

The fund was up 7.6% in the third quarter, outperforming the All Bond Index (up 6.9%). It has returned 17.3% pa over the last three years, outperforming the benchmark (up 15.7%), and 9.6% pa since inception in 2015 - ahead of its benchmark (9.0%).

Economic backdrop

Global economic activity is slowing due to increased US tariffs and uncertainty surrounding generally chaotic and aggressive US foreign policy. Financial conditions, which tightened meaningfully in the immediate aftermath of the April US tariff announcements, have moderated due to a sharp rise in asset prices.

Erratic US government policy continues to result in subdued consumer and business sentiment in the US and reduced investment, although the decline in business investment has been less severe than expected due to resilient AI-driven spending. The US labour market is softening as companies delay hiring amid tariff uncertainty and AI-driven change, which is creating lower confidence, skill mismatches, and more cautious workforce planning. Consequently, US economic growth is beginning to weaken from a previously robust rate.

China's nominal economic growth has been weak due to ongoing deflation and the consequences of a weak property market. The economy is now being further undermined by the escalating trade war with the US, which is expected to negatively impact Chinese exports and manufacturing. Positively, however, Chinese consumer confidence and spending may be improving from historically low levels, buoyed by more aggressive monetary and fiscal stimulus, and targeted structural state interventions that have had some success in improving local consumption.

The Japanese and European economies are being negatively affected by both the sharp increase in US tariffs and the continued uncertainty surrounding future tariff actions. There has been some front-loading of export activity ahead of tariff implementation, with underlying weakness now becoming more evident. Europe's economy, which has been stagnating due in part to its export link to a weak manufacturing sector in China, will start to benefit from higher domestic fiscal stimulus. German business confidence, while having retreated recently, remains structurally higher due to the lifting of the debt ceiling and the associated increase in fiscal spending on infrastructure and defence.

South African activity has been supported by higher precious-metal export receipts and a mild recovery in real consumption as falling inflation and interest rates ease household pressure. Yet, a significant increase in online betting has diverted spending from other goods and services. A more enduring lift to economic growth is, however, structurally constrained by the acute underperformance of transport infrastructure, poor service delivery from weak and revenue-hungry municipalities, inadequate (albeit improved) electricity supply and low business confidence. Disappointingly, the recent moderate increase in investment off very low levels has not yet been accompanied by any notable job creation.

In recent years, there has been progress made in moving to reform the economy through Operation Vulindlela and the partnership between government and business leaders that is targeting key priority areas needing reform. Additionally, the Government of National Unity has brought about positive leadership changes in key ministries and a renewed commitment by government to accelerate initiatives that address the country's structural problems.

Markets review

South African bonds increased by 6.9% in the quarter, outperforming cash (up 1.8%). Global bonds were largely weaker over the quarter. South African bonds outperformed emerging markets with long-dated fixed-rate instruments outperforming.

At their last meeting in July, the SARB reduced the repo rate by 0.25% to 7%. This was the first meeting at which the SARB considered its adjusted inflation target of 3% and it forecasts inflation to stabilise at this level in the medium term. The SARB has taken a cautious stance in its' policy approach due to high levels of uncertainty in both global and

local markets. South African government long bond yields remain high in the context of well-contained inflation, amid a weak but somewhat improving fiscus.

Fund performance and positioning

- The fund outperformed the benchmark during the quarter. Its long duration position contributed to performance as long dated fixed-rate Government issued bonds outperformed shorter duration bonds.
- The fund is long duration vs the benchmark, although this has been significantly reduced over the recent period. Real yields on offer in nominal RSA long bonds are still high in the context of a benign inflation outlook.
- The yield curve remains moderately high in our view and the fund is positioned to take advantage of moderately high carry yields and potential capital gains on offer.