

2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Improving the G20's coordination on the delivery and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda

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Abstract

In 2018 the G20 has the opportunity to streamline its commitment to the 2030 Agenda into its processes and practices with concrete actions. First, the G20 should task the Development Working Group with creating a common template to report on the SDGs that could replace other reporting formats within the G20. Here, the G20 has an opportunity to innovate in ways that ensure that all G20 actions refer to the 2030 Agenda as an overarching framework and thus more stringently support the general follow-up and review of the SDGs by the G20. Second, the Developing Working Group should promote collective reporting of the G20 countries and, third, it should encourage evaluation of policies and learning among countries.

Challenge

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the most ambitious development plan developed to date. While implementing it can be truly transformative for the world, countries can lose focus given the breadth of topics that the Agenda touches upon in its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda also holds overarching principles such as universality and leaving no one behind. The G20 has committed to the 2030 Agenda at the summits in 2016 and 2017. To fulfil this commitment, the G20 must go beyond the sectorial choices of particular SDG policies and focus on: i) promoting the notion of global development, meaning that both national and global policies are required, ii) incorporating the principle of 'leaving no one behind' and iii) keeping coherence between the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. Therefore, to honor its commitment to the 2030 Agenda, the G20 must encourage a sound implementation of the Agenda among its members. The lead for this process in terms of encouraging and reporting is with the Development Working Group (DWG). In doing so, the DWG should ensure close coordination with other work streams in order to honor the principle of universality of the Agenda and in order to achieve coherence between G20 action and the 2030 Agenda. It is particularly important that the financing of the 2030 Agenda, as well as the coherence of financial market regulation discussed at the G20 with the Agenda, become central themes for the G20. This policy brief builds on previous work of the T20 in 2017 on how the G20 could promote implementation of the 2030 Agenda at national and global levels, and how the G20 could achieve policy coherence for sustainable development (1) (2).



Proposal

1. Create and adopt a common template for reporting on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

In 2014, the G20 adopted the Accountability Framework to report on G20's development commitments. The framework includes the preparation of an Annual Progress Report. At the same time, the Hamburg Action plan states the G20's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and support to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) "through expedited, high quality and regular Voluntary National Reviews (VNR)"(3). The G20 can create a template that countries can use to report on the progress made towards implementation and achievement of the SDGs and that can feed into the Annual Progress Report. This would help the G20 streamline its processes, realign its strategy in light of the 2030 Agenda, and increase coherence through its areas of work. To increase coherence with the follow-up and review process of the HLPF, the template should build on the guidelines for the Voluntary National Reviews.

As of 2018, 106 countries will have presented at least one VNR, including the majority of G20 members, showing that beyond the group's commitment, there is also high interest among individual members in the 2030 Agenda. These reports follow the UN guidelines and the UN DESA Handbook for VNR, which include eleven building blocks¹ for the preparation of national SDG reporting. These guidelines are broad, and they are not consistently used across countries. As a result, key issues such as the means of implementation, or the statistical information are not present in many VNRs of 2016 and 2017 (4). Furthermore, the main messages may get lost within the various sections of the report. The lack of comparability of the VNRs reduces the accountability of the process since observers are unable to assess national or global implementation. The UN DESA Handbook highlights the practices that national governments already reported in the previous HLPF, leaving the role of innovation to member states.

The G20 can play a leading role in promoting and enhancing the accountability for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by creating a standardized tool to support high-quality comprehensive reporting across its members at the national level, and of the G20 as a group. A common template for reporting on the 2030 Agenda should be

1 The eleven building blocks proposed by UN DESA's VNR handbook are: ownership, incorporation into national frameworks, integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, leaving no one behind, institutional mechanisms, structural issues, goals and targets, means of implementation, next steps, annexes, conclusion.



designed to ultimately align the G20 annual reporting and accountability framework with the 2030 Agenda. The Development Working Group (DWG) should lead the initiative to discuss and incorporate a common template for reporting on the SDGs that links with other work streams and organizes the Accountability Framework around the 2030 Agenda.

A common template should build on the UN Guidelines to strengthen the alignment of the G20 commitments to the 2030 Agenda and the HLPF. It should guide countries to produce a strategic document providing information that allows actors to assess progress on the SDGs nationally and globally. The template should focus on the value added of the SDGs for national and international policies (5). Focusing on the value-added means not only reporting on the themes included in the goals and targets of the Agenda, but mainly on how adopting the principles of the Agenda is changing the way policies are being planned, budgeted and implemented, nationally and internationally.

