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NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A FIVE-YEAR STOCKTAKING

World Public Sector Report 2021

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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Foreword

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Foreword

National institutions are paramount to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The strengthening of national institutions to deliver the SDGs has been a priority in many Member States, as shown by their voluntary presentations at the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development during the first five years of SDG follow-up and review.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted even more the importance of national institutions for the achievement of the SDGs. In addition to causing economic and social shocks that have set back progress in numerous SDG areas, the pandemic has put stress on institutions, hampering their functioning and creating additional challenges for governments trying to devise coherent and inclusive policy responses while ensuring the delivery of essential public services. The pandemic has also revealed institutional weaknesses in areas critical for piloting the SDGs, such as crisis preparedness, policy integration, communication, and others. This has happened in countries at all levels of development. On the other hand, the year 2020 also witnessed institutional innovations in response to the pandemic, in areas as diverse as administrative management, stakeholder engagement, transparency and accountability, and digital government.

It is therefore critically important to take stock of developments in institutional arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda. The World Public Sector Report 2021 focuses on three dimensions of institutional change at the national level. First, it documents changes in institutional arrangements for SDG implementation since 2015. Second, it assesses the development, performance, strengths and weaknesses of follow-up and review systems for the SDGs. Third, it examines efforts made by governments and other stakeholders to enhance the capacity of public servants to implement the SDGs. The report aims to draw attention to the institutional dimension of SDG implementation and provide lessons for national policymakers in this regard. The report also takes stock of broader impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on national institutions and their implications for delivering on the 2030 Agenda.

Less than nine years remain before the end date for the Sustainable Development Goals. We should redouble our efforts to make the promise of the 2030 Agenda a reality. Effective national institutional arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda are not only needed to achieve the SDGs; they are a key requirement for a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the pandemic, one that will make societies more responsive to the needs and aspirations of people, more inclusive, and more resilient.

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

The World Public Sector Report 2021

With one third of the implementation period of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) having elapsed, it is important to take stock of how far countries have gone in adapting their institutional frameworks to implement the Goals.

Institutions are paramount to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is well recognized in the Agenda itself. Five years after the start of the implementation of the Agenda, governance issues remain at the forefront. Since 2015, most countries have progressively adjusted their institutional frameworks to support their commitments to implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Starting in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted even more the importance of national institutions for the achievement of the SDGs. The pandemic and governments' responses to it have impacted the functioning of public institutions in ways that directly affect the capacity of governments to deliver the SDGs, starting with the basic functions of government and public administration such as law- and policy-making and public service delivery. The pandemic has also revealed institutional weaknesses in areas critical for piloting the SDGs. On the other hand, the year 2020 has also witnessed institutional innovations in areas as diverse as administrative management, stakeholder engagement, transparency and accountability.

In this context, it is doubly important to take stock of institutional developments for implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national level. The World Public Sector Report 2021 aims to shed light on this area, through a focus on three aspects of it: the evolution of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation; the development, performance, strengths and weaknesses of monitoring and evaluation systems for the SDGs; and the efforts made by governments and other stakeholders to enhance the capacity of public servants to implement the SDGs. These three dimensions were relevant before the pandemic and have arguably taken on even more importance since then. The report draws on information at the global level as well as desk research on a sample of 24 countries from all regions. The report also examines the broader impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on national institutions and their implications for delivering on the 2030 Agenda.

Changes in institutional arrangements for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level since 2015

Chapter 1 undertakes a comparative analysis of institutional arrangements adopted mainly by a set of 24 countries to deliver specific functions in relation to SDG implementation. Many countries are still putting in place or adjusting key elements of their institutional systems with regard to SDG implementation. On the whole, there is a general trend of deeper institutionalization as well as multiplication of entry points for various actors to support SDG implementation. In fact, compared to other internationally-agreed development frameworks, the first five years of implementation of the 2030 Agenda have seen unprecedented institutionalization at the national level.

The chapter examines changes in several institutional areas that are considered critical in enabling SDG implementation, namely the adaptation of legal and regulatory frameworks at the national level; the integration of the SDGs into national strategies and plans; the development of SDG implementation roadmaps; the creation of piloting structures in government; and the development of aspects of national monitoring and reporting on the SDGs. Greater and more complex institutionalization of the SDGs can be seen in national settings since 2015. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs have achieved relatively high visibility as well as political salience as an overarching policy agenda in both developing and developed countries, with most countries having put in place coordination arrangements for implementation at a high level. The Goals' integration into national strategies and plans, and their reach into government agencies working in all sectors and across levels of governments, are evident. Also striking are efforts made by national governments to measure progress on the SDGs, both through global and national indicators.

Institutionalization of the SDGs has occurred at different speeds across countries, and within countries across levels of government and parts of the institutional system. While institutionalization does not seem to have occurred more rapidly in either developed or developing countries, many developed countries took a long time to institutionalize the SDGs. Patterns of institutionalization of SDG implementation at the country level are highly idiosyncratic, and no regularities or "typical" patterns are easily discernible across countries; nor are institutional adjustments always gradual or even linear.

Since 2015, institutional entry points for key stakeholders to get involved in SDG implementation at the national level have tended to increase in number and importance, reflecting the increasing maturity of institutional arrangements. They have enabled parliaments, supreme audit institutions, subnational and local governments, non-governmental organizations, academia and experts, and the private sector to engage in various aspects of the elaboration of relevant strategies and plans, SDG implementation, monitoring, follow-up, review, and evaluation, and feedback to policymaking. Yet some institutional actors contribute more than others to the mechanisms and processes set up around SDG implementation.

In many countries, parliaments are still not playing a regular role in oversight of government actions to implement the SDGs. Many parliaments, however, have issued at least one report on SDG implementation since 2015. The engagement of supreme audit institutions differs significantly across countries. As regards civil society, opportunities available for participation and levels of engagement also vary. However, in general voluntary national reviews (VNRs) have catalyzed civil society engagement around the SDGs, even in countries that did not have a strong tradition of engaging civil society in decision-making. The engagement of local governments is highly variable across and even within countries. Sustained efforts at SDG localization have borne fruit in some contexts, including in the form of voluntary local reviews. The existence of national coordination and advisory bodies often enables and facilitates various forms of engagement with the Goals by non-state actors as well as subnational and local governments.

Significant differences remain across countries in terms of the depth of SDG institutionalization. Institutionalization at the national level is therefore a work in progress, with most countries still in the process of refining their institutional arrangements for implementation of the Goals and integrating them within the broader institutional system. This long process is not surprising given the time it takes to change institutions as well as the broad range of the Goals, and some trends are encouraging. In many countries, there is still potential for further engagement of various stakeholders in SDG processes. Here too, the trends are encouraging.

Evaluations of the effectiveness of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation at the national level are still scarce. There is scope for greater activity in this area, as well as significant insight to be gained from it.

Monitoring, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level

Monitoring, follow-up and review systems and processes are essential for the effective implementation of the SDGs. Countries would ideally integrate SDG monitoring, follow-up and review into existing monitoring and evaluation systems to avoid overlaps and parallel systems. However, given the diversity and different level of institutionalization of existing monitoring systems, countries are at different stages of, and taking different approaches to, SDG monitoring, follow-up and review. Chapter 2 analyses these efforts and identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement in relation to how countries are integrating SDG monitoring with other monitoring processes and with key accountability institutions, opening up opportunities for stakeholder engagement, and using monitoring information to improve SDG implementation.

The chapter finds progress in the institutionalization of SDG follow-up and review systems and in the setting up of national indicator frameworks. National efforts to institutionalize and strengthen SDG monitoring, follow up, and review are evident. However, the resulting systems differ depending on how the SDGs have been integrated into each country's institutional structure. Moreover, while most countries have identified the institutions responsible for SDG monitoring, the performance of such institutional arrangements and systems is not always conducive to effective follow-up and review.

Regarding indicators, most countries have conducted assessments and prioritization exercises to identify the availability of national indicators based on the global SDG indicator framework, and have identified a national set of SDG indicators. However, fewer have identified national targets, baselines and benchmarks. There is also limited information on the alignment of national and global indicators.

Progress is also evident in the traction of the VNR process and its spillover effects at the subnational level. Overall, countries have improved the preparation of the VNRs and the VNR reports themselves. Online reporting has also increased, as countries leverage ICTs and open data to communicate on SDG progress and implementation.

While some countries have established periodic and regular reporting processes at the national level, standardized or routine national reporting and reporting to parliament present opportunities for improvement. The limited provision of regular SDG implementation reports to parliament illustrates the lack of articulation with the institutional oversight system to ensure accountability. A note for optimism is the increasing number of external audit reports on SDGs and the significant uptake they have had in several countries. Stakeholder engagement has also increased and more diverse stakeholders are contributing to SDG follow-up and review.

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The chapter identifies significant opportunities for improvement. These include coordination and integration of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review with existing monitoring systems, and strengthening subnational participation in SDG monitoring as well as subnational reporting processes. Other constraints relate to data gaps, disaggregation and quality, coordination of data producers and the capacity of local governments to collect and analyse data. Subnational governments have also experienced challenges with regard to the definition of roles and responsibilities for SDG monitoring, follow-up and review and their operationalization. The value of embedding VNRs as part of a continuous cycle of national monitoring, follow-up and review also deserves attention.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted SDG monitoring, follow-up and review. It has negatively affected the fulfillment of monitoring responsibilities and the routine operation of national statistical systems and oversight bodies. It has also imposed new challenges to the participation of stakeholders, and disrupted VNR preparations as a result of social distancing measures. Innovation, new partnerships and digital technologies have been crucial to support SDG monitoring. However, structural bottlenecks related to communications infrastructure and access to digital devices should be addressed to ensure inclusive and effective SDG monitoring, follow-up and review going forward.

Building the capacity of public servants to implement the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that capacity in governments at all levels is critical to successfully implement, follow up and review the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving the Goals hinges in large part on competent and effective national public administrations. Chapter 3 explores capacity-building efforts directed at enabling public servants at all levels to steer and support the transformations called for by the 2030 Agenda. The chapter focuses on capacity-building in relation to cross-cutting functions that directly support SDG implementation, leaving aside capacity-building efforts at the level of specific goals and targets.

Capacity-building for SDG implementation for public servants at the national level is delivered by an impressive variety of actors, both national and international. Government institutions and schools of public administration are prime "natural" providers of capacity-building activities on SDG implementation targeted at public servants. In many countries, government departments have developed training material and delivered training activities on SDGs, in others such training has been organized for members of parliament. Academia also plays a key role, often operating in collaboration with governments. National and international networks working with specific constituencies such as local governments, parliaments, supreme audit institutions and others have played a considerable role in developing training material and administering training in public institutions. International institutions and global think tanks have also been active in this area.

Since 2015, Governments -- either individually or in partnership with local, national and global actors -- have carried out a broad range of initiatives to raise awareness of the SDGs among public servants and enhance their skills in a variety of areas. Important efforts have been made to provide support and training in key areas identified in the 2030 Agenda as needing strengthening. For instance, Governments have enhanced capacities to mainstream the SDGs in long-term planning, while training-of-trainers modules and many other products have promoted and supported SDG localization. Governments and international institutions have strengthened the capacity of national statistical systems to produce disaggregated data at national and subnational levels and enhance mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and evaluating the SDGs. The United Nations system has supported governments in the preparation of their voluntary national reviews. Global efforts have also built the capacity of parliaments and supreme audit institutions to assess SDG implementation.

Capacity-building on policy integration and policy coherence has also developed rapidly since 2015. National governments (especially planning ministries) have built capacity to analyse policy synergies and trade-offs, conduct analyses of policy coherence, and seek increased policy integration. These efforts have been supported by international and regional organizations through the development of models, toolkits and related training.

A key component of strategies to build the capacity of public servants to implement and contribute to the 2030 Agenda is to provide them with guidance and guidelines that enable them to incorporate the SDGs in their daily work. This can range from basic awareness-raising products that aim to inform public servants in the context of their institution or organization, to training sessions, to more detailed guidance material that describe how the SDGs should be integrated into the various processes of an organization, from procurement to reporting to communication. This is an area that has witnessed the development of increasingly diverse training and capacity-building materials.

Although capacity-building is mentioned as a priority in many voluntary national review reports, in general, limited information is available on existing gaps and SDG-related capacity-building activities. Among the 24 countries examined in this report, few

have conducted a comprehensive, government-wide assessment of capacities needed to implement the SDGs. In some cases, external audits have provided insights in this regard. As of 2020, capacity-building strategies and plans for SDG implementation at a whole-of-government level are also extremely rare. However, many countries have incorporated SDG-related concerns into capacity-building strategies and plans at the sector or thematic level. This includes national strategies for the development of statistics.

Capacity-building efforts seem to have initially been driven largely by the "supply side", with important efforts made by international organizations and networks to provide support and training in key areas identified in the 2030 Agenda as needing strengthening, such as planning and statistics. While an increased range of capacity-building products has become available since 2015, the degree of customization of capacity-building activities to beneficiaries' needs is difficult to assess. Research done for this chapter also suggests a very fragmented landscape, with capacity-building activities targeting different ministries, government agencies and public institutions with little apparent coordination among them. Fragmentation can lead to duplication of efforts and capacity-building materials as well as missed opportunities for synergies.

In general, available information does not easily allow for a consolidated picture of ongoing efforts at the level of individual countries. Similarly, there is hardly any evidence that the efforts to enhance the capacity of civil servants, parliamentarians and staff from other public institutions to implement the SDGs are evaluated.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, capacity-development efforts have been impacted in different ways. An abrupt shift to online activities is the most obvious change spurred by the pandemic; however, little is known about the changes in learning outcomes that may have occurred because of it, and about its longer-term impacts for capacity in the public service.

A broader look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on national institutions and its implications for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

At all times, national institutions are a key enabler of governments' and other stakeholders' actions to foster progress on all the SDGs. The pandemic and its impacts have affected public institutions in different ways, which all have implications for the implementation of the SDGs.

On a first level, the pandemic has directly impacted the ability of national governments and national institutions to steer and monitor the SDGs as a programme of action. For instance, social distancing measures have hampered the operations of national statistical offices and the collection of data necessary for SDG monitoring. The resources available to other key institutions tasked with SDG implementation may also have decreased during the pandemic. The majority of countries presenting VNRs in 2020 reported that COVID-19 had disrupted VNR preparations.

The massive shock created by the pandemic has also created a range of risks, from decreased political salience of the 2030 Agenda to hardened resource constraints to the long-term goals embedded in the Agenda becoming seen as secondary to urgent needs created by the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. These risks have become more apparent as the pandemic lingered beyond its initial outbreak.

Among the key questions for governments is how to keep sight of the SDGs and how to preserve the policy and fiscal space to achieve the needed transformations they require while continuing to respond to the pandemic and managing recovery. While the choices of governments in this regard will depend on a country's context and circumstances, one key area of attention should be the articulation of the large public expenditures that are currently made to respond to COVID-19 and support recovery, and the longer-term strategies and plans to deliver the SDGs.

On a second level, the pandemic has affected broader national institutional systems in ways that could hinder SDG implementation.

The pandemic has created major disruptions to the functioning of governments as a whole and of specific public functions, including policymaking, the provision of basic services, law enforcement and the justice system. It has severely tested the resources of institutions in individual sectors. Restrictions and social distancing measures have challenged the working methods and processes of virtually all public institutions, creating obstacles for the regular conduct of business and potentially undermining legislative oversight and other institutional checks and balances. As importantly, the pandemic has revealed limitations and potential for improvement in cross-cutting dimensions of government action such as crisis preparedness, science-policy interfaces, communication, and the use of digital government, which are important determinants of governments' capacity to manage crises.

The capacity of national institutions to foster policy integration in all its dimensions is critical to setting visions, strategies and plans that align with the 2030 Agenda, devising and implementing coherent policies, and allocating resources accordingly. It has proven to be even more critical during the pandemic. Institutional arrangements for horizontal integration - the capacity of government departments to work together, for vertical integration across levels of government, and for engagement with non-State actors, have all been challenged, both in developed and developing countries.

The capacity of institutional systems to promote efficient and effective public spending and limit corruption, in particular through accountability and oversight mechanisms, impacts the delivery of actions to promote the SDGs. It became clear early on that emergency responses as well as measures adopted by governments to limit the economic and social impacts of the pandemic, such as response and recovery packages, can increase risks to accountability and integrity, including through greater opportunities for fraud and corruption. Across countries, oversight institutions have deployed a wide range of mechanisms to enhance transparency and government accountability during the pandemic.

At a broader level, the way in which institutions are set up and operate in practice influences the trust that people place in them and their ability to promote transformation at the societal level (for example, through changing social norms or fostering whole-of-society approaches), which are necessary to achieve the SDGs. During the pandemic, some governments have effected broader changes in political and institutional systems, such as the adoption of emergency laws that allow rule by decree and the suspension of individual liberties which, in part depending on how they further evolve, may have long-term negative consequences for human rights, particularly those of marginalized groups. In many countries, the pre-pandemic balance of power among institutions may be durably altered, with consequences for the relationship between States and their citizens and the capacity of societies to collectively set and follow pathways to achieving the SDGs.

