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ANNUAL  
REPORT:  
SDG REPORT

8 DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



SDG 8: DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH

Our Future  
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**UJ SDG REPORT 2023**

**SDG 8: DECENT WORK AND  
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**8**

**DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH**



# Report on the University of Johannesburg's Contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 8

## SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

### OVERVIEW: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the University of Johannesburg's (UJ) contributions to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) on Decent Work and Economic Growth during the 2023 academic year. UJ has long been committed to fostering inclusive economic growth and promoting decent work, in alignment with SDG 8. This goal aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. In 2023, UJ made substantial strides toward achieving SDG 8, building on its historical focus on skills development, job creation, and the empowerment of students and communities.

Through a combination of academic innovation, strategic partnerships, and robust community engagement, UJ has played an essential role in enhancing the economic resilience of South Africa's workforce. In particular, the university has focused on increasing the employability of its students, promoting entrepreneurship, supporting research that drives economic development, and creating a nurturing environment for innovation and skills

acquisition. Notable initiatives in 2023 included enhanced work-integrated learning programmes, entrepreneurship incubation and support, research outputs linked to economic growth, and the development of sustainable practices in local communities.

This report provides a comprehensive review of UJ's contributions to SDG 8, detailing key activities and achievements during 2023, and highlights how these initiatives are shaping the future of work and economic growth in South Africa.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Economic growth and decent work are pivotal to the broader global development agenda. SDG 8 addresses the need for sustainable economic progress, focusing on generating full, productive employment while ensuring that the benefits of growth are inclusive. As one of South Africa's leading institutions, UJ has aligned its efforts with the goal of fostering economic growth and supporting decent work, both within the university and in the communities it serves.

In 2023, UJ continued to focus on a comprehensive strategy that integrates education, research, and community outreach. Through initiatives such as skills development programmes, entrepreneurship support, and the promotion of work-readiness for students, the university has made tangible contributions to advancing economic growth and decent work. Furthermore, UJ's research output in areas like technology, local economic development, and the future of work has been vital in shaping policies and initiatives aimed at stimulating economic activity and addressing labor market needs.

This report explores UJ's contribution to SDG 8 in 2023, including the initiatives that have helped improve employability, create new jobs, support sustainable business development, and foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation within the South African economy. It outlines the critical activities and partnerships that UJ has undertaken to meet these objectives.

## **KEY ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES**

UJ's efforts to promote decent work and economic growth in 2023 were guided by several key themes, each aimed at fostering employment, encouraging entrepreneurship, and supporting the broader economic development of South Africa. These included skills development, innovation-driven entrepreneurship, academic research with economic implications, and strategic partnerships for job creation. Below, we examine each of these themes and the specific actions taken to support them.

These policies serve as the foundation of UJ's broader gender equity strategy and align with the university's goal of achieving a more equitable and inclusive institution. UJ's Transformation Unit, tasked with overseeing institutional transformation initiatives, has been central to the implementation of these policies. In 2023, the Transformation Unit collaborated with key stakeholders across the university to assess existing gender imbalances and propose solutions to enhance women's representation, particularly in leadership positions.

## ***1. Skills Development and Work-Readiness Programmes***

One of the primary ways in which UJ contributes to SDG 8 is through its commitment to enhancing the employability of its students. In 2023, UJ significantly expanded its work-integrated learning (WIL) programmes. These programmes provide students with the opportunity to gain practical, hands-on experience in their respective fields, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications. Work placements, internships, and cooperative education programmes are embedded into many of UJ's academic courses, ensuring that students graduate with not only a degree but also the skills required by employers in an increasingly competitive job market.

Through partnerships with businesses and industry leaders, UJ has created a strong network for students to secure internships and jobs. For example, in 2023, UJ partnered with key players in the technology sector to offer internships in software development and data science, which has led to high employment rates among graduates of these programmes. This initiative has proven to be a direct contributor to reducing youth unemployment in the country by providing students with practical skills that are directly aligned with industry demands.

In addition, UJ's Career Services Centre has become a central resource for students seeking employment opportunities. The centre hosted several career fairs and recruitment events in 2023, connecting students with top employers across various sectors, including engineering, business, education, and healthcare. Career services also provided workshops on resume writing, interview techniques, and job search strategies, ensuring that students are prepared for the realities of the job market.

