



Tracking Progress Together: Emerging Practices in National SDG Review

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Preface



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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become an important reference point for policy-making in many countries around the world and international cooperation. Through its adoption, the international community has agreed on a catalogue of ambitious universal and time-bound goals that covers the social, environmental and economic dimension of sustainable development. The



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2030 Agenda provides us with a global follow-up mechanism, with countries reporting on a voluntary basis on their implementation efforts. Measuring and reviewing progress in implementing the agenda is more important than ever: Despite some success stories and many exemplary efforts of different stakeholders so far, we still lag behind in achieving the global goals. We need to increase our efforts if we want to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The SDG Summit in September 2019 has the potential to provide strong political impetus – a wake-up call – to increase the ambition to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

In order to be effective, sustainable and inclusive reporting should be based on transparent and institutionalized national review mechanisms. While national governments are primarily responsible for its review and implementation, the 2030 Agenda also follows a multi-stakeholder and participatory approach. Combined efforts of all segments of society at national and local levels have to be mobilized in order to achieve the envisioned transformational change.

Countries face both context-specific as well as general challenges in setting up effective national review and accountability mechanisms. To facilitate exchange and mutual learning among stakeholders involved in national review and follow-up processes in their respective countries, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ) started the Partners for Review initiative in 2016.

In the past years, the network successfully provided collaborative formats to establish a trustful dialogue with and among the network members. We have been able to witness the growing interest of many state and non-state actors to become part of this transnational multi-stakeholder network. Through its multi-stakeholder approach, interactive character, geographical breadth and key focus on national review and implementation mechanisms, we believe that Partners for Review has illustrated its value. It complements the regional retreats organised by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), one of our cooperating partners.

Therefore, we hope that the following case studies of good practices will inspire the readers and spark their motivation to accelerate the setup of national review mechanisms as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As diverse the situations in our countries may be, we can always draw lessons from practical experiences.

We are looking forward to further supporting such exchange and the P4R network.

Dr. Ingolf Dietrich

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for the Sustainable Development Goals
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Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development
Federal Ministry for the Environment,
Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

Acknowledgements

This publication would not have been possible without the input from dedicated individuals who are personally involved in their respective national SDG implementation and review processes.

A key source of information for all articles presented here was extended skype interviews with Partners for Review network members, all of whom are representatives of institutions that support SDG implementation and review in their countries.

The following individuals, in the order of appearance in the magazine, took time and effort to share experiences and insights from their national processes:

Partners for Review would like to sincerely thank each of them for their most valuable contributions.

Ms Enid Chaverri,
Ministry of Environment and Energy, Costa Rica

Mr Mustafa Khawaja,
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National Administrative Department of Statistics, Colombia

Key lessons from the 10 case studies

The Agenda's core principles – universality; interconnectedness and indivisibility; accountability; leaving no one behind; and shared responsibility – make the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the most complex and ambitious set of goals that the international community has ever endorsed.

The commitment to participatory, transparent and integrated review processes of national SDG implementation poses a variety of challenges to everyone involved. These relate, among other things, to adapting existing or establishing new institutional and coordination mechanisms across ministries and levels of government (whole-of-government), ensuring broad and meaningful participation of non-government actors, including from civil society, the private sector and academia (whole-of-society), and addressing a range of data challenges to enable measurement of progress on complex sets of indicators.

This magazine presents ten practical examples from ten different countries. Each article portrays one specific approach that has been taken in the respective country to resolve a particular challenge in the SDG review process. Each of these countries obviously engages in many more SDG-related activities. However, in keeping with its aim of presenting practical solutions to spe-

cific challenges, the articles focus on a single aspect per country. The cases have been categorised and colour-coded according to the three main fields of challenges covered in this magazine: 'Whole-of-government' (green); 'Whole-of-society' (red); and 'Addressing data challenges' (yellow).

The ten examples are as different as the countries from which they come. However, certain key lessons learned were stated by most interview partners, and are reflected accordingly in the various articles:

1. One of the recurrent statements was that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs had opened up new opportunities. They have expanded possibilities for participation of very diverse groups and institutions, have helped promote holistic thinking that draws links between different problems and their solutions, and have stimulated development of new ideas and innovative approaches, such as in national statistics.
2. All of the partners underlined the importance of carefully building and maintaining partnerships, as no single institution can achieve SDG implementation or review on its own. While it was acknowledged that cooperation and coordination of diverse actors takes

time and effort, everyone agreed that working in partnerships vastly enriches both the process and its results.

3. It was frequently mentioned that the 2030 Agenda should not be considered something 'external' or 'additional', but that the SDGs should be seen as an opportunity to align national programs and plans.
4. Several partners underlined the usefulness of peer exchange, recommending participation in regional and international forums as a source of inspiration and mutual learning.

Many small, diverse and practical examples can provide rich inspiration and support everyone in designing their own solutions. In this spirit, the cases presented in this magazine are meant to contribute ten pieces that may help complete the international jigsaw of SDG implementation and review.



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About voluntary national reviews and the High-level Political Forum

When the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015, UN member states pledged to commit to ‘a robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review process at the national, regional and global levels’. The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) plays a central role in this follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. Once a year, member states present the outcomes of their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to the international community at the HLPF as the basis for debate on implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs.

The state-led and voluntary nature of national reviews is a central element of the mechanism. The UN Secretary-General’s reporting guidelines seek to frame the format and content of VNR reports and presentations – yet the 2030 Agenda is non-prescriptive as to national-level proceedings. Absent of binding principles, the review of the Agenda is a norm-building process in which individual countries’ best practices may persuade others to follow, thereby contributing to setting standards for the internation-

al community and raising the level of ambition for implementing the Agenda.

Effective review and follow-up requires, among other things, creating an appropriate institutional and coordination framework; tailoring the global Agenda to national and sub-national circumstances; fostering policy coherence; promoting meaningful involvement of stakeholders from civil society, academia and the private sector; and strengthening statistical systems to allow for timely and reliable monitoring.



About Partners for Review

Partners for Review (P4R) is a transnational multi-stakeholder network for government representatives and stakeholders from civil society, the private sector and academia involved in the national review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Initiated on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), the network's objective is to contribute to developing effective global and national review and accountability mechanisms for achieving the SDGs.

P4R facilitates dialogue and peer-learning on good practices and success factors, provides a safe space to explore challenges and lessons learned, and shares expertise on new and emerging issues related to national monitoring and review.

The exchange focuses primarily on three areas related to the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda: i) national coordination (whole-of-government), ii) stakeholder engagement (whole-of-society) and iii) addressing data challenges.

Since November 2016, the network has grown to assemble a large number of the countries that have presented their voluntary national review at the HLPF. It unites more than 250 key actors from 48 developing, emerging and industrialised countries as well as from international organisations and UN entities – and is unique in this constellation. Between the scheduled network meetings, dialogue is carried out via an online community and through webinars. In addition, the Secretariat of the Partners for Review compiles knowledge products such as this collection of case studies.



Partners for Review



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P4R NETWORK MEETINGS TO DATE

This magazine was launched at the Fifth P4R network meeting in Berlin, Germany, in November 2018.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS WERE HELD IN:

1. Bonn, Germany, November 2016, with 56 participants from 24 countries
2. Bogotá, Colombia, March 2017, with 84 participants from 26 countries
3. Kampala, Uganda, October 2017, with 83 participants from 31 countries
4. Tbilisi, Georgia, April 2018, with 85 participants from 26 countries



COSTA RICA:

A National Pact to Advance the SDGs

IN 2016, COSTA RICA BECAME THE FIRST COUNTRY TO FORMALISE A COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT TO THE SDGs. A NATIONAL PACT WAS SIGNED BY THE EXECUTIVE, LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL POWERS OF THE REPUBLIC, CIVIL SOCIETY AND FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS, PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR. TOGETHER, THEY COMMITTED TO REALISING LONG-TERM STRUCTURAL CHANGES TOWARDS SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THAT IS GUIDED BY A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE.





Costa Rica's national 2030 Agenda builds on the results of the completion period for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Between 2013 and 2015, the government conducted national consultations with a range of social and political stakeholders to receive feedback on the development vision for the country. This resulted in an intersectoral roadmap on priority issues and served as preparation for localising the SDGs. The national strategy for the Agenda consists of a multi-dimensional approach to bring about long-term structural changes for inclusive, environmentally sustainable development and to 'leave no one behind'.

Integrating national planning and the SDGs

Costa Rica's National Development Plan (PND) 2015-2018 seeks to transcend conventional short-term policies by establishing three central pillars: economic growth and quality employment, poverty alleviation and reduction of inequality, and

an open, transparent and efficient government. The pillars include objectives for each sector, so that all institutions execute programmes and projects accordingly.

The PND and the national 2030 Agenda complement each other. The two were aligned based on an analysis of links between the SDGs and existing national programmes. A related study identified 94 programmes and projects that contribute to 169 SDG targets and 181 indicators. The areas with the highest numbers of programmes were education (SDG 4), health (SDG 3), peace and justice (SDG 16) and terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15). In addition to showing programmatic strengths in some areas, the analysis also highlighted the areas where the country needs to reinforce efforts, for example, gender equality and employment. At the same time, the analysis underlined the need for programmatic and budgetary changes to implement a multi-dimensional rather than a sectoral or thematic approach to the 2030 Agenda.

