Transformative policies and policy coherence to realize the 2030 Agenda

Integration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into policies, plans and programs provides direction to government institutions and other stakeholders in the implementation process, signalling national priorities and efforts to address sustainable development gaps. Policy integration incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets and indicators, as well as guiding overall efforts with the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda such leaving no one behind, human rights-based approaches and progress within planetary boundaries. The 2030 Agenda is universal, integrated and indivisible. This calls for governments to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development within countries and in terms of the impacts of domestic policies on the realization of the agenda globally.

Key messages

- Siloed approaches to SDG implementation appear to be emerging standard practice. There is a need for governments to analyze existing policies, identify sustainable development gaps, and establish policies and plans to address gaps and ensure policy coherence.
- Policies for 2030 Agenda implementation should be guided by the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda and demonstrate commitment to progress at national and global levels. They should set out an integrated and ambitious approach to sustainable development, grounded in human rights frameworks and efforts to leave no one behind with due attention to inter-generational equity and progress within planetary boundaries.
- Governments should take steps to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development through
 policies and the establishment of systems to ensure coherence between and among government
 institutions, between and across levels of government, and in terms of the impacts of domestic
 policies on global progress.





Canada

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Introduction

In 2015, world leaders adopted the United Nations' <u>2030</u> <u>Agenda for Sustainable Development</u>. 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 civil society reviews of government reporting to the <u>United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable</u> <u>Development</u> 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.

Policies for 2030 Agenda implementation

A key element in ensuring effective implementation is integration of the 2030 Agenda, including its transformative elements, into policies, plans and programs. In this context, policy coherence is important for advancing the agenda through integrated approaches that recognize the interlinked nature of the SDGs as well as linkages between domestic actions and progress at local, national, regional and global levels. Policy coherence is not automatic and requires dedicated efforts through government leadership, policies and institutionalized mechanisms. Importantly, policy coherence is featured under SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals. <u>Target 17.14</u> commits countries to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development as measured by the number of countries with mechanisms to ensure policy coherence in place. According to the <u>International Institute for Sustainable Development</u>, policy coherence for sustainable development includes three key dimensions.

- Domestic coherence: Coherence at the domestic level in terms of national and sub-national policies that reinforce each other.
- International coherence: Coherence to ensure domestic policies have positive effects across borders.
- Temporal coherence: coherence in terms of the temporal dimensions of sustainable development with efforts that consider future generations.



This policy brief outlines emerging standard and good practices with respect to integration of the 2030 Agenda into policies and policy coherence. It is based on a review of country reporting to the High-level Political Forum over the 2016–18 period through <u>Voluntary National Review (VNR)</u> reports, which collectively serve as a key element of international follow-up and review of 2030 Agenda implementation. Also, interviews were carried out with 13 civil society organizations from 12 countries¹ 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 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

1 Interviews were carried out with civil society organizations from the following countries: Bhutan, Brazil, Colombia, Finland (two interviewees), Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Nepal, Portugal, Switzerland and Uganda. 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.

Transformative policies and policy coherence to realize the 2030 Agenda

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 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. 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.



In the context of policies for 2030 Agenda implementation, the transformative elements translate into a number of good practice areas.

P INTEGRATING THE 2030 AGENDA INTO POLICIES, PLANS AND PROGRAMS

Good practice is informing policies by gap and baseline assessments² and integrating the 2030 Agenda into overarching and sectoral policies, with provisions to ensure policy coherence. Good practice is translating policies that support the 2030 Agenda into plans, program, budgets and monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems.

P POLICIES GUIDED BY THE TRANSFORMATIVE ELEMENTS OF THE 2030 AGENDA

The transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda provide a basis for overall approaches to its implementation. Good practice is efforts that are guided by these transformative elements through policies, plans and programs.

P ENSURING POLICY COHERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Achievement of the 2030 Agenda requires domestic, international and temporal policy coherence. This means policy coherence between different levels of government, in terms of the impacts of domestic policies on global progress and consideration for the impacts of current policies on future generations. Addressing policy coherence through policies and institutional systems is good practice. Policy coherence for 2030 Agenda implementation requires various government institutions at different levels of government to work together and good practice is identifying suitable systems and mechanisms to do so.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

Policies should be developed through inclusive and participatory processes that support a whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation. In addition, a range of government institutions are implicated by the 2030 Agenda given the interlinked nature of the SDGs and have a role to play in implementation. Government institutions at national and local levels should be involved in the preparation of national policy frameworks and lead on integrating the agenda into their respective policy domains, with attention to ensuring policy coherence.

