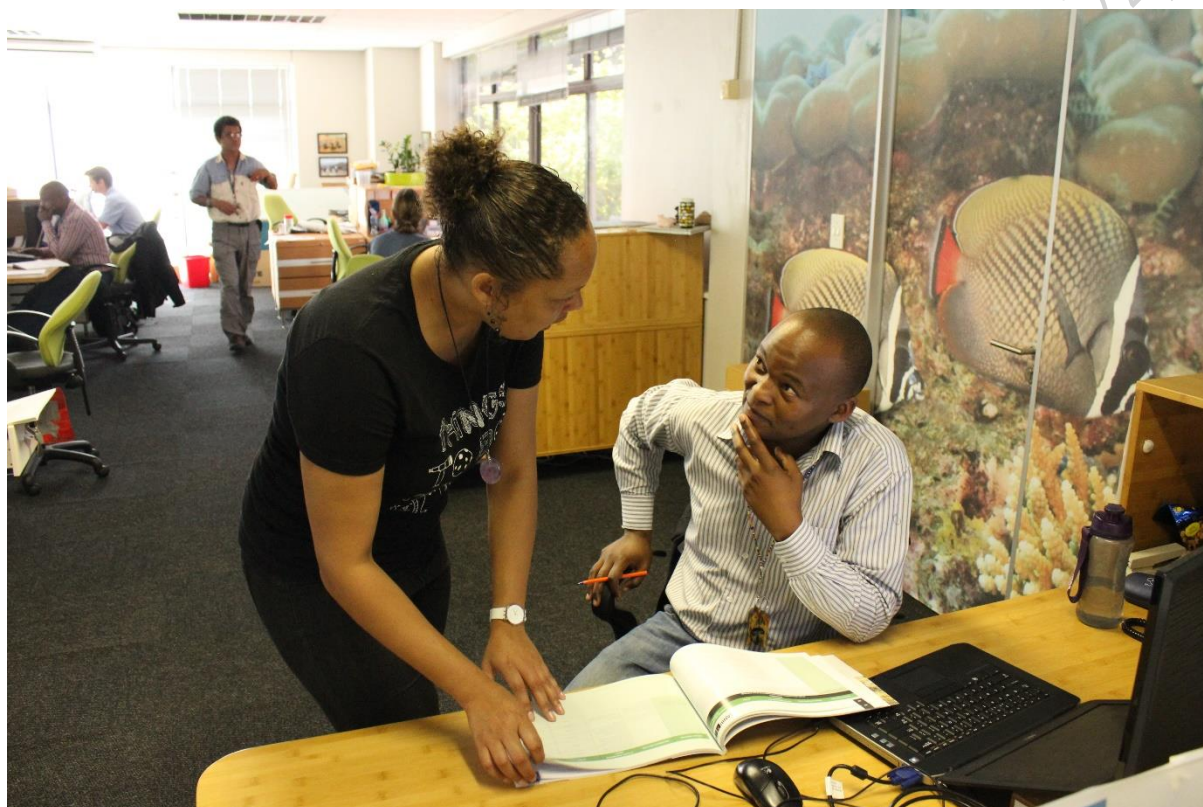


ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHENING FOR MONITORING, EVALUATION, REPORTING  
AND LEARNING FOR BIODIVERSITY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT  
AUDIT REPORT OF CURRENT CAPACITY AND PRACTICES



An initiative of the Organisational Strengthening and Co-ordination Implementation Hubs  
supporting the Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy 2010 to 2030

October 2024

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The 2020/2021 midterm review of the Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy for 2010 to 2030 identified the absence of a shared monitoring and evaluation framework as one of the key limitations to its implementation. It recommended the collaborative development of a shared framework and simultaneously strengthening organisational capacity to contribute to this shared process of monitoring and evaluating skills development initiatives towards the strategy.*

*Led by the Organisational Strengthening, and supported by the Co-ordination Implementation Hubs, a programme of work was initiated to enable learning towards strengthened practices for monitoring and evaluation and, through an application of learning in organisational contexts, to collaboratively generate the shared framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of and contributions to the strategy. To build on what is already being done organisationally, an audit was undertaken across the sector of existing processes and capacities in monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning of and for skills development. 61 respondents provided data through an online survey questionnaire and/or workshop participation in two centres.*

*The audit found that across organisations, volumes of data were collected by project staff and line managers for the purposes of copious reporting on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis for sharing with colleagues and accounting to boards, executive committees and funders on primarily the outputs of skills development activities. Several respondents noted the use of evaluations for improving programmes, planning and decision-making and applying for funding.*

*The most common challenges cited by respondents was the lack of a centralised, systematic process through which data could be collected, processed and accessed, highlighting the risk to the quality, validity, relevance and appropriateness of data collected. Further common challenges were ad hoc practices, often lacking in consistency and not guided by clear and consistent impact indicators. All respondents note the difficulty of measuring impact and unanimously support a programme of learning to strengthen organisational capacity for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning and collaboratively developing a shared framework to do so.*

*Respondents recommend a centrally co-ordinated framework, with generic indicators aligned with the goals and objectives of the strategy, and complemented by a guide/toolkit, with methods and tools that support implementation, as well as a roving fieldworker to support in-house monitoring, evaluation and learning. Recommendations are also made for a flexible, modular structured programme of learning, with an option of accreditation, that facilitates the strengthening of conceptual understandings associated with monitoring and evaluation, the appropriate use of methods and tools for data collection and the interpretation and use of data for evaluation and reporting purposes.*

*These recommendations support the next step in this initiative to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of skills development initiatives towards the strategy, which is the further development of a programme of learning, that will generate a collaboratively developed framework through an application of learning.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy for 2010 to 2030 (hereafter the Strategy) has a vision of a socially equitable and suitably skilled biodiversity and associated sectors – those that use and potentially impact natural resources – to enable effective strategies, responses and actions to biodiversity, environmental and climate change mandates and related global, regional and national commitments. This vision is being pursued through four strategic goals to attract talented, primarily black South Africans into working for biodiversity, enabling relevant, quality and appropriate levels of training, retaining and effectively deploying skills where needed and creating enabling conditions for ongoing, skills planning, development and evaluation.

In 2020, the mid-term review of the Strategy found that much investment had gone into implementation of initiatives that support the goals and objectives of the Strategy, primarily supporting new professionals as they entered work in the sector. One of the key limitations to effective implementation found in this review was the absence of a shared monitoring and evaluation framework through which to effectively evaluate the gains, achievements, outcomes and potential impacts towards the goals of the Strategy. In response, the review recommended the collaborative development of a shared monitoring and evaluation framework, while building organisational and sector capacity to effectively support its use and implementation.

To address the findings and recommendations of the mid-term review and support implementation up to 2030, six implementation hubs focused on co-ordination, advocacy, organisational strengthening, skills intelligence, employment and livelihoods and education and training were convened in the second half of 2021. The collaborative development of a shared framework was prioritised by the Co-ordination Implementation Hub and strengthening organisational capacity to effectively engage with and support monitoring and evaluation of skills development initiatives towards the goals of the Strategy was prioritised by the Organisational Strengthening Implementation Hub.

Led by the Organisational Strengthening Implementation Hub, and supported by the Co-ordination Implementation Hub, the Organisational Strengthening for Monitoring and

Evaluation project was developed and initiated in 2023. This initiative aims to build on and strengthen existing monitoring and evaluation processes and practices in organisations across the sector and generate a shared framework for monitoring and evaluating skills development initiatives that collectively contribute to the goals of the Strategy.

This report documents the outcomes of an audit of current monitoring and evaluation capacities and practices, as the first step in this initiative. The audit was undertaken through an online survey questionnaire and complemented by two workshops, one held in the Western Cape and one in Gauteng Province, to accommodate organisations across the country. Contributions were made by 24 respondents to the online survey questionnaire and 44 workshop participants from 32 organisations across the spectrum of national, provincial and local government, for and non-profit organisations and post school institutions.

To set the context, the report begins with an overview of the Strategy, the implementation plan to 2030 and the proposed organisational strengthening for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning six-year workplan. It briefly outlines the audit methodology, leading into sharing the findings of the audit. It concludes with recommendations for consideration in developing the shared framework and programme of learning through which to strengthen monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning capacity for skills development initiatives contributing to the Strategy.

