

Operationalizing Agenda 2030: Integrating Global Goals within National Development Planning

OPPORTUNITY

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should make it easier for countries to measure and track their development progress. Unfortunately, it is easier said than done for countries to integrate global goals within national planning processes. To move from rhetoric to action in realizing Agenda 2030, countries need better tools and guidance for how to effectively 'localize' the SDGs within their national development strategies and report on progress with minimal cost and effort. AidData proposes to document existing efforts to align national planning with the SDGs, identify lessons learned, and develop tools for countries to more efficiently link the SDGs with their existing planning and reporting processes. By lowering the barriers to entry for countries to operationalize Agenda 2030 on their own terms, this research will not only help national actors to better measure progress against global goals, but also enable development partners to support national priorities in line with the SDGs.

BACKGROUND

The SDGs have the potential to materially impact decision making at international, national, and local levels—from prioritizing where and how to channel resources, to setting development targets and measuring downstream results. Yet, the extent to which global goals translate into local action depends on the extent to which the SDGs are seamlessly integrated within national-level planning, budgeting, and reporting processes.

In the absence of a standardized approach, countries expend significant effort to develop ad hoc solutions which are not readily comparable across countries and do not integrate lessons from their peers. As a case in point: 23 out of 64 countries who submitted voluntary national reviews to the High-Level Political Forum between 2016 and 2017 reported undertaking (or are actively contemplating) isolated exercises to link the SDGs to their national planning. Examples of such SDG localization initiatives include: [Mexico](#), [Colombia](#), [Nepal](#), and [Rwanda](#).

As countries increasingly seek to align national planning and budgeting with the global goals, the question remains: how can this process become more efficient, rigorous, and replicable? Helping decision makers learn from each other by promoting common, practical methods will provide a more standardized and lower-cost entry point for linking the vast global indicator framework of the SDGs to a country's specific local needs.

APPROACH

AidData proposes to document current efforts to align national planning with the SDGs, identify best practices,

and develop practical tools to help countries more efficiently align domestic planning, budget, and monitoring frameworks with the SDGs. Specifically, this project will answer critical questions such as:

- To what extent are decision-makers bought into the idea of integrating the SDGs into their local planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes? What would they be trying to achieve by 'localizing' the SDGs?
- What constraints hinder decision-makers in operationalizing (or 'localizing') the SDGs within their planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes at the national and local level?
- How are countries working around these constraints to reduce the barriers to entry to effectively integrate the SDGs within their domestic priorities, plans, and processes? Which examples or models have the most potential to bring to scale in other countries?

The end objective of this research is three-fold: (i) to increase the ability of countries to more effectively (and efficiently) operationalize the SDGs within their domestic planning processes; (ii) to facilitate common understanding between governments and their development partners about the linkages between national priorities and global goals; and (iii) to spur development progress through more efficient data collection that supports planning, budgeting, and monitoring to ensure countries' remain on track with national and international targets.

To this end, we propose an 18-month project which will be executed in four phases: (i) mapping the status quo (months 1-6); (ii) understanding the exemplars (months 7-10); (iii) translating lessons learned into actionable recommendations (months 11-16); and (iv) dissemination and socialization of best practices (months 17-18).

PHASE ONE

Mapping the Status Quo (6 Months)

AidData will first use a combination of desk research and a targeted online survey of policymakers in 140 low- and middle-income countries to capture the status quo of whether and how countries integrate the SDGs within their national planning processes. First, we will design and field a short 12-15 question survey of policymakers in up to 140 low- and middle-income countries to elicit their perspectives in several areas, such as: (i) whether their country is implementing efforts to localize the SDGs—and why or why not; (ii) to what extent these initiatives are effective in supporting their country's attainment of national priorities and global goals; and (iii) what they see as the enablers and/or binding constraints that make these

initiatives successful or not. This survey will target government agencies identified as typically responsible for integrating the SDGs within national systems, such as national statistics offices and planning departments. Second, using the survey results and additional desk research, we will more thoroughly analyze current initiatives and common approaches to link the SDGs within national budget and planning processes.

PHASE TWO

Understanding the Exemplars (4 Months)

Using the results from phase one, AidData will select 3-5 countries which appear (at least at a distance) to be promising examples of successful integration of the SDGs within domestic planning processes. In phase two, we will interview stakeholders both inside and outside of government within these countries to understand the motivation and processes for linking the SDGs to national planning processes, including methodology, implementation, cost, and sustainability. In each country case, we will use the key informant interviews to pinpoint: (i) which agencies and individuals were responsible for initiating specific SDG localization initiatives; (ii) what factors enabled (or constrained) these agencies and individuals to gain traction for SDG localization; (iii) what resources were required to implement SDG localization in practice; and (iv) how local stakeholders would evaluate the results and downstream effects of these efforts.

PHASE THREE

Translating Lessons Learned into Actionable Recommendations (6 Months)

Drawing upon the insights from the global survey and country case studies, in phase three, AidData will translate these lessons learned into actionable recommendations for how countries can more effectively align their national planning processes with the SDGs. Specifically, we envision producing two end outputs that will be valuable to countries seeking to localize the SDGs on their own terms, as well as to the development partners who want to support them to this end: (i) a report distilling the global survey results and insights from the country case studies; and (ii) a toolkit outlining strategies, approaches, and practices for localization that have the most potential for scale.

The report will document the range of ways that countries have attempted to link the SDGs to national planning, identify primary motivations for localizing the SDGs,

address common challenges governments face, and document how they have addressed these challenges. The toolkit will include recommendations and best practices for standardizing processes, guidance on required resources and financing for implementing different SDG alignment initiatives, and resources for capacity building.

PHASE FOUR

Dissemination and Socialization of Best Practices (2 Months)

Following the publication of the report and toolkit, AidData will host a stakeholder workshop, bringing together international and national actors who are interested in promoting greater integration of the SDGs within government decision making. This event will be supplemented by digital promotion of the report findings and roadmap via AidData's corporate communications channels (e.g., social media, website, blog, media outreach) and presentation of findings at one or more international conferences and events.

About AidData

[AidData](#) is a research lab based at the College of William & Mary that helps governments and international organizations make better-informed decisions at multiple stages of their programming cycles—from design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation—with next-generation data, methods, tools, and analysis. AidData has managed more than 60 research and evaluation grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements worth more than \$40 million over the last 13 years. Since its inception, AidData has worked with more than 40 bilateral, multilateral, and foundation partners. Its global reach has also expanded through in-country partnerships with more than 90 civil society organizations, line ministries, think tanks and universities in over 30 different countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. AidData is a market leader in fielding large-n surveys of policymakers in low- and middle-income countries in a consistent and comparable manner, designing and executing complex field research on data for evidence-informed policymaking, as well as tracking financing for the SDGs.

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