2 The policy brief on gap and baseline assessments in this series provides a detailed overview of emerging standard and good practices in this area.

Standard Practices

According to the latest civil society <u>review</u> of VNR reports, reporting on integration of the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda into policies is limited in VNR reports overall. Information is also limited on efforts to ensure policy coherence.³

VNR reports for 2016–18 suggest that carrying out policy and/ or data assessments to inform implementation is a standard practice. For 88 countries that reported to the High-level Political Forum over 2017–18, 23 reported having carried out a policy and data assessment against the SDGs. An additional 18 countries mapped their policies. The development of a national sustainable development strategy that integrates the SDGs is also a standard practice. Nearly half of the countries that reported to the High-level Political Forum in 2017 and 2018 highlighted incorporating the SDGs into national policies. How the SDGs have been translated into programs, including budgets, is less clear. Few countries have reported efforts to align their budgets with the 2030 Agenda, suggesting that incorporating the SDGs into national budgets is not yet a standard practice.

With respect to the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda, standard practice appears to be the inclusion of the SDGs—but not the other elements of the 2030 Agenda—in policies. While some countries have taken the first step towards policy coherence by assessing gaps and identifying responsible government institutions for 2030 Agenda implementation, there is little evidence of emerging standard practices on policy coherence for 2030 Agenda implementation in VNR reports overall.⁴ Finally, VNR reports suggest that countries are adopting participatory approaches to selecting national priorities that inform policies. Fifty-seven countries reported consulting with non-state actors on national priorities in 2017 and 2018.

Good Practices

While carrying out gap and baseline assessments is a standard practice in 2030 Agenda implementation, good practice is ensuring that assessments inform national priorities and integration of the 2030 Agenda into policies, plans and programs. Also, emerging good practice is ensuring integration of the 2030 Agenda in overarching sustainable development policies and sectoral policies, including in ways that support policy coherence. Establishing specific action plans that outline how implementation will occur, including in terms of ensuring policy coherence, is also a good practice.

Good practices include developing policies, plans and programs that integrate the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda. Policies should be ambitious, inclusive, participatory, and integrated, be grounded in human rights frameworks, work to leave no one behind, respect inter-generational equity, and realize progress within planetary boundaries. Efforts to ensure domestic, international and temporal policy coherence are also good practice, including the use of overarching policies and institutional approaches to break down siloed approaches to ensure integrated policies and programs. Good practices to support policy coherence include establishing a commitment to policy coherence, establishment of coordination mechanisms and other institutionalized systems, and making effective use of technology.

POLICY ASSESSMENTS

Policy gaps should inform integration of the 2030 Agenda into policies, with steps taken to address gaps and ensure policy coherence. An audit was conducted in **Brazil** to highlight the government's preparedness to implement the SDGs. A methodological approach was developed that emphasizes policy coherence and integration for SDG implementation. **Greece** completed an in-depth analysis and mapping of all relevant national policies and legal frameworks. The mapping specifically focused on identifying areas of insufficient action and where crosssectoral collaboration could be improved. In **Lebanon**, the SDG parliamentary committee has started mapping existing legislation that is related to the 2030 Agenda. In **Pakistan**, the national government established a plan to analyze and identify gaps in SDG policies at the provincial level. This plan ensures aims to ensure domestic policy coherence.

In terms of informing policies from gap assessments, **Bhutan's** <u>Vulnerability Baseline Assessment</u> set a baseline to track vulnerable groups and formulate appropriate policies to leave no one behind in 2030 Agenda implementation. The assessment translated into a number of policy areas, including gender equality, addressing the needs of persons with disabilities and targeted poverty reduction programs.

³ It is outside the scope of this policy brief to undertake a full review of country efforts to improve policy coherence beyond information available in VNR reports and interviews with civil society organizations. Nevertheless, a rich body of research and analysis exists. A key contributor in this context is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which has historically promoted policy coherence for sustainable development among its members. With a focus on international dimensions, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee <u>peer reviews</u> examine efforts by members. The OECD emphasizes strong government commitment and leadership, coherent policies, institutional mechanisms and capacities to address coherence issues, and monitoring and evaluation as critical elements for ensuing policy coherence for sustainable development are also available.