## 2. THE CONTEXT OF MONITORING, EVALUATION, REPORTING AND LEARNING

The midterm review of the Strategy recognised significant gains made through the implementation of various initiatives to build transformational biodiversity skills. It also recognised the limitations of not having a cohesive, common framework for monitoring, evaluating, reporting and learning about actions, activities, processes, outcomes and potential impacts of the Strategy. Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning has been prioritised in the post 2020 strategic implementation plan to 2030.

## 2.1 The Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy for 2010 to 2030

The Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy for 2010 to 2030 is aimed at developing ‘a socially equitable and suitably skilled workforce of biodiversity leaders, professionals and technicians to optimally implement the sectors dynamic, expanding and increasingly complex mandate’ (South African National Biodiversity Institute and The Lewis Foundation, 2010)<sup>1</sup>. This aim is being pursued by four strategic goals, to:

- increase the number of talented, particularly black South Africans, into working for the biodiversity sector;
- improve the quality, levels and relevance of skills for the sector;
- improve the retention and effective deployment of suitably skilled individuals in the sector; and
- create enabling conditions for continuous skills planning, development and evaluation.

## 2.2 A Midterm Review of the Strategy

A mid-term review was undertaken in 2020/2021 to assess progress towards the aim and goals of the Strategy. It found a ‘significant amount of activity and inputs, was generally aligned with the strategic objectives and principles of the strategy, and achieved significant outcomes’ (Rosenberg & Kotschy, 2023a, p.13)<sup>2</sup>. Initiatives include a number of youth and/or entry level focused initiatives, amongst others foundation building in the school system, work integrated learning studentships, graduate internships, post graduate bursary awards, entrepreneurship initiatives and green career guidance. At a systems level, green skills research was collaboratively undertaken with key stakeholders in the national system of skills planning and development like the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), universities and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Others include the regular convening of the National Environmental Skills Planning Forum

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<sup>1</sup> South African National Biodiversity Institute and The Lewis Foundation. (2010). *A Human Capital Development for the Biodiversity Sector 2010 – 2030*. South African National Biodiversity Institute and The Lewis Foundation, Pretoria.

<sup>2</sup> Rosenberg, E., & Kotschy, K. (2023a). *Human capital development strategy for the biodiversity sector: Post 2020 Update*. Midterm review report, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment and the South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.

(NESPF) aimed at better co-ordinating and sharing skills development initiative, a few National Environmental Skills Summits that similarly convened stakeholders around skills development initiatives, and the Fundisa for Change teacher capacity development programme supporting foundation building in biodiversity teaching and learning in the school context.

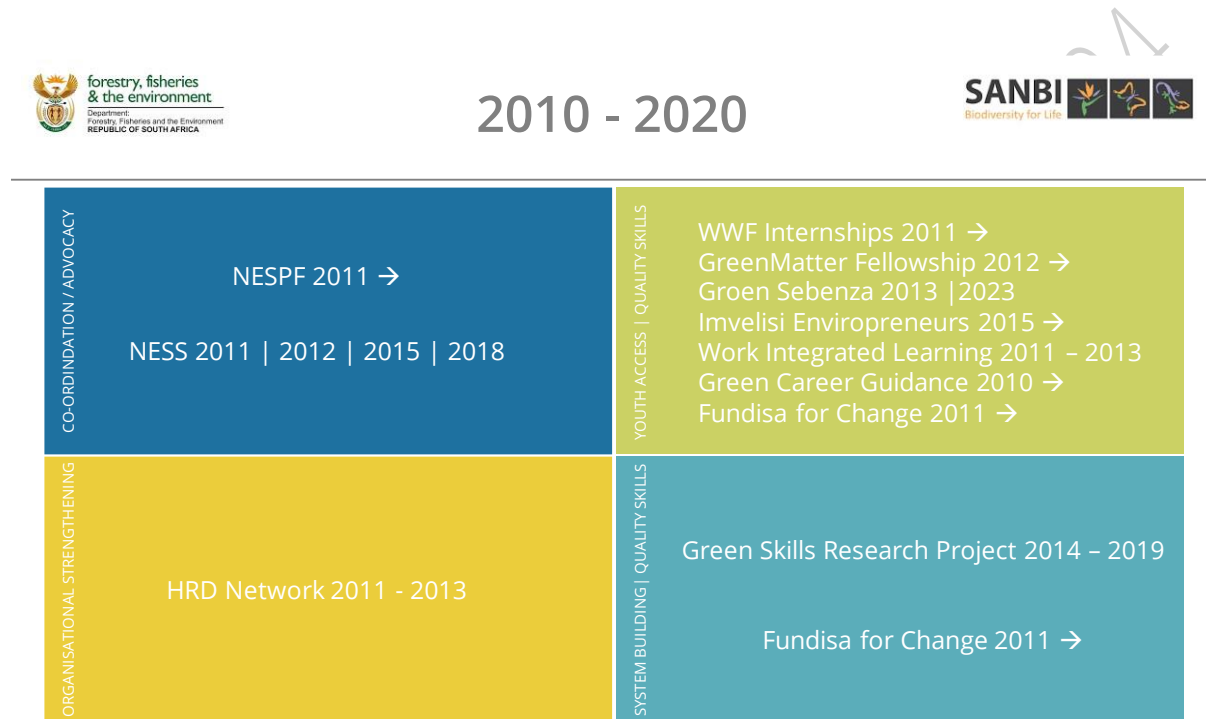


Figure 1 Initiatives contributing to the Strategy between 2010 and 2020, those indicated with a right arrow continuing to date

The review found the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation to be ‘a major shortcoming in the implementation of the strategy’ (Rosenberg & Kotschy, 2023a, p. 40)<sup>3</sup> to date. Together with a recommendation for improved co-ordination through multiple implementation hubs which aims to mobilise key stakeholders in government, civil society and learning institutions, it recommended the development and implementation of a shared monitoring and evaluation framework, complemented by strengthening organisational capacity for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning about the activities, actions, processes, outcomes and impacts of the Strategy.

<sup>3</sup> Rosenberg, E., & Kotschy, K. (2023a). Human capital development strategy for the biodiversity sector: Post 2020 Update. Midterm review report, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment and the South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.

### 2.3 Implementation to 2030

To strengthen co-ordination amongst and across multiple stakeholders for the Strategy, six implementation hubs were convened in 2021. These include the: (i) Co-ordination, (ii) Advocacy, (iii) Organisational Strengthening, (iv) Skills Intelligence, (v) Employment and Livelihoods and (vi) Education and Training Implementation Hubs. One of the five objectives of the Co-ordination Implementation Hub is to ‘institutionalise a shared monitoring, evaluation and reporting function as a vital coordination and advocacy function’ (Rosenberg & Kotschy, 2023b, p. 2)<sup>4</sup>. One of the five objectives of the Organisational Strengthening Implementation Hub seeks to ‘strengthen organisational M&E – build systems together with organisations’ (*ibid*, p. 6)<sup>5</sup>. Further recommendations made for monitoring and evaluation is for ‘each hub or project to do its own M&E’ (Rosenberg and Kotschy, 2023a, p. 40)<sup>6</sup>. These recommendations suggest a high prioritisation of monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning across implementing initiatives towards the aims and goals of the Strategy and involving multiple stakeholders to 2030.



## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2030

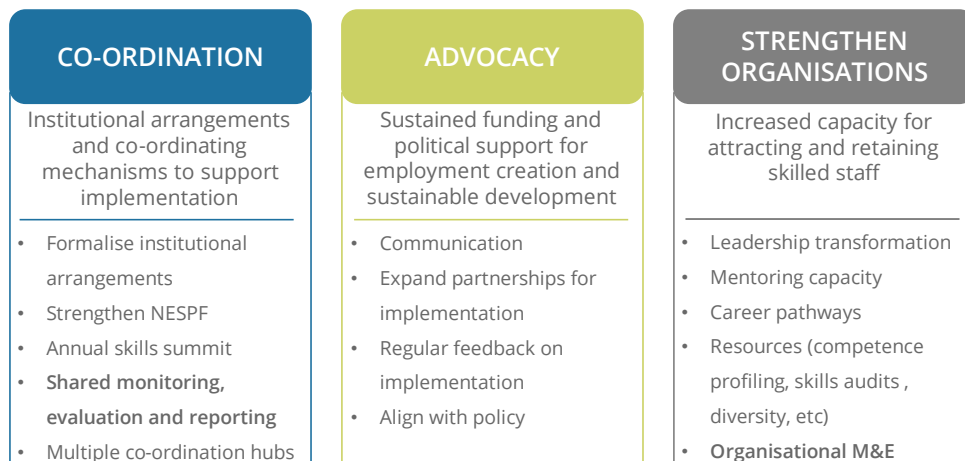


Figure 2 Three of the six strategic outcomes to 2030, with objectives

<sup>4</sup> Rosenberg, E., & Kotschy, K. (2023b). Human capital development strategy for the biodiversity sector: Implementation Plan to 2030. Post 2020 Update. Strategic implementation plan, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment and the South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Rosenberg, E., & Kotschy, K. (2023a). Human capital development strategy for the biodiversity sector: Post 2020 Update. Midterm review report, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment and the South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.



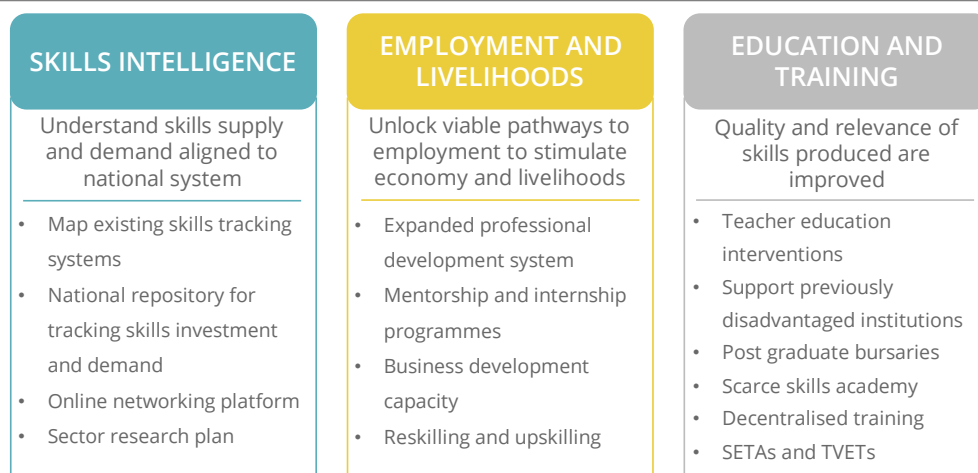


Figure 3 The remaining three strategic outcomes to 2030, with prioritised objectives

## 2.4 Organisational Strengthening for Monitoring and Evaluation

Organisational strengthening was a key priority at the launch of the Strategy in 2010, recognising the need for attractive, receptive work environments that enable effective and productive contributions to the work of organisations, while also facilitating continuous growth, development and transformation. It remains a key priority to 2030 to, in addition, support the strengthening of enabling environments for ongoing skills, planning, development and evaluation.

Objective 3.5 of the 2030 implementation plan proposes building systems together with organisations, collaboration of partners/organisations on monitoring and evaluation and shared reporting (Rosenberg & Kotschy, 2023b)<sup>7</sup>. The Organisational Strengthening Implementation Hub, through a few interactions, developed a four to five-year project to collaboratively develop a shared framework, and simultaneously build organisational capacity that could contribute to the collective monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning from skills development initiatives towards the strategy vision and goals. The plan proposes strengthening organisational capacity through a programme of learning

<sup>7</sup> Rosenberg, E., & Kotschy, K. (2023b). Human capital development strategy for the biodiversity sector: Implementation Plan to 2030. Post 2020 Update. Strategic implementation plan, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment and the South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.

that, through practice and applied learning, generates the shared framework and supports the development of an online platform that integrates findings into the skills intelligence system proposed through one of the implementation hubs.

To build on what organisations are already doing in monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning, the first step in this workplan was to undertake an audit across organisations to gain insights into existing monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning practices and capacities across organisations in the sector. The results of the audit will inform two complementary sets of recommendations, to inform the development and implementation of (i) a shared monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning framework, and (ii) a structure and flexible programme of learning that strengthens capacity to engage with this shared framework.



## THE PLAN

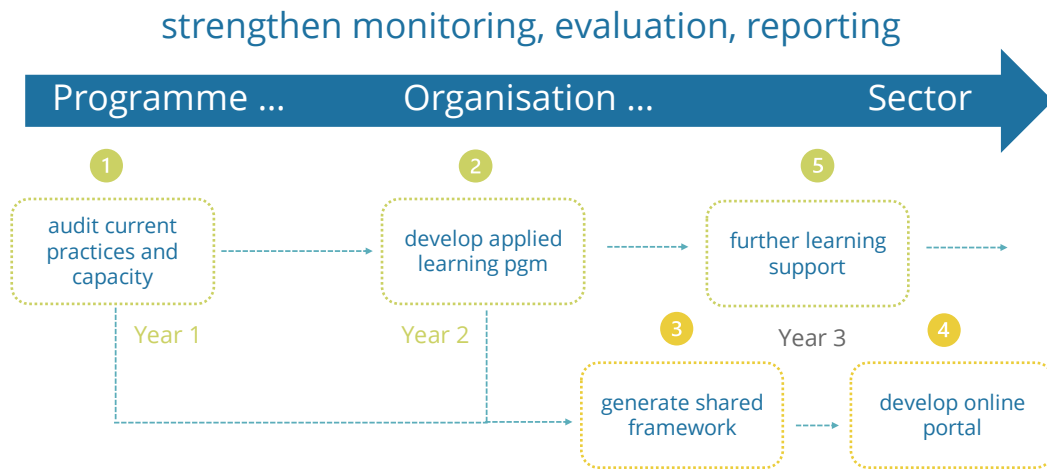


Figure 4 Workplan to strengthen organisational capacity for monitoring, evaluation and reporting

### 2.5 Auditing Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning Practices and Capacities

Stakeholders in the sector were invited to provide inputs, through a survey questionnaire and/or workshop participation, on current practices and capacities for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning. It explored current practices and capacities in terms of what is done, how it is done, by whom it is done, why it is done, and how insights are

used. Annexure A outlines the online survey questionnaire and Figure 4 shows the questions guiding the auditing discussions during the two workshops.



## MAPPING MERL PRACTICES (1)



### Monitoring your skills development [BHCDS] contributions

1. What data do you collect regarding your skills development contributions?
2. Who collects the data? Who stores and curates the data?
3. Why this particular data? Which indicators if any, inform the choice?
4. How is the data used?
5. Where are your challenges (if any)?

### Reporting on your skills development [BHCDS] contributions

1. What reports are produced by your organisation?
2. Who compiles these reports?
3. What do you report (on)?
4. Why these particular reports? (purpose)
5. Who receives/reads them?
6. How are reports used?
7. Where are your challenges (if any)?

Figure 5 Questions guiding the audit of monitoring and reporting practices during the workshop



## MAPPING MERL PRACTICES (2)



### Evaluating your skills development [BHCDS] contributions

1. Have you evaluated your organisation's skills development contributions? When?
2. What was the purpose of the evaluation(s)?
3. Who conducted the evaluation?
4. How was the evaluation used?
5. Where are your challenges with evaluation (if any)?

### Learning about your skills development [BHCDS] contributions

1. What are some of the things your organisation has learned about your skills development efforts over time?
2. How has this learning come about? What has made learning possible?
3. How have you or others used this learning?
4. When and how have you used evaluations for learning?

Figure 6 Questions guiding the audit of evaluation and learning practices during the workshop

**535 stakeholders**, past and currently engaged in various programmes and processes associated with the Strategy, were invited to respond to the online survey and/or make inputs during one of two workshops convened in Cape Town and Pretoria.

