity of roles. The initial focus is on improving learning outcomes, promoting inclusive job creation, and strengthening state capacity.
- Clarity of responsibility and accountability: Effective implementation requires clearly defined roles, timelines, and responsibilities, supported by robust oversight, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms to identify and address bottlenecks.
- Continuous learning and improvement: Implementation should follow a learning-oriented approach, allowing for adaptation and refinement based on evidence, monitoring outcomes, and institutional experience.
- Coordinated action: While the NDP provides an overarching policy framework, effective implementation depends on sustained coordination through regular interaction and collaboration across government and stakeholders.

According to the National Planning Commission (2023), South Africa's economy remains insufficiently inclusive, with persistently high levels of poverty and inequality driven by entrenched power imbalances. The enduring economic, social, and spatial legacies of apartheid, compounded by inappropriate policies, demand-led skills mismatches, and weakened state

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capacity during the period of state capture, continue to undermine national competitiveness and human potential. These constraints limit skills development and contribute to low growth, weak productivity, and consequently high unemployment and inequality. The DPME 30-Year Review acknowledges South Africa's developmental progress while underscoring persistent challenges associated with a maturing democracy. These include an economy operating below its potential, persistently high unemployment, entrenched pockets of poverty, and deeply rooted, racially skewed inequality. In addition, gains in human development are increasingly threatened by energy and water insecurity, while ongoing service delivery gaps continue to undermine service quality and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. The following are some of the challenges hindering the full-scale implementation of NDP within the South African Government of National Unity:

3.3.4.1 Development Planning

Pali (2026), the South African Government lacks a credible planning system. Dr Pali claims that this challenge is anchored in the education system and the liberal system that the country succumbed to during apartheid and post-democracy. According to the National Treasury (2024), South Africa's development approach has been widely debated across political, policy, business, academic, and civil society spheres, including among research institutions and think tanks such as the Human Sciences Research Council. According to the PSC (2016), a capable developmental state requires constitutional stewardship by senior public officials and a merit-based public service founded on qualifications, capability, and competence. According to the Medium-Term Development Plan, development planning and budgeting across all departments and spheres of government must be strengthened to ensure a balance between coordinated high-level strategic priorities and effective implementation at the operational level.

According to Moon (2022: 102), the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the state's capacity for effective governance, strategic planning, and coordination. It further illustrated that collaborative engagement with social partners enhances the government's ability to respond to complex crises (Dube, 2022: 16**)**. In confronting the pandemic, the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) demonstrated institutional agility, rapid decision-making, and a strong reliance on data-driven processes (Chika, 2023: 89). The most prominent

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manifestation of this institutional failure was the Digital Vibes scandal, where the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) exposed a fraudulent R150 million communication contract irregularly funnelled by senior health officials to close associates of the incumbent Minister of Health, Dr. Zweli Mkhize. Rather than reflecting pure data-driven public safety engagement, this scandal illustrated how emergency public health messaging was weaponised as a front for money laundering and personal enrichment (Chika, 2023: 92). Consequently, the SIU (2021: 12-14) stated that "all-of-society approach" was profoundly compromised; the administrative agility praised in executive reports co-existed with a predatory shadow state that actively undermined public trust and diverted vital funding away from frontline healthcare workers and vulnerable communities (Bundy, 2022: 48).

The all-of-society approach proved effective in addressing critical pressure points, facilitating information flows, reconciling competing interests, and supporting transparent public engagement. In addition, the revision of the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the reprioritisation of budgets towards urgent health and social relief interventions such as the Temporary Employment Relief Scheme (TERS) and the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant highlighted the state's adaptability and responsiveness to evolving socio-economic needs. Collectively, this experience underscores the central role of the centre of government (COG) in driving integrated, whole-of-society responses through sustained collaboration with business, civil society, and international partners.

According to the African Union Development Agency (2024), inadequate development planning has significantly constrained the effectiveness of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU). The government's limited capacity to implement the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP), compounded by global economic pressures, has impeded progress in critical sectors, including energy security, tourism recovery, industrial expansion, and social protection. Furthermore, the GNU's 2025 budget crisis has revealed structural weaknesses in coalition governance, contributing to a deterioration in service delivery and a decline in per capita expenditure on essential public services. The government's emphasis on infrastructure investment in the absence of complementary policy reforms has entrenched existing barriers to economic growth rather than alleviating them. Collectively, these challenges pose a serious threat to the

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GNU's long-term developmental objectives and South Africa's broader economic growth trajectory.

3.3.4.2 Alignment of Goals and Effective Allocation of Resources

According to the National Treasury (2024), effective public sector performance depends on alignment between planning and budgeting, as weak coordination limits programme impact and necessitates continuous, results-driven innovation. According to the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2024), the alignment of planning and budgeting under South Africa's Government of National Unity is constrained by a persistent disconnect between plans and implementation, weak prioritisation and coordination across the public sector, limited fiscal resources, and inadequate integration of monitoring and evaluation systems. These challenges undermine coherent resource allocation and highlight the need for a more integrated and results-oriented planning and budgeting framework. According to the National Treasury Strategic Plan 2025-2030 (2025), the National Treasury has developed a policy framework for resource mobilisation to enable the government to explore alternative and innovative funding mechanisms, including public–private partnerships (PPPs), to supplement constrained fiscal resources. Within this framework, Treasury will continue to safeguard a sustainable fiscal trajectory over the medium term. Concurrently, interdepartmental collaboration and partnerships with external stakeholders will be strengthened to optimise resource pooling and enhance implementation capacity.

Immediate measures include leveraging PPPs to mobilise private capital and technical expertise, and activating development finance institutions (DFIs) to secure specialised funding for catalytic industrialisation initiatives. DFIs will play a central role in supporting renewable energy, green technologies, and climate mitigation initiatives that advance a just energy transition. In addition, the government will deploy public guarantees and innovative financing instruments to enhance project viability, while reinforcing cross-sector partnerships to mobilise financial and technical resources (National Treasury, 2025: 39). According to Olanrewaju & Govender (2024: 114-115), financing infrastructure development remains critical for job creation and economic revitalisation. In the context of rapid urbanisation, private investment in urban infrastructure, affordable housing, and smart city initiatives has been encouraged, with DFIs providing long-term financing and promoting equitable outcomes for disadvantaged communities. In rural development and

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agriculture, a blended finance approach, combining grants and concessional loans, will be utilised to modernise agricultural production, strengthen food systems, improve rural productivity, and enhance food security, with targeted support for smallholder farmers and rural enterprises through DFIs (DBSA, 2025: 72-75).