## ***2. Promoting Entrepreneurship and Start-Up Incubation***

Another crucial area of UJ's contribution to SDG 8 has been its promotion of entrepreneurship, which plays an important role in job creation and economic growth. In 2023, UJ continued its support for aspiring entrepreneurs through the UJ Business Incubator. This incubator provides mentorship, funding, and business development resources to students, staff, and alumni who are looking to start their own businesses. By offering access to the necessary tools and networks, UJ is helping to stimulate innovation and create sustainable businesses that can contribute to local and national economic growth.

In 2023, the Business Incubator expanded its outreach and impact, supporting more than 50 new start-ups across various industries, including renewable energy, technology, and social enterprises. These start-ups, many of which have already begun hiring employees, are contributing to local job creation and addressing key social issues such as unemployment and inequality.

Moreover, UJ has actively promoted social entrepreneurship, which focuses on addressing social challenges through sustainable business models. The university's

involvement in the UJ Social Entrepreneurship Programme has been integral in helping students and graduates create businesses that not only generate profit but also contribute to the common good, particularly in underserved communities. One of the standout projects of 2023 was the UJ Green Tech Initiative, which encouraged students to develop business models focused on renewable energy and waste management, helping to create sustainable enterprises with a focus on job creation and environmental impact.

### ***3. Research and Innovation for Economic Development***

J's research output continues to contribute significantly to economic growth and job creation. In 2023, UJ's research initiatives aligned with SDG 8 through projects that foster innovation, drive industry transformation, and contribute to economic policy development. UJ's Centre for Local Economic Development (CENLED) played a pivotal role in providing research insights that have helped shape local economic development policies. CENLED's work focuses on issues such as poverty reduction, small business development, and job creation, all of which are critical for fostering sustainable economic growth.

In addition to CENLED, UJ's Technopreneurship Centre has been instrumental in bridging the gap between academic research and commercialisation. The centre has focused on developing technological innovations with the potential to be scaled into businesses that create jobs and stimulate economic activity. In 2023, several new products developed at UJ were successfully commercialised, including a mobile app designed to connect small businesses with customers and suppliers. These commercial ventures have not only brought new ideas to the market but also created new job opportunities for young people in the tech sector.

### ***4. Community Engagement and Job Creation***

UJ's role in fostering decent work and economic growth extends beyond the university's walls. Through its community outreach initiatives, UJ has supported job creation and skills development in underserved areas. In 2023, UJ launched several programmes aimed at enhancing the economic prospects of communities surrounding its campuses. These programmes focused on training community members in key sectors such as construction, healthcare, and information technology.

For example, the UJ Training for Employment Programme provided vocational training in construction and carpentry to young people in the surrounding communities of Soweto and Alexandra. Participants in these programmes were given access to work experience placements, and many went on to secure full-time employment with construction firms. This initiative addressed the need for skilled labor in the local economy while directly contributing to reducing unemployment rates in these communities.

UJ also partnered with local government and NGOs to implement skills development programmes for unemployed youth. These programmes focused on equipping participants with the necessary skills for the green economy, including solar panel installation, waste management, and sustainable agriculture. By preparing individuals for emerging sectors, UJ is helping to ensure that South Africa's workforce is prepared for the future of work.

## ***5. Strategic Partnerships for Economic Development***

UJ's collaborations with industry, government, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been essential in advancing SDG 8. These partnerships have enabled the university to contribute meaningfully to job creation, innovation, and sustainable economic growth. In 2023, UJ strengthened its relationship with various sectors, including manufacturing, renewable energy, and technology, to enhance the employability of its graduates and address national economic challenges.

Notable partnerships in 2023 included collaborations with South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SACCI) to develop policies aimed at promoting small business development and job creation. These collaborations have allowed UJ to leverage its research and resources to influence economic policy and foster an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and job growth.

## **CONCLUSION**

The University of Johannesburg has made significant strides toward achieving SDG 8 in 2023 by focusing on job creation, economic growth, and sustainable business practices. Through initiatives such as work-integrated learning, entrepreneurship support, innovative research, and community engagement, UJ has contributed to addressing the employment challenges faced by South Africa and is helping to foster inclusive economic growth.

Looking ahead, UJ will continue to build on these efforts, expanding its support for entrepreneurship, skills development, and economic research. The university remains committed to creating pathways for students to enter the workforce, fostering innovation, and contributing to the economic development of South Africa. Through these efforts, UJ plays an important role in shaping a future where decent work and sustainable economic growth are accessible to all.



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