At all these levels, lessons learned from rapid institutional changes experienced by countries in response to COVID-19 should inform efforts to recover from the pandemic and implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

Acronyms

A4SD	Action for Sustainable Development
AAPAM	African Association for Public Administration and Management
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADCCN	Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AFROSAI	African Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions
AGEVAL	Spanish Agency of Evaluation
ANAMM	Associação Nacional dos Municípios de Moçambique
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
APS-HRMnet	Africa Public Sector Human Resource Managers' Network
ARS	Agences Régionales de Santé (France)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASviS	Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development
Bappenas	National Development Planning Agency (Indonesia)
BKSAP	Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Body (Indonesia)
BPK RI	Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics (Nepal)
CCIC	Canadian Council for International Co-operation
CCONG	Confederación Colombiana de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales
CDP	Committee for Development Policy (ECOSOC)
CECADE	Centro de Capacitación y Desarrollo (Costa Rica)
CENTAL	Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia
CEPA	United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration
CEPEI	Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional
CGR	Office of the Comptroller General (Colombia)
CIC/NYU	Center on International Cooperation - New York University (USA)
CIDPs	County Integrated Development Plans (Kenya)
CIMES	County Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (Kenya)
CLAD	Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo
CLEWS	Global Climate, Land, Energy, and Water Strategies (Modelling Tool)
CMA	Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (Australia)
CNIS	Conseil National de l'Information et de la Statistique (France)
CNM	National Confederation of Municipalities (Brazil)
CNODS	National Commission for the Sustainable Development Goals (Brazil)
COMTEMA	Special Technical Commission for the Environment (OLACEFS)
CONPES	Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (National Council for Economic and Social Policy) (Colombia)
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSCM	Civil Service College (Mauritius)

CSO	Civil Society Organization
DANE	National Statistical Office (Colombia)
DGPOLDES	International Cooperation for Ibero-America and the Caribbean
DIFs	District Indicator Frameworks
DNP	Departamento Nacional de Planeación (Colombia)
DPIDG	Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government
ECA	European Court of Audit
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ENAP-Québec	National School of Public Administration of Quebec
EU	European Union
FBI4SDGs	Philanthropy and Business Platform for SDGs (Filantropi dan Bisnis Indonesia)
FOCELAC	Fomento de capacidades en evaluación en Latinoamérica
GAO	Government Accountability Office (USA)
GCNK	Global Compact Network Kenya
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEI	Global Evaluation Initiative
GOLD	Global Report on Decentralization and Local Democracy
GSDR	Global Sustainable Development Report
GT Agenda 2030	Civil Society Working Group for the 2030 Agenda (Brazil)
HCP	High Commission for Planning (Morocco)
HLPF	High-level Political Forum
IAEG-SDGs	Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators
IANZ	Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand
IASIA	International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administrations
IATWC/IATC	Inter Agency Technical Working Committee or Inter Agency Technical Committee (Kenya)
IBGE	Institute of Geography and Statistics (Brazil)
ICSU	International Council for Science (France)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDDRI	Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales
IDI	INTOSAI Development Initiative
IDLO	International Development Law Organization
IEEP	Institute for European Environmental Policy
IFDD	Institut de la Francophonie pour le développement durable
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent
IIAS	International Institute of Administrative Sciences
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INAP	National Institute of Public Administration (Spain)
INEC	National Statistical and Census Institute (Costa Rica)
INSEE	Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (France)

INTOSAI	International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions
Ipea	Institute for Applied Economic Research (Brazil)
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IRD	Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (France)
IREDD	Institute for Research and Democratic Development (Liberia)
ISAM	IDI SDG audit model
iSDG	Integrated Sustainable Development Goals (Modelling Tool)
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ISTAT	Italian National Institute of Statistics
JRC	Joint Research Centre (European Union)
KAM	Kenya Association of Manufacturers
KBCSD	Korea Business Council for Sustainable Development
KCOC	Korea NGO Council for Overseas Development Cooperation
KEPSA	Kenya Private Sector Alliance
KILA	Kerala Institute of Local Administration (India)
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (Kenya)
KoFID	Korea Civil Society Forum on International Development Cooperation
LDPP	Law on Development Policy and Planning (Mongolia)
LRG	Local and Regional Governments
LSE	London School of Economics
LSF	Living Standards Framework (New Zealand)
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MED	Monitoring and Evaluation Department (Kenya)
MERS	Middle East Respiratory Syndrome
Metropolis	World Association of the Major Metropolises
MIUR	Ministry of Education, University and Research (Italy)
MFARIIT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mauritius)
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Samoa)
MIDEPLAN	Ministry of Planning (Costa Rica)
MIDESO	Ministry of Social Development (Chile)
MINAE	Ministry of the Environment and Energy (Costa Rica)
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
MoSPI	Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (India)
MSDV	Sustainable Development Vision-2030 (Mongolia)
MSPs	Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships
MTNDP	Medium-Term National Development Plan (Sierra Leone)
MuAN	Municipality Association of Nepal
NAO	National Audit Office
NAP	National Action Plan (Indonesia)
NARMIN	National Association of Rural Municipality in Nepal

Acronyms

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NAYMOTE-Liberia	Naymote Partners for Democratic Development
NDA	Mongolian National Development Agency
NDP	National Development Plan
NDPIP	National Development and Public Investment Plan (Costa Rica)
NEDA	National Economic and Development Authority (Philippines)
NERS	National Ebola Recovery Strategy (Sierra Leone)
NITI Aayog	National Institution for Transforming India
NSDCs	National Sustainable Development Commissions or Councils
NSDS	National Strategy for Development of Statistics (Mongolia)
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategy
NSO	National Statistical Office
ODS	Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIF	International Organization of La Francophonie
OLACEFS	Organization of Latin American and Caribbean Supreme Audit Institutions
OPeN	Open Parliament e-Network
OSeMOSYS	Open Source Modelling System
PAS	Action and Follow-up Plan (Colombia)
PDP	Philippine Development Plan
PLANES	Plan Nacional de la Educación Superior (Costa Rica)
PNE	Política Nacional de Evaluación (Costa Rica)
PSA	Philippines Statistics Authority
PSB	Presidency of Strategy and Budget (Turkey)
RAD	Regional SDG Action Plan (Indonesia)
RAN	National SDG Action Plan (Indonesia)
RCCCV	Colombian Network of Cities How We Go (Red Colombiana de Ciudades Cómo Vamos)
RIA	Rapid Impact Assessment
RISDP	Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (Africa)
RKI	Robert Koch Institute (Germany)
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAI	Supreme Audit Institution
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SCOT	Territorial Coherence Scheme (France)
SCVO	Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
SEGEPLAN	Secretaría de Planificación y Programación de la Presidencia (Guatemala)
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Organization (India)
SIF	State Indicator Frameworks (India)
SINERGIA	National Evaluation and Results Management System (Colombia)

SINIA	National Environmental Information System (Costa Rica)
SNA	National School of Administration (Italy)
SNAP SDGs	Sub-National Action Plans for the SDGs (Indonesia)
SNDD	Stratégie Nationale de Développement Durable (Morocco)
TCU	Tribunal de Contas da União (Brazil SAI)
TNTP	The National Treasury and Planning (Kenya)
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UKSSD	UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development
UMT	Union of Municipalities of Turkey
UN ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAR	United Nations Institute of Training and Research
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNU-IAS	United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UT	Union Territories (India)
UVED	Université Virtuelle Environnement et Développement Durable (France)
VLRs	Voluntary Local Reviews
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WGSI	Waterloo Global Science Initiative (Canada)
WHO	World Health Organization
WNTA	Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (India)
WPSR	World Public Sector Report
YASHADA	State Level Administrative Training Institute (India)

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INTRODUCTION

NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: WHERE ARE WE AFTER FIVE YEARS?

A. National institutional arrangements for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: where are we after five years?

Institutions are paramount to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is well recognized in the Agenda itself.[1] Five years after the start of the implementation of the Agenda, governance issues remain at the forefront. For instance, a study of the voluntary national reviews (VNR) presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) in 2019 highlighted that 38 out of 47 countries had identified governance as a key priority for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, significantly more than in previous years.[2]

Since 2015, most countries have adjusted their institutional frameworks to support their commitments to implementing the 2030 Agenda. This has comprised, inter alia: incorporating the SDGs and other elements of the Agenda into the national institutional context (for instance, national strategies and plans, planning processes, and the work of parliaments and existing government or multistakeholder institutions); creating new institutions (for example, high-level coordination mechanisms or technical working groups); and setting up new mechanisms for engaging various stakeholders around SDG implementation. Such changes, which have been documented through successive snapshots provided by the voluntary national review (VNR) reports presented by countries at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) every year, have taken place gradually, at a pace typical of those to be expected in the institutional area, with typically some years between initial design and implementation.

Starting in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an abrupt shock to all countries. The economic and social shocks created by the pandemic have set back progress in numerous SDG areas, as documented in various reports. In addition, the pandemic period has highlighted even more the importance of national institutions for the achievement of the SDGs. The pandemic and governments' responses to it have impacted the functioning of public institutions in ways that directly affect the capacity of governments to deliver the SDGs, starting with the basic functions of government, including the delivery of public services and public administration. The imperatives of managing the pandemic have meant that governments have had to take quick decisions in terms of resource allocation, prioritization of policy agendas, and sustaining the functioning of key institutional processes, all of which potentially create tensions with long-term goals such as the SDGs. The pandemic has also revealed institutional weaknesses in areas critical for piloting the SDGs, such as crisis preparedness, policy integration, communication, and others. This has happened in countries at all levels of development. Lastly, the pandemic also highlighted the importance of trust

between people and governments, as well as the broader social contract under which societies operate. On the other hand, the year 2020 has also witnessed institutional innovations in areas as diverse as administrative management, stakeholder engagement, transparency and accountability.

In this context, it is doubly important to take stock of developments in institutional arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda. The main objective of this report is to document key trends in this regard, through a focus on a few selected dimensions.

B. Scope of the report

Among many possible entry points, this report focuses on three dimensions of institutional change at the national level that are relevant to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. First, it documents changes in institutional arrangements for SDG implementation. Second, it assesses the development, performance, strength and weaknesses of monitoring and evaluation systems for the SDGs. Third, it examines efforts made by governments and other stakeholders to enhance the capacity of public servants to implement the SDGs.[3] These three dimensions are important for several reasons; and their importance has been highlighted anew since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Documenting changes in national institutional arrangements for SDG implementation

Five years after the start of the 2030 Agenda, it is important to take stock of how far countries have gone in adapting their institutional frameworks to implement the SDGs and in mainstreaming the SDGs throughout their institutions. Already one-third of the SDG implementation period has elapsed, and yet many countries are still putting in place or adjusting key elements of their institutional systems in relation to SDG implementation. This long time scale of institutional changes should in itself be considered as an important factor in the capacity of countries to deliver the SDGs. It also implies that the institutional side of SDG implementation is vulnerable to short term changes in national contexts, including changes in policy agendas. These considerations have received relatively little attention in the SDG literature and discourse so far. They suggest the need for increased attention to the challenges and practicalities of institutional reform.

In order to capture the increasing complexity of national institutional arrangements for SDG implementation as they evolved since 2015, the report uses two approaches. The first one, taken by several studies and reports based on voluntary national reviews, is to look at the development of institutional mechanisms such as sustainable development strategies and national development plans; high-level coordination

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mechanisms for SDG implementation; involvement of various levels of governments in SDG implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and others.[4] The first chapter of the report documents the creation of institutional mechanisms over time, using examples from a sample of 24 countries. A second approach is to document the development of institutional entry points for various actors involved in SDG implementation at the national level. Over time, such entry points have tended to increase, which reflects the increasing maturity of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation. Chapter 1 documents the multiplicity of entry points for a selection of key institutional actors other than central governments.

Patterns of institutionalization of SDG implementation at the country level are highly idiosyncratic, and no regularities or "typical" patterns are easily discernible across countries. Countries have built on pre-existing arrangements and created new institutional mechanisms in variable proportions. The type of institutional arrangements that countries choose to put in place and the timing of institutional changes also vary. In spite of these differences, when looking at a sample of countries, trends can be perceived in terms of how quickly after 2015 different types of institutional arrangements have been put in place. While there is a clear trend towards the complexification of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation and the multiplication of potential entry points for different parts of government and non-government stakeholders over time, institutional adjustments are not always linear. Changes in political circumstances in a country can increase or decrease the visibility and prominence of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs on the national policy agenda, and affect institutional arrangements in ways that can reinforce them or diminish their effectiveness.

Taking a medium-term perspective on the development of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation is even more important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As explored in chapter 4 of the report, the pandemic and the responses of governments to it have impacted public institutions in multiple ways, affecting the capacity of governments to implement the SDGs in both direct and indirect ways. The rapid changes observed across national public institutions during the pandemic, and their potential implications for the post-pandemic period, provide a stark contrast to the gradual adjustments made by countries to the institutional frameworks for implementing the SDGs between 2015 and 2019.

The massive disruptions created by the pandemic have, understandably, shifted attention and resources towards urgent and short-term crisis responses and away from long-term strategies and institutional set-ups to achieve sustainable development. To build back better, governments must nonetheless not lose sight of the latter. Among many potential risks created by the pandemic, the lowering of the political priority of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the decrease in the resources available to various institutional processes related to SDG implementation (for instance for data collection and production or for stakeholder engagement), and the reduced capacity of public institutions to focus on long-term issues while addressing emergency situations are prominent. In sum, the institutional changes observed since the beginning of 2020 have disrupted the regular, incremental process of institutional adjustments, which could negatively impact institutional frameworks for SDG implementation. It will be important to consider how lessons from the pandemic can inform institutional strategies to deliver the Goals.

The pandemic has also underscored even more the interconnectedness of the sustainable development goals and the need for policy integration. What initially was a matter of public health has in many ways disturbed or upended, for instance, education, transport, trade, and aspects of equality; effects in each of those areas have yet further been felt in others. The connections among sectors show that institutionalized coordination within public administration and with other institutions is an imperative for cohesive policy responses. With regard to institutional actors, the pandemic may serve to highlight the dependence of public administration on collaboration with other actors to meet challenges and achieve transformative change. Successes in tackling the pandemic and its effects have often featured or included, for instance, civil society, the private sector, and parliaments. The institutionalization of avenues for such multi-stakeholder action can facilitate progress towards short- and long-term goals, including the SDGs.

Assessing the effectiveness of follow-up and review systems for the SDGs

Effective monitoring, reporting and more generally follow and review systems are a key requirement for implementing the SDGs. Since 2015, the work on SDG indicators and the reporting frameworks progressively put in place by countries building on the voluntary national reviews contemplated in the 2030 Agenda have received much attention. However, national follow-up and review systems go far beyond these two elements. Among other aspects, developing an understanding of the effectiveness of follow-up and review processes for SDG implementation involves examining how existing processes of data collection (e.g. SDG indicators, but also other monitoring and evaluation processes that have been in place at the macroeconomic or sector level, as well as information coming from different levels of government) inform policy-making; whether information systems put in place for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and other information systems mutually support one another; how monitoring and reporting on SDG progress contributes to government accountability, both through formal oversight by institutions such as parliaments and supreme audit institutions, and through the contribution of various stakeholders; and how the information produced in the context of SDG

monitoring at the national level informs the national policy debate and opens up channels of engagement for various public institutions and non-state actors.

Even though the SDGs are much broader than a typical government programme, they face similar risks in terms of operating in isolation from other processes. Three critical determinants of the effectiveness of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems at the national level are: the integration of SDG follow-up and review systems with other monitoring systems; their links with performance measurement systems; and how monitoring information feeds back into the policy cycle to strengthen SDG implementation. As explored in this report, information on these aspects has started to emerge, through evaluations produced by a range of actors. For instance, many of the audits of government preparedness to implement the SDGs conducted by supreme audit institutions in more than 70 countries in recent years considered whether the government had established a mechanism to monitor, follow up, review and report on the progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[5] Information from multiple sources is used in the report to assess common strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for countries to strengthen their national SDG follow-up and review systems.

In the context of the pandemic and its aftermath, follow-up and review systems for the SDGs take an even greater importance. As abundantly documented, the pandemic has had differentiated impacts on various groups in society. Women have been bearing a disproportionate share of the pandemic's economic and social impacts. More generally, the brunt of the negative social and economic impacts has been borne by the most vulnerable groups and individuals, and within-country inequalities have increased. This has been observed in both developed and developing countries. Negative impacts of the pandemic have affected vulnerable groups in multiple dimensions, including jobs, education, access to health, and other basic needs and rights.

These impacts directly affect progress on a range of SDGs. It is critical for countries to be able to measure and monitor them at the adequate level of detail and in timely fashion, not only to assess setbacks in progress along the different goals and targets and ways to address critical challenges during the pandemic, but also to inform policymaking during recovery efforts and in the longer term. Yet, in many countries systems for collecting and producing data and information relevant to SDG monitoring have been adversely affected during the pandemic, as documented for instance by surveys of National Statistical Offices conducted by the United Nations and the World Bank. This makes the analysis of strengths and weaknesses in national follow-up and review systems for the SDGs even more important than it was pre-pandemic.

Taking stock of efforts to build the capacity of public servants to implement the 2030 Agenda

Another key determinant of the effectiveness of national institutional arrangements for SDG implementation lies in the capacity of public institutions and individual public servants. Achieving the Goals hinges in a large measure on competent and effective national public administrations. Public administrations and public servants have a key role to play in implementing policy changes in practice and reflecting them in daily interactions with citizens. They also have a key role in raising awareness of the SDGs and their implications at the level of specific sectors, locations, and services. They are key relays between the level of strategies, plans, policies and programmes elaborated to implement the SDGs, and effective implementation and delivery on the ground by all actors.