5.3.4.3 Political Instability

According to the Presidency (2024), South Africa has, over an extended period, faced persistent political, economic, and social challenges that have significantly constrained public service delivery at both national and provincial levels, falling short of public expectations. Economic growth has remained insufficient to generate the resources required to address these challenges, resulting in persistently high unemployment, entrenched inequality, and widespread poverty. In addition, corruption and crime have become deeply embedded societal concerns. While these challenges are severe, they are not insurmountable and require an accountable, effective, and efficient government across all spheres. In this regard, the Government of National Unity's (GNU) Statement of Intent commits the seventh administration to implementing concrete measures to improve access to, and the quality of, public services. President Cyril Ramaphosa reaffirmed this commitment in his Address on the Opening of Parliament on 18 July 2024, where he emphasised the imperative of building a capable, ethical, and developmental state. A critical prerequisite for achieving this vision is government stability, as stable governance ensures the uninterrupted functioning of key state institutions, policy certainty, and predictability for citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders.

Frequent cabinet reshuffles and instability within the executive undermine government stability. In the context of the GNU, the coalition partners collectively command a majority in the National Assembly. At the same time, the African National Congress retains a dominant position in the National Council of Provinces. Consequently, provided the GNU remains intact and with sustained support from his party, President Ramaphosa is positioned to constitute and maintain a stable national executive throughout the term of the seventh administration. Although the initial phase of the GNU has reflected a relative culture of compromise and cooperation among coalition partners, emerging signs of discord are evident, most notably visible in severe policy clashes over South

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Africa's international stance on the Israel-Gaza and Russia-Ukraine conflicts, domestic friction regarding proposed Value-Added Tax (VAT) hikes, and procedural gridlock during the 2025 national budget formulation process (Mncube & Ndlovu, 2025: 49). Bosman et al (2024: 11) put forward that while conflict within coalition governments was to be expected, the effective management of inter- and intra-party tensions is essential to ensure continuity in governance and the long-term sustainability of the coalition.

The Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) observes that although the African National Congress (ANC) has retained a dominant position within the Government of National Unity, it continues to face significant challenges in equitable power-sharing, particularly in its relationship with the Democratic Alliance (DA). Ongoing tensions surrounding key policy areas, including proposed increases to the value-added tax (VAT), the implementation of National Health Insurance, land expropriation, and language policy in education, have tested the internal cohesion and stability of the GNU. These strains were most evident during the VAT increase impasse in early 2025, which brought the coalition to the brink of a political rupture. Nevertheless, by April 2025, a strategic recalibration had been initiated, marked by the ANC's increased engagement with smaller coalition partners to secure parliamentary majorities, thereby potentially reducing its strategic dependence on the DA and reshaping the coalition's internal power dynamics.

5.3.4.4 Intergovernmental relations

According to the State of the Nation Address (20244), South Africa operates within a multilevel system of government in which constitutional responsibilities are shared across the national, provincial, and local spheres. The Constitution does not provide a rigid or static division of functions; instead, it allows for flexibility and the reassignment of responsibilities where necessary. Several key functions are concurrent, including health care, primary and secondary education, and housing, with both the national and provincial governments holding constitutional authority. Other functions, such as policing, higher education, electricity generation, and land reform, fall primarily under the national government. In contrast, local government is responsible for services such as electricity reticulation, water provision, sanitation, and refuse collection. This constitutional arrangement results in significant functional overlap across the three spheres of

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government, making cooperative governance essential for effective service delivery. Chapter 3 of the Constitution establishes the framework for cooperative government and intergovernmental relations, supported by a range of legal and institutional mechanisms designed to promote sound coordination and collaboration. Intergovernmental relations occur in both the legislative and executive/administrative arenas. Within the legislative sphere, provincial and local governments participate in national law-making primarily through the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). For legislation to be enacted, a bill must be passed by both the National Assembly (NA) and the NCOP before being signed into law by the President. Before the 29 May 2024 elections, the dominance of the African National Congress (ANC) in both houses meant that the NCOP largely endorsed decisions taken by the NA, with few instances of legislative resistance. However, the post-2024 parliamentary configuration has altered this dynamic. No single party now controls the NA, while the ANC retains dominance in the NCOP. As a result, legislative processes may become more contested, potentially strengthening parliamentary oversight. The ANC may need the support of the Government of National Unity (GNU) partners to pass legislation in the NA, while its majority in the NCOP provides it with the capacity to delay or block legislation passed without its support, depending on the nature of the bill.

Beyond legislation, the NCOP exercises important powers in intergovernmental relations, including approving provincial and municipal interventions, ratifying international treaties alongside the NA, and co-approving the withholding of funds from provinces by the National Treasury. These functions position the NCOP as a central institution in South Africa's intergovernmental system, and its previously muted role may become more pronounced in the current political context. Executive intergovernmental relations are facilitated through several formal structures. The President's Coordinating Council, comprising the President, the nine Premiers, and organised local government, serves as a platform for discussing the formulation and implementation of national laws and policies at subnational levels. Fiscal coordination is managed through the Budget Council, which brings together the Minister of Finance and provincial counterparts, and the Budget Forum, which includes local government, to deliberate on intergovernmental fiscal relations and the equitable sharing of nationally raised revenue. Sector-specific coordination takes place through MINMECs, which provide forums for national ministers and provincial Members of Executive Councils (MECs) to engage on policy formulation and

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implementation. Additional inter- and intra-governmental platforms exist at provincial and local levels, as required by the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act of 2005.

According to the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act of 2005, South Africa's multilevel governance system is characterised by complex and interdependent relationships. Before 2024, national and provincial engagements were largely intra-party affairs due to the ANC's dominance across most spheres of government. This enabled disagreements between national ministers and provincial MECs to be resolved through the party's internal structures. However, the composition of the national executive following the formation of the GNU has fundamentally altered these dynamics. With nine political parties represented in the executive, intergovernmental relations now involve greater inter-party interaction. For example, a Democratic Alliance (DA) Minister of Education at the national level must engage with a DA MEC in the Western Cape and with ANC MECs in other provinces, raising new questions about coordination, accountability, and political alignment. In this context, the impact of the GNU on intergovernmental relations becomes increasingly significant. Clause 22 of the GNU's Statement of Intent indicates that the GNU may guide the development and implementation of policy across all three spheres of government. This approach has the potential to enhance cooperative governance by fostering collaborative policy development, integrating intergovernmental planning, and improving the effective use of resources. If successfully implemented, it could accelerate large-scale transformation across key concurrent areas such as health, policing, housing, disaster management, and public transport, leading to faster, more efficient service delivery.

However, the success of this approach depends on maintaining constructive relations among GNU partners, particularly in provinces and municipalities where no party holds an outright majority. Decisions taken at subnational levels may exacerbate inter-party tensions or undermine the implementation of GNU priorities if not carefully managed. While much attention is focused on inter-party relations, intra-party dynamics are equally important. The ANC's cooperation with the DA and other parties at the national level does not automatically translate into similar arrangements at the provincial level, as seen in Gauteng. This raises important questions about alignment between national and provincial party structures, the relationship between national government and provincially governed administrations, and the implications for governance

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stability. Furthermore, variations in GNU participation across national and provincial levels complicate coordination within institutions such as the NCOP and other intergovernmental structures. How these relationships evolve will be critical in determining whether the GNU can strengthen cooperative governance, sustain political stability, and ensure effective implementation of national priorities across all spheres of government.

