



Jump-starting the SDGs: Policy shifts needed to accelerate progress

Background paper prepared by World Resources Institute¹
for the side event on Sunday, 27 September 2015, 9:00-11:00am in CFR 12

This background paper has been prepared to help inform discussion at the side event on *Jump-starting the SDGs: Lessons from Early Adopters on Policy Shifts to Accelerate Progress*. The side event has three objectives:

- 1) showcasing experiences of a diverse set of countries which have demonstrated strong political will to accelerate progress towards sustainable development and are already aligning their national strategy and institutional processes with the ambition of the SDGs;
- 2) spurring member states to reflect on the challenges and opportunities of SDG implementation, and inspiring action by shining a light on the building blocks put in place by the selected countries for advancing this transformative agenda;
- 3) informing a robust research and learning agenda to help generate the momentum necessary for successful uptake of the SDGs.

1. A transformative agenda for all countries

“Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” – with a set of 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the center – is an agenda “of unprecedented scope and significance.” The SDGs, together with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing and the prospects of a new climate agreement at the COP21, aim to engage all countries in a collective effort to accelerate the transition to more inclusive, equitable and sustainable development pathways. This calls for deep economic, political and societal transformations:

- eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in one generation by 2030;
- leaving no one behind, and curbing inequalities which have steadily risen over the last decades;
- putting sustainable development at the core of global, national and local policies, and accelerating the shift to low-carbon, climate-resilient development pathways;
- building a renewed global partnership for sustainable development, based on multi-stakeholder partnerships that can leverage needed capacities and resources and achieve impact at scale;
- accelerating a data revolution and improving capacity to measure sustainable development;

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These transformative shifts are challenging and won't happen overnight – accelerated action over the next two years will be critical to lay the foundation for longer-term change. However, 'business-as-usual' approaches to implementation will not be up to the challenge and major policy and institutional shifts will be needed, including:

- moving from a focus on developing countries to a focus on all countries;
- shifting from a 'silo-ed' approach to comprehensive national sustainable development strategies that integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and pursue multiple objectives in a coherent way;
- recognizing the increasing interdependence between countries and the need to look at negative spillovers on other countries from domestic policies, and to integrate the global commons into national policy objectives;
- developing an inclusive and open implementation strategy aimed at enabling and leveraging the role of non-state actors, including the private sector, civil society and citizens;
- setting up a transparent, multi-level and multi-stakeholder accountability and monitoring system.

Some countries already are experimenting with such policy and institutional shifts and how to put into place the building blocks for accelerating progress. This background note briefly highlights some of these early experiences, and sets out some key issues and questions to consider under five inter-related objectives:

- establishing *policy coherence for sustainable development* (PCSD) as a guiding overarching principle for implementing the new agenda;
- contextualizing and mainstreaming global goals and targets through more *integrated policy, planning and financing frameworks* at national and sub-national levels;
- adopting a "*whole-of-government*" approach, going beyond mere coordination to ensuring stronger coherence at all levels of decision-making, including between the central government and local authorities;
- adopting a "*whole-of-society*" approach to mobilize and engage all sectors of society in implementation;
- enhancing evidence-based decision-making, transparency and accountability through *new metrics and robust monitoring and review processes*.

2. Policy coherence for sustainable development as a guiding principle

The 2030 Agenda underlines that the SDGs require "enhanced policy coherence for sustainable development" (Target 17.14). During the MDGs, policy coherence for development (PCD) has focused on how well developed countries have addressed the adverse effects of non-aid policies on their development cooperation ('do-no-harm' approach). The SDGs are much more ambitious – they require not only alignment between national policies and poverty reduction objectives 'elsewhere,' but call for transforming economies 'everywhere.' PCSD responds by providing a more holistic, proactive and multi-stakeholder approach and tools that *every* country can apply to better integrate economic, social and

environmental objectives at all stages of domestic and international policy-making (ex ante as well as during and ex post). This includes identifying synergies as well as trade-offs and misalignments between policy objectives, and taking into account trans-boundary and inter-generational impacts. For example, domestic farm subsidies in high-income countries not only can be at odds with policies to support smallholder agriculture in low-income countries, but may also run counter to making domestic agriculture more environmentally sustainable.