SDG governance and the National Pact

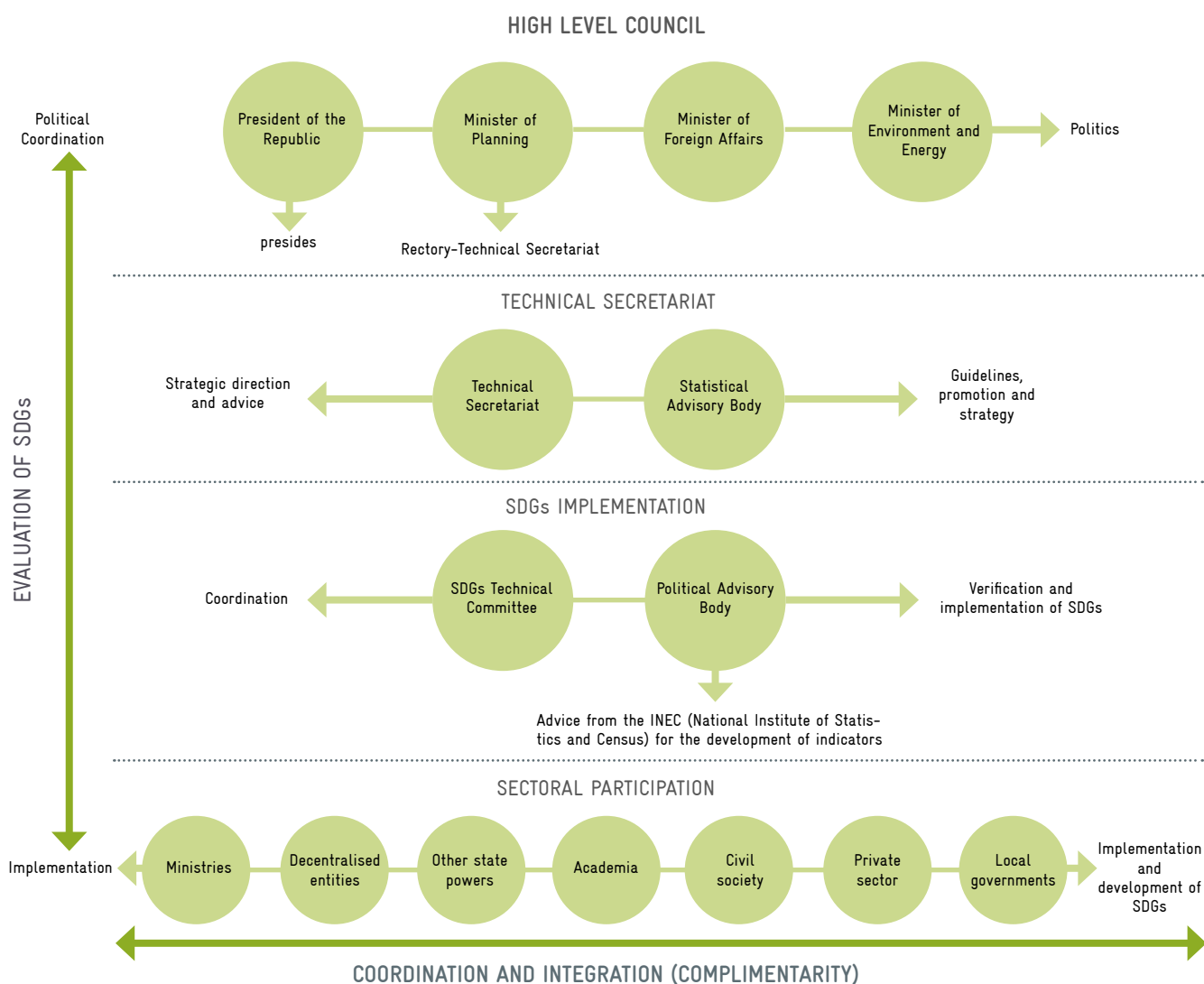
The National Pact to Advance the SDGs was created to help bring about the required structural changes. The Pact provides the basis for an inclusive and diverse multi-stakeholder SDG governance structure, which has been vital to coordinating implementation strategies and review processes.

The signatories of the National Pact have committed themselves to contribute to achieving the SDGs, to promote resource mobilisation by incorporating the goals into their planning and budgeting instruments and to strengthen their institutional capacities for developing related policies, plans and programmes. All members participate in reviewing and monitoring the national SDG strategy to ensure that it reflects the contributions of government as well as non-government stakeholders.



NATIONAL SDG GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE IN COSTA RICA

(Source: Costa Rica 2017 VNR, p. 37)



The active participation of a wide range of stakeholders has helped identify joint initiatives and establish accountability mechanisms. The National Pact promotes ownership by allowing stakeholders to define commitments in line with their respective capacities and resources and provides opportunities to articulate and advocate the interests of different groups.

Currently, various institutions are adjusting their strategies and management models and establishing SDG committees. Civil society organisations have created a platform to develop common strategic and policy agendas and have initiated training activities. Faith-based organisations are implementing programmes for vulnerable populations and community-based communication strategies. The local

network of the UN Global Compact in Costa Rica has organised training for private sector organisations.

A range of government initiatives aims to generate knowledge, raise awareness and create strategic alliances. Workshops and meetings were held, for example, on environmental, energy and land zoning issues. The National Council on Disabled People, the economic and social

councils of local governments and the National Agriculture and Live-stock Council conducted SDG-related awareness raising activities. In addition, multiple work meetings helped shape strategic alliances to manage the SDG indicators, define national goals, review progress and create progress reports that fed into the 2017 VNR.

Putting together the 2017 VNR

The focus of the VNR was to track Costa Rica's progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda in the two years since its adoption. It was not intended to evaluate the policies, programmes or initiatives carried out during the implementation of the SDGs but rather to capture the process carried out by Costa Rica from 2015 to 2017.

The VNR was prepared through an open, inclusive and participatory process in which the signatories of the National Pact used existing platforms to request and collect information. The elaboration process consisted of two stages: the design of forms on SDG monitoring and the collection of documentary

information through interviews and consultations. One form was used to collect data on the 2030 Agenda achievements, which helped identify lessons learned, challenges and next steps. The other form focused on SDG-related programme budgets, international cooperation and operational difficulties for compliance with the 2030 Agenda.

The review was complemented with semi-structured interviews with senior government officials to elicit details about implementation efforts and results. Consultation and validation workshops were also held with some of the most excluded groups in Costa Rica, such as people of African descent, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and many others, so they could express their opinions and ideas for the implementation of national initiatives, policies and strategies.

A multi-dimensional approach is the key to success

There are significant lessons to be learned from the implementation and review of the SDGs in Costa Rica from 2015 to 2017. A basic



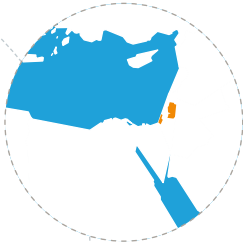
premise was that state institutions alone are not able to achieve transformative changes. Instead, the multi-dimensional approach and broad social and political participation encouraged all stakeholders to contribute to designing effective SDG initiatives and to be responsible for their progress. Contributions by the private sector, civil society, faith-based and international organisations have proven vital to creating synergies, including vulnerable parts of the population and building a consensus-based culture.

The interinstitutional articulation of different interests is helping to improve institutions, programmes and services. The SDG process has begun to change operational structures and procedures. Against the backdrop of experiences in Costa Rica, Enid Chaverri, national Focal Point for the SDGs at the Ministry of Environment and Energy, highlights that *'working together is the key to success'* for other countries also striving towards achieving the SDGs.





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PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: Involving Stakeholders to Overcome Data Gaps

THE 2030 AGENDA ENCOURAGES GOVERNMENTS TO INVOLVE CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE SDG REVIEW. IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES, THESE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS NOT ONLY CONTRIBUTED CONTENTWISE TO THE VNR BUT ALSO PROVIDED DATA FOR THE SDG INDICATORS. THE KEY TO SUCCESS WAS TO START EARLY, DESIGN A WELL-STRUCTURED PROCESS AND TAKE TIME TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH A BROAD RANGE OF ACTORS.

The Palestinian Territories are known to face many challenges. *'Being an occupied territory, our main challenge is the lack of control over our resources. Still, we are committed to implementing the SDGs. And we also have our internal challenges, so we have our own home-*

work to do,' says Mustafa Khawaja of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS).

Rather than developing a separate SDG plan, an early decision was taken to integrate the SDGs into the National Policy Agenda (NPA)



2017-2022. This six-year agenda is the guiding framework for all sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies.

A National Team to guide SDG planning and implementation

To ensure better implementation of the SDGs, the Prime Minister's Office set up a National Team comprising relevant government bodies and representatives from civil society and the private sector. This team is supported by working groups – one for each of the 17 SDGs. Each group is led by the Ministry that is responsible for the respective SDG and provides a platform for dialogue among diverse national stakeholders in that field as well as representatives from UN agencies. The groups' main task is to guarantee the integration of SDG targets in line with the strategies of the NPA policies

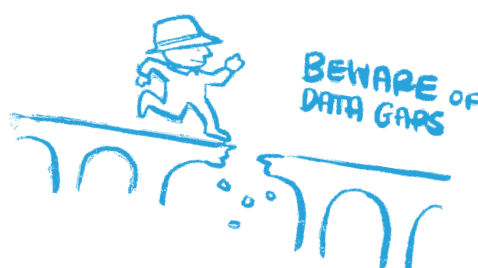
and programmes. The idea is to create the broadest possible platform for the exchange of information and views, including from the practical, grassroots level.