⁴ See Progressing National SDGs Implementation (Third Edition) for a detailed analysis of reporting on policy coherence in VNR reports.

POLICY FRAMEWORKS

An emerging standard practice is the integration of the SDGs into overarching national sustainable development frameworks. Good practice includes further integrating the 2030 Agenda into sectoral plans and establishing an action plan or roadmap to support implementation that focuses on how implementation will occur rather than substantive priorities.

In terms of sectoral policies, multiple government institutions in Armenia have incorporated SDG targets and indicators into relevant policies and strategies. Although lengthy, this process has allowed for better planning, monitoring and evaluation. Some of the sectors included in the process are health care, education and the environment. In Egypt, the National Committee ensures that there is coherence among sectoral strategies and plans and that environmental and social dimensions are integrated in these plans, strategies, and programs. Greece's Office of Coordination, Institutional, International and European Affairs internalizes the SDGs and ensures that all existing or new policies are aligned by working with government institutions. The legislature in Guatemala adopt a series of laws in the spirit of the SDGs in areas such as agriculture, food security, youth employment, and education, demonstrating political commitment to the 2030 Agenda. The country's national strategic plan has also harmonized with the SDGs, covering the period 2015-32.

Ireland, Kenya, Laos and Uganda have established 2030 Agenda implementation plans. Ireland's Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020 outlines how to integrate the SDGs into all policy areas and overcome inconsistencies. In addition to policy alignment, it focuses on raising public awareness, participation in implementation and support for communities to advance the SDGs. Kenya incorporated the SDGs into national plans and developed a SDGs roadmap to guide the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the SDGs in consultation with national and local governments, civil society and development partners. The country is also using performance contracts and strategic plans for government institutions to mainstream the SDGs. The roadmap includes stakeholder mapping and establishing partnerships, advocacy and sensitization, localization, mainstreaming and accelerating implementation, resource mobilization, tracking and reporting, and capacity building. Laos set out a SDG roadmap that emphasizes institutional strengthening and partnerships as well as includes parameters for reporting and accountability. In **Uganda**, a roadmap for 2030 Agenda implementation was developed.

FROM POLICIES TO PROGRAMS AND BUDGETS

Nepal's approach shows good practice by integrating the SDGs into policies and then supporting their implementation through programming and budgeting. The national budget is explicitly linked to the SDGs through an inter-ministerial system and focal points. Under three high-level committees and in Nepal's 14th national plan the country includes the SDGs and national indicators that identify priorities for spending, coded to specific SDGs assigned to all national programs.

TRANSFORMATIVE POLICIES

Good practice is including all aspects of the 2030 Agenda in policies and approaches to implementation. The 2030 Agenda is about more than the SDGs. Unfortunately, VNR reports suggest that most countries interpret policy integration of the 2030 Agenda to be integration of the SDGs. This limited view of policy integration is a missed opportunity to ensure that the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda are embedded in policy and practice. A limited number of good practice examples emerged from the review of VNR reports and interviews with civil society organizations.

Ireland's 2030 Agenda implementation plan includes a commitment that the country's overall approach will be guided by the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda and other principles. The plan refers to equity between generations, gender equity, respect for ecological integrity and biodiversity, social equity, respect for cultural heritage and diversity, and equity between countries and regions as key themes in Ireland's approach to sustainable development. Japan took steps to incorporate transformative elements into their approaches to 2030 Agenda implementation. The country used a comprehensive method of identifying guiding principles for implementation including universality, inclusiveness, participation, integration, transparency and accountability. These principles were established through a series of roundtables over three months with civil society organizations, academia, the private sector and international organizations.

AMBITIOUS

Ireland's implementation plan respects the aspirational nature of the 2030 Agenda. Recognizing that meaningful SDG implementation requires countries to translate global ambitions to the national context, Ireland's 2030 Vision, which is part of the country's implementation plan, includes ambitious high-level commitments that address the 17 SDGs. According to the country's VNR report, the government plans to review the 2030 Vision on a rolling basis to ensure that it remains ambitious as new SDG implementation plans are developed.

HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED

Countries have incorporated the human rights-based nature of the 2030 Agenda into their policies and approaches in different ways. **Australia** committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda through a human rights-based approach. It will draw on legal commitments, policies, institutions and programs to promote and protect rights at all levels of government as well as globally. This approach includes assessments of legislation against international human rights commitments, use of institutions such as the country's Human Rights Commission, and international cooperation to promote human rights at regional and global levels.

Armenia and Hungary are plan to adopt a human rights-based approach to monitoring progress on the 2030 Agenda. Armenia is collecting data for SDG indicators on a regular basis and with appropriate levels of disaggregation, through a participatory and consultative approach. Hungary's Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights plans to monitor progress on the 2030 Agenda in light of the country's existing human rights monitoring systems and will provide advice and expertise to the government on a human rights-based approach to data.

VNR reports for **Hungary** and **Portugal** made strong linkages between the 2030 Agenda and human rights frameworks. The reports presented the SDGs in light of specific international human rights frameworks. While the inclusion of such frameworks in VNR reports does not guarantee a human rights-based approach to implementation, it does provide an entry point for civil society organizations and citizens to advocate for the governments to ensure that 2030 Agenda implementation is grounded in human rights frameworks.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Ireland's <u>implementation plan</u> states that "every person is entitled to a life of dignity in which they can fulfil their full potential" and "pledges that no one will be left behind." The plan also includes a commitment to take steps to reach those furthest behind first. The inclusion of leaving no one behind as an overarching approach to 2030 Agenda implementation is good practice.

INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In addition to leaving no one behind, **Ireland's** implementation plan includes a commitment to ensuring that efforts are guided by the fundamentally linked and interdependent nature of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. To support this commitment, the government mapped out policies related to the 2030 Agenda, with attention to a range of sectoral polices that are mutually supportive of specific SDGs.

POLICY COHERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SDG target 17.14 calls for countries to improve policy coherence. Realizing greater policy coherence requires the establishment of policies and systems to ensure coherence between and across different levels of government. It also means developing approaches that address the impacts of domestic policies on sustainable development progress globally and for future generations. Countries have developed a range of approaches to ensuring policy coherence, though no example was found of a country that has adopted systems to ensure domestic, international and temporal policy coherence.

DOMESTIC POLICY COHERENCE

In terms of domestic policy coherence, examples exist of countries making use of policies, institutional mechanisms and technology to ensure policy coherence. In **Ecuador**, there is a binding resolution that requires government institutions, including the legislature, to adopt the 2030 Agenda.

In terms of institutional mechanisms, government institutions in Andorra must demonstrate how their actions are associated with at least one SDG for initiatives provided to the main government decision making body, the Council of Ministers, for approval. This approach has resulted in an assessment of the conformity of national policies with the 2030 Agenda. **Slovenia** has a permanent inter-ministerial working group that serves as a coordination mechanism to promote policy coherence and solve policy conflicts. The group includes two representatives from each ministry who are the main focal points for 2030 Agenda implementation. In **Turkey**, all ministries are expected to align their respective policies and fulfil their roles in implementing the SDGs.

Finally, **Benin** has developed an application to measure contributions by government institutions to the SDGs. The application, called MeSODD, makes it possible to assess the level of alignment of each ministry with the achievement of the SDGs including with respect to how activities relate to SDG priority targets. The application helps to focus attention on actions that could lead to inter-sectoral synergies for achieving the SDGs as well as outline comprehensive, collaborative and specific measures that should be followed by government institutions to make progress on the SDGs.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY COHERENCE

As highlighted in successive civil society reviews of VNR reports, some countries have taken steps to report on international dimensions of policy coherence, though the practice is not widespread. VNR reporting by **Germany**, **Finland**, **Romania**, **Spain** and **Sweden** highlights various efforts to promote international policy coherence. At the legislative level, Finland, Spain and Sweden have taken steps to ensure international policy coherence. In Finland, steps have been taken to improve the legislative process to ensure that there is coherence on actions taken at domestic and global levels. There is also a coordination body dedicated to policy coherence and intersectoral coherence and Finland's national follow-up system includes indicators on global issues. Spain is developing an impact analysis framework for legislation that evaluates the potential impact of policies on the SDGs. The framework will look at the impact of national policies on other countries and global public goods as well as the expansion of foreign policy initiatives that promote the SDGs. It will be part of parliamentary accountability mechanisms and inform the annual progress report on the 2030 Agenda. Sweden has legislation to ensure international policy coherence. The policy for global development supports coherence of all domestic policy areas contributing to sustainable development globally and highlights transparency when conflicts of interest occur between domestic policies and impacts on global sustainable development.