5.3.4.5 Local Government

According to Mzwange (2024), local government occupies a distinctive position within South Africa's democratic system. While municipalities are primarily mandated to deliver basic services to communities, they are simultaneously entrusted with a developmental role. To fulfil this extensive mandate, the Constitution confers both legislative and executive authority on municipalities, alongside clearly defined fiscal powers. These include the ability to raise one's own revenue and an entitlement to an equitable share of nationally collected revenue on an annual basis. Collectively, these revenue streams are intended to ensure that municipalities possess the financial capacity required to fund service delivery and implement development initiatives.

Notwithstanding this constitutional and fiscal framework, local government performance remains uneven. According to the AGSA (2022), of the 257 municipalities in South Africa, only a limited number function effectively, while the majority fail to provide adequate, quality services to their communities. This persistent underperformance is, in part, attributable to political and administrative instability within many municipalities. Fourie and Malan (2022) highlighted that in metropolitan areas and other councils where no single political party commands an outright majority, coalition governments have frequently proven to be fragile and unstable. It is against this backdrop that the emphasis placed on stabilising local government in the coalition government must be understood.

According to Beukes (2024), the establishment of the GNU at the national level has nonetheless signalled a new phase of coalition governance across South Africa's three spheres of government. While this development presents opportunities for enhanced intergovernmental relations, these improvements may depend on the extent to which the principles and structures of the GNU are effectively implemented at lower levels of governance. Given the scale and urgency of the

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challenges confronting local government, the question remains whether the GNU will be able to address systemic weaknesses and restore functionality at the municipal level. In this regard, the Strategic Plan 2020–2025 of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) reinforced the localisation of the National Development Plan, with a strong emphasis on the central role of municipalities. The Plan advocates for the scaling up and acceleration of the local implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals across municipalities nationwide. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 seeks to significantly reduce poverty and inequality by the year 2030 through the expansion of employment driven by accelerated economic growth, the enhancement of education quality and skills development, and the strengthening of the state's capacity to lead development and institutional change. The Department of Cooperative Governance's Strategic Plan (2020–2025) further underscores that the NDP explicitly recognises the attainment of South Africa's transformation agenda as contingent upon a substantially stronger and more coordinated intergovernmental commitment to the establishment of functional municipalities. Such municipalities are envisaged as safe, healthy, and economically sustainable spaces in which citizens can live, work, and socialise. Achieving this objective requires sustained and intensive engagement across all spheres of government. Although measurable progress has been achieved in certain areas, persistent socio-economic inequalities necessitate sustained and targeted interventions to address infrastructure backlogs, promote inclusive development, and enhance community resilience to future shocks. South Africa's long-term developmental vision, as articulated in the National Development Plan (NDP), seeks to ensure universal access to basic services, including potable water, adequate sanitation, waste removal, and reliable energy by 2030. In addition, the NDP emphasises strengthening tenure security, improving access to public transport, reducing commuting costs, and achieving a decent standard of living for all citizens.

Notwithstanding these policy commitments, significant constraints persist at the local government level. Masuku and Jili (2019) noted that the municipal governance landscape continues to be characterised by poor audit outcomes and financial mismanagement, widespread corruption and cadre deployment, inadequate infrastructure maintenance and planning, and political and administrative instability within councils. According to the Auditor-General of South Africa (2022), these systemic failures have contributed to declining service delivery, heightened public dissatisfaction, and an escalation in service delivery protests. In response, AGSA has consistently

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called for the institutionalisation of accountability and the strengthening of capable, citizen-centred leadership as essential conditions for improving living standards and addressing entrenched governance deficiencies. Municipalities, which are central to addressing South Africa's triple challenge of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, are increasingly experiencing institutional distress. Mguni and Subban (2022) observed that in 2021, 23 municipalities were placed under provincial intervention, a figure that increased to 33 by early 2022. The 2021 State of Local Government Report classified 64 municipalities as dysfunctional, 111 as medium-risk, and only 16 as stable. A 2025 investigative report by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) found that, in September 2022, 151 municipalities were reported to be financially insolvent, with 43 in a state of crisis and requiring urgent intervention to restore governance capacity and fiscal sustainability.

More than two decades after the adoption of the 1998 White Paper on Local Government, which envisioned a developmental local government system, many municipalities remain increasingly disconnected from this ideal. Persistent challenges, including corruption, political interference, weak revenue management, and inadequate infrastructure upkeep, continue to widen the gap between policy intent and implementation. Addressing this developmental deficit requires a shift towards alternative service delivery pathways grounded in accountability, innovation, and collaborative governance. In this regard, a "quadruple helix" approach, involving coordinated engagement between government, the private sector, academia, and civil society, presents a viable framework for repositioning municipalities to fulfil their constitutional mandates and advance the objective of a "better life for all." While progress has been recorded in selected areas, confronting the institutional and developmental weaknesses within local government remains imperative for the realisation of South Africa's vision of equitable human settlements and sustainable, high-quality service delivery.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the data collected through a desktop-based qualitative research approach and is organised into three (3) subheadings. It outlined and analysed data gathered primarily through document analysis and case studies. After collecting the relevant data, the researcher proceeded to discuss and interpret the findings. The data comprised secondary sources, including

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government gazettes, official government legislative and statutory policy documents, strategic frameworks, implementation progress reports, legislative and parliamentary records, independent analytical reports, socio-economic data, and other relevant materials, all of which are justified within the study. Through a systematic review of these sources, the researcher assessed whether the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 can be realised within the context of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU). This assessment examined annual reports from the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, with the analysis conducted for the period marking the formation of the Government of National Unity. In addition, the study reviewed the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029. It examined how political dynamics and inter-party cooperation within the GNU shape governance processes and decision-making related to the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the analysis and interpretation of data obtained through a desktop-based qualitative research approach, with a focus on document analysis and selected case studies. The chapter examined a broad range of secondary sources, including legislative and policy documents, strategic frameworks, implementation reports, parliamentary records, and socio-economic data, to assess the feasibility of achieving the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 within the governance context of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU).

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This chapter presents the study's key findings, recommendations, and conclusions regarding the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 under a Government of National Unity. The chapter addresses the extent to which the institutional arrangements, political cooperation, and governance mechanisms of the GNU facilitate or constrain the realisation of the NDP's developmental objectives. In doing so, it responds directly to the study's problem statement, research objectives, and guiding research questions. This chapter provides a synthesis of the study's core findings by reasoned assessment of evidence from the reviewed documents and reports. It evaluates the implications of inter-party dynamics, policy alignment, and state capacity for long-term national planning and development outcomes. Furthermore, the chapter outlined practical, policy-oriented recommendations to strengthen coordination, enhance implementation effectiveness, and improve governance coherence in support of the NDP 2030. The chapter concludes by summarising the overall contribution of the study to understanding the relationship between the government of national unity and the National Development Plan 2030 in South Africa, under first-hand objective and the drive for this study, presented the following questions:

- What impact does the Government of National Unity (GNU) have on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030?
- How do the political dynamics and inter-party cooperation within the GNU influence governance processes and decision-making in achieving the goals of the NDP 2030?
- What are the challenges facing the GNU in the implementation of NDP 2030?
- What initiatives can be put in place to realise the implementation of NDP 2030 in GNU?
- What strategies can be recommended to enhance the effectiveness of the GNU in ensuring the successful implementation of the NDP 2030?