Mapping and monitoring

Monitoring of the SDG indicators has been delegated to PCBS, which forms part of the National Team. One of the first tasks for PCBS was to map the situation for all 232 global SDG indicators. This was done in a nationally led process with some support from international experts. The key output was a matrix with detailed information on each SDG indicator, such as its relation to the NPA, availability of

data for disaggregation levels and years, timing and periodicity of data collection and data sources. As a result, PCBS now has a clear picture of the national status of the SDG indicators: who is responsible for each indicator, where and how to find the required data, who to cooperate with in data collection, etc.

The identification of partners for data collection led to the next major task. A total of 48 governmental and non-governmental institutions provide data for the SDG indicators.





Managing collaboration with so many partners required a comprehensive plan. *'We worked with*

each ministry to develop templates and forms to collect data for the SDG indicators under its responsibility,' explains Khawaja. *'But for each issue and each SDG, we have additional data sources, for example, NGOs. So we had to create forms for them too and define mechanisms for collaborating and collecting data from them. In return, we also discussed with everyone what kind of data needs they have beyond the SDG indicators. So it was a multi-layer exercise with different partners. This is what we called the modernisation of SDG indicators to localise them according to the national context.'*

The mapping results also fed into the design of the third census in 2017, as they helped uncover data requirements for SDG monitor-

ing that could be obtained from the census. It was a lucky coincidence that the metadata for the SDGs were released just when the census was being prepared: *'This allowed us to adapt some of the questions in the census, which later made the data we obtained from the census more suitable for supporting SDG monitoring,'* remarks Khawaja.

The VNR process

In preparation for the first Palestinian VNR in 2018, the National Team asked each working group to provide two to three pages of input on issues they deemed most important in relation to their respective SDG. To ensure even broader participation, the groups were asked to go further than just discussing the

'I can say with total certainty that our participation in the second Partners for Review meeting has significantly contributed to speeding up our preparation for this review.'

MUSTAFA KHAWAJA

issues among themselves. Instead, all members were requested to consult with their constituencies and partners and to bring their views back to the working group.

Once all the groups had submitted their input to the National Team, the main points were compiled and arranged in accordance with the





structure of the report. The resulting zero draft report was then circulated back to the working groups for feedback and comments.

Meanwhile, PCBS started verifying the data provided by the groups in collaboration with the statistical departments of all the ministries. One of the main challenges was that data for a particular SDG indicator could often not be verified by one institution alone. *‘For example, the Ministry of Health, which led the efforts on SDG 3, was asked to check the substance of the chapter on health, but of course not all of the indicators for SDG 3 are related to health only. So the ministry had to consult with other institutions, such as the water authority, while PCBS was responsible for verifying all SDG data,’* explains Khawaja.

After filtering all the figures through this process, PCBS submitted the ‘clean’ data to the National Team, which included them in an updated

version of the report. This semi-final version was further discussed at the sub-national level. The contents were presented in a series of workshops with grassroots organisations, who were given time to review the report and provide feedback.

Based on this feedback, the National Team undertook a final round of editing. Not all the comments could be considered, as some turned out to be outside the scope of the VNR, but no idea was ignored: *‘We returned detailed explanations, telling people exactly which comments had been considered and for what reasons other comments had been left out,’* adds Khawaja.

Lessons learned

According to Khawaja, the SDGs provide an opportunity to build real partnerships and work together at different levels and in different fields. The participatory process and broad consultations made the

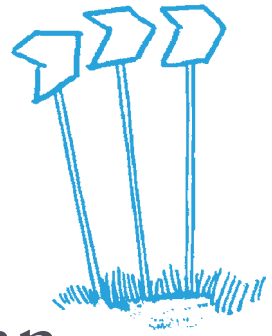


review a truly national exercise, not just a governmental one. In addition, sharing experiences and learning from peers from other countries has helped the Palestinians shape their own process.

However, consultations, meetings and dealing with different opinions take time – and a spirit of cooperation. Hence Khawaja’s advice to everyone: *‘Start early so you have enough time to involve more partners and allow them to participate in your consultations. If you have partners and a participatory process, you will see everyone with a sense of ownership. Your partners will help you, and this will boost work on the SDGs to achieve sustainability in your country.’*



NAMIBIA:

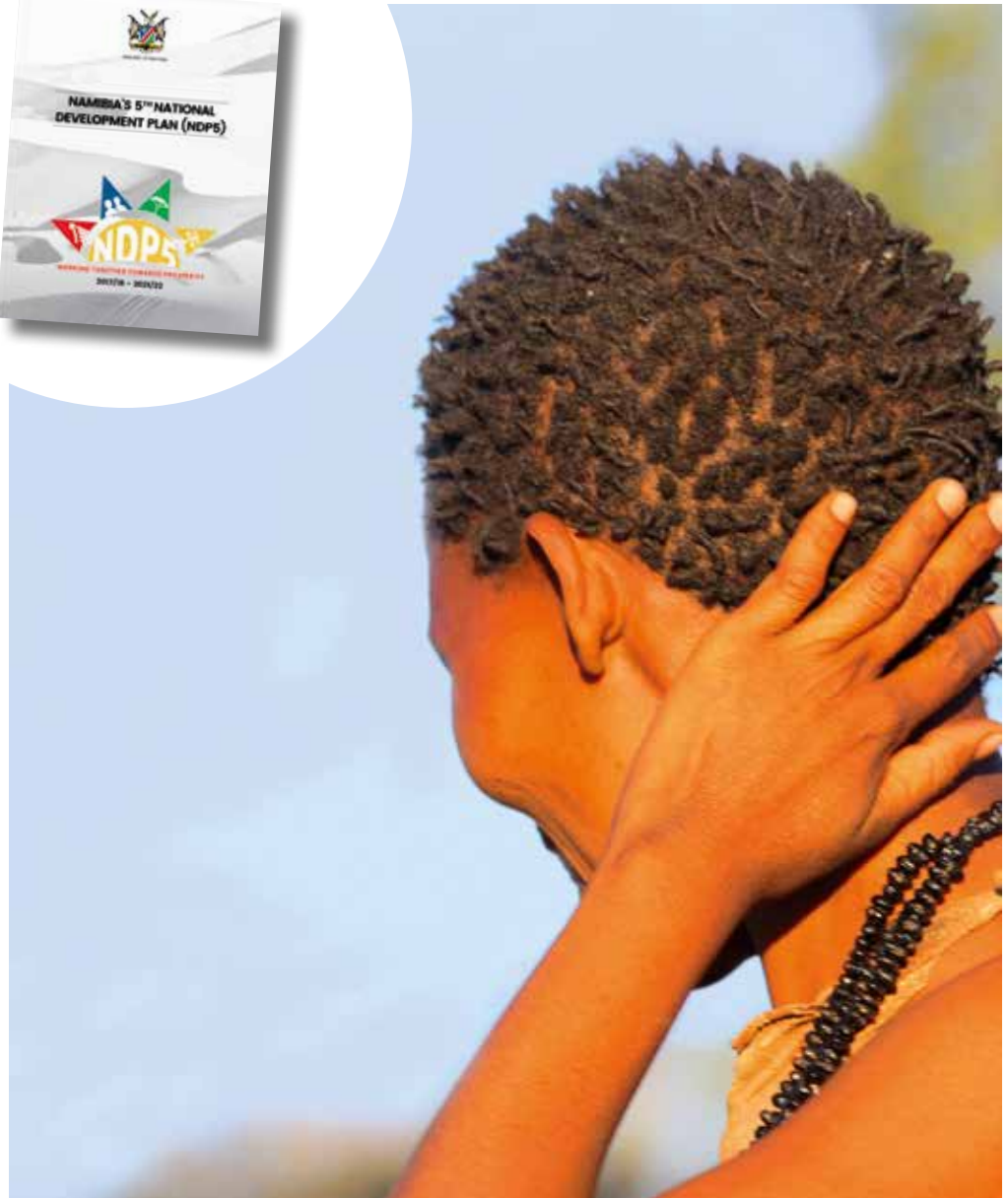
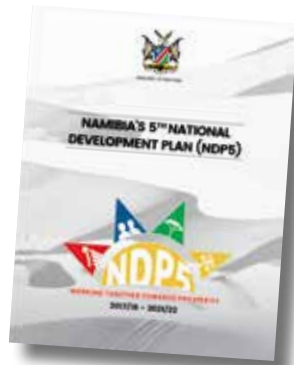


Aligning the 2030 Agenda with the National Development Plan

THE NAMIBIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN AN EARLY MOVER IN IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA. ITS COMMITMENT IS REFLECTED IN THE EFFORTS THE COUNTRY HAS UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE INTEGRATION OF THE SDGS INTO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING. DANIEL BAGWITZ OF GIZ SHARES SOME OF HIS OBSERVATIONS ON NAMIBIA'S VNR PROCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN EXTERNAL ADVISOR.

