Implementing the SDGs during the first 1000 days

Briefing note on the Africa Regional Dialogue

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Key messages

- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation plans should leverage existing regional spaces for political will, accountability and solidarity. In particular, they should be aligned with the African Union's first ten-year implementation plan for Agenda 2063. Countries should, through a regional action plan, agree on concrete ideas on what to do to fast-track early implementation of the SDGs.
- The SDGs should be embedded in national frameworks and institutions that will outlast political administrations. The integration of SDGs into national development plans and national plans should also be adequately resourced.
- Countries should prioritise the data revolution at the national and sub-national levels and promote open access to data.
- Early implementation efforts should focus on the SDGs with the strongest catalytic effects.
- The SDG agenda should be viewed as a social contract between governments and their citizens. Countries could consider compiling context-sensitive position papers that illustrate how an integrated approach to SDG implementation would 'leave no one behind' at national level.

This briefing note summaries the main outcomes and findings from an event held in Nairobi (April 2016), as part of the series 'Starting Strong: the first 1000 days of the SDGs'. The aim of the event was to gather participants from across sub-Saharan Africa – representing government, civil society, academia and the private sector – to identify key actions toward addressing the unfinished business of the MDGs and how to reach those who are furthest behind in relation to the new SDGs. The series is a collaborative partnership to initiate a wider conversation around priority actions for the first three years of the SDGs – just over 1000 days – with relevant stakeholders with a regional focus.

Image: People on the beach in Mogadishu, Somalia. © Stuart Price for UN Photo.

Introduction

This briefing note is a summary of the main outcomes of the African regional dialogue on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with an emphasis on early action for the first 1000 days, held in Nairobi, Kenya, 12-13 April 2016. A group of more than 80 actors from across Africa (including representatives from government, civil society, academia, think tanks and the private sector) pooled substantive evidence on integrated approaches to SDG implementation, and reflected on ideas and actions that take into account the political, socioeconomic and environmental dimensions of the goals.

Focusing on the first 1000 days of SDG implementation emphasises the important role of early actions that could have a significant influence beyond the first three years. This briefing note highlights five critical next steps for consideration in the first 1000 days of the SDG agenda in Africa both regionally and nationally. It will be presented at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York in July 2016 to inform the higher-level discussions on achieving the SDGs.

Next steps: early actions to achieve the SDGs

1. SDG implementation plans should leverage existing regional spaces for political will, accountability and solidarity. In particular, they should be aligned with the African Union's first ten-year implementation plan for Agenda 2063. Countries should, through a regional action plan, agree on concrete ideas on what to do to fast-track early implementation of the SDGs.

Africa's 2063 political agenda responds to the continent's specific aspirations and development challenges, and has traction at both the African Union and national level. The African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Conference held in April 2016 agreed to merge Agenda 2063's first ten-year implementation plan with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the new mechanism and means of implementation for SDGs in Africa. The long timeframe of Agenda 2063 raises questions of 'accountability to who by whom in 2063', but, as argued by Bitange Ndemo, an associate professor at the University of Nairobi, the two agendas converge on multiple points. They both respond to issues of people-centred social development, inclusivity of societies, economic development, peace and environmental sustainability.

The keynote speaker from the advisory team of the 2030 Agenda, Dr Edward Sambili, and the Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Devolution and Planning, Honourable Mwangi Kiunjuri, proposed that the dialogue should result in a regional action plan that takes into account Agenda 2063. Specifically, Hon. Kiunjuri noted, 'One outcome of this dialogue could be to follow up on this proposal through a regionally shared action plan,' while Dr Sambili argued for specific 'concrete ideas on what we can go out and do to fast-track achievement of the SDGs'.

2. The SDGs should be embedded in national frameworks and institutions that will outlast political administrations. The integration of SDGs into national development plans and national plans should also be adequately resourced.