The objectives of this study served as the guiding framework for deriving the research findings, informing the choice of research methodology, and shaping the interpretation of key concepts and thematic headings.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study on the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 is of critical importance because

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it illuminates how political pluralism and power-sharing arrangements can both enable and obstruct long-term development goals. By examining how ideological divisions, policy inconsistencies, and governance inefficiencies within the GNU affect the coherence and implementation of NDP initiatives, this study will help pinpoint structural weaknesses in the GNU's governance and policy coordination. As indicated in Chapter 1 of this study, in recent years, several revisions to the National Development Plan (NDP) have been proposed to ensure its continued relevance in the evolving global economic context and in South Africa's domestic priorities (Mthembu, 2019). The government has acknowledged the imperative of accelerating job creation, strengthening infrastructure development, and maintaining social stability through targeted policy interventions (Alexkor SOC Ltd, 2024). The harmonisation of the NDP with the policy objectives of the Government of National Unity (GNU) is a critical determinant in the attainment of the country's developmental goals (Motsoeneng, 2024). Achieving national development thus necessitates a stable, inclusive, and collaborative political framework capable of effectively executing long-term strategic policies.

According to the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME, 2023), the South African government should delineate a clearly defined, strategic role for local government in implementing the NDP 2030 goals. Specifically, the objectives of the NDP should be collaboratively developed and operationalised across all spheres of government to prevent fragmentation and the uncoordinated proliferation of activities. In this context, the national government is required to ensure that policy coordination and coherence remain central to the localisation of the NDP, fostering active engagement at provincial and municipal levels while instituting regular monitoring mechanisms to assess progress and guide adaptive implementation. Such an approach strengthens integrated planning, enhances accountability, and supports the realisation of the NDP's long-term developmental objectives.

The 2024 Government of National Unity Statement of Intent emphasises the importance of rapid, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth as a priority for the 7th Administration. This aligns with the goals of the National Development Plan, which aims to create jobs, improve infrastructure, and promote economic development across the country. The Government of National Unity's commitment to these principles implies a focus on addressing poverty and

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unemployment. The Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029 is aligned with the Government of National Unity's (GNU) Statement of Intent and the National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030, as it articulates the strategic priorities of the Seventh Administration. The Plan outlines a coherent programme of targeted interventions and measurable outcomes to be pursued during the current term of government. In advancing these priorities, the MTDP 2024–2029 functions as a strategic policy response to the prevailing economic and social challenges confronting South Africa.

Under the Seventh Administration, South Africa has committed to eradicating poverty, reducing unemployment, combating corruption and inequality, and ensuring the sustainable provision of basic services. Van Wyk (2020) notes that the National Development Plan (NDP) is firmly anchored in the objective of eliminating poverty and significantly reducing inequality by 2030. The realisation of these objectives depends on the effective mobilisation of societal capabilities to stimulate economic growth, enhance human capital, strengthen state capacity, and promote ethical and capable leadership. Given that achieving the NDP's goals requires a coherent, integrated education and skills development system to address multiple structural challenges, the Plan emphasised transparency and inclusivity through extensive consultation with government officials and members of the public. This participatory approach was intended to inform optimal resource allocation and enhance the NDP's overall effectiveness and sustainability (Celliers & Camp, 2019).

In addressing the research questions in Chapter 1 on the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, the study draws on scholarly perspectives on coalition governance. Longley (2023) explains that coalition governments typically emerge when no single political party secures an outright majority of seats in the legislature, particularly under proportional representation electoral systems. However, such arrangements may also arise in other electoral contexts, such as deep-seated proportional representation deadlocks in which no party secures a governing majority. These post-conflict transitions demand broad-based national reconciliation, or unexpected hung parliaments triggered by sudden political realignment. The formation of the Government of National Unity is commonly driven by periods of national crisis or emergency. Zweni, Faku, and Yan (2025: 147) argued that, when effectively managed, this arrangement can enhance governance by fostering

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communication, facilitating consensus-building, broadening political representation, and promoting compromise as a mechanism for resolving conflict (Longley, 2023).

Similarly, Levy (2022) contends that the Government of National Unity serves as an inclusive governance mechanism that enables the representation of diverse political ideologies and societal interests within the executive. By incorporating multiple political parties, the government of national unity is better positioned to reflect a wider cross-section of the population. In addition, Thijim (2021) argues that governments of national unity encourage negotiation and compromise, which are essential democratic practices that can improve policy outcomes through collective decision-making and consensus-building. Conversely, various perspectives caution that governments of national unity may be inherently unstable and susceptible to policy gridlock. Makgale (2020) asserts that divergent ideological agendas among coalition partners often complicate decision-making, leading to frequent disagreements, shifting alliances, and delays in addressing critical policy issues. Such dynamics can undermine effective governance and weaken the state's capacity to implement long-term developmental strategies, including the objectives of the NDP 2030.

According to Beukes (2021), a Government of National Unity (GNU) is a coalition arrangement that incorporates the majority of the political parties and interests represented in the legislature. Such governments are typically established to consolidate a broad spectrum of political representation, particularly during periods of political, social, or economic crisis. The primary objective of a GNU is to advance national interests, including nation-building, maintaining social order, and promoting peace and stability. Agreements underpinning GNUs are negotiated at the national executive level of participating political parties and often carry significant implications for governance and policy implementation across provincial and local spheres of government. This resonates well with the claims by Booysen (2021) that Coalition governments have increasingly emerged as a common feature of contemporary democratic systems, offering a governance mechanism through which political parties can cooperate in contexts characterised by the absence of an outright electoral majority, policy compromise, political instability, and the growing demand for enhanced accountability and good governance reforms.

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Chapter 1 of this study presented the introduction and background of the research, including the problem statement, the aim of the study, the research questions, and the specific objectives. The objectives of the research study were to assess the impact of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, to examine how political dynamics and inter-party cooperation within the Government of National Unity influence governance processes and decision-making in relation to the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 of South Africa, to investigate challenges facing the GNU in the implementation of NDP, to identify initiatives in place to realise the implementation of NDP 2030 in the GNU and to recommend strategies to enhance the implementation of the NDP 2030 through the GNU.