**24 responses** to the online **survey** questionnaire (see Annexure A) were received, seven from some participants in the workshops, two in the Cape Town workshop and the other five in the Pretoria workshop. Respondents to the survey work in parastatals, provincial government, local government, non-profit and for-profit organisations, as well as three institutions of higher learning. Four respondents work in a human resource management and/or development capacity, and two in organisational leadership. Findings from these responses are discussed together with inputs from the workshops in section 3.

**44 people participated in** and made inputs into the audit at two **workshops**, convened one week apart in August 2024. A Cape Town workshop was hosted by the City of Cape Town at the Green Point Park Education Centre and included 22 participants. 22 participants were also hosted, one week later by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) at the MilkPlum events venue at the Pretoria National Botanical Gardens.

Two participants in the Cape Town workshop and six in the Pretoria workshop work in a **human resource** management and/or development function. One of the six in the Pretoria workshop holds the portfolio of **organisational development**. At least nine participants across the two workshops have an organisational **leadership** portfolio. This includes the General Manager for Learning and Development in South African National Parks (SANParks), the Head of Nature Conservation at the City of Cape Town, three directors in three different public sector institutions, a chief operations officer and four directors, one of a for profit and three of non-profit organisations.

In two organisational responses to the survey questionnaire, there were two or more respondents, including from the human resource management and/or development function and professionals in line functions. In one of these organisations, there were a few individuals from different line functions across the two workshops. For example, respondents from SANBI included one from human resource development, two from Biodiversity Education and Public Engagement and two from Biodiversity Science and

Policy Advice, one a scientist and another with a human capacity development portfolio. The workshops similarly drew participation from different line functions in organisations. For example, participation from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) included individuals from the directorate of Education, Training and Development as well as two individuals from Strategic Foresight and Horizon Scanning, with an interest in anticipating future skills needs within a dynamic, fast changing environment, particularly in addressing complex socio-political processes like the just energy transition. SANBI also had diverse participation across the two workshops and from different line functions, as above.

Inputs offered through the survey and the workshops, therefore come from **diverse perspectives, from diverse organisations, functions and management levels**. Figure 7 reflects some of this diversity from contributing organisations.

National Government		DFFE – 3		EAPASA - 1
Parastatals	SANBI - 8	SANParks – 1	WRC - 1	CSIR - 1
Provincial Government	GDARDE - 2	FS DESTEA - 2	WC DEADP - 2	
Local Government	CCT - 3	Knysna DM – 1	Kouga DM - 1	Midvaal - 1
Non-Profits	SAIIA - 1	GM – 2	NC - 1	SEA - 1
	WESSA - 2	WT – 1	BLSA - 1	CLT - 1
	CSA - 1	EWT – 1	GA - 1	GP - 1
	SoS – 1			SS - 2
For-Profits	NCC - 1	AESI - 1	CEG - 3	
HEIs	SAWC - 2	TUT - 1	Wits - 1	

AESI - African Environmental Service Institute | BLSA – Birdlife South Africa | CLT – Cape Leopard Trust | CSA – Conservation South Africa | CEG – Contour Environmental Group | EWT – Endangered Wildlife Trust | EAPASA - Environmental Assessment Practitioners Association of South Africa | GA – Gondwana Alive | GM – GreenMatter | GP – GreenPop | NC – Nature Connect | SoS - Save our Seas | SS - Shark Spotters| SAIIA – South African Institute for International Affairs | SAWC – South African Wildlife College | SEA – Sustainable Energy Africa | WESSA – Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa | WT – WildTrust

Figure 7 The organisations and the number of contributions made to the audit

Contributors to the audit work across **multiple and diverse initiatives** that support skills development and contributes to the Strategy. These include:

- initiatives that seek to **attract**, particularly black South Africans into working for biodiversity, include school programmes of visits to reserves, gardens and zoos, in-school programmes and lessons, teacher support to strengthen biodiversity in the curriculum, bursary awards, particularly at post graduate level, youth and community-based programmes and career-focused programmes including career expos, science festivals, and inputs into science, technology, engineering and mathematical programmes, for examples STEMulator to which SANBI makes inputs, amongst others.
- **quality, relevant and appropriate** training is being pursued through work integrated learning studentships, internships including the Groen Sebenza programme and others, research placements particularly at the science focused institutions, in-service staff training, including skills audits to identify skills needs, and courses developed and offered by some institutions to build sector capacity, and a few examples of staff mentoring and coaching.
- across organisations, internships appear to be the only initiative focused on the **deployment** of skills into the sector and fewer initiatives are focused on skills **retention**, including staff and family bursaries being very common, and in the science-based public sector organisations, career pathways for critical and science-based occupations and the implementation of the occupation specific dispensation allowing for competitive, market related salaries and four organisations are focused on creating a positive, developmental culture of inclusivity, with one integrating this goal into the organisational strategy.
- creating **enabling conditions** include sharing resources and information, expert inputs into skills planning and development, building partnerships and working collaboratively, in some cases supporting partners to strengthen organisations, for example through leadership develop initiatives, internal organisational strengthening, such as mentors training, strategic organisational structuring, change

management initiatives amongst others, and building skills intelligence, through skills research for example.

This scope of multiple and diverse contributions are reflected below and indicates also the context from within responses to the audit were received.