The importance of building the capacity of public administration at all levels for implementing the 2030 Agenda was recognized by United Nations Member States in the Agenda itself; in particular, the text of the Agenda identified key areas where capacity-building should receive attention and resources. Since 2015, considerable efforts have been made by national governments, academia, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and other national and international actors to raise SDG awareness among public servants and build their capacity for SDG implementation. Those efforts have covered areas such as planning, monitoring and reporting, policy integration, stakeholder engagement, and many others. A key question is the extent to which the sum of those efforts has been meeting national needs in this regard. This includes whether training has addressed public servants' and public administrations' ability to reach the furthest behind. As shown in this report, publicly available information on ongoing capacity-building initiatives is limited and does not, in general, provide a clear answer to this question.

Here too, the pandemic has caused shocks that may have profound implications for the delivery of the 2030 Agenda. During the pandemic, public institutions and public servants have faced compelling demands on their resources to continue to provide key public services. Many have been faced with crisis situations requiring radical shifts in the way they operate, as well as reallocation of resources. Within public institutions, this may have resulted in lower priority being given to long-term capacity-development efforts, including those in relation to SDG implementation. Similarly, decreases in available resources or reallocation of those resources to other areas may have negatively impacted the capacity-development activities of many organizations and networks that used to be active providers before the pandemic. In addition, the constraints imposed by the pandemic on physical meetings, travel, and other resources have affected the delivery of capacity-building efforts, with a shift to digital delivery modes whose long-term impacts are yet unknown but could have negative implications for SDG implementation.

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There is therefore a need to better understand the trends in and features of capacity-building efforts in support of SDG implementation targeted at public servants, in terms not only of how they have developed over the past five years and are meeting the needs of countries, but also of how they could be adjusted in the future, taking into account lessons from the pandemic period.

C. Content of the report

In addition to this introduction, the report includes four chapters.

Chapter 1 reviews institutional adjustments made by countries to integrate the SDGs into their national institutional frameworks after five years of SDG implementation. The chapter illustrates the developments that have occurred in selected institutional areas such as the integration of SDGs into national planning processes, the creation of high-level mechanisms for SDG implementation, and the involvement of parliaments in SDG matters. It also documents institutional entry points that are available to different stakeholders at the national level to participate in SDG implementation.

Chapter 2 reviews national systems for monitoring, evaluation, review and follow-up in relation to SDG implementation. The chapter looks at the progressive institutionalization of national SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems, as well as at progress made in terms of monitoring the SDGs and reporting on SDG implementation. The chapter also examines how SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems contribute to ensuring government accountability on SDG implementation. The final part of the chapter examines the integration of SDG follow-up and review systems with other monitoring systems; their links with performance measurement systems; and how monitoring information feeds back into the policy cycle to strengthen SDG implementation. This last part provides abundant material for countries to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their national follow-up and review systems for the SDGs.

Chapter 3 looks at capacity-building on SDG implementation targeting public servants at the national level, including subnational levels as relevant. The chapter considers the priority given to capacity-building on SDGs by governments, as reflected in national documents. A range of capacity-building products, tools and delivery channels are presented. The focus of the chapter is on activities directly linked to the implementation of the SDGs as a programme of action, such as awareness raising, initial and continuous training of public servants, SDG planning and monitoring, policy coherence and policy integration. The chapter takes stock of the current limitations of available information on the scale, impact and effectiveness of capacity-building efforts as a whole, and

formulates recommendations to countries and international actors in this regard.

Chapter 4 examines the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on national institutions, and the potential consequences of those impacts for the delivery of the SDGs. The chapter aims to provide a reference to the broader institutional context of the pandemic that can be contrasted with the longer-term perspective of the first three chapters. Key dimensions of the impacts of the pandemic examined in the chapter include the functioning of public institutions; policy integration; government accountability and transparency; and trust between governments and citizens. The chapter provides a limited set of recommendations in this regard.

D. Methodology

The report was led and prepared by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The research and report preparation were done remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the existing landscape of information on institutional arrangements for SDG implementation at the national level, the preparation of the report followed a multi-source, multi-method and tiered approach.

At the core of the report, a sample of 24 countries representing all regions was selected for in-depth research. For countries in this sample, the report team researched all publicly available information, including voluntary national reviews (VNR) reports, national sustainable development strategies and national development plans, legal and policy documents coming from different levels of government, parliaments, and oversight institutions. Academic articles and studies, reports, and evaluations produced by non-governmental actors in English, French and Spanish language were also used whenever available. Templates for collecting information in a comparable way across countries were prepared, which covered the areas of monitoring and evaluation and capacity-building. Examples collected by the report team in the 24 countries were fed into a database that informed the first three chapters of the report.

A second level of information included the VNR reports presented by Member States of the United Nations from 2016 to 2020. The report also made use of studies and reports published by international organizations, international networks and other stakeholder, covering relevant topics in relation to institutional arrangements at the national level.

In order to elicit detailed information in the areas of monitoring and evaluation and capacity-building for the SDGs, the report team also conducted a survey to a set of international organizations active in these fields, through a

Figure A

Sample of countries selected for in-depth research

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Source: Authors' elaboration.

questionnaire. Nine organizations responded to the survey. Finally, an open call for inputs to the report was issued in June 2020. In all, over 30 experts and organizations provided contributions to the report.

The report relied on peer review by UN and non-UN experts, in addition to internal review in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Endnotes

1   See A/RES/70/1 found at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/ transformingourworld.

2   Shannon Kindornay and Renée Gendron, "Progressing National SDGs Implementation: An Independent Assessment of the Voluntary National Review Reports Submitted to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2019" (Ottawa: Canadian Council for International Cooperation, 2020).

3   Other institutional dimensions, policy functions and supporting processes relevant to SDG implementation have been explored in detail in recent editions of the World Public Sector Report, for instance, budgeting, risk management and policy integration. Also, the report does not go down to the level of specific goals within the SDGs, the implementation of which is supported by specific institutional arrangements.

4   As an illustration, UNDESA's Compendium of national institutional arrangements for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda documents institutional arrangements in the following nine areas: high-level institutional arrangements; national strategies for sustainable development; involvement of Parliaments; involvement of local authorities; involvement of supreme audit institutions; engaging and equipping public servants; engaging civil society and the private sector; arrangements for monitoring and review; and budgeting processes.

5   INTOSAI Development Initiative, "Are nations prepared for implementation of the 2030 Agenda?" (Oslo, 2019).

CHAPTER 1

**CHANGES IN INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IMPLEMENTATION
AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL SINCE 2015**

1.1. Introduction: national institutions for SDG implementation

National institutions are paramount to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is well recognized in the Agenda itself. Since 2015, most countries have adjusted their institutional frameworks to support their commitments to implementing the 2030 Agenda. This has comprised, inter alia: the incorporation of the SDGs and other elements of the Agenda into the national institutional context (for instance, national strategies and plans, planning processes, and the work of parliaments); the creation of new institutions (for example, high-level coordination mechanisms and technical working groups); and setting up new mechanisms for engaging various stakeholders around SDG implementation. Such changes, which have been documented through successive snapshots provided by the voluntary national review (VNR) reports presented by countries at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) every year, have taken place gradually, typically with years in between initial design and implementation.

Five years after the start of the 2030 Agenda, with one third of the SDG implementation period having elapsed, it is important to take stock of how far countries have gone in adapting their institutional frameworks to implement the SDGs. This chapter highlights that many countries are still putting in place or adjusting key elements of their institutional systems in relation to SDG implementation. The long time scale associated with institutional change contrasts with the urgency of the 2030 Agenda, and could in itself be a limiting factor in the achievement of the SDGs.

This chapter undertakes a comparative analysis of institutional arrangements adopted by countries to deliver specific functions in relation to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis is mostly based on information for 24 countries (see the introduction to this report) collected through publicly available sources.

In order to capture the increasing complexity of national institutional arrangements for SDG implementation as they evolved since 2015, the chapter follows two approaches. The first one, similar to that taken by several studies and reports based on voluntary national reviews,[1] examines the development of institutional mechanisms such as sustainable development strategies and national development plans; high-level coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation; development of SDG implementation roadmaps and action plans; and others. Section 1.2 of the chapter reviews changes in five institutional areas that are considered critical in enabling SDG implementation. Patterns of institutionalization of SDG implementation at the country level are highly idiosyncratic, and no regularities or "typical" patterns are easily discernible across countries; nor are institutional adjustments always

gradual and linear. Changes in political circumstances in a given country can increase or decrease the visibility and prominence of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs on the national policy agenda and affect institutional arrangements in ways that can reinforce or diminish their effectiveness. In spite of the differences in the types of institutional arrangements that countries choose to put in place for implementing the SDGs and in the timing of such arrangements, when looking at a sample of countries, trends can be perceived in terms of how quickly after 2015 they have been put in place (see section 1.2.6).

The second approach documents the development of institutional entry points for key stakeholders at the national level to get involved in SDG implementation. Over time, such entry points have tended to increase in number, which reflects the increasing maturity of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation. The chapter explores entry points for different institutional actors to engage in the delivery of key functions–strategizing and planning; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation. While the role of central governments and their departments, which lead SDG implementation at the national level, is largely addressed in section 1.2, section 1.3 examines several other stakeholders: parliaments; supreme audit institutions; subnational and local governments; non-governmental organizations; and academia and experts. The role of the private sector is also addressed to a limited degree, as it, too, has multiple links to institutional frameworks for SDG implementation.

Across the chapter, novel and innovative practices at the country level are highlighted to illustrate the potential for countries to more fully incorporate the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals into their national institutional frameworks. The chapter posits some lessons and conclusions from the past five years of SDG institutionalization, as well as proposes opportunities for its enhancement.

1.2. Institutional changes at the country level since 2015

Throughout the ongoing process of institutionalizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries have taken different paths according to national circumstances. Progress in embedding the Goals into national institutional frameworks and in localizing them at other levels of government therefore can and does look different across contexts. Despite this, certain commonalities among countries' experiences are observable. For instance, in the process of implementing the SDGs at the national level, most countries have had to create high-level coordination structures or mechanisms. This section reviews how the institutional landscape has evolved in five areas: the adaptation of legal and regulatory frameworks at the national level; the integration of the SDGs into national strategies and

plans; the development of SDG implementation roadmaps; the creation of piloting structures in government; and the development of national monitoring and reporting on SDGs, including the creation of SDG information hubs and SDG evaluation frameworks. Developments related to monitoring, evaluation and review are examined in more detail in chapter 2 and only succinctly reviewed in this chapter. The last part of this section presents an attempt at visualizing developments in some of these areas over time since 2015.

Beyond the institutional areas mentioned above, other areas have received attention from countries since 2015. Securing financing for SDG implementation has been a key concern in all countries, but especially in developing countries. Within the framework of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, several countries have started to develop sustainable development financing strategies. Efforts have also been made by many countries to increasingly map the SDGs into national budget processes.[2] Capacity-building around SDG implementation has further been an area of focus, with efforts from a wide range of actors targeting both government institutions and non-governmental actors. Chapter 3 of the report takes an in-depth look at efforts made to strengthen the capacity of public servants to implement the SDGs.

1.2.1. Creation of legal and regulatory frameworks for SDG implementation by governments

Legal and regulatory frameworks govern the development of institutional frameworks for SDG implementation. Among other things, they establish the nature and periodicity of national development strategies and other aspects of the national planning process; mandate the creation of new institutions or institutional mechanisms; and establish responsibilities for SDG implementation, monitoring and reporting across government.

Depending on the country, the institutional framework for SDG implementation is based on laws or decrees and directives issued by the executive, or both. Approaches to setting up national institutional frameworks are diverse, with some countries having adopted widely-encompassing laws or decrees that address a broad range of issues, and others having used more incremental approaches with successive laws, decrees and directives addressing specific aspects of SDG implementation, such as the creation of new structures or the assignment of responsibilities.

Indonesia is an example of the former approach. Its national strategy for implementing the SDGs is governed by Presidential Decree 2017/59. The Decree required the government to produce an SDG roadmap and a national SDG action plan, and all regions to produce regional action plans. It assigned primary responsibility for SDG implementation to the Ministry of Planning/Bappenas. It defined the institutional architecture for SDG implementation as well as the monitoring

and reporting framework. Regulations from the Ministry of Development Planning have operationalized the presidential decree, which created the obligation to report on SDG progress at the national and regional levels.[3]

Italy's implementation of the SDGs is backed by decrees of the Prime Minister's Office, which complemented existing laws. In 2018, the Prime Minister's Office adopted the Directive for implementing the national sustainable development strategy and the 2030 Agenda.[4] Among other things, the Directive called for the establishment of the National Commission for Sustainable Development (which had not yet met as of January 2020), and referred to the undertaking of comparative analysis of the actions carried out by the government and the contents of the national sustainable development strategy (art. 6).[5]

In the Philippines, an executive order underpins SDG implementation through a different means. The SDGs are integrated into the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022, the country's development blueprint[6], which serves as their implementation mechanism.[7] Executive Order 27 of 2017, which cites the 2030 Agenda in its preambular section, requires all levels of government to implement the PDP.[8]

In Colombia, an executive decree established the governance and institutional structure for planning, implementing and monitoring the implementation of the SDGs. In February 2015 (before the 2030 Agenda was formally adopted),[9] a High-Level Inter-Institutional Commission on SDGs (Comisión Interinstitucional de Alto Nivel para el alistamiento y la efectiva implementación de la Agenda de Desarrollo Post 2015 y sus Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible) was established and provides the institutional space for decision-making around the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Similarly, royal decrees in Spain appointed an Ambassador in Special Mission for the 2030 Agenda in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, created the Office of the High Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda within the Presidency of the Government of Spain, and established a new Ministry of Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda.[10]

Institutional mechanisms for SDG implementation are also often based on pre-existing law. For instance, the legal foundation for the Republic of Korea's "K-SDGs" (adopted by a resolution of the Council of Ministers in December 2018[11]) includes Article 50 of the Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth, enacted in 2010, according to which the government has to not only renew sustainable development basic plans every five years to carry out international agreements on sustainable development and promote sustainable development in the country, but also establish sustainable development goals and indicators.[12] Legal instruments indirectly support governance of the SDGs in different ways. For example, laws on integrated policy and planning can support government capacity to comprehensively and cohesively assess progress towards the Goals and feed results and lessons back into the

Box 1.1

Mongolia's 2015 Law on Development Policy and Planning (LDPP)

In Mongolia, the 2015 Law on Development Policy and Planning (LDPP) provides the basis for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Vision-2030 (MSDV), adopted in 2016, and the SDGs.[a] More broadly, the LDPP sets the legal foundation for an integrated system of development policy and planning, regulating the development, adoption, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of national, sectorial, aimag[i] and capital city level development policy documents.[b] With regard to monitoring and evaluation, the LDPP stipulates (articles 7.5, 7.6 and 7.7) that the ministry will receive monitoring and evaluation reports of the development concept of Mongolia conducted by State Central Administrative bodies every two years, consolidate those reports and submit them to the Government for discussion. Furthermore, that ministry is responsible for organizing an external audit of the implementation of the development concept of Mongolia every four years, a mandate that ensures an additional layer of accountability.[c]

Sources:

[a] Mongolia, "Mongolia Voluntary National Review 2019: Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals" (Ulaanbaatar, 2019), 39, https://
[b] Mongolia, "Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030," 2016, 37, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 51.
[c] Mongolia, "Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030," 2016, 41 (annex with LDPP).
     sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23342MONGOLIA_VOLUNTARY_NATIONAL_REVIEW_REPORT_2019.pdf.

Note:

[i] Mongolia is divided into 21 provinces or aimags and one provincial municipality. Each aimag is subdivided into several districts.

planning process (see Box 1.1). As another example, in France, Law 2009-967 (loi Grenelle 1) directed the government to develop "new wealth indicators" as an alternative measure to the Gross Domestic Product. In 2015, another law required the government to annually report to parliament on those indicators. The 10 indicators are now part of the 98 national SDG indicators that serve to monitor the country's SDG Roadmap.[13]

The use of executive powers (decrees or directives) to determine and elaborate institutional arrangements for the 2030 Agenda requires political will and sustained buy-in on the part of governments. It can serve to put a spotlight on the SDGs and prioritize them on political agendas. At the same time, it can later scale back such arrangements and shift priorities away from the Goals (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2

Executive actions change the path of Brazil

Brazil's 2016 Decree 8,892 created a multi-stakeholder National Commission for the Sustainable Development Goals linked to the Government Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic,[a] making the country the first in Latin America to constitute such a mechanism with equal representation of government and civil society.[b] The decree was also behind the development by the Commission of a national action plan for the implementation of the SDGs for 2017-2019.[c] In 2019, the Commission was abolished by presidential decree (N° 9.759/2019), and no institutional action plan at the national level was proposed for the period post 2019. Since then, the legal framework for the 2030 Agenda is Decree 9,980, which designates the Special Secretariat for Social Articulation as the responsible organ for assisting the Minister of State in matters relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, articulating within the Federal Government and other federal agencies the actions to internalize the SDGs, and requesting and consolidating information provided by government agencies on the implementation of the SDGs.[d]

Sources:

[a] Brazil, "Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals," 2017, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15806Brazil_English.pdf.
[b] Estratégia ODS, "Sem Sociedade Civil, Atingir os ODS é Objetivo Insustentável no Brasil," July 12, 2017, http://www.estrategiaods.org.br/sem-sociedade-civil-atingir-os-ods-e-objetivo-insustentavel-no-brasil/.
[c] Brazil, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Comissão Nacional Para Os Objetivos Do Desenvolvimento Sustentável (CNODS)," December 8, 2020, https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/assuntos/desenvolvimento-sustentavel-e-meio-ambiente/desenvolvimento-sustentavel/comissao-nacional-para-os-objetivos-do-desenvolvimento-sustentavel-cnods; Brazil, "Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals."
[d] Brazil, Presidência da República, Secretaria-Geral, Subchefia para Assuntos Jurídicos, "Decreto No. 9.980, de 20 de Agosto de 2019" (2019), http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2019/decreto/D9980.htm.

