

Preface

Since the end of the apartheid era, South Africa has made enormous progress in improving the living standards of its people. However, growth has been sluggish since the global economic and financial crisis, and a variety of structural and social challenges must be overcome for the country to achieve its full growth potential.

Green growth should be at the heart of South Africa's economic strategy and its efforts to overcome these challenges. This is the main message from this first OECD Environmental Performance Review of South Africa, which builds on a series of OECD policy reviews and represents a further step in the deepening co-operation between OECD and South Africa.

South Africa hosts some of the world's richest biodiversity, but the country's economy is also one of the most energy- and carbon-intensive. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 16% of all deaths and one-third of diseases in children under the age of five are environmentally related. Inadequate sanitation and indoor air pollution are two key factors. In addition to the human tragedy, this imposes huge costs on the economy. These are some of the reasons why transitioning to a low-carbon, resource-efficient economy, protecting the natural asset base, and improving the environmental quality of life of its people should be among South Africa's core policy objectives.

South Africa has made impressive progress to meet some of these challenges. Environmentally related taxes generate revenues on par with many OECD countries. Subsidies for fossil fuel consumption are much lower than in many other emerging market economies. A Green Economy Accord was launched in 2011 to promote partnerships with the private sector and others to green the economy. In some areas, such as biodiversity, South Africa has developed pioneering laws and policies that are more advanced than in many OECD member countries. The human and financial resources allocated to the environment have been significantly strengthened, and an effective framework for enforcing environmental laws put in place.

Despite this good progress, much remains to be done. In addition to examining South Africa's main achievements and remaining challenges, the report presents 36 recommendations with a special emphasis on biodiversity, environmental governance and green growth. It recommends, for example, to assess how environmentally related taxes could contribute to a more pro-growth, pro-poor tax structure, while continuing to reduce explicit and implicit subsidies for electricity and coal consumption, as well as implementing the proposed carbon tax as soon as possible. The Review also calls for strengthening the integration of environmental considerations into sectoral policies, particularly mining, as well as for streamlining and strengthening financing mechanisms for environmentally related infrastructure. Human and financial resources in provincial and local environmental authorities also need to be strengthened. Finally, the Review

recommends to broaden and deepen initiatives to integrate biodiversity into economic and social development.

This Review is the result of a constructive and mutually beneficial policy dialogue between South Africa and the members and observers of the OECD Working Party on Environmental Performance. I am confident that this collaborative effort will be useful to improve understanding of how to tackle the many shared environmental challenges faced by OECD member countries and key partners like South Africa.



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