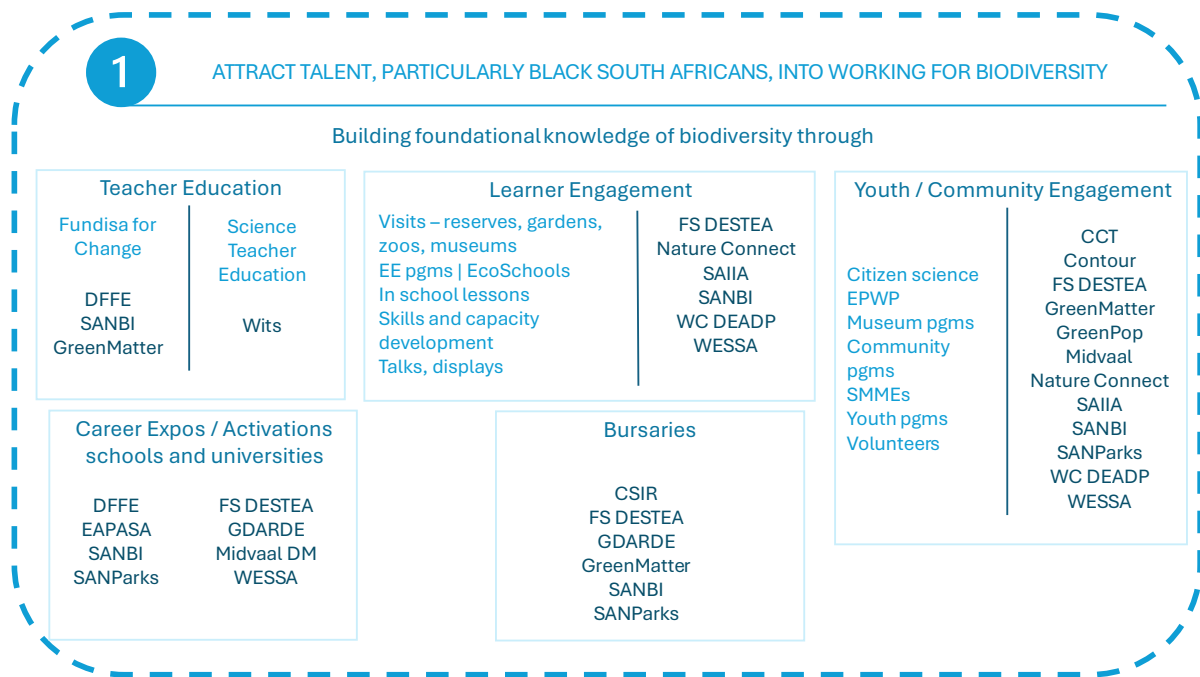


Figure 8 Organizational and programme contributions to goal 1 of the Strategy

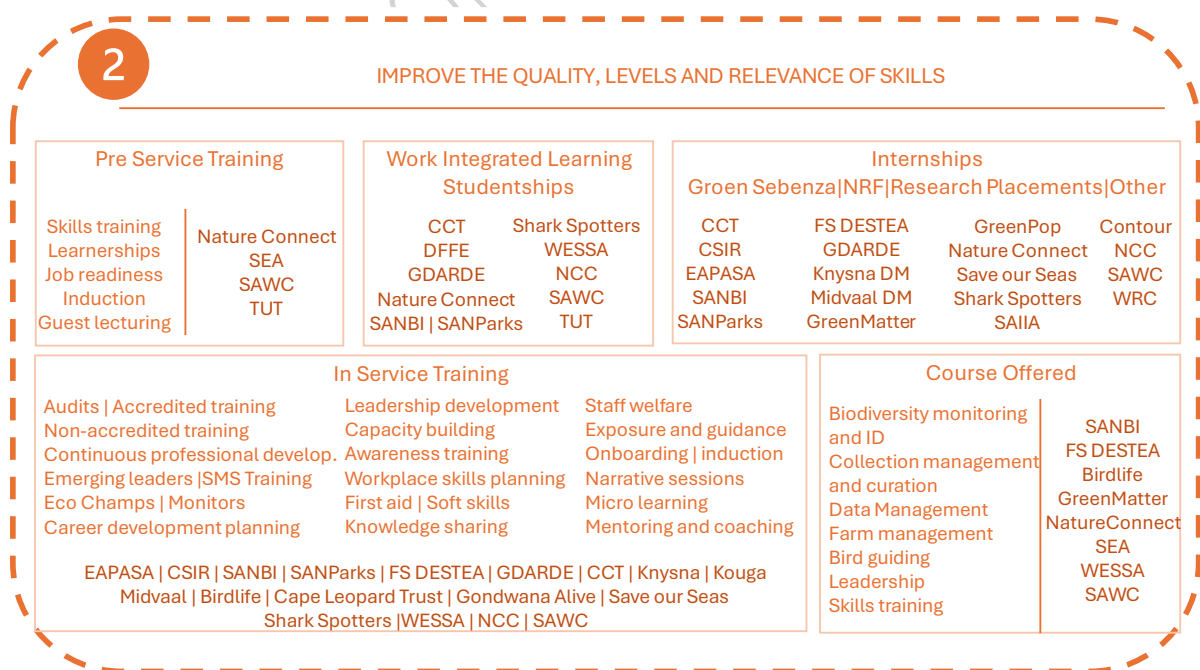


Figure 9 Organizational and programme contributions to goal 2 of the Strategy

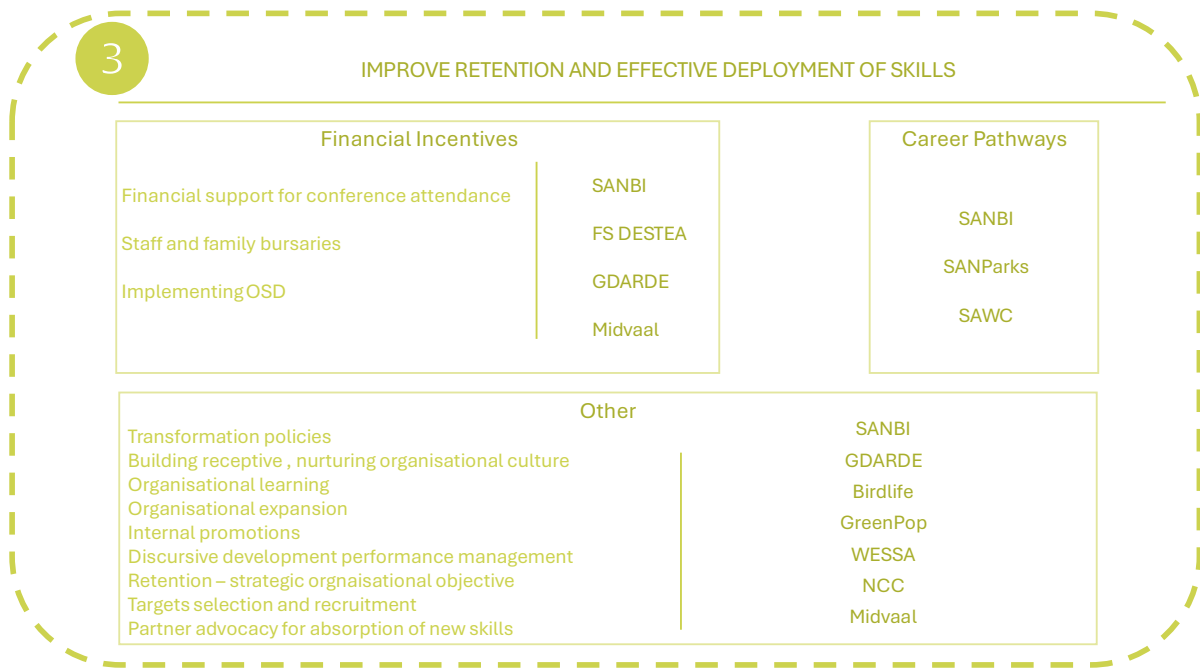


Figure 10 Organizational and programme contributions to goal 3 of the Strategy

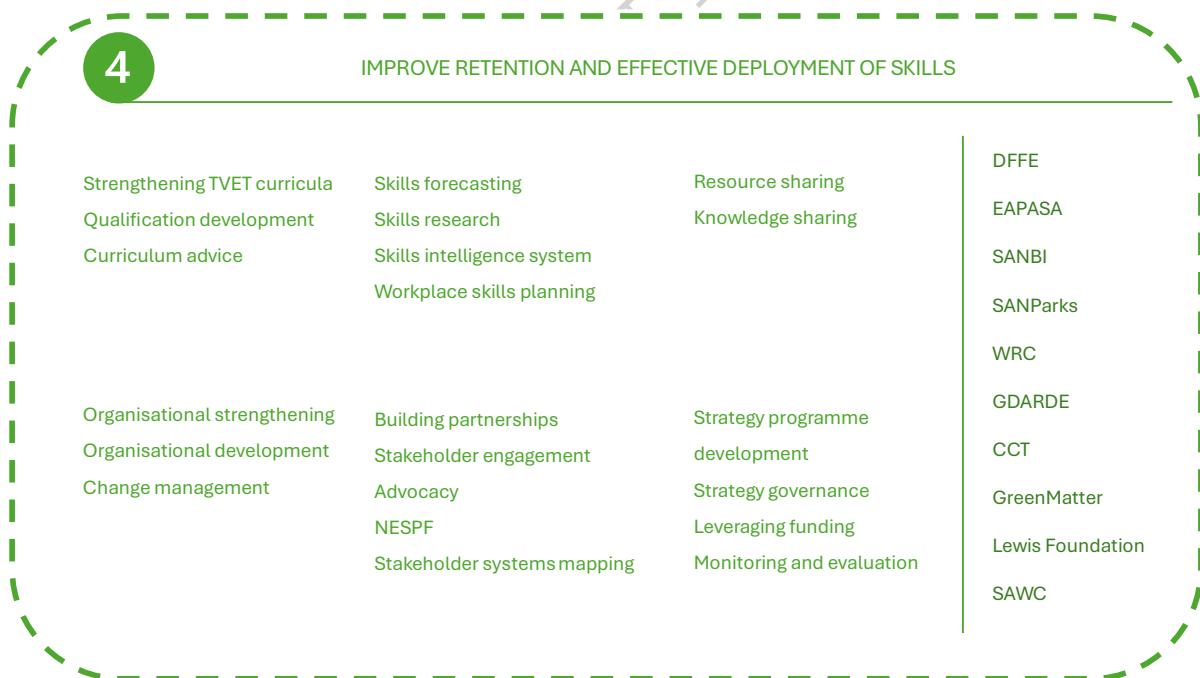


Figure 11 Organizational contributions to goal 4 of the Strategy

### 3. FINDINGS OF CURRENT PRACTICES AND CAPACITIES

The audit findings build on those of the midterm review (see section 2.2) regarding monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning, which also appears to be mostly absent



at organisational level. Some respondents note 'we do not have an evaluation system currently', '**no formal structure** for this, no clear request for this, no clear support for this'. A challenge highlighted by several respondents is the **inconsistency** in approaches, resulting from the absence of a structured and systematic framework and system, for example in 'evaluation is done *ad hoc*, not systematic'. Some respondents also note the challenge of changing frameworks of reporting, resulting in inconsistencies and often duplicated and ineffective efforts.