Chapter 1

Changes in institutional arrangements for Sustainable Development Goals implementation at the national level since 2015   11

In some cases, laws or decrees obligate subnational and local governments to take specific measures to advance the SDGs or to coordinate in this regard with national governments. The national frameworks of Indonesia, Italy, Mongolia, and the Philippines impose requirements at the subnational and/ or local levels, mainly with regard to implementation and monitoring.

1.2.2. Integrating SDGs into national strategies and plans

Most countries have taken concrete steps to either ensure alignment of their existing or new development plans and strategies with the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets and indicators, or integrate the latter into those plans and strategies. The fitting or "retrofitting" of the SDGs into national policy instruments is the main method of implementing the SDGs at the national level. It allows governments flexibility in determining how the Goals are and can be reflected in or addressed by policies and programmes that are designed according to national priorities and considerations. As a first step in adapting the SDGs to policy frameworks, many countries–particularly right after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda–have conducted assessments, mappings or diagnostics of the Goals, targets, and/or indicators and their relevant plans and strategies – from broad policy frameworks to specific medium-term plans or national sustainable development strategies. Such reviews were largely intended to identify and address gaps in coverage of the SDGs, including through the development of new policies.

In Sierra Leone, ministries, departments and agencies reviewed existing sectoral policies against the SDGs and mapped the Goals with the country's third generation poverty reduction strategy paper, the Agenda for Prosperity (A4P) (2013-2018), in 2016. The lead ministry further assessed its two key national development plans, the A4P and the National Ebola Recovery Strategy (NERS) (2015-2017), together with the SDGs, and prepared an integrated results framework that aligned the SDGs and the NERS to the monitoring and evaluation framework of the A4P.[14] More recently, the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) (2019-2023), entitled "Education for Development," was mapped and aligned with both the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063.[15] Turkey conducted a Stocktaking Analysis Project for the SDGs in 2017 with the participation of multiple stakeholders to establish a baseline and analyse gaps in the integration of the 2030 Agenda into its national policies. The country integrated the SDGs into national development plans and sectoral strategies.[16]

In 2016, the government of Colombia mapped the policies, programmes and initiatives of both governmental and non-governmental organizations and actors that contribute to SDG targets, identifying 86 per cent (or 146) of the targets as having at least one specific action or initiative related to

the National Development Plan, the Peace Agreements, the accession process to OECD, or the Policy Documents of the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES) (which contain the main public policy guidelines), facilitating the development of guidelines for SDG coordination and policy design and implementation. The government also determined that all CONPES documents must be consistent with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and identify the goals to which specified actions would contribute.[17] In addition to having a national strategy to implement the SDGs,[18] the National Development Plan 2014-18[19] incorporated the vision, principles and spirit of the 2030 Agenda and included strategies, concrete actions and indicators aimed at implementing and monitoring progress towards 92 of the 169 SDG targets.[20] The current National Development Plan 2018-2022[21] has also been designed to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs have been used as a tool for promoting coherence within and among the different sections of the plan, as well as a key reference for setting targets aligned with a long-term vision of the country.[22]

In several developed countries, the SDGs are aligned with national sustainable development strategies. For instance, Estonia implements the SDGs through its existing national strategy on sustainable development, Sustainable Estonia 21 (through 2030), which itself is implemented through sector plans and strategies.[23] In addition, the SDGs have been cited as the basis for the newly-approved long-term strategy, Estonia 2035, the country's "umbrella strategy for all sectoral development plans."[24] Estonia's 2020 VNR report notes that all future strategic documents must clarify how the SDGs will be achieved.

In 2017, Morocco adopted its National Sustainable Development Strategy (2016-2030), which highlights the need to assess the alignment of its objectives and targets with national priorities and the SDGs.[25] In 2019, the Secretariat of State for Sustainable Development undertook a study whose preliminary results showed that the national strategy covers 70 per cent of the SDGs.[26] A diagnostic study has provided an overall assessment of the level of integration of SDG targets in sectoral strategies, as well as the first mapping of priorities, the identification of accelerator targets, and a general view of how the national sustainable development strategy corresponds to the SDGs.[27]

In some countries, SDG-specific strategies or planning instruments and national sustainable development strategies are converging. In 2019, the government of France published its national SDG Roadmap, which succeeded its national sustainable development strategy upon its conclusion in 2020 and which focuses on six challenges that reflect France's national priorities.[28] Similarly, Spain's 2018 Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda aims to contribute to the development of a new sustainable development strategy aligned to the SDGs for the period 2020-2030.[29]

1.2.3. SDG implementation roadmaps

Several countries in the sample have undertaken roadmaps or action plans to guide their implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Among them, much of the focus is given to the key issues of policy coherence, SDG localization and ownership, monitoring and evaluation systems, and stakeholder engagement.

Some countries developed short-term roadmaps or action plans, often to either support a shift in focus away from the MDGs and towards the SDGs, or to define initial modalities for implementing the SDGs, requiring the preparation of a broader, long-term, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Kenya's Roadmap to SDGs (2016-2018), a strategy to transition between the MDGs and SDGs, included among several key interventions the mapping of all stakeholders and the development of partnerships, the undertaking of advocacy for and sensitization on the Goals, domesticating and localizing the Goals, tracking and reporting on progress, and building capacity for implementation at national and county levels.[30] In Brazil, the national SDG Action Plan 2017-2019 developed by the then National Commission for the Sustainable Development Goals (CNODS) contained five central strategic axes: a transversal one regarding the Commission's management and governance of the SDGs, and four others related to the dissemination, internationalization, adoption and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.[31]

Long-term roadmaps and action plans lay blueprints for SDG implementation through 2030. Examples of countries with such instruments include Colombia, France (noted above), Indonesia, Nepal, and Spain. In 2018, Colombia's SDG roadmap established a long-term vision and aims to advance statistical capacity and enhance SDG ownership among stakeholders.[32] Indonesia's SDG roadmap, launched in 2019, outlines key policy priorities, sets up target values for key indicators, and also contains a financing strategy.[33] In 2018, Nepal developed its SDGs roadmap that sets three intermediate milestones and four stages of implementation.[34] Spain developed an action plan in 2018 (noted above) that prioritizes nine policy levers to accelerate SDG implementation and ten cross-cutting transformational measures with national targets.[35] Some countries are either developing an implementation strategy or have scope for developing one. For instance, Canada has an interim document that serves as a starting point towards establishing a comprehensive strategy for implementing the 2030 Agenda and lays the foundation for a Canadian indicator framework. The next iteration of the document is forthcoming.[36] In addition, Chile has a mandate to develop a national strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, pending approval from the president.[37]

With only nine years remaining until the conclusion of the 2030 Agenda, the potential for new roadmaps or action plans may be diminishing. However, it is notable that some countries decided relatively late after the start of the 2030 Agenda that they needed a roadmap in order to accelerate SDG implementation, a move not unlike the recent launch of the UN's Decade of Action to deliver the Goals.

1.2.4. Creation of piloting structures in government

Governments have set up a variety of institutional arrangements for the coordination of SDG implementation at the national level. They have used pre-existing arrangements and mechanisms or created new ones.[38] In most cases, new SDG-dedicated structures have been established for broad coordination. Some countries have multiple structures with various roles. Several have adjusted their arrangements over time–through the creation of additional structures, changes to existing structures, or shifting responsibilities to different actors.

In Costa Rica, the High-level Council of the SDGs (Consejo de Alto Nivel de los ODS) is headed by the President, the Minister of Planning, the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and, since 2019, the Minister of Human Development.[39] Some structures promote inter-ministerial coordination on SDG implementation. Among other examples, Chile, which has a National Council for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda formed by representatives of five ministries, including the Ministry Secretary General of the Presidency,[40] also has a 2030 Agenda National Network composed of representatives of all ministries and other state institutions.[41]

SDG coordination structures frequently have subsidiary bodies, such as working groups or committees, that focus on cross-cutting or thematic issues–or clusters of issues (see Box 1.3). Some bodies and subsidiary bodies have as permanent or rotating members representatives of other stakeholders, such as civil society, the private sector, and academia.

In some countries, new SDG structures have been integrated into existing architecture. South Africa developed a national coordination mechanism to enhance the implementation of development policies and review its progress made on international agendas such as the SDGs. While largely relying on an existing structure, it created the Inter-Ministerial Committee of SDGs, Agenda 2063, and SADC-RISDP.[42] Among other elements, the mechanism has the cabinet at the lead and is supported by three thematic working groups.[43]

In Canada and Turkey, the designations of existing structures with responsibility for SDG coordination have been subject to changes. In the former, following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, preparations for implementation were coordinated and overseen by five lead federal organizations, with support from two other organizations,[44] through informal structures and processes.[45] In 2018, the government committed dedicated funding to support SDG implementation over 13 years, including to establish an SDG Unit within Employment and Social Development Canada to lead coordination at the

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Box 1.3

Several coordination structures operate similarly at the subsidiary level: examples from Colombia, Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines

Colombia's High-level Inter-Institutional Commission on SDGs, which coordinates all actors on SDG implementation and contributes to monitoring and reporting,[a] has a Technical Committee, a Technical Secretariat, and five cross-cutting Technical Working Groups on indicators, territorial issues, resource mobilization, international matters, and communications.[b] Some similarities at the subsidiary level are evident in Indonesia, where the institutional structure for SDG coordination is led by the Minister of National Development Planning/National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas), who serves as the National Coordinator for the SDGs and reports to a Steering Committee composed of seven key ministers and led by the President. A multi-stakeholder Implementation Team, with a dedicated secretariat and Expert Team, takes direction from the Steering Committee. It relies on four multi-stakeholder Working Groups, based on clusters, or pillars, of SDGs: economic (SDGs 7, 8, 9, 10, 17), social (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), environmental (SDGs 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15), and governance (SDG 16). The four working groups are also involved in the process of monitoring and evaluation of programmes contributing to the SDGs (the national SDG action plan (RAN) and regional action plans (RAD)).[c]

Parallel subsidiary approaches can be found in Nepal and the Philippines. In Nepal, a high-level Steering Committee on the SDGs, chaired by the Prime Minister, guides SDG implementation and monitoring. It is supported by the Implementation and Monitoring Committee as well as seven multi-stakeholder thematic committees that have been aligned to SDG clusters; for instance, the Social Development Committee addresses Goals 3 and 4.[d] In the Philippines, the Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, co-chaired by the National Economic and Development Authority and the Department of Budget and Management and with members from different key government agencies, has four technical working groups focused on different aspects of sustainable development–social; economic; environmental; and peace, security, and governance[e]–as well as a Stakeholders' Chamber.[f] Similar thematic working groups also operate in South Africa.

Sources:

[a]   Colombia, Presidencia de la República, Decreto 280. Por el cual se crea la Comisión Interinstitucional de Alto Nivel para el alistamiento y la efectiva implementación de la Agenda de Desarrollo Post 2015 y sus Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible -ODS, Article 4.

[b]   Contraloría General de la República de Colombia, "Evaluación de la preparación para la implementación de la Agenda 2030 y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible" (Bogotá, Colombia, December 27, 2018), 28, https://www.contraloria.gov.co/documents/20181/472298/Informe-evaluación-preparación-implementación-ODS+28122018A.pdf/7187aa4f-3fd7-40cd-9eb4-eb74b61f1b48?version=1.0.

[c]   Indonesia, Ministry of National Development Planning/National Development Planning Agency, "Voluntary National Review: Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing World," 97-99.

[d]   Nepal, National Planning Commission, "National Review of Sustainable Development Goals" (Kathmandu, June 2020), 15–16, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26541VNR_2020_Nepal_Report.pdf.

[e]   Philippines, "The 2019 Voluntary National Review of the Philippines: Review of the Status of the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Philippines Focusing on Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality."

[f]   United Nations, "Compendium of National Institutional Arrangements for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

national level and among stakeholders and to track progress towards the Goals.[46] The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development has overall responsibility, though works closely with other ministers and departments.[47] In Turkey, between 2016 and 2019, responsibility for SDG coordination changed from the Ministry of Development to the Presidency of Strategy and Budget (PSB) under the Presidency, which is also in charge of preparing national development plans. As of 2019, there were also plans for a new coordination structure that will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating SDG implementation, with broad multi-stakeholder participation.[48]

Some countries have seen multiple, rapid adjustments to their SDG coordination structures. In Mauritius, the lead government entity with responsibility for coordinating, monitoring and reporting on SDG implementation is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, which also chairs the multi-stakeholder SDG Steering Committee.[49] That ministry is the fourth to be assigned responsibility for those functions.[50] Spain has created multiple roles and structures with SDG responsibilities over the years. For instance, a High-Level Group[51], an inter-ministerial mechanism, was created in 2017, and had its composition and functions modified in 2019 to

Box 1.4

Italy's "Wellbeing Italy" Control Room

A distinct institutional arrangement exists in Italy, where in June 2019 a decree set up the "Wellbeing Italy" Control Room (Cabina di regia Benessere Italia) as the technical-scientific body responsible for supporting the Prime Minister on institutional, political, strategic and functional coordination for the implementation of fair and equitable welfare policies and the national strategy for sustainable development. The Control Room is composed of a representative of the Prime Minister; a representative of each ministry; a committee of experts including the heads of the National Institute of Statistics, the National Research Council, the Institute for Environmental Protection and Research, and the National Social Security Institute; the Spokesperson of the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS); and other experts.

Source: "Prime Minister's Decree (DPCM) of 11 June 2019" (2019), https://www.governo.it/sites/new.governo.it/files/DPCM_20190611_BenessereItalia.pdf, Articles 1.2 and 1.3.

include, inter alia, follow-up on the strategies and plans needed to implement the 2030 Agenda.[52] Also in 2019, two new bodies were established:[53] the National Commission for the 2030 Agenda, as the body to coordinate SDG implementation with the Autonomous Communities and local governments, and the National Council for Sustainable Development, as an advisory body to channel the engagement of non-state actors. (See also section 1.2.1)

In addition to high-level coordination mechanisms, many countries also have multi-stakeholder consultative structures, usually referred to as national sustainable development commissions or councils (NSDCs). Many of those pre-date the SDGs, having been created in the wake of the Earth Summit in 1992 and the Johannesburg Summit in 2002.[54] They often have a recognized role in the institutional arrangements set up for SDG implementation.

In Estonia, the commission on sustainable development, a multi-stakeholder advisory body with the main function of SDG monitoring, has as its secretariat the Strategy Unit in the Government Office, which coordinates sustainable development matters and the institutional framework for them.[55] Whereas in some countries, including Finland and Morocco, commissions include ministries, departments, and agencies, fostering horizontal coordination, Estonia's is composed of non-governmental umbrella organizations and associations of local governments.[56] In that country, horizontal coordination is facilitated by the Inter-Ministerial Sustainable Development Working Group, led by the Director of the Strategy Unit and composed of senior representatives of nine ministries as well as Statistics Estonia.[57] The Working Group and the Commission together are referred to as the country's coordination mechanism for sustainable development.[58]

1.2.5. Development of national SDG monitoring, follow-up and review frameworks

National monitoring, follow-up and review systems are a critical part of institutional arrangements for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Chapter 2 looks at such systems in detail. This section provides a brief overview of some of the features of reports, informational SDG websites and SDG evaluations found in the sample countries.

Countries are notably attentive to reporting on the SDGs. All of the countries in the sample examined for this report have completed one voluntary national review (VNR) report, and approximately half have completed two. Beyond the VNRs, which are ad hoc, voluntary and presented at the global level, regular reporting is increasingly pursued. More than half of the countries examined report on SDG progress or implementation regularly. Regular reporting on the SDGs takes a variety of forms, with some reports issued for wide, public consumption and others directed to government bodies with oversight roles, such as lead ministries, coordinating bodies (which may also produce reports) or parliaments. Reports may focus on indicators, implementation programmes, or both. Most reporting is done on an annual basis, or thereabout. Biennial reporting is institutionalized in Kenya and Mongolia. Regardless of how reports are called for and prepared, their regularity has significance. It demonstrates that governments continue to prioritize SDG implementation, are transparent about the results of monitoring, and respect the obligation to be accountable for their commitments. As noted in chapter 2, reporting on SDG progress can overlap or intersect with other monitoring initiatives.

