Inclusive coordination to realize the 2030 Agenda

The integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development challenges governments to ensure effective and inclusive coordination of implementation efforts at national and sub-national levels. Inclusive coordination mechanisms include participation by a range of stakeholder groups such as parliamentarians, national and sub-national government institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and others. Based on a review of good practices emerging from around the world, this policy brief offers recommendations on how governments can establish inclusive coordination mechanisms to ensure integrated and whole-of-society approaches to implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Key messages

- The inclusion of non-state actors in formal governance mechanisms is an emerging standard practice that supports inclusive and participatory coordination of 2030 Agenda implementation. Nevertheless, participation by local governments in coordination mechanisms remains limited.

- Governments should identify roles and responsibilities for 2030 Agenda implementation based on a mapping of priorities, institutions and policies. This information should be made publicly available to ensure clear lines of accountability.

- Making use of existing and new coordination mechanisms, governments should establish mechanisms that support political leadership and coordination between senior officials as well as coordination between government institutions and at local levels to ensure ownership and coherence among actors responsible for implementation at national and sub-national levels.

Produced in collaboration with:

Introduction

In 2015, world leaders adopted the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda, which introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sets out a transformative plan for people and planet. It aims to promote shared prosperity, environmental sustainability and progress on sustainable development that leaves no one behind. Realizing the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda requires a whole-of-society approach. Governments, citizens, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector all have roles to play in contributing to sustainable development outcomes.

Nearly four years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, many countries have put in place building blocks for its implementation as shown by reviews of government reporting to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Many countries have integrated the SDGs into policy frameworks. Institutional and governance mechanisms have been established to oversee and evaluate progress on implementation. Partnerships across sectors are forming, while systems for monitoring and evaluation are being put in place. However, progress has been mixed across countries, particularly in terms of the extent to which countries have localized implementation of the 2030 Agenda, integrated its transformative elements into policies and practices, and developed enabling environments that promote whole-of-society contributions to sustainable development.

Effective 2030 Agenda implementation requires the establishment of institutional mechanisms to ensure coordinated and integrated approaches. This includes identifying high-level leadership for 2030 Agenda implementation, articulating roles and responsibilities for government institutions and others, and establishing systems to ensure coordination, collaboration and coherence between and across different levels of government and with non-state actors. Although mandates can vary, coordination mechanisms tend to provide strategic guidance and oversight, coordinate activities directly related to 2030 Agenda implementation, and play a role in monitoring, evaluation and reporting. As noted in the policy brief on multi-stakeholder partnerships in this series, inclusive coordination

mechanisms can help support a whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation by providing space for cooperation and collaboration across sectors. Siloed approaches to sustainable development undermine the integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda and opportunities to maximize positive synergies and policy coherence.

Complementing the policy brief on policy integration and coherence in this series, this policy brief outlines emerging standard and good practices with respect to national[1] coordination mechanisms to implement the 2030 Agenda.[2] It is based on a review of countries reporting to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development over the 2016–18 period through Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports, which collectively serve as a key element of international follow-up and review of 2030 Agenda implementation. Supplementary information was also obtained from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs which produced reviews of institutional arrangements for 2030 Agenda implementation for countries reporting over 2016–17 and in 2018.[3] Also, interviews were conducted with 12 civil society organizations and one municipal association from 13 countries[4] to complement and validate information presented in VNR reports. The brief provides an overview of emerging practices along with recommendations on how governments can improve their efforts. An annex with detailed information on the specific good practices highlighted in this brief serves as a useful resource for governments and other stakeholders that are keen to adopt and promote good practices for 2030 Agenda implementation.

What is a good practice?

TRANSFORMATIVE ELEMENTS OF THE 2030 AGENDA

A good practice is an activity or approach that demonstrates incorporation of one or more of the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda. The agenda is human rights-based and focuses on the inclusion of, and change for, the poorest and most vulnerable by promoting their inherent dignity and human rights through efforts to leave no one behind. Efforts are informed by inclusivity, solidarity and participation. The 2030 Agenda is universal in that it applies to all countries and people. The economic, social and environmental pillars of the 2030 Agenda are of equal importance, with the

---

1   An analysis of regional and global coordination mechanisms, though important, is outside the scope of this policy brief. For more information on regional coordination, see the United Nations' Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: The Role of the Regional Commissions. Examples of global coordination mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda are too numerous to list. The United Nations' dedicated website on the 2030 Agenda provides links to many examples.