Namibia's homegrown Vision 2030 was adopted in 2004 and serves as the country's long-term development framework. The Fifth National Development Plan (NDP5) operationalises the Vision for the period from 2017 to 2022 and is informed by global and regional frameworks, including the SDGs. Namibia therefore decided not to develop a separate SDG strategy but to embed the SDGs in the NDP5. *'Managing multiple development plans in parallel is a great challenge, and the Namibian NDP5 objectives are much in line with the 2030 Agenda,'* says Daniel Bagwitz, Cluster Coordinator for the Sustainable Development Goals Initiative Namibia at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in Windhoek.

The NDP5 focuses on four key objectives: economic progression, social transformation, environmental sustainability and good governance. Its theme 'Working Together Towards Prosperity' highlights partnerships as a key principle in the pursuit of national development. Together, the theme and the objectives reflect the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership.





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Consultations for alignment

Elaboration of the Plan was based on extensive consultations with stakeholders, including community members at the local, regional and national levels, civil society organisations, the private sector and development partners and taking into account Namibia's priorities in relation to the 2030 Agenda.

The National Planning Commission (NPC) is in charge of the SDG review process. In preparation for the country's 2018 VNR, NPC worked with two main partners: the National Statistics Agency and a multi-stakeholder committee for the 2030 Agenda. The latter originally consisted of government and UN representatives, although efforts were made to also include representatives from civil society, parliament and the private sector.

One challenge in this process was that the degree of organisation of civil society in Namibia is still rather low. To promote awareness and discuss how civil society can better contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda, a workshop was held in July 2018, bringing together some 100 representatives from different stakeholder groups.

Timing and other challenges

Another great challenge that the country faces in both implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda is the absence of high quality data and the lack of statistical capacities. 'A sound data basis is a precondition, and countries should look at this early in the process,' says Bagwitz. 'We noticed only after starting to implement that a range of data gaps still exist. This makes monitoring difficult and can undermine implementation.' In Bagwitz's view, a success factor in the Namibian alignment process was the involvement of experts from the United Nations Office who supported the process with technical advice.

Much work remains to be done, however, to support and involve stakeholders, particularly civil society

and the private sector. Moreover, Bagwitz is convinced that governments need to allocate additional resources for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. *'Otherwise it is very difficult to implement and manage the process,'* he says. *'The budget needs to be well aligned with development priorities.'*

Based on his experiences in Namibia, Bagwitz recommends countries not to rush too quickly into presenting a VNR at the High-level Political Forum: *'It takes time to properly prepare the process.'* In the case of Namibia, it was very helpful that the P4R Secretariat conducted a workshop with national key stakeholders to develop a roadmap for the VNR process and facilitated the exchange with other P4R members who already had experience in conducting a VNR. Overall, he thinks that Namibia's approach is worth emulating: *'In Namibia, the entire government planning system is geared towards implementing NDP5. By including the SDGs directly in the national development plan, you ensure that the whole of government and the whole of society are supporting what the 2030 Agenda is there to achieve.'*



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TOGO:

Mobilising Civil Society for the SDG Review

THE INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SDG REVIEW IS NOT JUST A TASK FOR THE GOVERNMENT. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN TOGO HAVE ALSO BEEN TAKING THINGS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS, SPENDING TIME, EFFORT AND THEIR OWN RESOURCES TO ENABLE BROAD PARTICIPATION AND LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND. THE RESULT IS A WIN-WIN SITUATION FOR BOTH SIDES, THE IMPACT OF WHICH GOES BEYOND A CIVIL SOCIETY FOOTPRINT ON A GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT. PASSION, OWNERSHIP AND PERSEVERANCE ARE AMONG THE SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE TOGOLESE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM.

“It is an unacceptable excuse for any CSO in any country to claim that they can’t do anything because they don’t have the money. Our process proves how much you can achieve without external funds.”

SENA ALOUKA

The 2018 VNR is the third in a row that the country has submitted to the HLPF. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have been involved from year one, but over the years the movement has become stronger, and ever more people and organisations are joining the process.

At first sight, the VNR preparation process in Togo seems quite straightforward: the Ministry of Planning and Development, which coordinates the overall SDG process, prepares the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the VNR and shares them with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. Based on the validated ToR and a series of consultations, the Ministry prepares a first draft of the report, which goes out to everyone for comments. The feedback is incorporated into the second draft, which the Ministry then sends again out to all stakeholders. The final VNR is validated at a national workshop attended by representatives of all stakeholder groups.

A coalition to leave no one behind

Within this government-led process, Togolese CSOs have made great efforts to ensure the broadest possible

representation of views. The coincidence of two national processes was a catalyst for their forming a coalition. Sena Alouka, National Director of Young Volunteers for the Environment and a participant in all three reviews, recalls: ‘Two years ago, the government invited some CSOs to contribute to drafting the National Development Plan (NDP). They had some initial contacts, but various groups were fighting each other. In this context, we decided to form a working group to try and forge our own way into the process. We used the SDG window to bring all the groups

together and establish a platform in which everyone has the same power. Our goal was to reach out to as many organisations as possible, to really leave no one behind. Luckily, almost everyone believed in this process, and we ended up creating the Civil Society Forum on SDGs.’

According to Alouka, the motivation for all these groups to participate lies in a ‘triangle of benefits’. First, the SDG process provides a unique opportunity for everyone to come together, form a coalition



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and overcome the old silos. Second, being organised as an open forum fosters citizen participation. Members reach out to local authorities, technicians, students, smaller CSOs, vulnerable groups and many others all over the country, extending participation to the broader public. Third, working together increases overall civil society influence and advocacy in the VNR process. For example, the Forum organised a one-day internal workshop the day before the national VNR validation workshop. Members discussed the draft VNR, shared information and stories and gathered evidence to contribute to the report. As a result, the Togo VNR contains several paragraphs and sentences that were drafted by CSOs.

This is an added value for the government too, as some information is only available from CSOs. The Minister of Planning recognises these efforts by supporting participation of CSO delegates at the HLPE. *'This increases our visibility and helps build our capacities. But first and foremost, it helps build a strong civil society alliance,'* says Alouka.

Identifying resources

But what about resources: who pays for all this? In the beginning, the Forum tried to avoid fundraising. They feared that external funding would only resurrect the old demon of competition, as it would create a need to manage and decide about money. So far, most of the work has been done on a voluntary basis. For example, the 2017 CSO shadow report was written in its entirety by volunteers. Members also contribute with existing resources, such

as offices, internet access, furniture and other equipment. This made it possible to organise some 40 to 50 meetings in Lomé and the rest of the country, using the premises of member organisations. Some people also contribute financially from their own pocket, especially members of the diaspora, which the Forum has been able to engage in the process. Finally, some organisations have ongoing projects or programmes on the ground from which they may use some resources, thereby gaining visibility.

However, some things do require extra money. For example, the shadow report could not be printed because of a lack of funds. In addition, the Forum would like to organise more activities, such as an SDG festival, a national campaign or a series of training events, but so far fundraising efforts have not been successful.

Investing in partnerships

Alouka mentions three other challenges in the process: understanding, trust, and time. *'Knowledge is power,'* he says. *'To build a strong CSO alliance, you need people to have a good understanding.'* But the SDGs are a complex package. They need to be explained to all members and also be framed in ways that the target groups understand. With no training and little time, this was and remains no easy task for the organisers.

Developing trust and the capacity to work as a team is another ongoing challenge for this diverse group. *'There is no precedence in Togo for what we are trying to do. We have a history of divisions in our country; there is a lot of distrust. Bringing people together just like that and saying "hey, let's work together for development" is something that just*





hasn't happened in the past 20 years. It is a learning process – but we are on a good path.'

Finally, developing a new working relationship with the government takes time on both sides. In the past, the administration used to work with just a few selected organisations. Now there is the Forum, and no organisation walks alone. *'Dealing with this huge crowd will take time; the government also needs to learn,'* says Alouka.

In terms of achievements, the most visible results are, of course, the text contributions to the official VNR and the shadow report. These are authentic CSO inputs – and something unthinkable in the past. However, less visible, but at least equally important, is the fact that many organisations feel strengthened because of this process. Participation has given them a new sense of identity and belonging. The process has helped level the playing field between the big and the small. Furthermore, the Togo model has been so successful that CSOs from other countries – for example, Benin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Niger – have approached the Togolese Forum for support in their own processes, which members have been happy to provide.

ASKED ABOUT SUCCESS FACTORS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, ALOUKA COMES UP WITH A WHOLE LIST:

- **SPONTANEITY:** Don't wait for someone to invite you. Just stand up, get together and make your voice heard.
- **OWNERSHIP:** Make the process your own; be proud of what civil society has to contribute. Put yourselves in the driver's seat.
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Use new social media. WhatsApp has been very effective in Togo in bringing people together, sharing information and engaging in discussions with some 300 organisations.
- **VOLUNTEERISM:** Work with motivated volunteers and try to rely as much as possible on existing resources.
- **TRANSPARENCY:** Give up any hidden agenda; don't try to control. Instead, make everything open and share all information with everyone else.
- **PASSION:** Put your heart into it, believe in what you do!
- **MOSAIC SPIRIT:** Keep looking out for new groups to join. Be open to everyone – the diaspora, the handicapped, the LGBT community, albinos and anyone else who may still be left outside.
- **PERSEVERANCE:** Walk the last mile to bring life to the 'leave no one behind' principle.
- **COURAGE:** Don't be shy about questioning the government, but also stay open to dialogue. You can have different views and still develop a friendly working relationship.
- **ALLIES:** Join other networks and work together. Take inspiration and become strong through exchanges with peers.