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Box 1.5

Reporting requirements in Colombia and Indonesia

The Technical Secretariat of Colombia's SDG Commission must present an annual report that includes information on progress towards the Goals. However, the Action and Follow-up Plan (PAS) to the national SDG strategy has a shorter reporting period. The PAS identifies the entities responsible for each action, implementation periods, as well as needed and available resources, and requires all entities identified in the strategy to report on the PAS every 6 months.[a] In Indonesia, where there are detailed guidelines on reporting, the Implementation Coordinator reports on progress towards SDG targets at the national level to the President, as Chair of the Steering Committee, at least once a year but at any time if necessary.[b]

Sources:

[a]   Colombia, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, "CONPES 3918. Estrategia Para La Implementación de Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible En Colombia," 57.

[b]   Indonesia, Ministry of Development Planning, "Pedoman teknis pemantuan dan evaluasi pelaksanaan tujuan pembangunan berkelanjutan (Technical guidelines for monitoring and evaluation of SDG implementation)," 2019.

In addition to SDG reports, information on the SDGs is usually made available on government websites. This visibility of information is important for multiple reasons. Expanding awareness of the Goals serves to create ownership of them and drive multi-stakeholder participation in their implementation. It also serves to inform and build the capacity of different stakeholders to contribute to SDG implementation (see chapter 3 for examples). It supports citizens and policymakers in monitoring the Goals and identifying gaps and priority areas for action. It demonstrates that Governments are following through on their commitments to the 2030 Agenda by examining results and making them transparent. It further fosters public engagement with the Agenda and enables stakeholders to hold governments to account.

All governments examined have made information about the SDGs available online for all audiences, albeit to different degrees. A few countries only mention the Goals in a succinct way on a page of a ministry's website. Others have built comprehensive repositories of resources. Most countries in the sample have set up dedicated central "one-stop" SDG platforms that gather information on the Goals, including official documents, guidelines, studies and reports published by various actors, collections of tools and practices, as well as SDG-related events and news. These platforms are often operated by the government department in charge of coordinating SDG implementation (for instance, in Finland, France, Indonesia, and Nepal). In parallel, many countries have SDG data platforms or dashboards maintained by the national statistical office, which enable the public and government users to access statistical data on the SDGs. The two types of platforms are often linked. Some countries also make available ways to comment on relevant strategies or data or information to measure the contributions of the private sector to the Goals.

Several governments have created a central online SDG platform with comprehensive data that users can explore and with which they can interact, along with other relevant information. This is the case, for example, in India, Indonesia and Nepal. In India, information about the SDGs is centred on the website of the National Institution for Transforming India, NITI Aayog.[59] In particular, there is the SDG India Index & Dashboard 2019-20, with the dashboard[60] illustrating the Index, which assesses progress made by states and union territories (UTs) on indicators under the Goals, providing a composite score for each subnational government, and attempts to measure incremental progress since 2018.[61] It contains an interactive map of states and UTs and downloadable data. A dedicated section of the website further includes, inter alia, a mapping of central sector schemes and ministries against the Goals and reports of national and regional consultations about them.

While countries devote considerable and broad efforts to monitoring SDG progress, particularly through indicators and statistical data, SDG evaluation frameworks have generally received less attention (see chapter 2). Such evaluations are valuable for providing critical analysis of SDG governance and implementation gaps as well as successes. Evaluations offer governments insights and recommendations that can lead to enhanced SDG delivery. They can also inform the work of other stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and parliaments. Thus far independent evaluations of SDG implementation commissioned by governments to external actors have been exceedingly rare. Most notably, Finland has institutionalized regular independent assessments of its government's performance in implementing the SDGs. In 2018, the government commissioned an independent and comprehensive evaluation of national sustainable development policies, undertaken by three Finnish non-

> **Box 1.6**
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> **SDG web hubs managed by non-governmental actors in Kenya, New Zealand, and South Africa**
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> In some countries, SDG web hubs containing extensive information about the Goals, including monitoring data, are managed by civil society organizations. In New Zealand, a web hub of SDG data, information, and resources, New Zealand Sustainable Development Goals,[a] provides an interactive model to present New Zealand's performance on the Goals in two formats – an indexed series, showing progress since 2015, and a natural units series, which adds context by comparison. The site also contains background information on the SDGs, relevant articles and events, and other resources, including for teaching the Goals. Notably, it further showcases "The People's Report on the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals" of 2019, an independent assessment of SDG progress by civil society.
>
> Similarly, the South African SDG Hub[b] identifies relevant research from university repositories and classifies them by Goal, hosts events that enjoin policymakers and researchers, and issues analytical briefing notes, such as on the integration of the SDGs with national plans and effective SDG coordination mechanisms.
>
> Another online SDG hub is provided by SDGs Kenya Forum for Sustainable Development,[c] a group of civil society organizations working on issues related to the Goals that also co-chairs the Inter Agency Technical Working Committee (IATWC).[d] Its website contains reports, policy documents and various other resources, presents its projects, and features its series of civil society VNR reports that address its roles and contributions.
>
> *Sources:*
>
> [a]   See https://www.sdg.org.nz/.
>
> [b]   See http://sasdghub.org/.
>
> [c]   See https://sdgkenyaforum.org/.
>
> [d]   Kenya, National Treasury and Planning, State Department for Planning, "Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals," June 2020, 20, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26360VNR_2020_Kenya_Report.pdf.

governmental research-oriented organizations, Demos Helsinki, the Finnish Environment Institute, and the Helsinki Institute of Sustainability Science. The report focused on Finland's sustainable development policy; the operational model of sustainable development; the coordination model for sustainable development; and the presence of foreign policy in all sectors of development. Among its recommendations are the preparation of an SDG roadmap for Finland and for sustainable development to become the basis for all government programmes in the future.[62]

As documented in detail in chapter 2, supreme audit institutions (SAIs) have played an active role in assessing the preparedness of governments to implement the SDGs.[63] By, in effect, formalizing the recognition of impediments to effective SDG governance, and issuing direct or indirect recommendations to address them, SAI evaluations create transparency around SDG preparedness and implementation and guide appropriate action. SDG preparedness audits completed by SAIs have identified key challenges with regard to institutional arrangements for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including, among others, the need for robust monitoring and reporting systems and for clear governance

and accountability arrangements, and limited stakeholder engagement, vertical coordination, and integration of the SDGs into long-term plans (see Box 1.7).

In some cases, it is clear or implied that governments have indeed acted on SAI audit recommendations with regard to the SDGs. Morocco's government created the National Commission for Sustainable Development specifically in response to the SAI's recommendation to set up a mechanism for coordinating and defining responsibilities in the SDG monitoring process.[64]

Evaluations of SDG governance and progress towards the goals are also carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or associations thereof, on an ad hoc or regular basis. They add crucial value to the formulation of objective views of where the SDGs stand and how they can best be realized in countries by contextualizing the goals with ground-level perspective, including on gaps, successes, complementary issues, and relevant programmes and initiatives, as well as issuing recommendations for further action. In some cases, NGOs also share data that they have produced themselves.

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In several of the countries examined, NGOs or, more commonly, groups of NGOs, produce series of reports on SDG implementation, with civil society in some other countries also producing individual assessments (see chapter 2). In Italy, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), an organization representing multiple CSOs and institutions, produces an annual report analysing progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. The reports identify priority areas for action, with the 2019 edition also providing an overview of initiatives carried out to advance sustainable development, evaluating policies implemented in 2018, and making proposals to accelerate progress.[65] Brazil's Civil Society Working Group for the 2030 Agenda (GTSC A2030) issues an annual spotlight report on the 2030 Agenda, the "Relatório Luz".[66] In Kenya, reviews of SDG progress are regularly undertaken since 2017 by SDGs Kenya Forum for Sustainable Development to inform the country's VNRs. The Forum's 2020 report reflects civil society's views and experiences in implementing the 2030 Agenda including successes, challenges, and gaps, as well as the alignment of its work with national policies and its support needs, plans for 2020, and recommendations for accelerating SDG implementation.[67] The report is accompanied by a People's Scorecard whereby CSOs assess the current stage of certain aspects of SDG implementation, such as monitoring, evaluation and reporting and plans and strategies (see chapter 2).[68]

Box 1.7

Examples of findings of SAIs' government preparedness audits in relation to SDG governance and institutional arrangements, from the SAIs of Canada, Costa Rica, Mauritius, Morocco, and Nepal

Canada's SAI found that, as of November 2017, there was no "clear lead or federal governance structure with defined roles and responsibilities to manage the 2030 Agenda's implementation."[a] It also cited, inter alia, limited national consultation and engagement. The recommendations of the SAI have since been acted upon. The government, has, among other things, created a government entity to lead SDG coordination and held public consultations to guide the development of a national strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[b]

Costa Rica's first SAI audit on SDG preparedness found limited awareness-raising for stakeholders about the SDGs and stressed limitations in the strategic planning process and the identification of responsibilities of various public entities involved in implementation.[c]

The SAI of Mauritius urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (MFARIIT), in its audit report issued in 2019, to strengthen its efforts to establish suitable institutional arrangements for coordinating, monitoring, and reviewing SDG implementation, and observed that the three-year strategic plans and annual Budget Speeches did not cover the period through 2030. It found insufficient clarity regarding how local government plans and operations linked to the SDGs, and the absence of a plan of activities to raise the awareness of stakeholders about the SDGs and engage them in relevant efforts.[d]

The SAI of Morocco, in its preparedness audit report of 2019, noted the lack of a governance structure with clearly-defined prerogatives to manage government action and coordinate a national approach with other levels of government and the population on the 2030 Agenda and the definition of national priorities, in addition to constraints faced by the national statistical system.[e]

The SAI of Nepal has found challenges such as the integration of the SDGs into plans, sector strategies and programmes and localization at the subnational level,[f] and expressed concern regarding progress on institutional arrangements.[g]

Sources:

[a] Office of the Auditor General of Canada, "Report 2–Canada's Preparedness to Implement the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals."

[b] Canada, Global Affairs Canada, "Canada's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development-Voluntary National Review."

[c] Contraloría General de la República de Costa Rica, "Informe de Seguimiento de la Gestión del Centro de Gobierno para la implementación de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible," Informe DFOE-EC-SGP-00001-2018 (San José, Costa Rica: CGR, 2018), https://cgrfiles.cgr.go.cr/publico/docs_cgr/2018/SIGYD_D_2018003161.pdf.

[d] National Audit Office of Mauritius, "Performance Audit Report on Preparedness for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade."

[e] Moroccan Court of Accounts, "Rapport thématique sur : L'état de préparation du Maroc pour la mise en œuvre des objectifs de développement durable 2015-2030, Synthèse," 2019, 4; Morocco, "Examen National Volontaire de La Mise En Œuvre Des Objectifs de Développement Durable," 2020, 12, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26406VNR_2020_Morocco_Report_French.pdf.

[f] Nepal, National Planning Commission, "National Review of Sustainable Development Goals," 20.

[g] Office of the Auditor General of Nepal, "The Auditor General's Fifty-Fifth Annual Report," 2018, 79.

Box 1.8

Examples of CSO perspectives of SDG implementation gaps in Brazil, India, Nepal, and New Zealand

CSOs in Brazil have become concerned about what they perceive to be the government's inattention to the 2030 Agenda, which they fear has reversed achievements and efforts.[a] Following the dissolution of the National Commission for Sustainable Development, the role of CSOs in reporting on SDG progress has taken on greater significance.

In India, CSOs have raised concern over the degree to which monitoring of progress towards the SDGs captures the experiences of the most vulnerable groups in accordance with the "leave no one behind" principle of the 2030 Agenda.[b]

In Nepal, CSOs have questioned the functional status of the country's institutional framework for the SDGs, noting a lack of clarity about the frequency and outcomes of meetings, and found limited information available about local-level institutional mechanisms. They highlighted the need for Nepal to strengthen monitoring of the SDGs in partnership with stakeholders. Further to the recognition in Nepal's 2020 VNR report of the need to enhance the capacity of governments, the CSOs specifically highlighted capacity gaps at the local level.[c]

In New Zealand, CSOs have expressed support for the Living Standards Framework (LSF) adopted by the New Zealand Treasury, which contains goals that largely align with the SDGs. However, they question its lack of clear and strong links to the global framework of the SDGs.[d]

Sources:

[a]   Civil Society Working Group for the 2030 Agenda (GTSC A2030), "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Spotlight Report - Synthesis IV, Brazil."

[b]   Qadri and others, "Multiple Challenges of Marginalised Communities in Achieving SDGs: A Civil Society Review of Sustainable Development Goals in India" (New Delhi: Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, September 25, 2019), VI, https://e38d8451-4f59-418e-9009-db4f524870a2.filesusr.com/ugd/7bfee1_551dd7a422d44bf8b3d57ec54b6c7dee.pdf.

[c]   SDGs National Network Nepal, "Voluntary Peoples Review of SDGs in Nepal. 'Amplifying Voices of the People: Closing the Gaps of SDGs.' Civil Society Spotlight Report 2020" (SDGs National Network Nepal, Secretariat-National Campaign for Sustainable Development Nepal, July 2020), 5, 88–89, 7, https://nacasud.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2Nepal-Civil-Society-Spotlight-Report-of-SDGs-2020_Final.pdf.

[d]   Dr. Gill Greer and Moko Morris, eds., "The People's Report on the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. An Alternate Report for Aotearoa New Zealand (2019)," 2019, 10–11, https://www.sdg.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Final_PeopleReport-2019-Dec-2019_for-web.pdf.

As is the case with SAI audits, civil society evaluations highlight gaps in SDG implementation and sometimes differ from the evaluations of governments. Among findings from across countries, CSOs have noted that although more forms of stakeholder engagement are evident, their broad use remains limited.[69] In addition, the capacity needs of stakeholders to effectively contribute to the SDGs are not well covered by VNRs, which also provide limited information on standard government practices to address them.[70]

1.2.6. Visualizing the build-up of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation since 2015: a milestones approach

As illustrated by previous sections of this chapter, since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, countries have made major strides in creating institutional arrangements for SDG implementation. Arrangements have been adjusted over the years, and made progressively more complex through the involvement of more government and non-governmental actors, as well as through the creation of opportunities for different actors to engage in various tasks relating to the

elaboration of strategies and plans, SDG implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review, evaluation and feedback to policy-making. The sequence and speed of institutional changes in relation to SDG implementation, though, has varied significantly across countries, as has the complexity of current institutional arrangements.

In order to enable a more visual perspective of these considerations, nine "milestones", or key institutional steps that many countries have taken in relation to SDG implementation, were defined (see Table 1.1). For each of the 24 countries in the report's sample, the year of occurrence of each milestone, starting in 2015, was recorded. In this way, a comparable picture of the development of institutional frameworks across countries can be obtained.

As with any limited set of binary indicators, because of the necessary simplification inherent in converting narratives of the evolution of institutional arrangements into binary criteria, such an approach does not do justice to the diversity of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation that exist, or to the nuances that characterize those arrangements at the country level. For instance, the milestone for the involvement

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Table 1.1

Definition of the milestones chosen to illustrate the building up of institutional arrangements since 2015

Milestones	Criteria	Comments
Integration of the SDGs into a national sustainable development strategy (NSDS) or national development plan (NDP)	Published NSDS or NDP based on the SDGs, or clearly reflecting the correspondence between national development goals and the SDGs.	Date of publication. The strategy/plan needs to be publicly available.
Publication of a national SDG roadmap or action plan for SDG implementation	Published SDG implementation roadmap or action plan presenting how the country is planning to implement the SDGs until 2030. The strategy needs to cover all of the SDGs.	Date of publication. The roadmap or action plan needs to be publicly available.
Creation of a high-level piloting structure for SDG implementation in government	Government high-level institutional mechanism established (e.g. ministry mandated) to coordinate SDG implementation at the national level.	Date of mandate or of creation of the institutional mechanism
Publication of national SDG indicators	First time a set of agreed national SDG indicators is published (either through a report or an online platform presenting the indicators).	Date of first publication
Government reporting on SDG progress at the national level	First time government reports on SDG implementation at the national level - either through a VNR report or an SDG progress report.	Date of publication
Creation of a central SDG hub – electronic portal	Launch of a dedicated central online portal operated by the government with information on the country's initiatives to implement the SDGs. The platform has to include information beyond SDG indicators.	Date of launch
Parliament's involvement	Specific committee/caucus/working group in parliament created or mandated to work on the SDGs; or official report issued by parliament on SDG implementation.	Date of creation or mandate, or date of parliament's report
SAI's involvement	First national audit report on SDG preparedness published by the SAI, or first occurrence of official involvement of the SAI in the VNR or national SDG reporting process.	Date of publication
Evaluation by non-state actors	First time a report evaluating progress is published independently by civil society (shadow report, also called alternative report); or first time an independent evaluation commissioned by the government is published.	Date of publication

Source: Authors' elaboration.

of supreme audit institutions (SAIs) in SDG implementation considers the publication of an SDG audit report as one of its criteria. Some SAIs have conducted audits of government preparedness to implement the SDGs, but had not published them by the end of 2020. In such cases, and absent another formal channel of engagement of the SAI in SDG implementation, the country in question will not be recorded as having achieved this particular milestone. Nonetheless, this simplified set of milestones provides interesting insights in terms of the development of institutional and other arrangements for implementing the SDGs since 2015.