Current practices appear to be dominated by monitoring for extensive reporting. Lots of **quantitative data** is collected, in for example, the number of 'learners and schools participating in ... programme', 'teachers trained', 'interns placed and trained' with details of what training and whether accredited or not, 'training needs identified', 'placements post intervention ... promotions ... advancements', amongst others. Some, fewer examples, of narrative data is used for monitoring and reporting. Monitoring and reporting are mostly done against predefined targets and indicators, mostly of an output and/or quantitative nature. Though some indicators, referred to as **output indicators**, do include qualitative dimensions, these are not referred to in responses to in the context of monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning. Most respondents note the challenge and/or absence of, and the critical need to evaluate impact of initiatives and investments, for funders and to understand organisational contributions to the goals of the strategy.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting is **decentralised** in almost all cases, and data is collected, stored, managed and used for reporting by project staff and line management. Many respondents note this as a key challenge, in that data is stored locally on personal computers, with the risk of data being lost. Several respondents also question the quality of the data, 'what counts' and unsure of 'how something is best measured', and whether 'we ask the right questions'.

A few mention the need for measuring efficiency, effectiveness and relevance as the purposes of **evaluations**. All respondents indicate processes of evaluation undertaken in relation to their work, primarily at a **project/programme** level. A few respondents refer to measuring effectiveness, efficiency and relevance in evaluations as the purposes of

evaluations to inform planning, decision-making, fundraising, reporting and many cite the use of evaluations for reorienting, changing or improving projects/programmes. Learning appears to be closely linked to evaluation, as most lessons learnt and used similarly refer to sharing, reorienting, changing and improving programmes.

### 3.1 Types of Data Collected

Types of data collected in skills development interventions (see section 2.5) can be grouped into that indicating participation/reach of programmes, relating to training needs and interventions and performance related data.

- Data indicating the nature and scope of **participation and/or reach** of skills interventions include, for example:
  - the number and names of learners, and/or schools visited or being visited;
  - the number of teachers participating in teacher development programmes;
  - the number and names of interns, students and other participants in skills development programmes and events, including also demography, such as age, race, gender, fields of study or learning programmes, graduating universities, province of origin, host/employer organisations, number of hours per programme; and
  - the 'footprint' or scope of activity, for example beach clean-ups, alien clearing.

In fewer cases some narrative data is collected, for example through testimonials of experiences of participation in skills development programmes or interventions, feedback from learners – written or verbal - and mentors, assessments, tracking career development, and the number of businesses registered as an output of an SMME development initiative.

- Data related to **training** include training needs or gaps identified through skills audits, and the number of participants in different types of training interventions, with a distinction between accredited and non-accredited training. Skills development providers similarly collect data on training recipients, and the number and type of interventions offered. Data is also collected on the duration of training and its nature,

for example, whether formal or informal training, and the costs associated with training.

There are fewer examples of data collection on 'placement post intervention in the sector, promotions, advancements and pathways' and 'value created' through participation in a training intervention. Some also collect data on training themes in relation to training needs identified, and how workshop and conference attendance shapes or changes operations or strategies. One organisation collects data that indicates an individuals' growth measure, as part of exit interviews.

- Data from other **performance indicators** include lessons learnt, stories of change, success of implementation and participant satisfaction. Others relate to the number of publications, citations and use and growth of taxonomic collections. Some collect data from narrative and financial reports and on the amount of funding raised in relation to expenditure. A few collect operational data for example, social media performance, engagement and coverage, and the scope of sales, expenses, payments, invoices, the number of contracts of engagement and other operational data like equipment, maintenance and water supply. One respondent also cited the monitoring of municipal energy data, informing the work they do.

### 3.2 Purpose of Data Collection

Primary **reasons** cited for the collection of data include:

- progress tracking and reporting, performance monitoring and assessing return on investment
- identifying challenges and learning
- organisational strengthening, future planning and improving processes and systems, decision-making, forecasting, strategy development and budgeting
- funder requirements and fundraising
- compliance and legislative requirements, for example demographic transformation and policy alignment, such as school programmes aligned with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) of the Department of Basic Education (DBE)

- understanding skills needs and the required and quality of interventions in response and developing and reporting on workplace skills plans
- communication, reporting and storytelling.

Two respondents note **'impact'** as the reason for collecting data, linked to 'number of beneficiaries, registered businesses, staff, interns, casuals, learners, demographics, personal and qualification information, tracking professional development, scarce and priority skills, social media performance, funding raised and expenditure, major events attended and/or report outputs' collected through 'testimonials, individual conversations, feedback on training, feedback from supervisors, value creation analysis, portfolio of evidence, costs and financial data, evaluation forms, feedback reports, stories of change'.

Though asked explicitly, albeit with 'why this data' and qualified with 'if any' (see Annexure A & Figure 5), only four people responded to the question about **indicators** guiding data collection. These respondents refer to 'APP/CSP [annual performance plan/corporate strategic plan]' output indicators, for example, 'number of black undergraduates, graduates and postgraduates in biodiversity related fields benefitting from ... human capital development programmes (post-graduate studies, work integrated learning and internship programmes' with defined annual and quarterly targets. Others refer to key performance indicators/key performance areas/key result areas. For example, 'students placed in work integrated learning programme', 'environmental career development workshops for higher education students conducted' and 'co-ordinate environmental input into the DBE curriculum strengthening' with respective key performance indicators as the 'number of students receiving ... support for ... work integrated learning environmental qualification requirement', 'number of environmental career development workshops for higher education students conducted' and 'environmental input into the curriculum strengthening process submitted'.

### 3.3 Data Collection Processes

Data is collected by project, programme and line managers who are involved in, or oversee skills development interventions. Few organisations have dedicated monitoring and evaluation functions/capacities/human resources. Even in examples where

dedicated capacity exists, the collection of data appears to be undertaken by project, programme or line managers, and collated centrally by the dedicated capacity for reporting.

Data **management and curation** is dispersed across organisations and those who collect data and held, in all cases, on personal laptop computers. This is cited by more than one respondent as a challenge to the safety, consistency, integrity, quality, access and transferability of data for decision making and planning.

Data collection **methods** include databases, attendance registers, event programmes, student workplans, letters of appointment, course applications and registration forms, certificates that indicate training completed, narrative reports, workplace skills plans, training reports, evaluation forms, exit interviews, surveys, one-on-one engagements, monthly reflection journals, narrative and financial reports.

### 3.4 Reporting

Data is used primarily for reporting, organisationally, to principal organisations, for example, SANBI and EAPASA to DFFE, and to funders. Reports are prepared for similar reasons cited for data collection as in section 3.2, including:

- measuring progress towards performance targets, track organisational performance against annual performance and corporate strategic plans and tracking change;
- for the board to provide guidance and direction to the organisation and inform management meeting agendas;
- to review policies and standard operating procedures;
- share successes and surface challenges and documenting for organisational memory;
- accountability and compliance;
- audits by National Treasury;
- assess contributions to national priorities;
- for communicating and inspiration, stakeholder management and engagement and advocacy.

All organisations cite **multiple reports** prepared, ranging from monthly to quarterly through to annual, executive committee and board reports. One parastatal reports the preparation of eight reports annually and a municipality reports into corporate monthly reports, annual unit reports and the organisational scorecard, monthly, quarterly and annually, in addition to annually and between three to five years into a local biodiversity strategy and action plan. Some note the preparation of specific compliance reports like transformation, gender response and employment equity reports, some report on internal and external training interventions through annual training reports, one reports on youth employment, student progress and competence in work integrated learning, amongst some other specific reports.

Reports are **prepared by those who collect data**, including project, programme and line managers (see section 3.3) and are meant for parliamentary monitoring committees, boards, executive committees and members like Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Chief Operating Officers (COOs), principals (see example above), strategic planning directorates, directors and senior managers, project staff and colleagues and donors. Some specific recipients of these reports include a monitoring and evaluation unit, partners, like provincial conservation agency from the local municipality, sub councils, mayoral committee and council, portfolio committees and the public. Some are shared with communication teams for websites and other social media platforms and BBBEE auditors to fulfil compliance requirements.