Other examples of good practice include monitoring international policy coherence and building capacity for greater coherence. **Germany** established indicators to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development and measure domestic and global impacts of policies. The <u>Federation of Romanian Nongovernmental</u> <u>Organizations for Development</u> organized training on the international dimensions of policy coherence in **Romania**, which aimed to improve understanding of how international dimensions of policy coherence apply to SDG implementation and was attended by representatives of ministries and civil society organizations.

TEMPORAL POLICY COHERENCE

As part of its Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, Hungary has an Ombudsman for Future Generations. The ombudsman is unique and has an overarching mandate to protect the interests of future generations. The ombudsman has made recommendations for SDG implementation and is set to play an important role in implementation to support inter-generational equity, thereby contributing to temporal policy coherence. Malta's Guardian for Future Generations has a legislated mandate to safeguard inter-generational and intra-generational sustainable development. The Guardian convenes on a quarterly basis, and includes a four person board with representatives for civil society and the environment, the private sector and the economy, and society and community affairs. Among other duties, the Guardian advocates for sustainable development, audits sectors that contribute to sustainable development, proposes actions that government institutions could take, socializes sustainable development among the citizenry and non-state actors.

INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING

The inclusion of non-state actors in developing national priorities to inform policies for 2030 Agenda implementation is a standard practice. The policy brief on <u>multi-stakeholder engagement</u> in this series provides several examples of inclusive and participatory approaches in this context.





This brief outlines emerging standard and good practices for integrating the 2030 Agenda into policies and ensuring policy coherence in implementation. While many governments have developed overarching strategies for 2030 Agenda implementation, an opportunity exists for governments to draw on international good practices to integrate the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda into policies and approaches and pursue policy coherence. Several key recommendations emerge from the analysis.

Map policies, identify gaps and address these gaps in policies and approaches for 2030 Agenda implementation.

Priorities, policies, plans, programs and budgets to support 2030 Agenda implementation should be informed by an in-depth assessment of existing policies with a focus on where gaps exist and how they can be addressed. Attention should also be given to identifying when and how policies support the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda and domestic, international and temporal policy coherence.

Integrate the 2030 Agenda into overarching and sectoral policies.

In addition to establishing overarching sustainable development policies, governments should examine sectoral policies and align them with the 2030 Agenda. This process should give particular attention to interlinkages between the SDGs and domestic, international and temporal policy coherence.

Establish an action plan or roadmap that sets out how 2030 Agenda implementation will occur.

Action plans or roadmaps complement policies that identify substantive priorities by outlining the mechanisms or steps that will be undertaken to implement the 2030 Agenda. Whether embedded in broader national implementation policies or prepared as standalone frameworks, such action plans or roadmaps should address policy integration, awareness raising, participation and multistakeholder engagement, capacity development, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Action plans or roadmaps should be broadly socialized with government institutions and non-state actors in 2030 Agenda implementation.

Budget for 2030 Agenda implementation.

Governments should ensure that 2030 Agenda-related policies are translated into budgets and programs to advance progress and as a means to ensure policy coherence.

Use the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda to guide policies for 2030 Agenda implementation.

Governments should define how the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda inform national and international efforts to advance sustainable development. Policies should be ambitious, inclusive, participatory, and integrated, be grounded in human rights frameworks, work to leave no one behind, respect inter-generational equity, and realize progress within planetary boundaries. Governments should make use of existing institutions, policies and processes that support the transformative elements of the agenda, such as human rights bodies, to support its implementation.

Use a government-wide approach to implement the 2030 Agenda and ensure domestic, international and temporal policy coherence.

Governments should create mechanisms to ensure policy coherence in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Assessing the impacts of policies across domestic and international policy domains and with respect to future generations is an important first step. Governments should be transparent about trade-offs and work to maximize positive synergies and minimize negative impacts. National and international reporting on the 2030 Agenda should include progress on ensuring policy coherence.



Photo: Cristian Pino Anguita, Forus, General Assembly, 2018

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