MEXICO:

Engaging Subnational Levels in the SDG Process

THE FIFTH LARGEST COUNTRY IN THE AMERICAS HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN CREATING CONSIDERABLE MOMENTUM FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW AT THE SUBNATIONAL LEVELS. EXPERIENCE SHOWS THAT SUCCESS IS AS MUCH ABOUT STRUCTURES AS IT IS ABOUT COMMUNICATION AND MOTIVATION.



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‘The P4R network has been a very useful tool for Mexico to adapt good practices on how to implement the 2030 Agenda at the local level.’

ADOLFO AYUSO-AUDRY



range of national stakeholders and institutions. State governors are not regular members but are invited to attend the meetings. The National Strategy was also developed at federal level, and the states were invited to comment on the draft. Mexico’s 2018 VNR is based on this strategy. Again, although a federal-level product, the draft VNR was sent to all states for comments, and good practice examples from various sub-national levels, including the states, were featured in the report.

For Adolfo Ayuso-Audry, Director General for the 2030 Agenda at the President’s Office, involving sub-national levels in the Mexican SDG process prompts the question: *‘How can we use our existing structures to introduce the ideas of the 2030 Agenda and accelerate transformation?’*

Transmitting the spirit of the Agenda

The established forum for coordination with and among the federal states is the National Governors’ Conference (CONAGO). All 32 governors are part of CONAGO,

irrespective of political affiliation, and its work is organised through over 30 thematic commissions. *‘It is important for us to speak with the governors and explain the benefits of implementing the SDGs,’* Ayuso-Audry points out. *‘So we went to CONAGO and said: “Look, here is something new; it has nothing to do with political parties. This Agenda was adopted by 193 nations. Let’s look at it and see how you can use these SDGs in your state development plans.”’*

As part of the subsequent process, one governor was invited to lead an initiative to establish state-level multi-stakeholder councils for the 2030 Agenda that would serve as platforms for dialogue among state governments, municipalities, civil society, the private sector and academia. To date, 31 of the 32 federal entities have made commitments. Some have established a council; others have included a mandate in their legal framework. Some municipalities have also installed similar mechanisms.

UNDP supported the councils in setting up work plans, making diagnostics, work-



Mexico is a federal republic with clearly defined powers for the different administrative levels. Each of the 32 federal entities (31 states and Mexico City) has its own constitution, laws, etc. Any cooperation between the national and subnational levels has to respect this division of powers.

At the federal level, the National Council is the highest decision-making body for implementing the 2030 Agenda. It is chaired by the President and composed of a broad



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target, what is the national diagnosis? And where is my state compared to the other states and the country?' An idea he is contemplating in this context is to replicate the VNR presentation format in CONAGO in order to promote further exchange of experiences and dialogue among the states on progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Obstacles along the way

According to Ayuso-Audry, one challenge in transmitting the spirit of the 2030 Agenda from the global to the subnational level is that international meetings are mostly attended by officials from national ministries. His team has therefore been making explicit efforts to take people from the state level to international SDG fora. *'Last year, six state secretaries attended the HLPF in New York, and they got quite motivated by what they saw,'* he remarks.



ing with the national statistical institute and establishing plans with clear targets. The President's Office published a guide for municipalities to align their plans with the SDGs and recently started a dialogue with the Institute for Municipal Development. *'All of this is just the beginning,'* says Ayuso-Audry. *'These things take time and a lot of commitment from the highest political level.'*

In his view, the exchange with the governors and the state councils has been an enriching experience that is helping transmit the true spirit of the 2030 Agenda. For example, some states in the interior of the country initially felt that SDG 14 (Life below water) did not apply to them. But after discussing issues such as plastic consumption and the extractive industries, they saw the interconnectedness of the problems and understood how they too can contribute to this SDG.

For other states, the Agenda provided a framework to establish their own targets. For example, the state of Coahuila found that it had already reached the targets in primary education. Therefore,

they decided to focus on universal secondary education, aiming to ensure that by 2030 all students in the state finished high school. The capital of Nuevo León, Monterrey, decided they wanted to become the first city in the country to completely eradicate extreme poverty. The SDGs helped the city to assess where it stands compared to others and to make pledges and plans for its own administration.

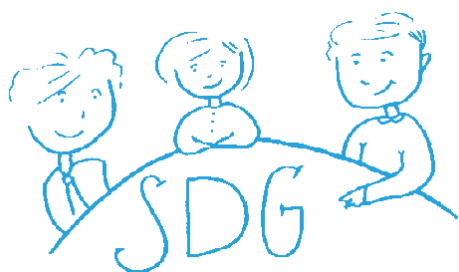
Ayuso-Audry is convinced that the process will keep gaining momentum: *'The national sustainability strategy we are now developing will be a great reference for the states to see where the country is with regard to each SDG. For example, how is Mexico doing in health? What is the*

'The SDG circle should become as well known as the Olympic rings.'

ADOLFO AYUSO-AUDRY



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However, this led to another problem: many people in Mexico do not speak English, which can make it difficult for state representatives to benefit from attending these meetings. Ayuso-Audry has two solutions for this: (i) translating – literally and figuratively – by continuously explaining and debriefing the international discussions; and (ii) taking people to regional meetings, for example, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, where the SDGs are discussed in Spanish.

Another challenge he sees is the high mobility of subnational officials. *'Resources are spent, they get excited ... and then three months later, they move to another position,'* Ayuso-Audry remarks. This observation leads him back to the structures: weaving the SDGs into laws, having all the information on a single website and establishing clear processes are just some of his ideas for addressing this challenge, so that *'no matter who sits at the desk, we can structure and institutionalise this.'*

Further challenges include resources and communication. So far, the President's Office has no specific budget for the SDG process. One solution Ayuso-Audry sees is to integrate existing institutions that already have human and financial resources. Mexico has many councils and commissions on specific issues that are all part of the SDGs. If some of these could be integrated into, for example, a National Council for Sustainable Development with a budget or a Ministry of Social Development, more resources might become available for the SDG process.

The lack of resources has also put limitations on communication. *'You need experts to develop and implement a communication strategy,'* he says. *'We will soon publish 17 infographics to explain the SDGs, but that's not a communication strategy. Sustainability needs to be introduced into the popular culture, in soap operas, etc. The SDG circle should become as well known as the Olympic rings.'*

'The P4R network has been a very useful tool for Mexico to adapt good practices on how to implement the 2030 Agenda at the local level,' explains Ayuso-Audry. For instance, experiences in terms of communicating the Agenda using fictional characters from Brazil, led to the idea in Mexico to start an initiative to develop a communication strategy based on the characters of Cri-Cri, a very popular songwriter from the 1940-50s.

Asked about recommendations, Ayuso-Audry first mentions that having the lead for the SDGs at the highest political level was a key to success: *'Had we come from some line ministry rather than the President's Office, the governors probably would not have listened to us as much as they did.'* Second, engaging in permanent dialogue and translating the spirit of the Agenda to everyone's realities is essential *'to involving not only the subnational levels, but also the private sector and academia.'* Third, he reiterates the importance of a solid communication strategy and the need to have a budget and hire experts for it: *'We need communication campaigns that speak to people's hearts and that everybody understands,'* he concludes.



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SENEGAL:

Developing a localised SDG information system

SENEGAL'S FIRST VNR SUBMITTED TO THE HLPF IN 2018 PROVIDES DETAILS OF PROGRESS IN NATIONAL SDG IMPLEMENTATION. AT THE SAME TIME, THE REPORT REPEATEDLY STATES THAT THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM DOES NOT YET ALLOW DIFFERENTIATED ASSESSMENTS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR SPECIFIC POPULATION SEGMENTS, VULNERABLE GROUPS, DECENTRALISED ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS, ETC., DUE TO A LACK OF DISAGGREGATED DATA. A PILOT INITIATIVE IN THE DIOURBEL REGION AIMS TO HELP SOLVE THIS PROBLEM BY USING A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH.

The Dakar-based regional NGO Millennium Promise (MP) and the Alioune Diop de Bambey University (UADB) have joined efforts to help improve subnational statistics in Senegal. Both are members of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), a global network under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, which mobilizes scientific and technological expertise to promote practical solutions for sustainable development. The pilot project initially focuses on eight districts in the Diourbel region, with a total of 43 communes.

The Senegalese statistical system currently covers the national and regional levels. Lower administrative levels – districts, departments and communes – are not yet represented. According to Dr Amadou Ibra Niang, CEO of MP, the system would also benefit from more involvement by universities to provide

CAPTION BLINDTEXT





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scientific innovation. The MP-UADB joint pilot initiative thus aims to create an interinstitutional, multi-sectoral baseline and database in the Diourbel region to enable better alignment of the SDGs to national and local priorities. The database is to support decision-making in development planning, programming and budgeting at the national and local levels.