Policy coherence is critical for capitalizing on synergies between national implementation of the SDGs and the objectives of national climate action plans also known as intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs). While these two policy arenas are still often regarded as potentially conflicting, they are strongly intertwined – the SDGs won't be achieved without holding global temperatures below 2°C, and the SDGs can accelerate a global shift to low-carbon and climate-resilient societies. A comprehensive and integrated approach to SDG and INDC implementation can generate co-benefits from policies and investments in productive sectors and infrastructure, as well as through climate adaptation, resilience, disaster risk management, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding.

Sweden

In 2003, Sweden adopted the law on "Policy for Global Development." This legislation puts a policy coherence approach at the center of Swedish development policy, and mandated equitable and sustainable development as the shared responsibility of all ministries. The law is poverty-focused and takes a human rights-based approach. Swedish domestic and international policies must be aligned with this objective. The Government reports every two years on its efforts to ensure policy coherence for global development.

Source: Government Offices of Sweden website, <http://www.government.se/legal-documents/2003/05/200203122/>

Some questions to consider:

- *What real-world examples are there in effectively addressing cross-border impacts of domestic policies on the global objective of poverty eradication?*
- *How to embed the PCSD principle across national policies (i.e. through legislation, binding principles in policy planning guidelines)?*
- *What institutional structures work well to foster PCSD (i.e. dedicated unit in each ministry and agency, PCSD directorate responsible for the whole government in the President/PMs Office)?*

3. Integrated national policy, planning and financing frameworks

The comprehensive scope of the SDGs cuts across most areas of national policy – both domestic and international policies. Many countries have previously put into place national sustainable development strategies, and in some cases established related inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms in various forms. While countries should build on these frameworks as much as possible, in many cases these

strategies are mainly focused on environmental challenges and do not sufficiently address economic and social priorities – and for this reason often are not at the center of decision-making. Thus, merely updating these existing frameworks often will not be sufficient to drive SDG implementation. Putting sustainable development at the center of decision-making will require contextualizing and embedding the goals and their targets across all relevant macro and sectoral policies in line with national circumstances and priorities, and ensuring their coherence within the framework of a new overarching national plan or vision. Integration of the goals and targets into economic strategies and policies will be particularly crucial in order to reconcile growth and sustainability objectives.

Gabon

The 2014 Gabonese law on sustainable development establishes a national objective of defining growth pathways that also sustain the environment. The law is relevant for both SDG and INDC implementation, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensuring sound management of forests and other natural resources. All Government-approved projects and programs have to be in line with the 19 sustainable development principles embedded in the law.

Source : Présidence de la République, Loi portant orientation du développement durable en République gabonaise, <http://loggingoff.info/sites/loggingoff.info/files/LOI%20N°0022014ORIENTAT°DEV DUR.pdf>

Switzerland

Under the Swiss strategy for sustainable development 2012-2015, the Federal Council “understands sustainable development not as an element of sectoral policy, but as a mandatory component of policy in all fields.” This has been built into all areas of policy and administration, and into the legislative planning program.

Source : Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE website, <http://www.aren.admin.ch/themen/nachhaltig/00262/00528/index.html?lang=en>

Equally important is the need for an integrated budget strategy that aligns with national sustainable development objectives and policies, so that all public investments help drive the shift towards low-carbon, climate-resilient and inclusive development.

Indonesia

The Green Planning and budget strategy for Indonesia’s sustainable development 2015-2020 sets an overall objective to reach high-income country status by 2033, with a primary focus on climate mitigation, adaptation and long-term sustainable growth. Coordinated by the Ministry of Finance Centre for Climate Change and Multilateral Policy (PKPPIM), and supported by an inter-ministerial team, it requires all Ministries to define and estimate green economy benefits when preparing policy proposals and investment programs.