### 3.5 Evaluating Skills Development Initiatives

Seven organisations report organisational evaluations being undertaken, including one strategic review, assumed to be focused on the organisational strategy. Most respondents report evaluating primarily projects/programmes to understand impact, change, to improve programmes and pursue funding opportunities. The timing of evaluations are mostly defined by reporting frameworks of funders and strategic/project/programme planning and otherwise *ad hoc*. They are also done mostly as project/programme activities take place, with feedback elicited from participants in skills development initiatives.

Most evaluations are conducted **internally**, by project, programme or line management staff who do the data collection and reporting (see sections 3.3 and 3.4). These internal evaluations are sometime complemented by external service providers. Two respondents note the use of only external evaluators.

The primary **purposes** cited for evaluations relate to funding and improving projects/programmes or systems, and largely to measure relevance, impact, effectiveness and efficiency of projects / programmes, as reported below.

FUNDING	IMPACT	IMPROVEMENT
'funding applications'	'measure impact, effectiveness, efficiency of the programme'	'response to systems challenges'
'budget motivations'	'evaluate the reach and value of the programme nationally'	'learning'
'verification for continued funding'	'evaluate value ... in skills and retaining young professionals, efficiency of programme model and implementation'	'learning and programme development and organisational design'
'demonstrate the value of the programme to funders'	'to see relevance of ... programme, effect it has on ... community, to get feedback'	'learn lessons to inform better practice and planning'
'accountability and compliance'	'to assess the impact of training ... whether schools continue to practice lessons / skills'	'to improve'
	'measure progress and impact'	
	'assess impact of ... programme, what works, what doesn't, adaptations'	
	'impact assessment'	
	'evaluate the programme - impact and learn for change'	
	'to measure the progress or impact'	

Evaluations are **used** for change and reorientation of projects/programmes, for decision making, planning and to inform future projects/programmes, to 'shape future

approaches’, ‘design new programmes’, ‘make the case’, ‘communicate feedback to stakeholders’ and also ‘bragging rights’ and ‘boasting about work well done’.

### 3.6 Learning through Evaluation

Respondents report several lessons learnt about skills development programmes, including lessons learnt about evaluation processes. These are used to reorient and improve programmes for future offerings and for planning extension or new interventions.

Some examples of **learning** from evaluating projects/programmes include:

‘for 1 or 2 employees that did training, there is an improvement in the quality of work being produced, new skills learnt and assisting with the job, adding value’

‘blended approach – F2F and online’ works well

‘growing capacity asks us to pay attention to how we do everything’,

‘some programmes ... were less effective and we had to change them’,

‘interest in environmental issues is increasing, learners develop an interest in environmental activities’,

‘the internship programme is not in line with the recruitment plan’

‘mentoring needs to take individuality into account, it’s impossible to develop a one size fits all programme’

‘which applied skills are beneficial and relevant’

Some of these learnings **inform** the development of funding proposals and actions for change and improvement of projects/programmes proposed or planned for the future.

Some respondents refer to what was **learnt about evaluation processes**, as in the following examples:

‘requires substantial and sustainable support/funding’



'impact can only be appreciated over time'

'tracking alumni are essential, but difficult'

'impact is difficult to understand in increasing scale'

'identified a clear need for this, identified limited interest for this ... need to formally request this as a key strategic focus area'

'we do a lot but we don't measure and reflect enough'

### 3.7 Challenges in Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning

Respondents cite challenges around the lack of systems and structures for effective monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning, linked to data collection and management, consistency and quality of data and processes and, often cited, the lack of impact monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The one challenge mostly cited, by almost all respondents is the lack of overall capacities, including systems, structures, framework and processes, as before, and implementation challenges of appropriate and relevant tools, time, funding, people and expertise. A few note the low prioritisation of monitoring, evaluation and learning.

- The absence of a **centralised and systematic** framework and processes for data collection, monitoring, evaluation and reporting is noted by several participants. Respondents note the absence of 'a central repository', 'absence of effective knowledge management systems', 'central hub to retrieve data as needed' and 'a system of recordkeeping' creating 'the risk of potential loss of data', which are seen to compromise the 'integrity', 'reliability and validity of data sources' and the 'quality of reports'. Many note inconsistencies in both data collection and reporting, with 'changing data needs', 'changes in reporting requirements', 'leadership changes, reporting changes, no consistency over time', 'expanding indicators', 'irregular tracking' and 'reports not synced', needing lots of interpretation and 'funders not always clear on reporting requirements'. These challenges are similarly highlighted as impacting the quality of evaluations with one respondent questioning 'are we asking the wrong questions, are we doing the right evaluations'.

- Many recognise the limitations of output monitoring and the lack or 'inability to measure **impact** in terms of organisational contribution to the strategy'. Some express the difficulty in deciding 'what to measure' and believe it is 'not easy to quantifying ... impact' and 'hard to measure/conduct impact'. Some also express difficulty in 'monitoring programmes' and 'tracking learners' and using historical data to understand impact.
- Limited **resources** are cited by most respondents as a key limitation, coupled with inefficiencies created by 'duplicated efforts for reporting'. Together with the absence of a centralised, structured system and framework, as above, challenges relate also to appropriate and relevant capacity related to:
  - **Human resource capacity**, both in terms of the people to guide and undertake monitoring, evaluation and reporting, as well as the required skill and expertise is noted as a key challenge. One respondent notes a 'lack of skills ... interpreting data' and another comments also on the capacity of external service providers who are 'not equipped or compliant with government processes' to deliver monitoring and evaluation services effectively. One respondent notes 'unsure if and ... what counts' and another is 'not clear how to start this'.
  - **Time** is a common challenge noted by respondents in finding processes 'it is time consuming for staff', 'staff struggle to find time', 'time [limited] for internal evaluation and capacity for interpretation' and 'time to distil and share learning, insights ... where to share'. Related to time constraints, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning is not seen as a priority in organisations, with respondents noting that it is given 'low priority from line managers' and often comes up against 'competing priorities'. Some respondents report the onerous bureaucratic and compliance driven processes as compromising the time for valuable reflection and evaluation.
  - The absence of relevant and appropriate **tools** that support effective monitoring and evaluation is also noted as a key challenge and links to the lack of centralised, standardised processes for monitoring and evaluating appropriate and relevant aspects of skills development. One particular example noted is that of 'tracking

alumni over time' or 'irregular tracking' and 'tracking alumni is essential, but difficult'.

- Funding and budgets are often noted as a challenge, which perhaps links to the prioritisation of monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning. Limited budgets limits the ability to bring in complementary expertise and operationally support monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning in terms of data collection, storage, often 'reliant on funding ... to meet ... follow up' as some examples.
- Other challenges relate to efficiencies in monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning processes, for example, the 'bureaucracy of government processes', public sector 'hard copy requirements and paperwork' involved. Other inefficiencies are seen in 'duplicated efforts'. One respondents notes 'many tools and data collected, however ...', appearing the question the value of collecting all of this data.

#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the findings of the mid-term review of the Strategy about the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation (see section 2.2), the implementation plan for 2030 (see section 2.3) proposed the development of a shared framework and building organisational capacity for its implementation. The audit (see section 2.5) was undertaken to understand and build on current capacities and practices to collaboratively, with stakeholders and organisations, develop that shared framework and inform a programme of learning for individuals and organisations to strengthen capacity for monitoring, evaluation, learning and reporting.

In the online survey questionnaire and the workshop, participants also explored what this shared framework might look like and discussed some ideas for supporting the strengthening of capacity. The recommendations draw on the audit findings, complemented by these direct inputs, to make suggestions for what such a shared framework might look like and how to strengthen capacity for effectively implementing such a framework.

Overall, respondents in the audit recognise the need for a shared central, effective, quality, framework for monitoring, evaluation and learning with clear indicators to measure outcomes and impacts of their skills development interventions, sufficiently flexible and agile to accommodate and complement current output-focused which can be used to organisational advocacy for institutionalisation. This framework must be accompanied by a streamlined, user-friendly, preferably online system of tools for efficient data collection, management and curation, enabling easy access across organisations in the sector.