2   This policy brief complements BCCIC's policy brief on institutional structures for 2030 Agenda implementation. While BCCIC's brief focuses on examples of institutional models, this brief focuses on good practices in relation to coordination.

3   The compendiums examine national strategies, institutional arrangements, local governments, legislatures, engaging and equipping public servants, civil society and the private sector, monitoring and review, engaging supreme audit institutions, and budgeting.

4   Interviews were carried out with organizations from the following countries: Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Finland, Guatemala, Hungary, Jordan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Paraguay, Uganda and Zimbabwe. This brief also includes a number of good practices based on VNR reports for other countries, but it should be noted that information for these countries could not be validated beyond additional Web-based searches.

SDGs being integrated and indivisible—achievements under any one goal are linked to progress on others. Implementation of the agenda should occur with respect for planetary boundaries and inter-generational responsibility, recognizing the need to protect the planet's resources now and for future generations. Importantly, good practices respect the aspirational nature of the 2030 Agenda, demonstrably moving beyond standard practices or business-as-usual approaches. Finally, the 2030 Agenda is grounded in commitments to transparency and accountability.

HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

INTEGRATED AND INDIVISIBLE

INCLUSIVITY AND PARTICIPATION

PROGRESS WITHIN PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

INTERGENERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

ASPIRATIONAL

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The United Nations Development Programme identified good practices to establish coordination mechanisms in its 2017 guidance note. These good practices align with those identified in successive civil society reviews of VNR reports and information collected from interviewees.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
Good practice is providing clarity on institutional mechanisms, roles and responsibilities for 2030 Agenda implementation. It includes mapping existing policies, plans and programs against the 2030 Agenda to inform these efforts. This process should identify gaps, interlinkages, and roles and responsibilities for implementation across government institutions.

INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY
Good practice is ensuring that coordination mechanisms are multi-stakeholder in nature and inclusive in order to support a whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation. In its review, the United Nations Development Programme found that participatory coordination mechanisms tend to promote greater ownership over efforts to realize sustainable development, which supports implementation. In this context, inclusion of historically marginalized groups is important to establishing approaches to implementation that are guided by efforts to leave no one behind. Since inclusiveness is a fundamental criterion of good practice, only inclusive and participatory coordination mechanisms are highlighted in this brief.

COORDINATION AT DIFFERENT LEVELS
There is a need for coordination mechanisms at different levels. Good practice is ensuring that inclusive coordination mechanisms exist at the highest levels of government as well as among government institutions and between different levels of government to enable both vertical and horizontal coordination. Inclusion of local levels of government is particularly important given the crucial role that they play in advancing sustainable development. While country contexts vary, local governments are often responsible for implementation on the ground. According to the United Nations Development Programme, vertical coordination entails top-down leadership and steering, complemented by bottom-up engagement, ownership and action.

Standard practices
VNR reports show that most countries have developed institutional arrangements for 2030 Agenda implementation, either making use of existing councils or committees related to sustainable development or establishing new ones. The 2019 report Progressing National SDGs Implementation shows a significant rise in the inclusion of non-state actors in governance arrangements for 2030 Agenda implementation. Over 2017–18, 23 of 88 countries reported including civil society and the private sector in lead councils or committees for 2030 Agenda implementation.[5] The overall increase in inclusion of non-state actors in high-level coordination mechanisms is welcome, though governments reporting in 2018 pointed to less involvement by non-state actors in coordination mechanisms involving government institutions in comparison to

5   See the report for information on the inclusion of non-state actors such as academia, trade unions and youth.
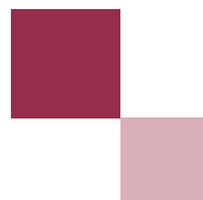
2017. Moreover, participation remains limited for a number of groups including parliamentarians and local governments. According to the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments and United Cities and Local Governments' 2018 report Towards the Localization of the SDGs, out of 99 countries that reported to the High-level Political Forum over 2016–18, only about one-third had follow-up mechanisms that include local governments.