Source : Republic of Indonesia website, <http://www.kemenkeu.go.id/sites/default/files/gpb-strategy.pdf>

Some questions to consider:

- *How have ‘early SDG adopter countries’ integrated the SDGs into their existing national policy framework while avoiding the pitfalls of ‘cherry-picking’? How to mainstream SD objectives in national budget and financial planning?*
- *Are there lessons about how to best sequence the policy measures SD implies?*
- *What key political drivers and incentives have spurred these countries to quickly embed this agenda into national policies? What difficulties and bottlenecks have been encountered?*
- *What tools have been used to analyze potential economic, social and environmental synergies and trade-offs across policy objectives?*

4. A “whole-of-government” approach

The implementation of the SDGs will go far beyond the responsibility of one or a few line Ministries. A whole-of-government approach will be essential to meet the ambition of the agenda. Strong political leadership at the President/Prime Minister level and enhanced inter-ministerial coordination will be needed to mainstream the goals and targets and achieve policy integration and coherence – including consistency with climate and other sectoral priorities; fostering synergies and addressing potential trade-offs; and ensuring a strong, inclusive and transparent national monitoring and review framework. Particular consideration needs to be given to ensuring the central role of Economic and Finance Ministries – as has happened in Belize and Gabon – in order to drive policy reforms aimed at transforming existing economic, production and consumption patterns.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” formula for achieving a whole-of-government approach to SDG implementation, but some ingredients for success can be identified: (i) leadership from the top of government; (ii) a powerful central coordination body; (iii) efficient and effective inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; and (iv) strong coordinated monitoring and review systems.

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the Prime Minister’s office leads a Ministerial Steering Committee that, together with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, brings together the State Ministers and representatives of partner institutions to set the overall direction of the country’s Climate-Resilient Green Economy Strategy (CRGE). CRGE units have been established in key implementing line ministries and regions to translate the CRGE strategy into sectoral programs and investment plans.

Source : Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority, Ethiopia’s climate resilient green economy strategy, <http://www.epa.gov.et/default.aspx>.

Colombia

Colombia has set up an inter-institutional High Commission in charge of preparing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the SDGs through all public policies. Chaired by the National Planning Department, the High Commission brings together a core group of Ministries from across the government, including Finance, Social Protection, Environment, Foreign Affairs and National Statistics. The Commission has gathered monthly until September 2015, and will continue every three months afterwards.

Source : Colombia's National Development Plan 2014-2018 (<https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Prensa/Bases%20Plan%20Nacional%20de%20Desarrollo%202014-2018.pdf>), Office of the President, Decree 0280 of 18 February, 2015 on the High Level Interinstitutional Commission.

Some questions to consider:

- *What are some additional examples of whole-of-government approaches adopted so far, and what are their strengths and weaknesses?*
- *Are Finance and Economy Ministries fully on board, and what steps have been taken to engage them? What difficulties and bottlenecks have been encountered?*
- *How to more effectively link planning at national and subnational levels, building on the trend toward greater devolution of policy and budget responsibilities?*

5. A “whole-of-society” approach

One of the main paradigm shifts of the SDGs is the emphasis on principles of inclusivity and transparency in support of more participatory policy and implementation processes, and to enhance accountability for results. Delivering on the SDGs will require the active participation of all segments of society – civil society actors, parliament, local government, academia, private sector actors, consumers, the financial sector and others. Critical elements of a more inclusive and open whole-of-society approach include:

- making awareness-raising about the SDGs a top national priority;
- enhancing consultation and coordination mechanisms with local governments, cities, civil society and the private sector to set out national and local sustainable development priorities;
- identifying ways to promote more open, transparent and inclusive institutions;
- spurring private sector actors to integrate climate and sustainable development objectives into their business models and reporting frameworks;
- providing better channels and opportunities for civil society to hold national and local governments accountable.