Main components of a common template

The common template created by the G20 must build on the guidelines already in place by the UN and provide innovation to the review process. The main components that the G20 can adopt in its common reporting on the SDGs are:

A comprehensive follow-up of a critical set of SDGs and targets

The building block of “Goals and targets” has been interpreted differently by governments that have chosen to report, many times on just a selection of SDGs. The G20 does not cover all SDGs in its work with the same emphasis. For G20 reporting, the DWG can have a specific focus on common targets to report on that relate to G20 priorities, mirroring the selectivity of the G20 in choosing the policy fields where it wants to cooperate. Comprehensive reporting will be done in the single VNRs of G20 members. The template should require reporting on how the G20 respect the intersections between the social, economic and environmental dimensions and between goals and targets, as repeatedly stated by UN agencies at the HLPF. The template could thus suggest including information about how the different targets relate to each other, and the extent to which achieving one goal can support or hinder reaching another one. The template should refer to indicators that show how intersections are being taken account of and indicators that can be disaggregated and show progress within different sectors of society and fulfill the principle of ‘leave no one behind’.

With regard to national VNRs, the DWG should emphasize that G20 members report on all 17 SDGs and their targets, include specific information on interconnections between goals and targets, and on how the principle of ‘leave no one behind’ is applied in implementation.



Finally, this section should include a quantification of progress to date in making use of the SDG indicator framework and national complementary indicators, analyzing existing gaps and specific challenges with data.

Complementing National Frameworks with SDG Budgeting

One of the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals – the previous UN development agenda which expired in 2015 – was the lack of monitoring of public spending related to the achievement of the goals (6). This lack of transparency made it difficult to hold governments accountable and to establish clear connections between public spending and outcomes. Since the adoption of the SDGs, an encouraging number of governments has already announced that they will integrate the SDGs into their national budgets.² Mexico, for example, made progress to align its budget with the SDGs, identifying specific budget items that contribute to the SDGs and using a results-based management approach (7). Other countries have mentioned the link between the budget and SDGs, including Argentina.

One of the building blocks of the VNR is the “Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in national frameworks.” To narrow down and specify this building block, the template can focus on how countries are adapting their budgets to respond to the SDGs. This information should show SDG-allocations both in terms of actual budget disbursements and commitments. It is important that the budget information is related to the other building blocks of ‘institutional mechanisms’ and ‘means of implementation’ already in the guidelines.

A section on global public goods and spillovers beyond national borders

By being universal, the 2030 Agenda acknowledges that what happens in the rest of the world may matter more than what each country can do within its borders (8). As the SDGs are to be achieved globally and implemented nationally, the common template should encourage countries to assess their contribution to global public goods and on their impacts beyond their borders. Some examples of key global public goods include combating climate change, protecting forests and oceans and maintaining bio-diversity. A focus on the spillover effects would consider effects from trade such as imported CO2 emissions, imported deforestation or the effects of migration on improvement of human development. If these issues are taken into account, there would be better policies to support the achievement of the SDGs at the global scale. These cross-country challenges could also inform and lead new G20 flagship initiatives.

² Between 2016 and 2017, fourteen governments have announced they already do – or will in a near future – use the SDGs and their set of indicators in their budgetary processes: Norway, Denmark, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Indonesia, Mexico, Colombia, Afghanistan, Costa Rica, Thailand, Nepal, Jordan, Uganda, Belize. It is worth noting here that the options chosen to integrate the SDGs are very different: while in Norway every Ministry must attach to its budget proposal a progress report on the SDGs it is responsible for, the government of Belize plans to measure the impact of its budget on the SDGs.



2. Foster collaboration to collectively report at the HLPF 2019

To emphasize their commitment to sustainable development, G20 countries should elaborate a synthetic report on G20 collective action and national action with a view to the 2030 Agenda for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2019. As stated above, such a report could focus on the policy field covered by the G20 as a group and expose how they contribute to achieving the SDGs, how they consider the interconnections between goals, targets and dimensions, and how they ensure that no one is left behind. By submitting a synthetic report, the G20 could restate its objective to lead by example. In 2019, the HLPF will gather at the level of heads of state and heads of government. The meeting will take stock of implementation efforts so far, and it will discuss proposals for making the HLPF more effective.

The lead for this synthetic report should be with the DWG and be based on input by all relevant work streams of the G20, based on the common template for reporting. The DWG already has the mandate to compile a Comprehensive Accountability Report every three years, supplemented by Annual Progress Reports. The G20 heads of state and government discuss the comprehensive reports, while the Sherpas discuss the annual reports.

Already in 2017, the Annual Progress Report published by the DWG tracked advancements on all active G20 development commitments and analyzed a few 2030 Agenda-related commitments outside the DWG's remit. The DWG agreed that in future, the Annual Progress Report would have to include a review of the entire list of collective actions and commitments contained in the Hamburg Update of the Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda. This should also apply to the next Comprehensive Accountability Report that is due for 2019.

In 2017, the G20 agreed on several commitments that are significant for implementing the 2030 Agenda and these commitments were attained outside the DWG (9). They include “fostering the implementation of labour, social and environmental standards and human rights” in global supply chains, “national action plans on business and human rights”, eliminating “child labour by 2025, forced labour, human trafficking and all forms of modern slavery”, and safeguards against health crises and investment into health systems. Further, the G20 committed to improved food security through increased agricultural productivity and that such productivity not undermine sustainable management and protection of water and water-related ecosystems. In addition, a Marine Litter Action Plan was agreed to, as well as a commitment for a rules-based global trading system. There was also a statement of all G20 leaders but the United States on the irreversibility of the Paris Agreement on climate change and on its swift and full implementation.