Chapter 2 of this research study presented the relevant literature on the concept of government of national unity, the theoretical and legislative framework supporting the dynamics of South Africa's government of national unity in the realisation of the National Development Plan 2030, the formulation and the introduction of the NDP 2030, its vision, and the progress towards its realisation, critiques of the National Development Plan 2030, implementation phases of the NDP 2030, and the success in relation to the targets and goals of the NDP 2030.

Chapter 3 of this study provided an overview of the implications of the government of national unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030, formulation, and the introduction of the government of national unity following the 2024 national elections in the Republic of South Africa, taken into comparison with the 1994 government of national unity, the relationship or alignment between the GNU and the National Development Plan was also discussed in this chapter. This chapter also provided the implementation challenges of NDP 2030 under the government of national unity.

Chapter 4 presented the research design and methodological approach adopted for the study. It detailed the research strategy, study area, study population, sampling methods and techniques, sample size, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations that guided the research process. The study specifically assessed the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030.

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Chapter 5 presented the analysis, discussion, and interpretation of data derived from secondary sources through a desktop research approach, including legislative and policy instruments, strategic planning frameworks, implementation and review reports, parliamentary records, and socio-economic datasets, to assess the feasibility of achieving the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 within the governance context of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU). Particular emphasis was placed on the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029, the 2024 Government of National Unity Statement of Intent, departmental Annual Performance Plans (APPs), and the Presidency Strategic Plan (2025–2030), with specific focus on the Presidency and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME). In addition, the analysis drew on the 2020 NDP Review (covering the 2012–2019 period), National Planning Commission (NPC) reviews and reports, including the 10-Year Review of the NDP and progress reports on NDP 2030 targets and goals (2012–2022). Reports from institutions such as the World Bank, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), and Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) were also examined, alongside an assessment of political dynamics, inter-party cooperation, and consensus-building mechanisms that influence governance processes and decision-making under the GNU.

Chapter 6 presented the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. It synthesised the key findings arising from the analysis and discussion on the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, and further identified areas for future research in related disciplines. The chapter contributes to broader scholarly debates on democratic stability and multi-party cooperation within the context of Government of National Unity dynamics. In addition, it demonstrated how the study equips stakeholders at both provincial and national levels with evidence-based strategies to mitigate the risks of political and institutional fragmentation, thereby ensuring that the GNU functions as a catalyst rather than a constraint in advancing the NDP 2030's objectives of inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and institutional reform. The central objective of the chapter was to assess the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan and to propose strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the GNU in

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facilitating the successful realisation of the NDP 2030. This study has contributed critical insights into how the Government of National Unity can enhance the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 by strengthening governance accountability, reinforcing democratic stability, improving policy coordination, and fostering a governance culture conducive to effective planning, implementation, and long-term developmental outcomes across the state.

6.3 FINDINGS

The primary findings of this research emerged from its core objectives, which sought, first, to assess, the impact of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, and second, to examine how political dynamics and inter-party cooperation within the Government of National Unity influence governance processes and decision-making in relation to the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 of South Africa, and to investigate challenges facing the GNU in the implementation of NDP. The study also aimed to identify initiatives in place to realise NDP 2030 implementation in the GNU, as well as to recommend strategies to enhance NDP 2030 implementation through the GNU. The findings were as follows:

6.3.1 The Impact of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in the Implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030

The first objective of this study was to assess the impact of the government of national unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. The study revealed that the establishment of the Government of National Unity (GNU) at the national level has marked the emergence of a new phase of governance across South Africa's three spheres of government. This study also found that the 2024 national elections and the period immediately following them exhibited the key features of a stable constitutional democracy. The elections were largely accepted by all political parties, including those that lost by a wide margin. In line with constitutional requirements, governments were formed at both national and provincial levels. In this study, it was found that the Government of National Unity (GNU), comprising several political parties, has taken office at the national level. The parties have committed to a set of shared

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priorities, including economic development, improved public service delivery, and strengthened state capacity. One of these priorities is the realisation of the National Development Plan 2030.

The study also found that several key policy documents, legislative priorities, and strategies, including the 2024 Government of National Unity Statement of Intent, the Presidency Strategic Plan 2025–2030, and the Medium-Term Development Plan 2024–2029, provide a clear framework that outlines what needs to be done and how it should be achieved. The 2024 Government of National Unity Statement of Intent highlights rapid, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth as a key priority of the Seventh Administration. This focus aligns closely with the objectives of the National Development Plan, which seeks to create employment, improve infrastructure, and stimulate economic development across South Africa. The GNU's commitment to these principles reflects an intention to address persistent challenges related to poverty and unemployment. However, the study found that ideological differences, policy inconsistencies, and governance inefficiencies within the GNU affect the coherence and effective implementation of NDP initiatives. As South Africa continues its efforts to build a more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive society, the 2024 National Development Plan Indicators and Targets Report emphasises the need for integrated planning, evidence-based policy decisions, and adaptive governance to strengthen implementation outcomes.

6.3.2 The influence of Political Dynamics and Inter-Party Cooperation within the Government of National Unity on Governance Processes and Decision-Making in the Implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 of South Africa

The second objective, examining how political dynamics and inter-party cooperation within the Government of National Unity (GNU) influence governance processes and decision-making in relation to the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, revealed that persistent political and ideological contestations continue to undermine policy coherence, unity of purpose, and sustained political commitment required for effective implementation of the NDP 2030 Plan. Despite a comprehensive constitutional and legislative framework that promotes cooperative governance, multi-party democracy, and coordinated development planning, inter-party competition and fragmented political ownership of policy priorities have constrained

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collective decision-making and weakened accountability across government spheres. The findings in this study further indicate that party-political interference, weak decision-making processes, and politically-motivated appointments, particularly at the local government level, have negatively affected institutional capacity, public servant morale, and public confidence in governance institutions, thereby impeding the translation of NDP objectives into tangible development outcomes. Although efforts by institutions such as the Presidency and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) have sought to strengthen whole-of-government coordination, oversight, and awareness of the NDP 2030, these initiatives have not consistently resulted in firm political alignment or implementation commitment by governing actors. The study also reveals that the relative novelty and complexity of coalition and unity governance in South Africa, coupled with limited institutionalised mechanisms for managing inter-party relations, present risks to policy continuity and governance stability. Consequently, the effective implementation of the NDP 2030 under a GNU arrangement depends on deliberate political leadership, structured inter-party cooperation, and the institutionalisation of coalition governance practices that uphold the constitutional principles of cooperative governance and democratic accountability.

6.3.3 Challenges Facing the GNU in the Implementation of NDP

The third objective aimed to identify the challenges facing the government of national unity in implementing NDP 2030. This study revealed that while the GNU is intended to stabilise the political landscape and promote inclusive governance, it introduces significant complexity that directly affects the realisation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. The GNU presents opportunities for broader representation, political pluralism, and potential consensus on national priorities. However, it also faces profound challenges, including ideological clashes among coalition partners, policy incoherence, governance inefficiencies, institutional fragmentation, and diminished strategic leadership. These dynamics often produce decision-making gridlock, where party interests supersede national development objectives, undermining the coordinated and sustained implementation of long-term plans such as the NDP 2030.