National 'Open Government' Action Plans

Under the Open Government Partnership (OGP), participating governments and civil society co-create open government commitments to advance transparency, accountability, participation, access to justice and effective and inclusive institutions. These commitments are then included in government-owned National Action Plans, which are renewed every two years and are subject to independent review. These National Action Plans can serve as effective tools for supporting multi-stakeholder policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring and review processes.

Source: Open Government Partnership, <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about>

Some questions to consider:

- *What are successful examples to promote more open government policies? What are good practices for involving non-state actors in policy making and monitoring?*
- *How to strengthen vertical integration of the national sustainable development strategy for greater collaboration between the central government, local governments and cities?*
- *How to reach out to and involve the most vulnerable populations in decision-making and policy monitoring?*

6. New metrics and robust monitoring, review and reporting processes

A key element of the transformative nature of the SDG agenda is the need for more effective measures of progress. Existing metrics for measuring growth and progress – primarily Gross Domestic Product, which looks at only one part of economic performance, income – significantly undervalue natural and social capital. Some countries have been experimenting with broader measures of progress, such as natural capital accounting, that aim to more fully integrate and reflect natural capital, equity and human well-being values. Over time, better metrics and indicators will be critical to providing the evidence base needed to support more integrated policy, planning and financing frameworks, to enable more informed decision making, and to enhance countries' ability to assess real progress towards the SDGs.

Robust, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review is seen as vital to implementing and achieving the SDGs. All countries will need to assess their existing institutional frameworks for monitoring, review and reporting in order to identify priority areas for improvement. This includes the need for enhanced inter-agency coordination and capacity across government in order to deliver a comprehensive and accurate report on progress.

A whole-of-government approach to monitoring, review and reporting is necessary but will not be sufficient. A whole-of-society approach is needed to ensure the participation of all actors and to track and assess initiatives and progress beyond government. This includes the need for open and transparent government processes, participatory dialogue with all segments of society, and mechanisms to ensure their input into national reviews and reporting – particularly with respect to the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach segments of society.

Bhutan

Since 1972, Bhutan has advanced the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) over Gross National Product as a more holistic approach to defining and measuring progress, giving equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing. Enshrined in the Constitution, the GNH promotes a balanced approach to development encompassing four pillars: (i) sustainable and equitable socio-economic development; (ii) preservation and promotion of culture; (iii) conservation and sustainable utilization and management of environment; and (iv) promotion of good governance.

Source : Gross National Happiness Commission, <http://www.gnhc.gov.bt>

Some questions to consider:

- *What are leading examples of applying new and broader measures of progress at the national level? How to boost the global discussion on this critical issue?*
- *How to ensure improved, integrated and transparent monitoring, review and reporting without overburdening governments, especially LDCs?*
- *What are good practices for involving all segments of society in national monitoring, review and reporting? What are effective approaches for involving the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations?*

Conclusion

The side event on **Jump-Starting the SDGs** aims to help identify real-world examples of how the issues highlighted in this background paper are being addressed, in order to inspire action and build momentum for accelerated implementation of the SDGs. Key messages and learnings that result from the discussion during the side event will inform a robust research and learning agenda to help generate the momentum necessary for successful uptake of the SDGs.

Some essential reading

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Große-Puppenthal, S. (2015). *From Universality to European Reality? Is the EU up to the job of sustainable consumption and production?* ECDPM, Talking Points blog, 29 July 2015.

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Knoll, A. (2014). *Bringing Policy Coherence for Development into the Post-2015 Agenda – Challenges and Prospects*. ECDPM Discussion Paper 163.

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UNEP (2015). *Policy Coherence of the Sustainable Development Goals: A Natural Resource Perspective*.

Stevens, D. (2015). *From Declaration to Delivery: Actioning the Post-2015 Agenda*. NYU Center on International Cooperation, published by Save the Children.