Overall, civil society organizations have identified the increased participation of non-state actors in high-level coordination mechanisms as a potential emerging standard practice. Reporting to the High-level Political Forum in upcoming years will provide further indication as to whether governments have more broadly adopted inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches to coordination.

Good practices

Good practice is articulating a coordination framework that clearly outlines how coordination will occur at different levels and with whom. Identifying high-level leadership for 2030 Agenda implementation, such as the head of government or state, and establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms at the ministerial level are good practices. Mapping government institutions and their policies, plans and programs against the 2030 Agenda is a good practice for identifying the roles and responsibilities of government institutions to support implementation. Good practice is being transparent about mapping processes and providing information on responsible government institutions, what their responsibilities entail and how non-state actors can engage with them. At the level of government institutions, coordination mechanisms such as working groups, task forces and technical committees support day-to-day implementation activities and can ensure coordination and collaboration in implementation. Establishing a committee to ensure coordination on monitoring, evaluation and reporting is also a good practice.[6] At the same time, effective coordination requires dedicated human and financial resources. Good practice is backing coordination mechanisms at ministerial and government levels with a well-resourced secretariat to ensure effective operations. Finally, a cross-cutting good practice is ensuring representative and inclusive participation by legislature, local governments, civil society, academia, the private sector, youth, trade unions and others across different coordination mechanisms.

This policy brief does not speak to the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms per se, though does point to relevant research where possible to identify good practices. Soliciting interviewees within the time frame of the series for all identified countries was challenging. In addition, many countries that were identified as potentially having adopted good practices for coordination of 2030 Agenda implementation were removed as a result of interviews. For this reason, the good practices mentioned should be understood as examples with respect to the structure of coordination mechanisms. Unless otherwise stated, the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms in practice could not be assessed.

⚷ ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The identification of roles and responsibilities in the context of 2030 Agenda implementation is a first step in the coordination process. According to their VNR reports, **Albania**, **Hungary**, **Indonesia**, **Ireland**, **Latvia**, the **Maldives**, **Spain**, **Sri Lanka**, the **State of Palestine** and the **United Arab Emirates** identified responsible government institutions, though only Ireland, Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates provided significant details on their approaches. **Ireland** carried out a mapping of policies and government institutions related to 2030 Agenda implementation, which the government made publicly available. The country's implementation plan includes a matrix of lead and stakeholder departments. These government institutions are assigned responsibilities for specific SDG indicators. The implementation plan also includes a SDG policy map that maps government policies, institutions and key priorities against the SDGs.

In **Sri Lanka**, the lead institution responsible for 2030 Agenda implementation, the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Wildlife and Regional Development, is identifying roles and responsibilities for government institutions in 2030 Agenda implementation. It is focusing on linkages, overlaps and gaps. Institutions identified focal points and the 2030 Agenda is being mainstreamed into institutional plans. The **United Arab Emirates** has integrated sustainable development into national key performance indicators. Government institutions are responsible for reporting on specific indicators at national and sub-national levels. The country's 2018 VNR report also includes references to lead government institutions in goal-by-goal reporting.

---

6   The policy brief on monitoring and evaluation in this series provides an overview of good practices in relation to coordination of monitoring and evaluation efforts.

HIGH-LEVEL COORDINATION

The establishment of multi-stakeholder governance models for 2030 Agenda implementation is an emerging standard practice. The annex of this policy brief provides details on mechanisms for **Albania**, **Benin**, **Brazil**, **El Salvador**, **Finland**, **Honduras**, **Jordan**, **Lebanon**, **Mali**, **Mexico**, **Slovakia** and **Thailand**. These countries have inclusive coordination mechanisms at the highest levels of government. Among these countries, **Benin**, **Finland**, **Mali** and **Thailand** have governance mechanisms that are particularly inclusive.