To support its implementation audit participants suggest a programme of learning that accommodates for the diversity of organisations and individuals in the sector, both in terms of type, size and capacities for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning, with optional accreditation and a modular structure, that enables flexible entry and exit from the learning process.

#### 4.1 A Shared Framework

Audit participants are unanimous in recognising the need for a centralised system for monitoring, evaluation of, and learning about skills development initiatives. Responses within the audit suggest also the will amongst participants to support the collaborative development and implementation of such a system., Some specific recommendations for this shared monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning system include:

- The centralised system is described as including a **framework** for monitoring and evaluation, including generic strategy aligned indicators that can be adapted to suit organisational contexts, with **implementation plans** for this framework that include relevant and appropriate tools and organisationally aligned time frames, complemented with a clear **guide/toolkit** to support implementation and a roving **'coach/tutor'** to support implementation.
- The system must include an efficient, **online system** for quality, reliable and valid data collection, collation, curation and easy access. This online system is proposed as part of a skills intelligence system housed within SANBI, as part of biodiversity knowledge management.

- The framework should be developed with common, outcome and **impact indicators**, aligned with the goals and objectives of the Strategy and that measures what counts, complements current output indicators and that can be easily contextualised within specific organisations.
- The framework should include a range of digital **tools and methods** that can easily be adapted for appropriate use in context. One critical tool to be developed is one to track the career and learning pathway progression of individuals entering into and progressing through the sector.
- **Reporting** processes must align with current practices of monthly, quarterly and annual reporting, board and executive committee reports, as well as funder reports and *ad hoc* reporting.
- Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning must be **embedded** in current practice, and not become an added burden. This proposal is supported by the current decentralisation of existing practices, and could assist in expanding a culture for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning.
- Arguments are made for the central **co-ordination** for this monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning framework, institutionalised within SANBI. The recommended approach is for the roving 'coach/tutor' (see above) to work with the monitoring and evaluation resource from the Groen Sebenza Programme, to expand the focus of monitoring and evaluation to the Strategy in its entirety.
- A proposal is made for regular periods for the **review** of this framework, including its relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency as well as its implementation. In effect, a resource should ideally evaluate the implementation of monitoring and evaluation within this shared framework.
- Respondents also note the critical need for broader **advocacy and socialising** of this framework across the sector. Some respondents note the complete absence of organisational processes and a low prioritisation in some organisations. This proposal for advocacy and socialisation should equally focus on supporting the strengthening of practitioners' capacity to advocate for and socialise the framework within their respective organisations.

- In addition to requests for training and workshops to strengthen capacity for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning, participants also request the development of a **toolkit with resources** to guide the implementation and use of the centralised monitoring and evaluation framework.
- A proposal is made for a roving human resource, within in the capacity of a **coach/tutor** to support implementation of the shared framework across organisations. This request came from across organisations, but more vocally from smaller organisations where individuals often hold multiple portfolios. This coaching/tutoring processes could also support organisations to contextualise the shared framework to respective organisational contexts.
- A recommendation is made for the clear articulation of the **purpose** of this shared framework, as well as the purpose of monitoring, evaluation and reporting. These clear articulations should form part of the proposed process of advocacy to ensure consistency in purpose and approach,

#### 4.2 Strengthening Capacity for Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning

To support implementation of this shared framework, recommendations for the learning programme include:

- A **modular**, structured, yet flexible programme of learning is proposed, with **accreditation optional**, supported by **shared practices and experiences** (cases, tools, resources) of what works (and not) in monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning, a **toolkit** of suitable resources and a roving tutor/coach.
- One proposal is made for **learning** to be at the centre of this programme of learning, not only learning about monitoring, evaluation and reporting, but also using these insights for sector, organisational and project/programme learning.
- A recommendation is made for identifying the **critical organisations and individuals** who should be involved in such a programme of learning and integrate into the proposed advocacy (as above) the participation of these individuals in the programme of learning. An important consideration in this process is organisational type, size, structure and resources.

- It is also recommended that the programme of learning be offered at an **institutional** level, where appropriate.
- A **hybrid design** is proposed, that accommodates both online and face-to-face engagements, variable in nature and length and complemented by coaching/tutorial visits.
- Respondents recommend a modular structure to the programme of learning, with accreditation an option, to enable flexible entry into and exit from the programme.
- Proposed **content** for the programme of learning includes:
  - clarifying **concepts** related to monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning;
  - how to **plan** an evaluation, where to start;
  - **what** to measure and **how** best to measure;
  - **methods and tools** for data collection, and how to use these to elicit unbiased, quality, relevant and appropriate data;
  - **interpreting and using** data effectively for the purpose intended.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The midterm review recommends the collaborative development of a shared monitoring and evaluation framework. The proposal from the Organisational Strengthening Implementation Hub is to generate this shared monitoring and evaluation framework, collaboratively through learning to strengthen practices in monitoring and evaluation.

The audit, through the online survey and the workshop aimed to mobilise participants around this initiative and elicit insights to inform both the shared framework and programme of learning.

Useful insights and suggestions were made during these processes that will inform the next step in this initiative, to develop and offer the programme of learning in parallel, and through applying learning through participation in the programme and in the organisational context, generate a shared framework for strengthened monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning framework for skills development and the Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy.

ANNEXURE A Survey Questionnaire



ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHENING FOR EVALUATING BIODIVERSITY HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

## Survey Questionnaire

The Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy, led by the South African National Biodiversity Institute and supported by the Lewis Foundation, was launched in 2010, to address a skills crisis and facilitate transformation. It aims at attracting, enabling access, supporting development and retention of key skills in the sector. A mid-term review in 2020, showed that some gains were made in the first ten years of implementation, mostly focused on new entrants into the sector and workplace. A key finding is the ‘complete absence of shared monitoring, evaluation and reporting which also limits promotion potential’ (Mid-term Review Synthesis Report, p. 7).

**This survey explores current monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning practices and capacities, to inform the development of:**

- (i) **an evaluation framework for the Strategy; and**
- (ii) **an accredited, applied learning programme to strengthening practices and capacities in the sector.**

1. Name
2. Organisation
3. Job role / Title / Designation
4. Email
5. How do you contribute to skills development and/or the Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy?

*Choose one of more segments in the human capital development pipeline where you work and briefly describe your programme(s).*

Foundation building indicating grades and subjects <i>tick describe</i>	Post-school education and training <i>tick describe</i>	Transitioning from learning into work <i>tick describe</i>	In-service skills development <i>tick describe</i>	Enabling skills development at the macro level <i>tick describe</i>
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6. Where is monitoring, evaluation and reporting situated in your organisation?

*Choose all relevant options.*

In programmes <i>tick</i>	In units <i>tick</i>	Organisation wide <i>tick</i>	Other <i>tick</i>
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7. Who leads, supports and/or participates in monitoring, evaluation and reporting in your organisation?



Choose all relevant options, list the job title of leads, support and participants and briefly describe their role in monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

In programmes		In units		Organisation wide		Other	
job title	role	Job title	role	job title	role	job title	role

8. Why is monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning done?

Choose all relevant option and specify other.

Funder requirement	Performance Management	Strategic organisational performance	Other (specify)
tick	tick	tick	tick

9. When are evaluations done?

Choose all relevant options, specify time frames and explain.

Formative in programmes	Summative at the end of a programme	End of financial year	Interim periods	Other
specify frequency	tick	specify	specify and explain	specify and explain

10. What guides your monitoring, evaluation and reporting?

Choose all relevant options, indicate how many indicators, where relevant, and share some examples.

Individual performance indicators	Organisational performance indicators	Strategic impact, outcomes, targets, indicators	Theory/theories of change	Other
# example	# example	# example	describe	specify

11. What kinds of data are collected and how are these managed?

Provide a brief description of your quantitative and qualitative data sources.

describe

12. How are the outcomes of monitoring, evaluation and reporting used?

describe

13. How could monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning be strengthened for your own work, in your organisation, and the sector?

Specify also what will be needed to achieve this vision.

Your own work	Your organisation	The Sector
describe	describe	describe

Thank you for your time and contribution.

The Organisational Strengthening and Co-ordination Implementation Hubs