The DWG should start to prepare this report already in 2018 in order to ensure that it contains analyses and findings that help to understand progress, gaps and challenges in G20 collective and national action towards sustainable development, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

National reports of G20 countries on 2030 Agenda implementation, based on the common template as elaborated above, should feed into the Comprehensive Accountability Report, together with relevant reporting initiatives at the OECD. Altogether, such reporting would encourage the adjustment of policies in all these areas so that they effectively contribute to Agenda 2030 implementation.

3. Foster learning and evaluation for more effective policies

Currently, the Comprehensive Accountability Reports and Annual Progress Reviews are a rather formal exercise that at best can contribute to raising awareness and increasing transparency. However, realizing the transformative change required to implement the 2030 Agenda demands more substantial evaluation and learning processes. The G20 should use these Reports and others elaborated in other work streams continuously across Presidencies for this purpose (10). In order to analyze whether its advances in implementation are sufficient, the G20 can take into account different resources already available to benchmark and assess performance such as the Human Development Index, the Social Progress Index, the Multidimensional Poverty Index and the SDG Index.

Two commitments contained in the Hamburg Update of the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda offer potential in this context (9): First, the G20 agreed to voluntary peer learning exercises regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including countries beyond the G20. In 2017 and 2018, two sets of countries engaged in voluntary peer learning: Germany, Mexico and the Netherlands, and China, Mexico and Norway. Second, the G20 committed to “having a regular knowledge exchange with G20 engagement groups hosted by the G20 presidency, focusing on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the promotion of multi-stakeholder approaches” (11). Following the Hamburg Update, the G20 DWG is expected to promote the active participation of the engagement groups and facilitate “a structured, continuous and timely dialogue and knowledge exchange with all engagement groups” (11).

Both dialogues organized by the DWG – with peer governments and with the engagement groups – could use the findings of the reports as a reference. In addition, there could be specific thematic dialogues at the level of the Sherpas who are able to promote policy coordination and coherence across relevant G20 work streams. A third modality could be detailed peer reviews on selected topics, following the



example of the voluntary peer review on rationalizing and phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies which the G20 established in 2013. Engagement groups should be included in these peer reviews and ensuing policy learning dialogues, too (10). The G20 could also invite engagement groups to comment on the G20's accountability and annual progress reports and thus increase learning opportunities.

Progress reports and accountability reports as well as voluntary national reports, however, cannot substitute for the systematic learning that is enabled by evaluation. In 2017, the T20 Task Force on the 2030 Agenda proposed that the G20 calls on its members to ensure the evaluation of all SDG-related policies and major programs when designing and formulating national interventions. This would allow the sharing of lessons learned among countries and across sectors, and seed the global development community with fresh findings and knowledge. Positive experiences with implementing the SDGs could be shared among G20 members, especially with a view to monitoring and evaluation.

The Task Force also suggested that the DWG work on a review system for the collective implementation of the 2030 Agenda by the G20, which could help to increase coordination between the DWG and other G20 work streams.

The review system could help to identifying specific successful policies, programs or projects at the national level that are innovative, sustainable, and replicable. These policies, programs, and projects could be documented and shared as SDG Solutions within a digital DWG knowledge platform. Further, it could be useful to create a toolkit referencing successful initiatives and tools that facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda within G20 countries.

These suggestions remain valid. Evaluation is a crucial instrument for policy learning through knowing which measures taken helped to make progress under specific (clusters of) goals and targets and why they failed or stagnated on others. Systematic exchange on evaluation results among G20 countries, on specific SDG clusters and their targets would connect reporting with increased understanding why changes occur, and what to learn from different experiences and scale. This would increase the effectiveness of implementation and the possibility of scaling up, if these results are actually used, discussed and fed back into decision-making processes.

For the DWG, it may be especially relevant to find ways for including progress made in the implementation of the Africa Compact into evaluation and policy learning.

Future key actions of the DWG for the promotion of evaluation and policy learning include:

- Identify G20 countries that engage in context-specific evaluations of public



policies that are relevant to SDG achievement and invite them to share their experience with methods, processes and results within the G20,

- Establish additional country groupings for voluntary peer learning across the DWG members and invite other developing countries to them, and engagement groups,
- Evaluate the experiences made with the peer learning process and improve it, e.g. by establishing clear objectives and identifying best practices.

We suggest three options for flagship initiatives the G20 could launch in the coming years to promote implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to foster systematic policy learning:

- Establish national quantified goals and indicators that can be used to inform budget expenditures and national long-term trajectories of change towards sustainable development
- Measure spillover effects and agree on priorities for collective action,
- Focus joint learning on experiences with investment in infrastructure in order to avoid and prevent unsustainable investment



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