Benin's Steering Committee is headed by the minister of state for planning and development. Reporting to the president, the committee meets three times per year. It is responsible for resource mobilization and overall guidance and oversight. The committee includes representatives from government, technical and financial partners, civil society, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the National Employers' Council, the Council of Private Investors of Benin, trade unions, the National Association of Municipalities of Benin, the Women's Federations, the Associations of Disabled Persons, and the Youth Parliament. The inclusion of representatives of women's groups, youth and people with disabilities is a good practice. These stakeholders are often at risk of being left behind.

The National Committee for Sustainable Development in **Finland** has a broad multi-stakeholder membership. Led by the prime minister, it includes national and sub-national governments, the legislature, civil society, trade unions, the private sector, academia, religious organizations and several experts. Membership was extended to deputy members for each stakeholder group to increase inclusivity. The committee convenes on average twice per year and holds additional meeting and seminars. Also, an Agenda 2030 Youth Group was established in 2017 to increase participation by youth in planning and implementation.

Mali's National Steering Committee is led by the prime minister and includes representatives of different levels of government, the legislature parliament, civil society, development partners and the private sector. It is backstopped by a special SDG coordination group. Five thematic working groups were also created.

Thailand's National Committee for Sustainable Development is chaired by the prime minister. It is responsible for policy formulation on the SDGs and monitoring implementation. The committee includes 37 members, of which 16 are from government institutions, three are from academia, there are two each from civil society and the private sector, and four are independent experts on sustainable development. The sub-committees of this committee include a larger number of participants. Sub-committees focus on planning, coordination, monitoring, awareness raising and developing an information system to support sustainable development.

COORDINATION AMONG GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Honduras, **Lithuania**, **Uganda** and **Zimbabwe** have developed inclusive coordination mechanisms among government institutions to support 2030 Agenda implementation. **Honduras** developed inclusive coordination mechanisms among government institutions and a high-level. These are backed by the General Government Coordination Secretariat, which serves as the institutional focal point for 2030 Agenda implementation. The secretariat is responsible for planning, oversight, coordination and facilitation of cooperation with domestic and international partners. The High-Level Commission defines SDG strategies and includes representatives of different levels of government, civil society, the private sector and several stakeholder groups. A Technical Commission, which was established to provide thematic advice and follow up on implementation, includes a similar set of representatives as well as one from the national statistical office.

Lithuania's Ministry of Environment leads on 2030 Agenda implementation. The institution established an inter-institutional Working Group on Sustainable Development that includes government ministries and civil society organizations. The working group supports the Ministry of Environment to prepare reviews of implementation for the National Commission on Sustainable Development, which is chaired by the prime minister and includes representatives of civil society, the private sector and academia.

Uganda's National SDG Coordination Framework outlines coordination mechanisms to support 2030 Agenda implementation. The framework includes a multi-stakeholder SDG National Task Force and five technical working groups. Each led by a government institution, technical working groups include coordination, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, data, planning, communication and advocacy, and finance. Government institutions, civil society, the private sector and development partners are represented. While the establishment of the coordination framework is a good practice, the full implementation of all technical working groups has yet to occur.

Although there have been challenges in implementation, **Zimbabwe** developed an inclusive coordination structure. The Steering Committee that guides 2030 Agenda implementation includes representatives of government institutions, civil society, the private sector, parastatals, and development partners. The chairs of associated technical working groups are also included. Led by the chief secretary to the president and cabinet, the committee

provides strategic leadership. It is backed by the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare that coordinates three technical working groups—clusters—that cover specific SDGs and are led by ministries. This approach has ensured that all government ministries are actively involved in SDG implementation. While the coordinating ministry has demonstrated good practice by engaging civil society, a lesson from Zimbabwe is the importance of raising awareness of opportunities for participation presented by the clusters.

LOCAL-LEVEL COORDINATION

Good practice is including local governments in national coordination mechanisms, as shown by the examples from **Benin**, **Finland**, **Mali** and **Honduras**. Some countries have also developed local-level coordination mechanisms.