Networking to grow partnerships

One of MP's areas of expertise is SDG-based information systems. The organisation has extensive experience, for example, with GIS and with facilitating multi-stakeholder processes. UADB, on the other hand, is well known in the region and has good outreach and an experienced statistics and information and communication technologies (ICT) department. Both organisations share common objectives, and their capacities complement each other. Together, they involved further partners to define locally adapted SDG indicators in line with national priorities and to ensure links to political decision-makers from the outset. Current partners

include local government, a development committee of regional technical services that the Governor of Diourbel established for this project, representatives of the communes, the Ministry of Planning and the national statistical agency.

In a series of work sessions, the partners identified the SDG targets most relevant for the region, determined relevant data gaps, agreed on the methodology for the survey and organised implementation. The two main methods to be used are the Rapid Infrastructure Facility Assessment, developed by the University of Columbia and MP in the context of the Millennium Villages project, and household surveys inspired by approaches used in that same project. To avoid duplication of existing work and thus save costs and time, both approaches are to focus on previously identified data gaps.

The road ahead

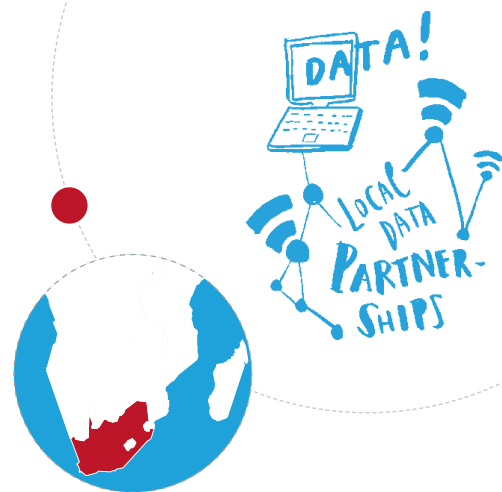
Next steps include planning and implementing a work plan for the survey, presenting the results of the pilot phase to the SDSN General Assembly in New York and sharing results and experiences with the

Senegalese institutions in charge of implementing and monitoring the SDGs at national level. Ultimately, the lessons learned from the project are to be used to upscale the approach to all the country's communes and other countries where MP is operating.

Regarding lessons learned so far, Niang mentions that getting everybody on board requires clearly defined roles and benefits for all participants. MP's role is to make tools available, bring different partners together and facilitate the process. The University contributes its expertise, and its students assist with the implementation of the survey, while communities mobilise staff to support the survey, provide accommodation and help with logistics. The regional technical services provide data and information and promote the effective involvement of all partners. Everybody gives something and gains something in return. Yet ultimately, it is the results that count. According to Niang: *'What motivates everyone is that at the end we'll have data from the district level which are not available at present. These can be used at the national level to improve policies that affect everyone.'*

SOUTH AFRICA:

Promoting Constructive Science-Policy Dialogue for the SDG Review



SOUTH AFRICA IS GOING TO PRESENT ITS FIRST VNR TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN 2019. PREPARATIONS ARE WELL ON THEIR WAY, AND THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY IS READYING ITSELF TO PLAY ITS PART IN THE PROCESS. THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA HOSTS THE SOUTH AFRICAN SDG HUB, A PLATFORM TO HELP POLICY-MAKERS AND RESEARCHERS ENGAGE IN CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE ON THE SDGS. PROF. WILLEM FOURIE, COORDINATOR OF THE HUB, EXPLAINS THE APPROACH IN A PERSONAL INTERVIEW.

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Prof. Fourie, how do you see the role of the scientific community in the 2030 Agenda process generally?

FOURIE: The scientific community has vast intellectual resources to contribute to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. And the bulk of the research done and the innovations developed at universities and other research institutions are already in one way or another relevant for governments, companies and CSOs interested in the implementation of this Agenda. In my view, the main challenge lies in the timely translation of research findings into formats that are accessible to policy-makers. In this regard, there exists a dire need for intermediary platforms to handle this process of connection and translation.

What tendencies do you observe internationally regarding the science-policy dialogue in SDG processes?

Surprisingly, most governments and national scientific communities find it challenging to engage in constructive science-policy dialogues. Typically, several reasons are given for this, such as the complexity of the evidence bases, clashing time-lines, lack of trust and budgetary constraints. Despite these barriers, I still find the difficulty of constructive science-policy dialogues surprising, as most researchers want as many people as possible to use their research, and governments have a strong interest in accessing and using the research produced in their respective national science, technology and innovation (STI) systems.

What motivates scientists to contribute to the VNR process? What is your own motivation?

The 2030 Agenda's SDGs encompass a very large array of themes. In fact, it is not possible for any one person or actor to have a complete grasp on all of the SDGs. Reporting on a country's progress in realising the SDGs is therefore necessarily a process that should involve very many actors – including researchers.



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In my view, researchers' main motivation for participating in VNR preparation processes should be borne from a sense of societal responsibility. As researchers, we are responsible for making a contribution both in our respective fields of expertise as well as in the society that gives us a 'social licence' to do our research.

I would say the latter is my main motivation for contributing towards the realisation of the SDGs in South Africa, but I am also grateful for having been 'socialised' in the academic field of social ethics – later specialising in leadership and development – which provides me with the academic grounding for participating in more technical conversations surrounding the implementation of the SDGs.

South Africa is planning to present its first VNR to the HLPF in 2019. What can you tell us about this process from the perspective of academia?

There is certainly a growing interest amongst South African researchers in playing their part in South Africa's VNR preparation process. As the South African SDG Hub, we're privileged to be playing a role in bringing together different stakeholders. In our view, an inclusive VNR preparation process can go a long way to supporting the realisation of our national and continental development priorities.

You are the coordinator of the South African SDG Hub, which is hosted by the University of Pretoria. What specific challenges do you intend to solve with this Hub?

We want to create one of the intermediary platforms needed to connect researchers and policy-makers. We are doing this by developing a number of interesting digital technologies, by convening roundtables in collaboration with government partners and by disseminating relevant information. In addition to this, we are also working on some substantive pieces of research on issues related to coordination.

What has been your experience in the South African review process so far? What has worked well and what have the challenges been?

In my reading of other countries' preparation of their VNRs, coordination of the large number of government and non-government actors is tricky. This is certainly the case in middle-income countries such as South Africa too. But I view the process of setting up the most effective coordination structures as a strategic opportunity for identifying duplication and inefficiencies and improving synergies between all actors involved.

What recommendations do you have regarding involvement of the scientific community in the VNR process in South Africa?

To me, the most important is to set up, support and participate in intermediary platforms. This is what we are trying to do with the South African SDG Hub. Up to now, we have received very positive feedback from actors within government as well as academia. But one platform such as the South African SDG Hub is certainly not enough. There is a need for theme-specific platforms. Meeting the targets in SDG 3, for example, is dependent on a different set of actions, actors and institutions than in the case, say, of those included in SDG 13. Platforms that cover the needs of specific groupings of societal actors are also important, notably platforms that link like-minded companies.



FOR THE MOST RECENT INFO ON THE STRUCTURE AND FOCUS AREAS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SDG HUB, PLEASE SEE: [HTTP://SASDG.ORG/ABOUT/](http://sasdg.org/about/)



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NETHERLANDS:

A Structured Approach to Involving Multiple Stakeholders in SDG Reporting

THE NETHERLANDS HAS INTEGRATED SDG REVIEW INTO THE POLICY CYCLE THROUGH REGULAR MEASURING, CONSULTING AND REPORTING ON PROGRESS. STRONG PARTNERSHIPS WITH RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS HAVE MADE THIS PROCESS A TRULY COLLABORATIVE EFFORT.



A principle of the Dutch SDG process is to build on existing policies, institutions and bottom-up initiatives. A broad range of governmental and non-governmental actors are involved in the implementation, follow-up and review of the universal goals. The annual process of reporting on SDG progress provides an excellent framework for this.

The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation is the Cabinet member responsible for coordinating overall SDG implementation both at the national level and in terms of Dutch contributions to achieving the SDGs in other countries. A National SDG Coordinator chairs an inter-ministerial SDG network of focal points, which is composed of representatives from line ministries and tasked to for-



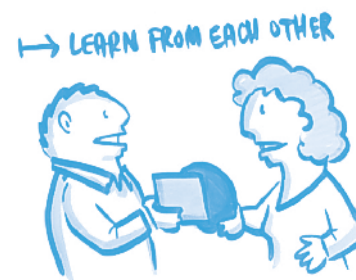
© SDG Charter

mulate and stimulate government action. In addition, the government works with five umbrella organisations – for the private sector, academia, youth, local governments and NGOs – that serve as points of contact for assessing needs and coordinating the related consultation processes.

In 2016, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation sent two letters to Parliament, outlining policy initiatives and implementation approaches for every SDG. One of the actions proposed

overview of policies and activities by governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, illustrating the collective nature of SDG implementation in the Netherlands. The five umbrella organisations each contributed one chapter to the report.

The report derives data from the Dutch National Statistical Office (CBS). In 2016, CBS was the first national statistical office in the world to provide statistical measurements on SDG indicators. For the subsequent report, which was published in March 2018, CBS used



The national SDG report served as one of the inputs for the VNR of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which was submitted and presented to the UN High-level Political Forum in 2017.