Looking first at the situation in 2020 (Figure 1.1), by the end of 2020, 23 out of 24 countries had put in place arrangements

for high-level coordination of SDG implementation. All of them had also reported at least once on SDG progress, either through voluntary national reviews or national progress reports. All countries but one had published SDG indicators (national adaptations of the global SDG indicators, national SDG indicators, or both). The majority had created central SDG portals managed by government institutions. In about half of the 24 countries, parliament was actively involved, either through the creation of a dedicated committee or caucus on SDGs, or through reports on SDG implementation published by the parliament. In about two-thirds of the countries, the SAI had published a report on SDG implementation or was involved in national reporting mechanisms. In 19 countries, non-state actors had published evaluation reports on SDG

Figure 1.1

Number of countries having achieved the different milestones by the end of 2020
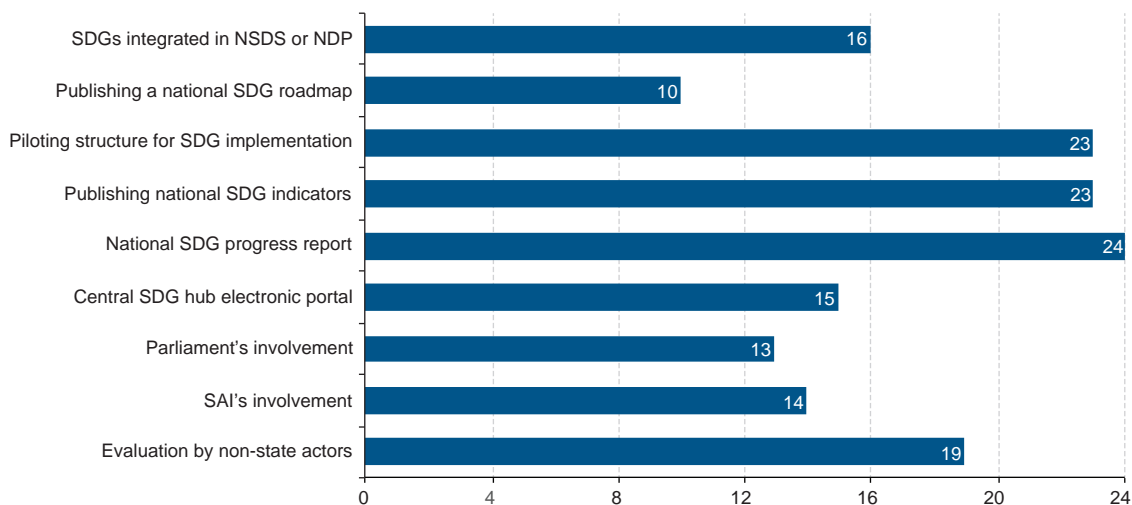
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Note: Numbers in this graph may differ from numbers provided in other chapters of the report, due to different definitions.

implementation (see section 1.2.5 and chapter 2). Only ten countries out of 24 had published a roadmap for SDG implementation extending to 2030.

Figure 1.2 presents the evolution of countries in the report's sample achieving specific milestones each year since 2016.

The figure shows that change was not limited to the initial years of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It also shows that on average, some milestones were achieved earlier, indicating that the underlying area of work was a priority in many countries. The picture shows that establishing a high-level coordination or piloting structure for SDG implementation was

Figure 1.2

Milestones achieved by year since 2016, by type of milestone
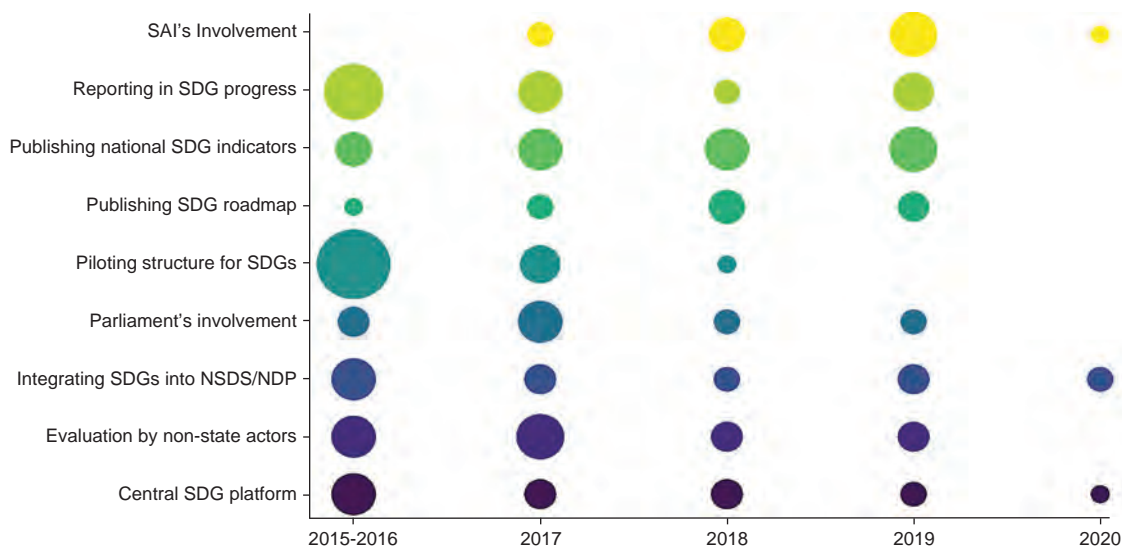
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Note: the size of the bubbles is proportional to the number of countries (out of 24) having achieved a given milestone in a given year.

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Figure 1.3

Distribution of the number of milestones achieved in the 24-country sample in 2016, 2018 and 2020
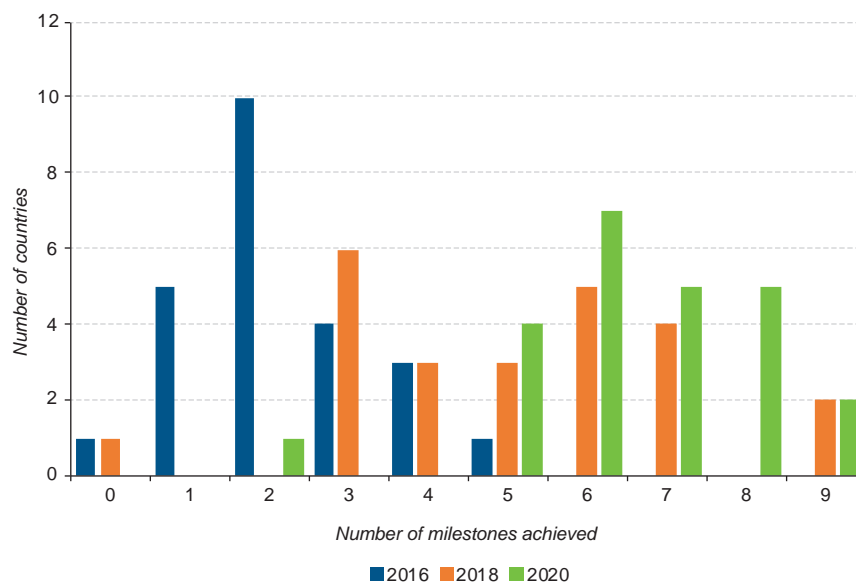
Source: Authors' elaboration.

a high priority in many countries in the sample, with most of them having done so by the end of 2016. Also frequent in 2016 was the creation of online SDG portals and reporting on SDG progress. However, those two milestones were more evenly distributed over time, with a significant number of countries publishing their first national implementation report in 2018 or later. Evaluations of progress published by non-governmental actors followed a similar pattern to that of official reports, which may suggest that the VNR process is indeed a catalyst for civil society involvement in SDG follow-up and review. The first publication of national SDG indicators took time, with a majority of countries publishing them for the first time in 2018 or later. As regards supreme audit institutions, in most countries where they play an active role, their involvement materialized in 2018 and 2019, which is the period when many audits of government preparedness to implement the SDGs were published. The integration of SDGs into national planning and policy frameworks has been spread over time, which in part reflects different starting dates for medium- or long-term planning instruments across countries.

Lastly, Figure 1.3 shows the annual evolution of the distribution of the number of milestones achieved by a given year in the sample of 24 countries. The figure gives a sense of the time dimension of institutional adjustments, and its variation across countries. By 2016, one country (Finland) had achieved five milestones, and three had achieved four of them. A typical country in the sample, though, had achieved only two milestones. By 2018, the distribution has shifted markedly to the right, with all but one country having met at least three

milestones. By 2020, the average number of milestones in the sample had increased to almost seven; all but one country had met at least five milestones, with seven countries having met eight milestones or more.

Although the figures are based on a sample of countries of limited size, they provide a sense of how long it takes for countries to adjust their institutional setups, and for different institutional actors to mobilize around new processes such as the SDGs. They also reflect varying levels of priority given to the full integration of the SDGs into domestic frameworks. In this limited sample, there is no clear divide between developed and developing countries in this regard. In several European countries, for instance, a political push seems to have occurred around the years 2018 and 2019, relatively late in the SDG implementation cycle.

Because it only looks at the first time a given activity happens in a country, the approach by milestones followed here does not provide a snapshot of the current set of activities occurring in a given country. For instance, some countries may have seen SDG implementation prioritized in the first few years following 2015 and achieved a number of "firsts" early on–only to see the related activities or institutional mechanisms discontinued in later years due to political change or other reasons. And indeed, while the approach by milestones by definition shows increasing numbers over time, in reality the development of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation is often not linear (see previous sections). Notwithstanding this, even the favorable picture provided by the milestones approach used

here suggests that five years after the starting date of the 2030 Agenda, some countries still have room to involve more actors in their institutional arrangements for SDG implementation.

1.3. Current state of involvement of different parts of the institutional ecosystem in SDG implementation

Central governments have a key role in steering SDG implementation, and much attention has been paid to how centres of government in particular coordinate SDG implementation. This section examines the roles played by other parts of national institutional systems and other actors, focusing on a limited subset of those that includes: subnational and local governments; parliaments; supreme audit institutions; non-governmental organizations; academia and experts; and the private sector. The focus in this section is on entry points that exist for the different actors to engage with governments and among themselves. As with prior sections of this chapter, the goal is not to be exhaustive, but to highlight examples found in the sample of 24 countries.

The analysis presented below complements other publications on multi-stakeholder engagement. In particular, a report published by the United Nations entitled "Multi-stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation: A review of Voluntary National Review Reports (2016-2019)" presents various approaches taken by Member States to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower the public in SDG implementation, including with regard to institutional arrangements.[71]

1.3.1. Subnational and local governments

Information about SDG governance is less available at the subnational and local levels than at the national level. However, it is evident that many subnational and local governments across regions have taken some important steps to raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda, to adapt their planning and operations to advance its implementation, and to monitor and report on progress. Levels of engagement with the Goals vary. Subnational and local governments both contribute to and coordinate on various SDG-related efforts at the national level, and undertake initiatives to localize, implement and monitor the SDGs.

Engagement with national-level SDG implementation

Subnational and local governments in several countries contribute to SDG coordination at the national level through their formal participation in or engagement with national institutional coordination mechanisms and advisory bodies (see section 1.2). For instance, in Spain, the National Commission for the 2030 Agenda, established in 2019, serves to coordinate SDG implementation with the Autonomous Communities and local governments.[72] In parallel, subnational

and local governments advise national governments on aspects of SDG implementation through their role as members of institutional advisory bodies, such as Estonia's Commission for Sustainable Development, in which cities and rural municipalities are represented through associations.[73]

Some channels of engagement with the Goals at the national level relate to dedicated SDG strategies and plans or to the alignment or integration of the Goals into policies and strategies. Subnational and local governments in some countries have contributed to the preparation of national sustainable development and SDG strategies. For instance, in Finland, municipalities and regions were consulted on the preparation of that country's implementation plan for the 2030 Agenda through their representation in the National Commission on Sustainable Development.[74] Such representation also illustrates how subnational and local government contribute to the alignment of national plans and policies with the SDGs, as that national commission was responsible for updating the country's national sustainable development policy, "The Finland We Want by 2050—Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development," in 2016 in order to ensure its alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

Monitoring and reporting on the SDGs is another area in which subnational and local governments engage at the national level (see chapter 2). They have contributed to the process of defining national-level SDG indicators, also through participation in national coordination or consultative mechanisms, as well as through consultations. Reporting on national SDG implementation is a widely accessed channel of engagement by subnational and local governments, with many involved in VNR processes and in informing progress reports, in some cases, again, through their representation in national mechanisms, in others through calls for inputs and participation in workshops. VNR reports reflect SDG initiatives and progress at the subnational and local levels in different ways, often through a mainstreamed approach.

SDG implementation at the subnational and local levels

Subnational and local governments have undertaken initiatives to implement the SDGs at their levels that are largely along the lines of their support to national governments. Some subnational governments have created or assigned institutional structures or mechanisms to lead the coordination of SDG implementation. Provinces in Nepal have set up steering committees that coordinate and promote SDG implementation.[75] Several coordination arrangements are found in India (see Box 1.9).

Subnational and local government engagement with the SDGs often relates to dedicated SDG strategies and plans and to the alignment or integration of the Goals with or into existing or new policies and strategies. Provinces in Indonesia have been preparing subnational action plans for the SDGs

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Box 1.9

Subnational coordination mechanisms in India

In India, most states/Union Territories (UTs) have designated their planning departments as nodal agencies to coordinate SDG efforts, with some creating dedicated cells/units for such coordination within or outside those departments. A few states/UTs have designated officers in each government department with responsibility for coordinating SDG-related activities at the department-level.[a] Also at the state level, high-level committees have been established to provide continuous guidance, oversee implementation and monitoring, and put in place mechanisms for ensuring coordinated action on the SDGs. They are usually chaired by the Chief Secretary of the state and have all departmental heads as members, though in a few cases are headed by the Chief Minister, adding weight to the SDG reviews.[b]

Sources:

a   India, NITI Aayog, "SDG India Index & Dashboard 2019-20," 5.

b   India, NITI Aayog, "India VNR 2020-Decade of Action, Taking SDGs From Global to Local," 2020, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26279VNR_2020_India_Report.pdf.

(SNAP SDGs) as called for by presidential decree. As of June 2018, the formulation of such plans was underway in 34 provinces, involving all districts and cities in each,[76] and as of the drafting of the 2019 VNR, plans were completed in 19 of them[77]. Regional and municipal strategies for sustainable development are also required in Italy by that country's national sustainable development strategy. They should include the "definition of a series of regional goals, specifying their relationships with national goals" and a series of related indicators, be linked to funding provisions within regional budgets,[78] and have an accompanying plan for monitoring and review.[79] Some municipalities in Costa Rica have aligned their planning instruments with the SDGs,[80] while the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa mapped the seven strategic goals of its Provincial Growth and Development Plan against the SDGs.[81]

Deeper implementation of the SDGs can be achieved through their integration into plans and policies, which is also occurring at the subnational and local levels across global regions in the country sample. Many provincial governments in Nepal have prepared plans integrating the fundamental principles and goals of the 2030 Agenda.[82] Several examples come from the African region. For instance, the SDGs have been mainstreamed into Kenya's County Integrated Development Plans (2018-2022), and county officers are required to demonstrate how they have mainstreamed SDGs in their plans, strategies, activities, projects and programmes as a performance measure.[83]

Also notable in this regard is Colombia, where all 63 subnational governments' 2016-2019 development plans achieved some, though varying, levels of SDG integration or alignment. The efforts of Colombia's subnational governments were supported by a web-based tool–referred to as a territorial

kit[84]–developed by the Technical Secretariat of the SDG Commission with guidelines and recommendations for the preparation of plans that integrate the Goals. The tool was developed on the basis of an assessment of the responsibilities of the territorial governments in the implementation of the SDGs.[85] Moreover, some subnational government have achieved linkages between budget processes and the SDG.

Engagement is also prevalent at the subnational and local levels with regard to the definition of SDG indicators for monitoring progress and to reporting on implementation, for instance in India, Spain and New Zealand. Several subnational and local governments across regions are increasingly reporting on the status of SDG implementation through progress reports and voluntary local reviews (see chapter 2 for a detailed analysis).

Subnational and local governments are also active in raising awareness and ownership of the SDGs among public servants and the broader public, as well as in building the capacity of public servants to implement them (see chapter 3). Various strategies for awareness-raising include seminars, toolkits, communications strategies, the designation of SDG champions, and the sharing of best practices. For instance, the Union of Municipalities of Turkey (UMT), the main local government association in the country, has looked to the sharing of SDG best practices among its members as a way to mainstream SDG awareness.[86] Though limited information was found about efforts to strengthen the capacity of public servants in this regard, which is foundational to the advancement of the Goals, there are some examples of trainings, workshops and guides, some of which are also designed to localize the Goals. The Chilean Association of Municipalities incorporated the SDGs into its Municipal Training Schools in 2019.[87]

1.3.2. Parliaments

Information about the role of parliaments in SDG governance, while limited, shows a high degree of variability.[88] In some countries, parliaments have had little involvement with the SDGs since 2015. In others, parliaments have been significantly engaged through a formal role or through extra-parliamentary activities related to the Goals. Across a range of entry points, there appears to be increasing engagement on the part of parliaments in SDG implementation and oversight, albeit with significant scope for enhancement.