Mali, **Mexico** and **Paraguay** have developed local-level coordination mechanisms. In addition to **Mali's** National Steering Committee that includes representatives of local governments, the government plans to have institutional structures at the regional, local and community levels to monitor SDG implementation that make use of existing committees at all three levels. Similarly, 29 states and 300 municipal governments in **Mexico** established committees to implement and monitor the 2030 Agenda. Local

governments are also represented in the country's National Council for the 2030 Agenda. **Paraguay** established multi-stakeholder municipal (district) and provincial (departmental) development councils. The country's 2018 VNR report notes that 244 district councils and 17 provincial councils were established. Local development plans, which align with national development plans, were established through participatory processes. The councils provide opportunities for local residents, activists and civil society organizations to influence local development processes.

Germany and the **United Arab Emirates** have created opportunities for exchange and collaboration with local governments. **Germany** established Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies. These hubs serve as platforms for online and offline information exchange and multi-stakeholder engagement. They aim to foster innovation, the exchange of ideas and projects. Supported by the federal government, four hubs link municipal, state and federal levels. The **United Arab Emirates** holds an Annual Government Meeting to develop and review sustainable development strategies. The meeting serves as a whole-of-government platform that includes officials from national and sub-national levels.

Recommendations

This policy brief outlines emerging standard and good practices to develop inclusive, multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms to support 2030 Agenda implementation. A number of recommendations emerge.

Demonstrate political leadership through the development of a high-level, multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism to ensure effective strategic guidance and oversight of 2030 Agenda implementation.

While forms may vary, high-level coordination mechanisms are necessary to ensure integrated and coherent approaches to 2030 Agenda implementation. Ensuring such mechanisms are multi-stakeholder in nature and include representatives of communities that are at risk of being left behind supports a whole-of-society approach to implementation.

Assign responsibilities for 2030 Agenda implementation across government institutions to promote ownership, identify shared responsibilities, and ensure transparency and accountability for progress on implementation.

There is a need to work with government institutions to identify individual and shared roles and responsibilities for 2030 Agenda implementation. Making this information publicly available ensures transparency and establishes clear lines of accountability.

Establish inclusive, multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms among government institutions.

Political leadership is critical for successful 2030 Agenda implementation. However, leadership and ownership are also necessary within government institutions by the individuals who are responsible for day-to-day implementation. Inclusive coordination mechanisms among government institutions support opportunities for collaboration and coherence between and across different levels of government and with non-state actors.

Support local governments in coordination on 2030 Agenda implementation, including by involving them national coordination mechanisms and enabling them to develop inclusive local-level coordination mechanisms.

As front-line implementers of the 2030 Agenda, sub-national governments should be included in national coordination mechanisms to ensure their ownership of implementation and promote collaborative and coherent integrated approaches. In addition, national governments should support sub-national governments in ways defined by the latter to develop their own localized, inclusive and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms that can facilitate greater opportunities for local leadership by government institutions, local communities and various non-state actors in implementation.
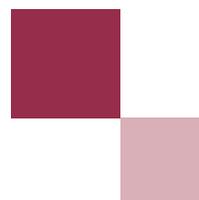
Backstop coordination mechanisms with appropriate human and financial resources.

Coordination mechanisms require dedicated and well-resourced support to be effective. There is a need to allocate appropriate human and financial resources to secretariats to enable them to organize and facilitate coordination efforts as well as carry out necessary actions.

Ensure coordination mechanisms are inclusive and participatory to leave no one behind.

While inclusion of non-state actors appears to be an emerging trend in institutional arrangements for 2030 Agenda implementation, many governments have not formalized engagement with non-state actors. The inclusion of a range of non-state actors in coordination mechanisms, including representatives of historically marginalized groups, supports a whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation and can work to ensure that efforts are guided by the needs and priorities of groups at risk of being left behind.

Be transparent about the form and function of coordination mechanisms.

Some countries have developed frameworks that outline their approach to coordination while others have used dedicated websites to present information on specific coordination mechanisms. What these approaches have in common is transparency on the roles, responsibilities, membership and activities of coordination mechanisms.