Participants discussed the institutional framework that might be most successful for early actions. Many agreed that a committee on SDG implementation in parliament could be considered, coordinated through clerks of parliament to ensure continuity of the SDG agenda beyond ministers' and parliamentarians' often short terms of service. It was also proposed that an inter-ministerial committee, convened by the office of the president (such as in Kenya and Liberia) or coordinated through planning ministries (as in Ghana) could be established to ensure the integration of SDGs into the national planning processes. The integration of SDGs into national development plans and national plans should also be adequately resourced. Although African countries increasingly need to rely on their own domestic resources to finance the SDGs, participants argued that developed nations must recommit to assisting developing countries through official development assistance (ODA). There is a need to put a greater focus on innovative financing instruments that can help to deliver assistance more effectively, raise more financial resources and leverage more public-private partnerships.

Drawing from the discussion 'Political Perspectives, Financing and Institutions, and Accountability', there was a consensus that beyond the regional political agenda, there was a need to domesticate SDGs through national plans. National-level plans for implementing the SDGs will need to take into account systemic issues and policy coherence (vertically and horizontally) alongside other domestic policies and regional and global policies more widely. At the national level, participants specifically recommended the establishment of administrative structures for SDG implementation from the grassroots levels, including among disadvantaged social groups where SDG literacy is a priority, right up to the government levels where policy on how to include those left behind is debated. This is significant as it takes into account various national contexts, capacities and different levels of local development.

3. Prioritise the data revolution at the national and subnational levels and promote open access to data.

There were contending views on data, with participants arguing that although data was available within 'government repositories' it was not publicly accessible (improvements needed in South Africa). Others, argued that there was 'poor data culture' in Africa, and more was needed to inculcate a sense of data production, dissemination and use across all sectors of development (improvements needed in Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Liberia). Participants argued that it was imperative that baseline data for all the prioritised SDGs are collected at

the national level to facilitate monitoring and tracking development progress.

There was also a sense of urgency about promoting open access to national data to create multiple avenues for its interpretation. Data production, dissemination and use would need to be championed by various actors, including NGOs, local authorities, traditional leaders, academia and communities. But, there is also progress already happening on data quality, analytics and uptake, with countries such as Kenya, through its Deputy President's office, taking a lead alongside other African governments to champion the data revolution through multi-stakeholder initiatives, such as the National Partnership on Sustainable Development Data. Participants recommended that these different actors in the 'data revolution' can also strengthen accountability, track development progress, close existing data gaps to prevent discrimination and promote 'data culture' in both small and big data analytics at community and policy levels. This suggests that existing and new sources of data, including monitoring and evaluation systems, non-traditional data sources and new data analysis tools such as the iSDG (Millennium Institute)[1] or the SDG scorecard (Overseas Development Institute),[2] can be used by statistical or monitoring and evaluation departments to increase support for statistical systems that track and measure development progress.

4. Early implementation efforts should focus on the SDGs with the strongest catalytic effects.

The SDGs are highly interconnected, integrated and interdependent. Recognising this, participants highlighted the need for governments to recognise and prioritise those goals that have catalytic effects on others – building coalitions of support around goals to research and reflect on their trade-offs and synergies. Despite consensus on the need to cluster SDG implementation teams and integrate goals with the strongest links, the dialogue also cautioned that clustering implementation should not be a national-level task alone. It should be rooted at the grassroots levels to account for indigenous activities of transformation led by communities. For instance, 'If those working in community gardens [agriculture] can work with village health workers [health service], women's groups [gender] in the community, we could promote the integration of SDGs' (participant in one of the breakout groups). Community-level structures that cluster teams, integrate goals and have catalytic effects on other goals already exist through rural district councils in several African countries, including Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and South Africa.

5. The SDG agenda should be viewed as a social contract between governments and their citizens. It should prioritise inclusivity, equality and justice across socioeconomic dimensions of wellbeing of all people.

Participants recommended countries consider compilation of context-sensitive position papers that illustrate how an integrated approach to SDG implementation would 'leave no one behind' at national level. Among other key social groups, participants argued that consideration should be made for all deprived social groups living in extreme poverty across Africa, including women, children, expecting mothers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer communities, and people living with HIV. To do this, participants argued that SDGs need to be viewed as a new social contract that encompasses a broader view of human well-being founded on moral obligations for justice, inclusivity and equality between governments and citizens.

1   www.millennium-institute.org/integrated_planning/tools/SDG/index.html
2   www.odi.org

southernvoice.org　　　　**developmentprogress.org**　　　　**kippra.or.ke**