Partnerships are key

Machiel van Stralen, SDG Team Leader at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlights the importance of partnerships to promote SDG implementation. *‘Historically, we have a strong tradition of forming partnerships in the Netherlands, which originates from fighting sea water levels. This fits nicely with the 2030 Agenda message that no single actor can achieve these goals alone – which is exactly what we had to learn the hard way in the Netherlands,’* he explains.

Civil society is a strong force in the Netherlands that has only grown stronger under the scope of the 2030 Agenda. The SDG Charter, for example, which is today a multi-stakeholder platform with over 150 Dutch companies, NGOs, knowledge institutions and philanthropists, originated in 2014 as a joint



was to report annually to Parliament on progress made towards achieving the SDGs.

The first national SDG report, signed by eight ministers, was issued in 2017. The report provides an

additional data sets maintained by ministries and stakeholder organisations to boost data availability. This way, CBS was able to increase data coverage from 37% of SDG indicators to 51% of indicators within just one year.



initiative by a Dutch multinational company and a social enterprise.

The SDG Gateway is an online community of stakeholders across sectors, where partners can create profiles and showcase their SDG work. And a national SDG summit in 2017 became the start of the 'Adopt an SDG' campaign, in which 25 members of parliament each adopted one or several SDGs.

Starting in 2019, the national SDG review will also be integrated with the yearly Monitor on Well-being, which in turn was the outcome of a 2015 parliamentary initiative to assess well-being beyond gross domestic product (GDP), taking into account indicators such as environment, health, education, labour, security, trust and inequality.

The mobilising effect of the SDG process

Van Stralen believes that the key to attaining the SDGs is to utilise the mobilising effect of the process as it creates impact and visibility. For example, the government has integrated the results of the review into its trade and official development aid policies. *'This really shows the mobilising role that the SDGs have played in putting sustainable development on the agenda. The SDGs concern issues that people and organisations deal with on a daily basis, whether it is energy pricing or a general effort to become "greener"'. A main outcome of the review, according*

If statements from different groups are streamlined too much, you lose important insights.'

MACHIEL VAN STRALEN



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to van Stralen, is that stakeholders see the connection between their own work, the work of the government and that of other partners.

A multi-stakeholder effort of this dimension obviously comes with some challenges too. For example, elaborating the VNR with so many diverse actors meant dealing with different priorities, capacities and languages. *'While NGOs tend*

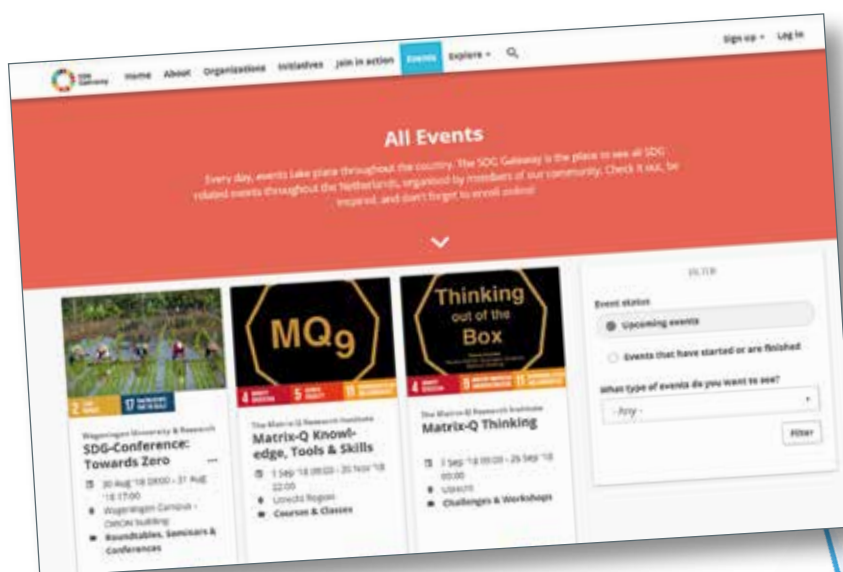


to have well-established structures and are used to writing reports, the youth had to develop a good way to coordinate their inputs to such a document,' explains van Stralen. 'Yet, if statements from different groups are streamlined too much, you lose important insights.' This is one of the reasons why each of the five umbrel-

la organisations was invited to write its own chapter for the report. In addition, the groups were not only encouraged to describe their own perspectives and contributions but also to identify areas for further action and collaboration. This ensured a critical yet constructive approach to writing the report.

Overall, van Stralen is very optimistic: *'We are now seeing progress in a number of fields where we have challenges, such as climate impact and renewable energy. In the future, we need to keep focusing on where there is still a distance to achieving the goals and then channel our resources and capacities into those areas.'*

Against the backdrop of his experience, van Stralen stresses the importance of translating the momentum of the SDG review process into action. *'The real value added is that you get the stakeholders around the table. They have to form a vision and come up with an action plan for themselves. The VNR report is really a means to an end, not a goal in itself,'* he concludes.





NIGERIA:

Engaging the Private Sector in the Voluntary National Review



'ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND PROMOTING PROSPERITY IN A CHANGING WORLD' IS THE MAIN SLOGAN OF NIGERIA'S 2017 VNR. PRIVATE BUSINESSES ARE A KEY DRIVER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CAN BRING FINANCIAL LEVERAGE TO THE 2030 AGENDA PROCESS. THIS IS WHY THE NIGERIAN PRIVATE SECTOR ADVISORY GROUP (PSAG) PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN NATIONAL SDG IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW. THE GROUP IS GUIDED BY AN INTERMINISTERIAL SDG COMMITTEE.

Nigeria's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017-2020 was originally not aligned with international development objectives. With the advent of the SDGs, however, the need increased to bring the ERGP in line with global goals as well as with other national plans, such as the Nigeria Vision 20:2020, which aims to make the country one of the top 20 economies in the world by 2020.

The private sector had played a key role in developing the ERGP and Vision 20:2020. Discussions on the SDGs in the newly established PSAG then became a driving force for making sustainable development

a core issue for the private sector. SDG profiling at company level has intensified this trend, which is also reflected in public opinion: a global SDG Engagement Survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in 2015 revealed that 58% of Nigerian citizens consider it important for the private sector to sign up to the SDGs, and 65% of them would like to see companies embed the SDGs in their business processes.

SDG monitoring to enhance visibility

SDG attainment depends on effective monitoring and evaluation. The PSAG consults with its members





to account for SDG-related performance of the private sector and also to convey a sense of representation and recognition to companies. To support this process, PwC Nigeria, a member of the PSAG, recently developed the SDG Reporting Tool, a localised instrument designed to help companies identify, prioritise and report their contributions to achieving the SDGs. Developing the tool became crucial since there was previously no central unit for the private sector to report SDG-related activities to the government.

The tool also serves the need of businesses to carry out reporting by themselves and to demonstrate to the public and other stakeholders what they are doing regarding the SDGs. There is a strong belief that the success of the PSAG largely depends on how well its members report on their work. *'It is key to have more and more players interested in the PSAG and other stakeholder groups. The goal is to attract membership,'* says Mories Atoki of PwC Nigeria. *'Profiling and assessing relevant activities is very important. The SDGs require evaluation mechanisms to be able to rate performance.'*

Catering to private sector needs

One challenge was how to create incentives for companies to join the PSAG. In Nigeria, responding to two business imperatives – security and resilience – helped encourage engage-

ment with the SDGs. First, businesses that align their strategy with national priorities are more likely to be licensed to operate and will also enjoy greater acceptance by citizens. Second, as governments are now using the SDGs to reform policies and regulations, businesses that are aware of and aligned with the SDGs are more likely to be able to deal with emerging policies, which makes for more resilient business models.

This was not fully clear to Nigerian companies when the PSAG first started its work. Its members agreed with the government about existing challenges, such as high unemployment or productivity deficits, but whether the ERGP or the SDGs would be able to resolve these issues was another question. Many companies seemed to assume that putting corporate social responsibility measures in place was enough to deal with sustainability. Nobody had assessed what the SDGs actually meant for their organisation or what gaps existed regarding meaningful indicators. *'PwC, through the PSAG, tried to whet the appetite of businesses to find out what the needs of the country are in relation with their own business goals and models,'* observes Atoki. *'And there was indeed a high degree of responsiveness in that regard.'*

The PSAG continues to advocate policies and incentives for the private sector to contribute to achieving the SDGs. Impact assessments and tax reliefs for accomplishments such

as job creation, food security or education are among the options under consideration.

From single-stakeholder involvement to multi-stakeholder platforms?

One of the PSAG's successes has been to engage many players in collecting information and committing to the process. A key success factor was appreciation of the reporting tools designed by PwC for the private sector, which may also be adapted to the public sector. Integrating contributions in one single reporting database is considered a realistic goal for 2019.

What Atoki would still like to see is for civil society, academia and the private sector to come together around the same table and discuss the SDGs from different angles. To support this process, she organised a session on Tracking and Reporting the SDGs at the annual Capability Enhancement Workshop for Nigerian journalists in 2017, providing information on the SDGs and on tools to navigate, track and report their attainment.