In some countries, parliaments contribute directly to national SDG implementation through formal participation in national institutional coordination and consultative mechanisms. For instance, in Chile and Costa Rica, congresses are represented in the 2030 Agenda National Network and the SDG Advisory Committee, respectively, through which they have been assigned or assumed specific responsibilities.[89]

In addition to those roles, parliaments in around one third of the countries in the sample have created committees or other bodies (sub-committees, forums, caucuses, fronts) that are dedicated in full or in part to the SDGs, while a few have assigned other committees responsibility for the SDGs (e.g. Finland, India). The new bodies were formed between 2016 and 2019 and generally perform oversight functions, though also others including promoting awareness of, action on, and strengthened capacity to oversee the Goals. In Kenya, the Caucus on SDGs and Business is concerned with promoting sustainable development as well as responsive business through legislation, representation, oversight and partnerships.[90] Italy's Standing Committee on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, within the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, is specifically responsible for continuing the preliminary activities of a fact-finding survey to ascertain the effectiveness of the national legislative framework and cooperation system for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[91]

A key oversight function of parliaments is receiving reports from governments on sustainable development progress for approval or comments. However, only a few governments regularly report to parliament on the SDGs (e.g. Finland, Mongolia, Spain) (see chapter 2). Other formal channels of parliamentary engagement with the Goals are the drafting of laws and resolutions and the issuance of budget proposals aligned with the 2030 Agenda, functions led by the above-referenced committees and similar structures. For instance, the Sustainable Development and Good Governance Committee of Nepal's National Assembly has been working to ensure that central and provincial government bills incorporate the spirit of the SDGs before they are passed.[92]

Other entry points for parliament include occasional or ad hoc reports, debates, and inquiries. The Indian Parliament's Public Accounts Committee conducts oversight of the SDGs though periodic reviews of NITI Aayog, the lead government entity for the SDGs in India, and relevant ministries.[93] In Morocco in 2019, a joint meeting of five standing committees of the House of Councillors debated the report presented by the country's SAI, the Court of Accounts, on Morocco's preparedness for SDG implementation,[94] and the House of Councillors subsequently organized a debate to discuss the report's recommendations among all parties engaged in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the SDGs.[95] The Parliament has also conducted inquiries on the methods the government used to integrate the SDGs into its overall policy and sectoral strategies.[96] With regard to SDG follow-up, several parliaments have engaged in consultations or otherwise contributed to VNR processes (e.g. Indonesia, Morocco) and to national progress reports and the UN high-level political forum (e.g. Kenya).

Parliaments also engage in briefings and events aimed at awareness-raising and knowledge exchange among stakeholders. Working sessions have been held on nationalizing the 2030 Agenda and means of parliamentary engagement in it, and national seminars organized, including with other branches of government and civil society. In the Republic of Korea, the National Assembly's UN SDG Forum has been holding open meetings, public hearings, and campaigns on the SDGs aimed at creating more awareness among citizens.[97] Several related activities have also been organized at the inter-parliamentary level. For instance, Indonesia's Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Body (BKSAP)[98] has organized annual World Parliamentary Forums on Sustainable Development since 2017 for parliamentarians to exchange experience on SDG implementation.[99]

In conducting their SDG-related work, it is notable that parliaments collaborate with and receive support from civil society. In both Brazil and the Republic of Korea, the formation of parliamentary bodies dedicated to the SDGs arose through the joint efforts of parliaments and civil society.[100] Another example of collaboration is from Sierra Leone, where in 2017 the civil society organization Coalition 2030 organized a capacity-building retreat for Members of Parliament, with 25 members participating, including the Deputy Speaker, as well as parliamentary clerks. The training also produced a Memorandum of Understanding on ongoing engagement between the Parliamentary Action Group on the SDGs (now the Departmental Oversight Committee on Sustainable Development Goals[101]) and Coalition 2030, intended to remain in effect through 2030.[102] Among other provisions, the Action Group commits to requesting regular updates from the executive and to contributing to national reporting.[103]

1.3.3. Supreme audit institutions

Supreme audit institutions (SAIs) engage with the SDGs to varying degrees. In a small number of countries, SAIs have a formal role in national SDG monitoring, review, and follow-

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up processes, while in many others, they support the Goals through other means. In others still, SAIs have no or minimal engagement. A key source of SAI engagement with the Goals is SDG audits, which have focused on assessing the preparedness of governments to implement the SDGs, and are increasingly moving to audits of SDG implementation. Yet other channels of engagement can be identified. SAIs provide comments to relevant government reports. In Finland, for example, the National Audit Office comments on the government's report on SDG implementation and gives its assessment to the parliament. Taking the office's comments into account, the parliament then gives feedback to the government.[104] The General Comptroller of Chile, as a member of the 2030 Agenda National Network, contributes to the review of all public action to implement the SDGs in order to provide inputs to national-level follow-up. Although there is no legal provision for a specific role for the SAI, the General Comptroller has been active in those areas.[105] Chile's 2019 VNR report includes an annex summarizing the inputs and contributions of the General Comptroller.[106] Also with regard to VNR processes, Morocco's Court of Accounts took part in the national consultation held in preparation for that country's 2020 VNR,[107] and the National Audit Office of Mauritius was listed as a consulted organization or contributor in the VNR of that country[108]. The role of SAIs in the monitoring, review and follow-up of the SDGs is addressed in detail in chapter 2.

Audit offices further contribute to building awareness and fostering ownership of the SDGs. For instance, the General Comptroller of the City of Bogotá organized several seminars and activities to raise awareness of and disseminate the SDGs at the local level.[109] Another entry point for SAIs is through their internal processes and audit plans, which is also discussed further in chapter 2.

1.3.4 Civil society - non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Across the countries examined, civil society actors are increasingly assuming significant, broad, and recognized roles in the implementation of the SDGs. In a few, civil society appears to drive many of the dedicated efforts that are underway. In some cases, the roles of civil society actors are formalized, in others they are largely informal. It is clear that progress towards the achievement of the Goals rests in no small part on civil society.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have myriad entry points for engaging with the 2030 Agenda. They raise awareness of the SDGs and advocate for action across the Goals, conduct research and tracking of progress, promote mobilization and partnerships, and identify opportunities to adapt the Goals and principles of the Agenda to national and local contexts. They also advise governments and other actors on ways to address implementation challenges and enhance progress, as well as conduct trainings related to the Agenda for public servants and lawmakers. They further often work to promote accountability on the part of governments as the actors primarily responsible for fulfilling the Goals. The following section examines the engagement of NGOs in some of these areas.

Participation in national institutional structures

NGOs are often represented in the institutional structures that lead or advise the national coordination of SDG implementation, discussed above (see section 1.2.4), which can enable multiple means of engagement with the Goals. In some countries, NGOs are represented in national councils and commissions for sustainable development, as in the case of Estonia,[110] Finland[111] (see also Box 1.10), Republic of Korea,[112] Mongolia,[113] Morocco[114] and Spain.[115]

Box 1.10

Finland's 2030 Agenda Youth Group

Following the recognition in Finland's 2016 VNR of the need to enhance youth involvement in sustainable development issues and the 2030 Agenda,[a] Finland set up a 2030 Agenda Youth Group under the National Commission on Sustainable Development, in which youth are also represented, in 2017. The platform is aimed at strengthening youth participation and enabling its members to be ambassadors for the SDGs in their regions of origin in Finland. Members of the Group discuss and advocate for the Goals in various fora, including schools.[b]

Sources:

[a]   Finland, Prime Minister's Office, "National Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Finland," October 2016, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10611Finland_VNR.pdf.

[b]   Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, "Finnish Agenda 2030 Youth Group," n.d., https://kestavakehitys.fi/en/agenda2030-youth-group.

NGO representation in other institutional structures is also notable. In Costa Rica, the SDG Advisory Committee enjoins both state and non-state actors for consultation and dialogue to advise the High-Level Council on SDG implementation. The Committee has the representation of all of the institutions that are signatories of the country's distinct National Pact for Advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the three branches of government, the Supreme Court of Elections, faith-based organizations, civil society, unions, local governments, public universities, and the private sector. However, the main institution for consultation and upholding government accountability for SDG implementation is the National Forum on SDGs.[116] In Kenya, SDGs Kenya Forum for Sustainable Development, a group of more than 350 civil society organizations, in fact co-chairs, along with the government and a private sector umbrella group, the Inter Agency Technical Working Committee (IATWC), which supports the SDG Coordination Directorate within the State Department for Planning at the National Treasury and Planning Ministry.[117] The IATWC, which includes other stakeholders, such as academia and the National Youth Council,[118] was chaired solely by the government prior to 2018.[119] NGOs are additionally represented in a sub-committee under the IATWC that was established in 2019.[120] In some countries in which civil society involvement in SDG governance is not institutionalized through membership in coordination or advisory bodies, consultations can be used by governments on an ad hoc basis, for instance in Chile.[121]

Creation of collective platforms to facilitate action

As noted above, many non-governmental organizations have coalesced around the 2030 Agenda into NGO and civil society networks, forums and platforms dedicated to contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. With many NGOs operating in countries in areas across the Goals and targets, their enjoinment around the 2030 Agenda is a positive reflection of its integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature. In addition to the participation of some NGO collectives in the institutional coordination and consultative structures described above, many also engage with the Agenda in other ways, such as drawing attention to the importance of its cross-cutting "leave no one behind" principle and coordinating contributions to voluntary national reviews.

Brazil's Civil Society Working Group for the 2030 Agenda (GTSC A2030) is composed of 51 NGOs, forums, networks, social movements, as well as foundations and universities. It engages in partnerships, analysis and advocacy work at the local and international levels for sustainable development, equality, human rights, and the participation of civil society in decision-making. The Group was formed in 2014 amidst civil society engagement around negotiations on what would later become the 2030 Agenda.[122] Spain's SDG Observatory is a

network of 50 civil society organizations established in 2016 by Futuro en Común. That organization is also part of SDG Watch Europe (Observatorio Europeo de los ODS), through which it takes part in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the European level.[123] The SDG Observatory monitors SDG implementation at the national and international levels and issues recommendations to advance progress.[124] In Sierra Leone, a CSO integrated platform for the SDGs facilitates coordination and follow-up among civil society and with the government. Among its members is Coalition 2030, mentioned above, with the participation of the parliament and the supreme audit institution also expected.[125]

Civil society organizations in Mongolia formed the National CSO Network on SDGs in 2017 to contribute to 2030 Agenda implementation by raising awareness, mobilizing resources, cooperating and developing partnerships in local communities, as well as supporting the public's participation in development processes.[126] India's Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA) is among some collectives that existed prior to the SDGs but shifted their focus following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. WNTA is a campaign of CSOs, counting more than 4,000 partners across the country, committed to upholding government accountability for national and international commitments. It previously tracked progress towards five-year plans and the Millennium Development Goals.[127]

Engagement in awareness-raising and advocacy

A core entry point for the engagement of civil society with the SDGs is the development of public awareness and knowledge of the Goals and interest among the public about ways to contribute to them. While many people around the globe have some awareness of the Goals, few report being somewhat or very familiar with them (with familiarity and awareness lowest in the most developed countries).[128] Civil society is often well positioned, at ground level, to communicate with segments of the public on issues of importance to them and to identify and explore areas of synergy between those and the Goals. Given that the SDGs apply to all countries, there is particular scope for communities of all sizes to feel connected to and invested in the Goals in distinct solidarity with the global community. Many organizations have seized on this opportunity to develop awareness and promote commitment to and ownership of the Goals, undertaking information campaigns, organizing events, and collaborating with governments and other actors on communications and activities.

In France, civil society has promoted the SDGs through a number of territorial initiatives. For example, the collective Comité 21 initiated the SDG Tour of France (Tour de France des ODD) in 2018 to address low awareness of the Goals at the local level. The Tour is a series of local workshops at which the SDGs are presented and debated in the context of local economic, social and environmental dynamics. Sectoral workshops are organized for CSOs, businesses, and other

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actors.[129] Comité 21 has also published some reports over the years which relate directly to the SDGs, including a report on SDG ownership by non-governmental actors that was included as part of the government's 2018 stocktaking report (point d'étape).[130]

In the Republic of Korea, many organizations are strengthening their partnerships with other stakeholders to both build SDG awareness among the public and share information and knowledge with the government. They include, among others, the Korea Civil Society Forum on International Development Cooperation (KoFID), a network of Korean civil society organizations working to make development cooperation more effective, the Korea NGO Council for Overseas Development Cooperation (KCOC), and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Korea.[131]

Civil society also participates in events and activities initiated by or with governments, often consultations and awareness-raising sessions organized around VNR processes. These have been noted in Mauritius, Sierra Leone, South Africa and other countries. In some cases, such activities were prioritized in the months following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

Provision of policy inputs to governments

Several other entry points have been used by NGOs to engage with the 2030 Agenda. Where national roadmaps or dedicated strategies or action plans exist for SDG implementation, NGOs have sometimes contributed to, been consulted on, or collaborated on their development through government-led consultations or participation or membership in national institutional coordination or advisory bodies and ad hoc structures set up for roadmap preparation, among other means.

NGOs have also been involved in SDG follow-up, monitoring, and reporting at national and local levels, in some cases through institutional coordination and advisory bodies. They have contributed to progress reports prepared by governments (e.g. France, Kenya). They have also widely participated in VNR preparations through consultative processes laid out by governments, such as workshops, as well as questionnaires, inputs and even drafting. Furthermore, NGOs have led and facilitated consultations with non-state actors to convey the views and goals of communities to VNR processes (e.g. India, South Korea). In some countries, they have additionally been involved in validating VNR reports or data used for them (e.g. Sierra Leone, Morocco).

Other aspects of engagement relate to indicators and statistics. NGOs have been consulted on the development and updating of national SDG indicators. Such engagement in monitoring and follow-up also occurs at the subnational and local levels in various forms, through participation in formal monitoring structures that replicate those at the national level (e.g. Indonesia), and both independent and joint initiatives. In

Winnipeg, Canada, NGOs issued a report on the status of the SDGs in the city based on a well-being focused community indicator system,[132] while another NGO think tank provides an SDG indicator portal with a section on Canadian Cities.[133]

Other NGO entry points include the provision of advisory services to governments on SDG implementation, and contributions to oversight and evaluation. NGOs and other non-state actors issue recommendations, studies and good practices to governments relating to aspects of SDG implementation. As noted, they have also widely produced evaluations of and promoted accountability for SDG progress in the form of shadow/spotlight/progress reports on implementation, reflecting their own perspectives and contexts.

Though not specific to NGOs, citizens may directly evaluate the state of sustainable development in Finland through its annual (since 2019) Citizens' Panel, in which around 500 Finns volunteered to serve as panelists in 2020 and completed an online survey that informs the government and the National Commission on Sustainable Development.[134]

1.3.5. Academia and experts

Academic institutions and experts largely access the same entry points to engage with the SDGs as do NGOs, though some are nonetheless distinct. These actors appear to be increasingly involved in promoting and monitoring the Goals, though there is scope for even greater engagement. Channels of engagement between policymakers and scientists, researchers, and experts constitute science-policy interfaces, which can inform and enhance sound and evidence-based decision-making on sustainable development policies through information exchange, dialogue and debate.

A prime illustration of a science-policy interface is the South African SDG Hub, an online platform hosted by the University of Pretoria with a mandate from the Department of Science and Innovation. The hub is focused on research related to the SDGs and aims to connect its work with national policymakers (see chapter 3).[135] Another example is provided by Indonesia, where academia and experts form one of four groups of stakeholders, or platforms, specifically recognized in the presidential decree on SDG implementation, with each group having representatives in the national coordination bodies and assigned different roles.[136] Their particular platform includes nine SDG Centers in Indonesian universities, which conduct studies and policy research on the Goals, and is expected to focus on SDG monitoring and evaluation.[137]

In many countries, academic and related institutions focused on science and research participate along with NGOs and other actors as members of national institutional structures that lead or advise the coordination of SDG implementation (e.g. Costa Rica, Estonia, Finland, Indonesia, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Mauritius, Mongolia, Philippines, South Africa, Spain).

They are often represented by umbrella groups, though in one country, Mongolia, the Mongolian Academy of Sciences and the national university are specifically represented in the National Council for Sustainable Development.[138] In some countries, there are provisions for more than one channel of engagement in this regard; in Finland, while experts form part of the national Commission on Sustainable Development, there is also an Expert Panel for Sustainable Development, comprising eminent researchers from different disciplines, which challenges and enhances the work of the Commission and also adds a critical voice in the sustainability debate, when needed.[139] Where academia and experts are not formal members of national institutional bodies, there can be provisions for such bodies to invite them to take part in relevant activities on an ad hoc basis. Academia and experts also engage with the SDGs informally through networks.