The study further reveals that weak intergovernmental coordination, bureaucratic rigidity, and fragmented institutional structures have constrained the GNU's capacity to operationalise integrated, adaptive governance approaches necessary for effective NDP implementation. Political

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and ideological contestations within the coalition have eroded policy coherence, diverted focus from strategic priorities, and perpetuated short-term decision-making. The absence of sustained strategic leadership and clear political stewardship has limited the GNU's ability to unify government departments, social partners, and civil society around a shared developmental agenda, resulting in stalled progress towards NDP objectives. These challenges are compounded by declining trust between government, business, and labour, as well as public dissatisfaction stemming from governance failures, service delivery shortcomings, and corruption, further weakening participatory development and the legitimacy of state-led initiatives.

Despite prevailing challenges, the Government of National Unity (GNU) has the potential to serve as a corrective mechanism to address longstanding weaknesses in the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. Its inclusive, multi-party structure aligns with the principles of cooperative governance and social compacting, offering a platform to enhance collective accountability, rebuild trust among social partners, and improve coordination across all spheres of government. Through legislative and procedural reforms, strengthened technical capacity, and improved alignment of budgets, planning frameworks, and performance systems, the GNU can narrow the gap between planning and implementation. However, the study finds that unresolved challenges such as ideological contestations, policy incoherence, institutional fragmentation, governance inefficiencies, and weak leadership pose significant risks to the realisation of NDP 2030. Consequently, the GNU represents both a potential enabler and a critical risk factor in determining South Africa's long-term developmental trajectory.

6.3.4 The Initiatives that can be put in place to realise the Implementation of NDP 2030 in GNU

The fourth objective focused on the initiatives that can be put in place to realise NDP 2030 in the GNU. The study found that the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 within the Government of National Unity (GNU) is supported by a range of strategic and institutional initiatives aimed at rebuilding national consensus, strengthening political alignment, and repositioning the NDP as South Africa's overarching development framework. Central to these

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initiatives is the role of the Medium-Term Development Plan 2024-2029, which outlines a coherent framework through which the Seventh Administration seeks to advance an inclusive society and give effect to the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, particularly its core objectives of poverty eradication and the reduction of unemployment and inequality. The establishment of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2024 paved the way for political stability and policy continuity. Through its Statement of Intent, the GNU committed to promoting stability and social cohesion, addressing the persistent challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, upholding constitutional democracy and the rule of law, and fostering an inclusive South Africa. The Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029 aligns with both the GNU's Statement of Intent and the National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 by articulating the Strategic Priorities of the Seventh Administration. The study found that the MTDP builds on the NDP's outcomes and long-term objectives while also reflecting the GNU's electoral mandate.

The findings in this study also indicated that, although persistent political and ideological contestations have historically undermined the unity of purpose, the GNU presents a renewed opportunity to cultivate political stability, trust, and collective accountability necessary for translating the NDP's aspirations into concrete developmental outcomes. The study found that the establishment of the Government of National Unity (GNU) represents a significant governance intervention aimed at addressing political fragmentation and institutional incoherence that previously hindered the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP). By bringing diverse political parties together under a common developmental framework, the GNU enhances policy coherence, strengthens institutional coordination across all spheres of government, and supports the alignment of national, provincial, and local priorities in pursuit of the inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development envisioned in Vision 2030.

The findings in this study further indicate that ongoing efforts to reposition the NDP from an aspirational policy framework to a more actionable, measurable implementation instrument are critical to accelerating progress toward the 2030 targets. Central to this shift is a renewed focus on priority developmental challenges, strategic implementation areas, and the mobilisation of collective effort. The study also highlighted the growing recognition of non-state actors, including business, labour, civil society, and communities, as essential partners in implementation,

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reinforcing the NDP's vision of a capable state supported by active and engaged citizens. Additionally, the study found that recent national reviews and strategic planning responses, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, have intensified the focus on strengthening state capacity, rebuilding public trust, and addressing structural socio-economic vulnerabilities. Overall, the findings suggest that while the GNU offers a strategic platform for political cohesion and coordinated action toward the realisation of NDP 2030, its effectiveness ultimately depends on sustained political commitment, enhanced institutional capacity, and the successful positioning of the NDP as a shared national programme rather than a state-centred policy.

6.3.5 The necessary strategies to enhance the implementation of the NDP 2030 through the GNU

The fifth objective of this study centred on the necessary strategies to enhance the implementation of the NDP 2030 through the GNU. South Africa requires a strategic and forward-looking approach to effectively address development challenges arising from a complex global political and economic environment, while simultaneously leveraging opportunities for social and economic advancement. The study found that effective implementation of the NDP depends on strong government leadership and sustained collaboration across all sectors of society. In line with this, the Medium-Term Development Plan 2024–2029 emphasises the importance of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to achieving developmental outcomes. Supporting this view, the Edelman South Africa Trust Barometer (2024) indicated that 61% of South Africans believe that partnerships between business and government can enhance trust in the management of technology-driven change, thereby contributing to national progress and economic growth.

The study further found that the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality and unemployment remain the government's central objectives. Consequently, the 7th Administration prioritises rapid, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth alongside job creation. However, the effectiveness of any development plan ultimately depends on the robustness of its implementation mechanisms and the institutional capacity to translate policy commitments into tangible outcomes. The NDP identifies constitutional values, social inclusion, active citizenry, broad-based

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leadership, and a social compact as central to nation-building and social cohesion. Achieving these objectives requires accountable, collaborative governance, strengthened through multi-sectoral partnerships and a professionalised, merit-based public service. The study finds that the 7th Administration's commitment to sustaining reform momentum and inclusivity is essential to building a capable, ethical, and developmental state capable of driving inclusive economic growth.

The study further indicated that effective implementation of the NDP 2030 depends on strong government leadership and the meaningful integration of local government into national development processes. COGTA's Strategic Plan (2020–2025) underscores the localisation of the NDP through strengthened municipal capacity, improved territorial coordination, and adequate financial resourcing. National strategic frameworks, including the President's Strategic Plan 2025-2030 and the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement, emphasise governance reform, accountability, skills development, and inclusive economic transformation as prerequisites for sustainable development. Collectively, these findings indicate that South Africa's ability to realise the NDP Vision 2030 rests on strengthened state capacity, effective leadership, and partnerships that mobilise both governmental and non-governmental actors toward shared developmental goals.