Overall, she concludes, *'If companies recognise how they can support achieving the SDGs, that is quite commendable. We are not there yet, but the fact that we are on the way is very valuable.'*



COLOMBIA:

From Big Data to Smart Data to Advance SDG Statistics

COLOMBIA'S NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICE – DANE – BEGAN WORKING WITH BIG DATA IN THE CONTEXT OF A BROADER INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY THAT WAS LAUNCHED IN EARLY 2015. THE SDGS ADDED TO THE MOMENTUM, AS MANY INDICATORS REQUIRED NEW SETS AND COMBINATIONS OF DATA THAT WERE NOT READILY AVAILABLE AT THE TIME. SANDRA MORENO, ÁNGELA LÓPEZ AND ANGÉLICA PALMA SHARE SOME OF THEIR INSIGHTS FROM DANE'S ENDEAVOUR TO CONSTANTLY THINK AND ACT 'OUTSIDE THE BOX'.

As part of the strategy to achieve DANE's vision to 'Innovate, produce, integrate and provide strategic information for Colombia', two innovation contests helped promote smart thinking and identify new approaches to addressing upcoming challenges. Many employees proposed projects involving the use of big data. As a result of the contests, they now have the necessary resources and action steps.

Exploring new sources and methodologies

In the SDG context, DANE's main efforts with big data so far have focused on using NASA satellite images, as these are high quality, easy to access and free of charge. For example, the information required for SDG indicator 11.3.1 (ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate) was originally not available. Using satellite images in combination with population

projections and other new sources of information has enabled DANE to calculate this indicator. Similarly, combining the information from satellite images and digital elevation models with census and administrative data has made it possible to calculate indicator 9.1.1 (proportion of rural population living within 2 km of an all-season road). Among other things, the images helped identify land cover and detect obstacles to reaching the roads, such as water bodies.

A second innovation approach is web scraping. Aiming to improve the consumer price index, DANE developed a robot to extract price information from websites. The process produced some initial results but also revealed limitations. For example, only big companies tend to have websites, while information on prices in smaller shops still needs to be obtained from traditional surveys. In addition, some websites put restrictions on web scraping. And when shops change their websites, it may become necessary to change the script of the robot or even start over again.

Another web-based experiment involved social media. Based on questions from its Life Quality Survey, DANE developed a methodology to assess poverty perception by analysing messages posted on Twitter. The results in this case were not conclusive. Besides incomplete coverage (not everybody uses social media), perception turned out to be very difficult to measure from text messages. DANE therefore decided to continue using traditional sources for this purpose. Still, the experiment led to employees acquiring new capacities in text processing and machine learning techniques.

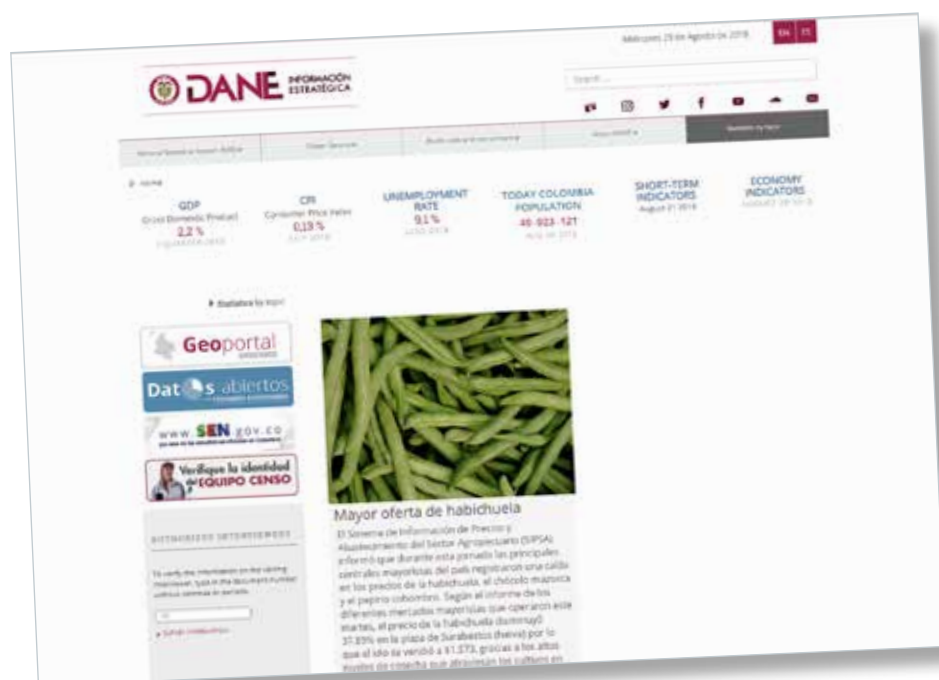
In its most recent initiative, DANE is reviewing the use of mobile phone data. A pilot partnership with a mobile phone operator involved joint definition of the type of information to be shared, the required level of data aggregation and the methodology for calculation. Since micro data could not be obtained due to



confidentiality reasons, the operator processed the data and produced aggregated reports. DANE used this information to calculate ICT indicators, develop indicators for optimising the census field operation and calculate other indicators, such as the geographical distribution of population. In the future, DANE hopes to obtain further mobile phone-based information on such things as population density or mobility and develop methodologies for quality checks and getting complementary information on SDG indicators.

Some challenges and solutions

Experimenting with a whole set of new sources and methods naturally comes with some challenges. Perhaps the most obvious one is technology: 'big' data means large volumes of data, which require the technological





infrastructure to process them. ‘We are working on that right now,’ says Sandra Moreno, ‘but we still have a lot of work to do in this area.’

Other challenges include representativeness of the data and, depending on the source, privacy issues. For example, DANE currently obtains mobile phone data from just one company, so clients of other providers are not yet represented. Furthermore, mobile phone coverage may be limited in some remote rural areas. These data are also very sensitive in terms of privacy, which is why DANE obtains only aggregated reports and has signed a confidentiality agreement with the provider. Data obtained from web scraping may come with a bias too: not all companies have websites or allow extraction of data, and not everybody uses social media. Whether or not any of this is a problem depends on information needs. DANE currently uses the new information to complement what is obtained through traditional statistical operations.

However, technological adjustments alone cannot do the job. Using new sources of information involves new methodologies to obtain and process the data and to combine them smartly with more traditional sources. This calls for investments



in capacity development to update employees’ knowledge and develop their skills. Moreover, employees need to be able to dedicate time and space to research and find out how the new sources can be useful.

An institutional strategy

All of these new developments require an institutional strategy that goes beyond targeting the core statistical processes. DANE’s innovation plan rests on the idea that modernisation needs to include the supporting processes, such as human resource management, team development and institutional partnerships.

DANE works with several public and private partners. Through the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, DANE

connected with NASA, Group on Earth Observations and various universities, which offered feedback and recommended software and algorithms. The Spanish School of Industrial Organisation provided training for DANE officials on the use of big data and related methodologies. And partnering with the mobile phone operator has been crucial to exploring the potential of mobile phone data for national statistics. As big data are mostly generated by the private sector, DANE hopes to cooperate with other companies in the future. Yet *‘before entering new agreements, we first need to review the existing partnership and modes of cooperation,’* says Moreno. Overall, the team considers working with these new approaches a great improvement. *‘The set of SDG indicators includes things we had never before thought of measuring,’* says

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Angélica Palma. *'Also, not all SDG indicators had defined data sources or methodologies for being calculated. We took this as an opportunity to explore new data sources to complement our traditional statistical processes and respond to new demands.'*

Moving from 'big' to 'smart'

Using big data has a lot of potential to increase effectiveness and reduce costs. However, they are no panacea. They do not replace traditional sources or methods but are a valuable complement for specific needs. The 'smart' DANE approach lies in constantly exploring new sources and methods, seeing how these can be combined with traditional sources and embedding all this in a broader institutional strategy. As Palma puts it: *'Moving from a "big data" to a "smart data" strategy*

means strengthening DANE's role as coordinator of the national statistical system.' And whether or not a newly tested approach immediately leads to the intended results, *'the capacity, skills and knowledge remain and can be used for other purposes to optimise the performance of our tasks,'* she highlights.

"We took the SDG indicators as an opportunity to explore new data sources to complement our traditional statistical processes and respond to new demands."

ANGÉLICA PALMA

List of Acronyms

BMU	Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und nukleare Sicherheit (Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety), Germany
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), Germany
CBS	Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (Dutch National Statistical Office)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CONAGO	Conferencia Nacional de Gobernadores (National Governors' Conference), Mexico
CSO	Civil society organisation
DANE	Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (National Administrative Department of Statistics), Colombia
ERGP	Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, Nigeria
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (German Agency for International Cooperation)
HLPF	High-level Political Forum
ICT	Information and communication technologies
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MP	Millennium Promise, Senegal
NDP	National Development Plan, Togo
NDP5	Fifth National Development Plan, Namibia
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPA	National Policy Agenda, Palestinian Territories
NPC	National Planning Commission, Namibia
P4R	Partners for Review
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PND	National Development Plan, Costa Rica
PSAG	Private Sector Advisory Group, Nigeria
PWC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
SDGS	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
STI	Science, technology and innovation
TOR	Terms of Reference
UADB	Université Alioune Diop Bambey (Alioune Diop de Bambey University), Senegal
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
VNR	Voluntary National Review

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