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6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institutionalise a "GNU NDP Technical Buffer" consisting of non-partisan subject matter experts embedded in each Ministry to ensure that technical NDP milestones remain consistent, even if the political leadership of the Ministry rotates between different parties. This buffer will function as a ring-fenced unit of senior career technocrats and sector experts, permanently appointed under the Public Service Act No 103 of 1994, to insulate the administrative machinery from political turnover. For practical implementation, the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) shall secure these experts on long-term, merit-based contracts tied directly to NDP targets. Under the Public Finance Management Act No 1 of 1999 (PFMA), this unit will legally lock pre-approved infrastructure procurement pipelines and budgets. This mechanism will ensure that when a ministry's executive leadership shifts among coalition partners, future administrations will not be able to unilaterally dismantle or disrupt ongoing developmental programs for partisan gain.
- Implement a Ministerial Portfolio Performance Dashboard accessible to the public, which tracks NDP 2030 indicators specifically by Ministry, creating a competitive yet transparent environment where individual members of the executive must prove their delivery efficacy to the public. This dashboard will be established as an open-access digital tracking platform managed independently by the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency. To align strictly with Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution, the platform will monitor the operational output of specific national ministries rather than political parties, tracking real-time metrics against the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP*)* 2024-2029. The Presidency will utilise this unassailable data for objective executive evaluations, forcing sitting ministers to remain anchored to their state delivery mandates. Ultimately, this mechanism will transition public evaluation away from a polarised, partisan lens and will empower the electorate with empirical data to measure portfolio efficacy ahead of future democratic cycles.
- Establish Joint-Portfolio Implementation Task Teams that force Ministers from different departments to co-sign on projects that cross-cut departments (e.g., Energy and Environment), preventing isolated successes and ensuring a unified approach to the NDP's structural reforms. Exercising executive authority under Sections 91 and 92 of the

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Constitution, the President shall mandate the establishment of these cross-departmental units under the Public Service Act No 103 of 1994 to enforce horizontal integration across split-portfolio mandates. These task teams will be formally integrated into the existing Cabinet Cluster system to coordinate macro-developmental projects where interdependent functions, such as the Just Energy Transition, span multiple ministries. To enforce compliance, the National Treasury will structurally tie departmental funding allocations under the Division of Revenue Act No 2 of 2025 (DORA) directly to the co-signed achievement of these joint milestones. This statutory framework will break down institutional fragmentation and will legally prevent any individual minister from utilising departmental veto power to cause gridlock or stall national structural reforms.

- Develop a provincial GNU alignment Clause in the District Development Model, requiring that provincial and local governments with different political compositions than the national GNU must adhere to a standardised "NDP Service Level Agreement" to prevent political sabotage of national projects. This clause will be enacted as a standardized, legally binding intergovernmental mechanism under the Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) Framework Act to manage vertical governance friction. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) shall mandate that all Provincial Growth and Development Strategies and Municipal Integrated Development Plans embed this agreement. This contractual tool will legally compel sub-national spheres regardless of their local political or coalition composition to execute national infrastructure blueprints. Consequently, it will insulate national developmental targets from localized political sabotage, ensuring uniform NDP 2030 implementation across all three spheres of government.
- Introduce a Legislative Sunset Review for all new GNU policies, where any policy that deviates from the NDP 2030 roadmap must undergo a mandatory public impact assessment by the National Planning Commission before being enacted. This mechanism will serve as a statutory brake on evaluations, preserving long-term macro-policy coherence amid competing coalition interests. Parliament will legislate that any new draft policy, White Paper, or major amendment originating from a GNU must trigger a mandatory compliance audit if it alters established NDP targets. The National Planning Commission (NPC) shall conduct an independent public impact assessment, which must be tabled before the relevant

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Parliamentary Portfolio Committee and Cabinet before voting. This review process will prevent temporary, short-term political concessions between coalition partners from quietly diluting or derailing long-term national developmental goals.

- Formulate a conflict-resolution Secretariat within the Presidency specifically for NDP deadlocks, utilising independent mediators to resolve policy disagreements between GNU partners that threaten to stall critical infrastructure or energy transitions. This body will be formally established as a permanent, non-partisan dispute-clearinghouse located within the executive support structures of the Presidency. The Secretariat will utilise independent constitutional experts and professional mediators to resolve high-stakes policy deadlocks that threaten to paralyse national infrastructure or economic transitions. It shall operate within a strict, legally mandated, time-bound arbitration window, relying on empirical performance data from the DPME rather than political compromises. This institutionalised mechanism will guarantee governance stability and will ensure that executive ideological friction does not stall progress toward national development objectives**.**
- Legislate an NDP Alignment Audit under the Public Finance Management Act No 1 of 1999 (PFMA) for all departmental Annual Performance Plans (APPs) to prevent short-term policy shifts from subverting long-term macro-targets. This audit will function as a compulsory compliance mechanism enforced by the National Treasury during the annual national budgeting cycle. In practice, the Auditor-General of South Africa shall incorporate an "NDP Alignment Score" into the standard audit framework. National Treasury will utilise this statutory audit to withhold or delay funding allocations to any GNU ministry whose strategic budget allocations or operational performance plans deviate from the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029 outcomes. This financial and legal check will compel future administrations to prioritise long-term development targets over immediate, localised political adjustments.
- Establish a National Social Compact Forum under the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) Act No 35 of 1994 to repair and institutionalise multi-stakeholder developmental collaboration formally. This statutory forum will be structured as a permanent, high-level negotiating chamber within the existing NEDLAC architecture to bridge the gap between state organs and external economic actors. Under this framework, the Presidency shall convene quarterly structural dialogues to bind social

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partners to shared, quantifiable benchmarks for infrastructure and employment. The Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME) will formalise these commitments into legally binding pacts. This mechanism will insulate national economic transformation initiatives from coalition instability and will restore public and investor confidence through structured, non-partisan public-private delivery channels.

- Enforce a Merit-Based Local Government Professionalisation Directive under the Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act No 3 of 2022 to eradicate political patronage in sub-national administration. This directive will be enacted as a binding regulatory code issued by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) to govern administrative appointments. The regulation shall render it illegal for any municipal council or local coalition to appoint administrative staff, municipal managers, or technical directors who do not possess pre-certified professional competencies. The Public Service Commission will exercise strict oversight to veto irregular, politically driven appointments. This statutory mechanism will restore administrative capacity, protect local-level infrastructure spending pipelines, and accelerate the municipal-level rollout of the NDP 2030 roadmap.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The study aimed to assess the impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity on the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. This study assessed how the institutional arrangements, political cooperation, and governance mechanisms of the Government of National Unity (GNU) enable or constrain the achievement of the NDP's developmental objectives. While the GNU offers opportunities for inclusive governance, political pluralism, and consensus-building, it also poses significant risks, including ideological contestation, policy incoherence, governance inefficiencies, institutional fragmentation, and weakened strategic leadership. The findings indicated that coalition governance can lead to decision-making gridlock, in which partisan interests override national priorities, thereby undermining the effective implementation of long-term development frameworks such as the NDP.

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This study is premised on the concern that the challenges confronting the Government of National Unity (GNU) may exacerbate existing governance and coordination weaknesses that have historically hindered the effective implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 serves as South Africa's long-term development blueprint aimed at eliminating poverty, reducing inequality, and promoting inclusive economic growth. It envisions a capable and developmental state that is people-centred, accountable, and responsive. In this study, a framework was developed to support the effective functioning of a Government of National Unity by addressing key challenges that may hinder the full realisation of the goals of the National Development Plan 2030.

The findings of this study are relevant to South Africa's governance strategies, particularly in understanding the complexities of a Government of National Unity in relation to the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030. It is important to note that the study does not rely on primary data, and the methods applied are not unique to this research. Rather, they support an assessment of the Government of National Unity's impact in ensuring that the roles and actions of the various political parties within the GNU contribute meaningfully to the full realisation of the NDP 2030 vision.

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FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT, COMMERCE & LAW

FACULTY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INTEGRATED COMMITTEE (FRIIC)

MASTER'S ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE
CATEGORY ONE

The table below lists a Master's Student from the **Department of Public and Development Administration** whose registered Research Project is in the Ethical Clearance Category One. The Research Reports are straightforward without ethical problems *(No risk to humans, animals, or the environment)*.

	STUDENT NAME	GENDER	STUDENT#	RESEARCH REPORT TITLE	ETHICAL CLEARANCE#	SUPERVISOR/S
1.	Munyai, N	M	19009798	The Impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the Implementation of National Development Plan 2030	FMCL/25/PDN/59	Dr E Maemu Dr H Takalani

Approval Period: December 2025- November 2026

The **Faculty Research and Innovation Integrated Committee** of the **Faculty of Management, Commerce & Law hereby** approve the Research Project and issue this Certificate as indicated above.

General Conditions

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- *The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:*
  - *Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project*
  - *Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the project.*
  - *Annually, research projects may be randomly selected for auditing.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Should a change to the protocol be deemed necessary during the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes before their implementation. Should there be a deviation from the study protocol, without the necessary approval for the change, the ethics approval is automatically forfeited?*
- *The date of approval indicates the earliest date that the project may begin. Should the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made, and a new approval received before or on the expiry date.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the FREC retains the right to:*
  - *Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,*
  - *To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require a further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.*
  - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
  - *Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.*
  - *It becomes apparent that relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.*
  - *The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,*
  - *New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary*

ISSUED BY FACULTY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INTEGRATED COMMITTEE ON THE 5TH OF DECEMBER 2025

FRIIC CHAIRPERSON: Prof V Moyo (Title, Initial, Surname) ..... (Signature)

FMCL EXEC. DEAN: Prof M Kanyane (Title, Initial, Surname) ..... (Signature)

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT, COMMERCE & LAW
LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA
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DR SHUMANI ERIC MADIMA
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Cell: 082 073 8313
Eric.Madima@univen.ac.za/ericmadima@gmail.com

14 May 2026

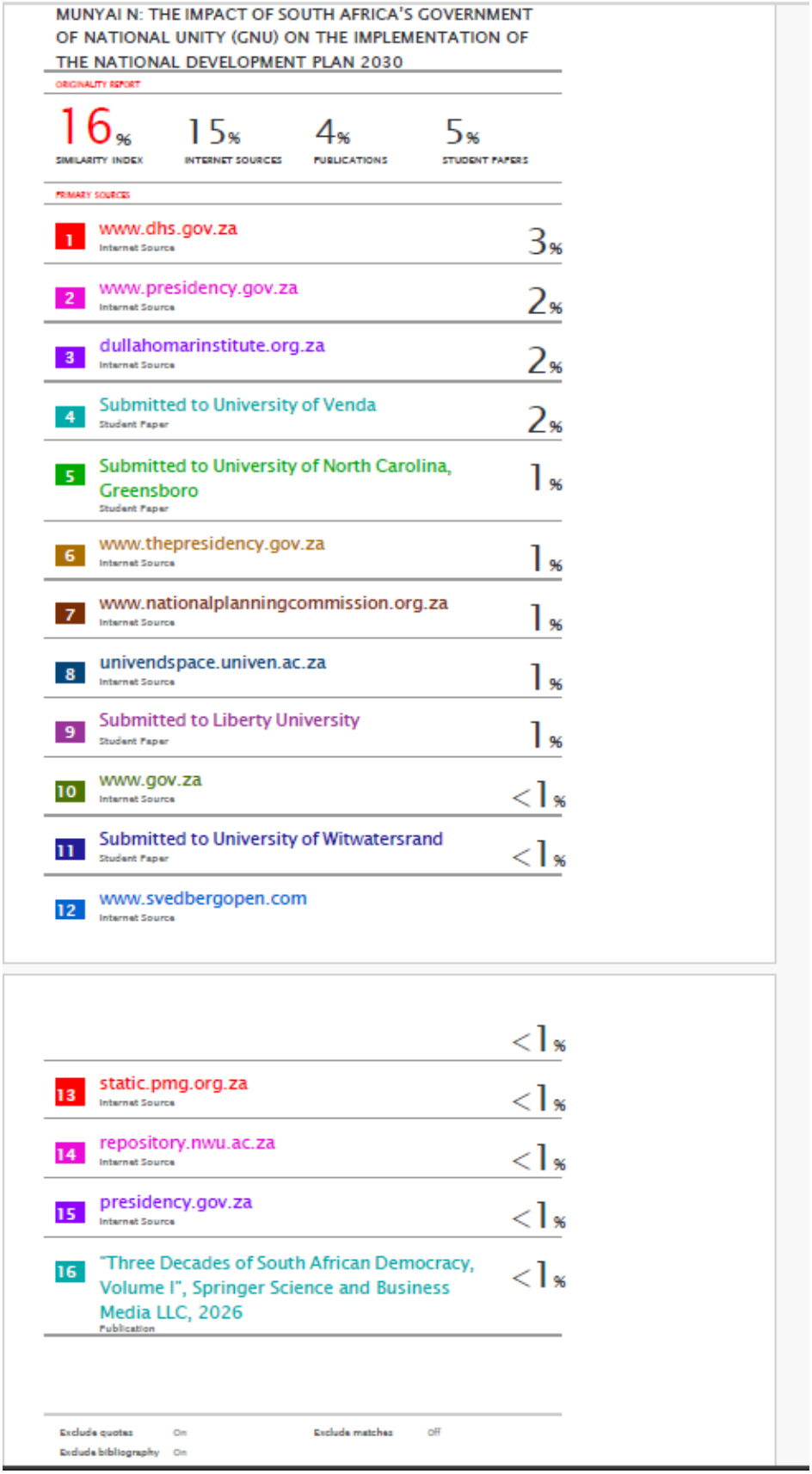
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that I, Dr SE Madima, edited the research titled "The impact of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) on the implementation of National Development Plan 2030" by Nakisani Munyai.

.....
Dr SE Madima (PhD)
Senior Lecturer (Linguistics Section Coordinator)
Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

ANNEXURE C

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MUNYAI N: THE IMPACT OF SOUTH AFRICA'S GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY (GNU) ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030

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