Building awareness, ownership and knowledge of the SDGs

As have other actors, academic institutions and experts have both participated in awareness-raising, sensitization, and engagement activities on the 2030 Agenda organized by governments and other actors, as well as initiated them, often through partnerships. In New Zealand, Universities New Zealand, which represents eight universities at the national level, and other stakeholders (including civil society, the central and local governments, and the private sector) have organized annual New Zealand Sustainable Development Goals Summits that seek to, inter alia, connect people from all sectors to develop and commit to positive action towards the Goals.[140] Universities in many countries have been undertaking research programmes linked to the SDGs. This is the case in Kenya, where the Kenya School of Government also collaborated with the government's SDGs Coordination Directorate to develop a curriculum on the SDGs, mainly to build capacity among public servants to implement the Goals. The Directorate also collaborated with a quasi-government think tank, the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), to carry out a country-wide survey in 2019 among multiple stakeholders to determine the level of awareness of the SDGs and the impact of advocacy and awareness campaigns, the findings of which were used to inform subsequent awareness-raising strategies.[141]

Universities have also carried out efforts to raise awareness and build ownership of the Goals at the organizational level. Costa Rica's National Commission of University Deans set out to incorporate the SDGs in the vision of its strategic framework, PLANES 2021-2025, and has been implementing specific activities accordingly, including an event on higher education and the SDGs and the formation of a working group that regularly gathers and reviews information on university activities that address the Goals. Linked to the PLANES 2021-2025, an action plan includes a goal and specific actions, by SDG, to fulfill the National Pact for the Advancement of the SDGs.[142]

Contributions to SDG follow-up, monitoring and reporting

Academic institutions and experts are actively engaged in monitoring, follow-up and reporting on the SDGs (see chapter 2). In some cases, they elaborate, share, and collaborate on indicators, statistics, and data. For example, New Zealand's SDG web hub, New Zealand Sustainable Development Goals, described as a public good contribution of the School of Government of Victoria University of Wellington and guided by a multistakeholder steering group, is focused on monitoring the country's SDG progress.[143] Academia has also participated in or contributed to consultations on VNRs in many countries. It further lead efforts to report on SDG progress at the local level, with the Waterloo Global Science Initiative (WGSI) in Canada embarking on a pilot project to support Canadian communities to undertake voluntary local reviews on the SDGs using localized indicators.[144]

Contributions to oversight and accountability

Academia and experts widely contribute to the oversight and evaluation of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to holding governments accountable for their commitments to it. They contribute to shadow/spotlight/progress reports on SDG implementation, including those prepared in Brazil and New Zealand, and to a range of evaluation initiatives (see chapter 2). In Nepal, for instance, three evaluation associations, which include academics in their ranks, participated in developing the country's Integrated Evaluation Action Plan (2016-2020),[145] which institutionalizes SDG evaluations that are equity-focused and gender-responsive.[146] Independent evaluations of the SDGs have also been prepared by academics and experts in a small number of countries (also in chapter 2).

1.3.6. Private sector

The private sector is also a prominent stakeholder in SDG implementation, yet with its own distinctions. Private entities engage with the SDGs in many of the same ways as other actors discussed, particularly with regard to SDG coordination and the monitoring of and reporting on the Goals. Business and industry also work to mobilize action, contribute expertise, and set positive examples to advance sustainable development.[147]

Along with other actors, businesses and industry are formally represented in national institutional coordination and advisory bodies in many countries across regions. Among them are the Stakeholders' Chamber of the Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development Goals of the Philippines[148] and the Inter Agency Technical Working Committee (IATWC) that supports the SDGs Coordination Directorate of the State Department for Planning at the National Treasury and Planning Ministry of Kenya[149]. As noted, in Kenya, the multi-stakeholder IATWC, originally chaired by the government, is now co-chaired by the government, the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), and the SDGs Kenya Forum (representing civil society). KEPSA is also represented in the IATWC's sub-committee.[150] Outside

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of national institutional mechanisms, business networks in several countries, including Global Compact Local Networks, coordinate SDG activities for the sector. Some are dedicated to the Goals, such as the Philanthropy and Business Platform for SDGs (Filantropi dan Bisnis Indonesia - FBI4SDGs) in Indonesia,[151] while others engage with the SDGs in the context of their sustainability and other relevant initiatives.

The private sector has contributed to the development of SDG strategies and frameworks and the definition of SDG indicators at the national level. In the Republic of Korea, experts from the private sector contributed to the development of the country's tailored SDG framework, the K-SDGs.[152] Similarly, the private sector in Nepal participated in the government's preparation of the SDGs: Status and Roadmap: 2016-2030 report.[153] In New Zealand, businesses, through public consultations, provided input as subject matter experts to the development of the Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand (IANZ), which support the development of the country's Living Standards Framework and are further used to monitor and report on the SDGs.[154]

A widely-accessed entry point for SDG engagement is participation in national government-led efforts to report on SDG progress. The private sector in many countries has been involved in the preparation of VNR processes through various types of consultations put in place by governments, such as workshops, technical sessions, calls for inputs, or questionnaires. In Mauritius, Business Mauritius, an independent association of local businesses, and AfrAsia Bank, Chair of the UN Global Compact Network Mauritius, were among the private entities with which the government's lead ministry on the SDGs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, worked closely on the VNR, and the report was, in part, sponsored by the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry.[155] In Kenya, KEPSA coordinates the preparation of private sector voluntary progress reports, including to complement the 2020 VNR, and was part of the team that prepared the 2017 VNR report and the 2019 SDGs Progress Report.[156]

Data for SDG monitoring at the national level comes in part from the private sector. Business networks and collaborative initiatives have been involved in compiling data on corporate sustainability and the contribution of the private sector to the SDGs. For instance, the SDG Corporate Tracker on Colombia's National Planning Department's SDG website monitors the private sector's contribution to SDG implementation.[157] Further to a pilot project that examined the contributions of 70 companies to the Goals, the platform was launched in June 2020 and is gathering information from participating companies in the three dimensions of sustainable development and with regard to the COVID-19 crisis. Similar efforts have been underway in Costa Rica.[158] The private sector is also part of the Colombian Network of Cities How We Go (RCCCV)[159] that has worked with multiple actors on the development of reliable and standardized information for monitoring the SDGs at the local level.

The private sector has further collaborated on evaluation initiatives to assess aspects of SDG readiness and implementation in countries. In Nepal, the private sector forms part of the Nepal SDGs Forum, an SDG platform of non-state actors that has issued several reviews of SDG implementation that have, inter alia, addressed implementation mechanisms and frameworks, gaps, and challenges.[160] Another example is the SDGs Readiness Report prepared in Kenya in 2020 by the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), the Office of the Deputy President, and Global Compact Network Kenya (GCNK) that focused on the policy, legislative, and institutional dimensions of the SDGs in that country.[161]

1.4. Main lessons from five years of SDG institutionalization

This section draws lessons from the trends identified in previous sections.

1.4.1. Compared to previous internationally-agreed frameworks, the institutionalization of the SDGs is unprecedented

A first, incontestable lesson from five years of implementation of the 2030 Agenda is that it has given rise to unprecedented institutionalization at the national level, compared to other internationally-agreed development frameworks. The outcome of the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) had translated into the creation of institutional mechanisms in many countries and regions. However, during the 20 years that followed the Earth Summit, sustainable development was an issue of limited political salience.[162] The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had also seen the creation of national institutional mechanisms. Yet the MDG framework only concerned developed countries as far as development assistance was concerned.

The level of integration of those mechanisms with other parts of national institutional systems never reached that of their equivalents for the SDGs. The same can be said of the visibility and political salience of the SDGs as an overarching policy agenda at the national level. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs have achieved relatively high visibility in both developing and developed countries, truly signaling the universal nature of the Agenda and reflecting its broad thematic scope. The Goals' integration into national strategies and plans, and their reach into government agencies working in all sectors and across levels of governments, are also visible. Also striking are efforts made by national governments to measure progress on the SDGs, both through global and national indicators. Lastly, the involvement of actors such as parliaments, supreme audit institutions and civil society has been growing in importance since 2015.

It seems clear that such political salience and the related efforts to integrate the SDGs within institutional apparatus at the country level were fostered by the way the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are constructed. The universal nature of the Goals was conducive to their adoption and translation into the national frameworks of both developing and developed countries. By laying out details about key dimensions such as follow-up and review, the Agenda spurred action at all levels. In particular, the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) have played a catalytic role in the development over time of national ecosystems around SDG follow-up and review, which involve a range of actors in addition to central government and whose activities extend well beyond the presentation of national reports at the United Nations.

1.4.2. The development of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation has taken a long time, and is not a linear process

As illustrated by section 1.2, there is a clear trend toward greater institutionalization of the SDGs in national settings since 2015, although at different speeds across countries, and within countries across levels of government and parts of the institutional system.

Based on the information collected for this report, there do not seem to be systematic patterns in terms of institutionalization of the Goals that apply to all countries; nor does institutionalization seem to have occurred more rapidly in developed or developing countries. In fact, many developed countries took a long time to institutionalize the SDGs, with countries like Canada, France, and Spain having progressively ramped up efforts in this regard. Regional circumstances have also influenced the speed at which some SDG-related processes were put in place. For instance, the production of a set of SDG indicators by Eurostat in 2017 likely spurred European countries to adopt their own national SDG indicators.

It could be argued that some developing countries with a tradition of strong planning systems (such as Colombia and Indonesia) were the fastest to institutionalize the SDGs in their development frameworks and processes, including through legal changes and strong mandates for the institutions leading SDG implementation. The experience of the Millennium Development Goals may have been an accelerating factor, both from a national perspective (for instance, through prior work on national indicators) and an international perspective, as international development agencies already had a range of tools in place to support countries with critical functions such as planning.

One explanation for the relatively slow institutionalization of the SDGs in national contexts may be their extremely wide scope. The Goals cover sectors that were not included in prior development frameworks, and for which the existing

apparatus in terms of monitoring, reporting, and integration with other sectors had to be developed. This is exemplified by Goal 16, with its scope covering activities managed by many parts of government and for which there is no standard conceptual and practical framework for monitoring. The fact that institutionalization was not particularly rapid in many developed countries, in spite of the long-standing existence of institutional frameworks for sustainable development in most of them, can be in part attributed to the need to integrate the SDGs into domestic frameworks, as opposed to external development assistance frameworks – a distinction that is still visible in some countries. It could be expected that when the successor framework to the 2030 Agenda is adopted, many countries will already have in place institutions and processes that are adapted to this breadth of scope and universality, with instruments for dialogue and coordination across state institutions and levels of government–and between governments and other stakeholders–already well established.

Still, five years after the start of the 2030 Agenda, significant differences remain across countries in terms of the depth of SDG institutionalization. The levels of involvement of different state and non-state actors in SDG implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review exhibit wide variations. As time elapses since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, it is also becoming increasingly clear that the development of institutional frameworks around SDG implementation is not always a linear process. While the general trend is one of deeper institutionalization and multiplication of entry points for various actors, institutional arrangements for SDG implementation have been subject to inflections, and in some cases, abrupt changes, as documented in earlier sections of this chapter. In some countries, less active engagement by one level of government around SDG implementation at one point in time has been balanced by the continued or more active engagement of other government levels.

Yet in other countries, institutionalizing the SDGs may prove difficult where many public entities already operate in the fields of planning and policymaking, and responsibilities for SDG coordination and implementation are not clearly defined.

1.4.3. Differences across countries in how the SDGs are "owned" and used by governments for communication at the national level

There are clear differences across countries in how the SDGs are "owned" by the central government and used for the purposes of framing national sustainable development agendas. The framing of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in this regard can vary from an overarching umbrella under which all policies have to be designed and measured, to one agenda among others (for instance, climate, low-carbon economy, green growth, or national transformation). These differences are visible in policy documents, which make more or less use of the SDGs in terms of substance and language. Some

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governments clearly prefer to present national development visions, priorities and strategies in a language that is anchored in the national context and refer to the SDGs as an international agenda. Others have made the choice to inscribe the national development vision within the overarching framework of the SDGs.

Differences are also visible in the coexistence of multiple strategies and institutions serving similar functions but addressing different policy areas. In many developed countries that had ongoing national strategies for sustainable development, those and the SDGs coexisted for several years, in some cases to the present day, with parallel institutions, processes, reporting tools and indicators. This duplication of frameworks has been resolved or is in the process of being resolved in several countries, which might bring both greater visibility to the SDGs and greater coherence to national action to promote sustainable development. The multiplication of institutions addressing related policy issues can have adverse consequences for the institutionalization of the SDGs. It can result in less awareness and ownership of the SDGs among all potentially relevant actors. It can also create duplication of efforts within public administration, for instance multiple and uncoordinated reporting systems.

1.4.4. Unequal engagement of different parts of national institutional systems in SDG implementation

The level of engagement of different actors with the SDGs is difficult to apprehend in a comparable way across countries. This chapter has shown that actors have used a great variety of entry points into SDG-related institutional processes.

As illustrated in section 1.3, some parts of national institutional systems contribute more than others to the mechanisms and processes set up around SDG implementation. In many countries, parliaments are still not playing a regular role in oversight of government actions to implement the SDGs. Many parliaments, however, have issued at least one report on SDG implementation since 2015. The engagement of supreme audit institutions also varies significantly across countries. As regards civil society, the level of engagement and the opportunities available for participation are also variable. However, VNRs have catalyzed civil society engagement around the SDGs, even in countries that did not have a strong tradition of engaging civil society in decision-making. The existence of national coordination and advisory bodies often enables and facilitates various forms of engagement with the Goals.

The engagement of local governments seems eminently variable across and even within countries. Sustained efforts at SDG localization have borne fruit in some contexts, as witnessed by the multiplication of cities that see benefits in using the SDGs as an opportunity for engaging their citizens and collaborating with other cities and levels of government,

including through engaging in voluntary local reviews. Yet, the challenges associated with vertical integration, including planning and budgeting for, implementing, and monitoring the SDGs, have not disappeared.[163]

1.4.5. Role of national and international networks in spurring institutional development for SDG implementation

The institutionalization of the SDGs over the years has not resulted only from the interaction of governments with individual actors. Exchanges of experiences among governments themselves, promoted and supported by international organizations at the regional and global levels, have contributed to a knowledge base that has undoubtedly helped some countries in adjusting their institutional frameworks for SDG implementation. The role of international development agencies in delivering technical assistance, advice and capacity-building in areas such as planning and policy integration has also supported those efforts.

Beyond that, a clear contribution has also been made by other local and national actors interacting with their counterparts at different geographical scales. Constituency-based and thematic networks at all levels from the national to the global have played a critical role in raising awareness of the SDGs among their constituents. They have also highlighted challenges observed in different countries and possible solutions to them. Importantly, they have been key actors in terms of SDG monitoring, review and follow-up (see chapter 2). It is notable that many of those channels and related activities initially developed organically, within existing structures.

1.4.6. Weakness of evaluation of the effectiveness of institutional arrangements

Research undertaken for this report has confirmed a scarcity of evaluations of the effectiveness of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation at the national level. The voluntary national reviews (VNRs) are not, in general, highly informative in this regard. Governments presenting their VNRs at the United Nations tend to convey facts about institutional changes having occurred since their previous report rather than evaluations of the performance of their institutional arrangements. In addition, the images conveyed in VNRs regarding institutional challenges and the involvement of governmental and non-governmental actors in SDG implementation can be at odds with the perceptions of those same actors, as reflected earlier in this chapter. While recognizing the conceptual and practical difficulties inherent in measuring the effectiveness of institutional arrangements, there remains room for progress in this area. One way to address this would be to encourage Governments presenting VNRs for the second or third time to give more prominence to evaluations of the effectiveness of institutional arrangements in their reports.

1.5. Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed developments in national institutional arrangements for SDG implementation that have occurred since 2015. In spite of the diversity of countries' situations in this regard, some clear trends emerge.

The first conclusion is that institutionalization of the SDGs at the country level remains a work in progress. The end of 2020 marked the conclusion of one third of the time span of the Goals; yet, most countries are still in the process of refining their institutional arrangements for SDG implementation and integrating them within the broader institutional system. There are stark differences across countries in those two respects. In a number of countries, an acceleration of efforts was perceptible around the years 2018 and 2019. This long process is not surprising given the time it takes to change institutions, even though compared with the MDGs, the SDGs were largely known more than one year before their official adoption, giving time to national governments and other actors to familiarize themselves with the new framework. Some trends are encouraging, such as the involvement of supreme audit institutions in SDG matters, because they reflect an institutionalization of the SDGs that extends beyond traditional central government institutions and involves a greater variety of actors.

As with other aspects of development, there is a risk of falling into what could be termed a "best practice fallacy", an assumption that all countries could quickly copy institutional models and practices from "lead" countries. In fact, no country appears to be at the frontier across the board. Even in countries like Finland that are considered to be international references in terms of their institutional arrangements for SDG implementation, there remain areas of duplication (for instance, a dual system of sustainability indicators) and areas where more integration could be achieved (for instance, in terms of mapping the national budget to the SDGs).

In many countries, there is still potential for further engagement of various stakeholders in SDG processes. Here too, the trends are encouraging. For instance, engagement that was mainly organized around VNR processes has, in many cases, evolved to occur through a broader range of entry points, and on a continuous rather than one-time basis, also involving more diverse stakeholders and enabling a much denser network of interrelationships. In coming years, it would be interesting to evaluate how mechanisms such as multi-stakeholder working groups put in place by governments as part of SDG institutionalization have performed in practice.

There is also potential for deeper integration of SDG-related institutional mechanisms with other parts of national institutional systems, in particular with respect to strategy development and planning processes. The benefits of greater integration are multiple, from reduction of costs, to cross-fertilization and capacity development, to more coherent policymaking. As elaborated in chapter 2, SDG monitoring and reporting systems are still, in general, not well integrated with other monitoring systems.

One last issue that must be highlighted is the great potential for cross-country learning in every area of SDG implementation, taking account of countries' individual contexts. Notwithstanding national differences in the capacity of national institutions to implement the SDGs, there are many common needs across countries in relation to specific institutions (for instance, parliaments) and specific government functions (for example, planning, or monitoring) and potential for exchange of experiences. National governments and the international community should encourage such activities and continue to support them when appropriate.

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Endnotes

1   Three examples, among many, are: UNDESA's annual syntheses of VNRs (produced by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals); UNDESA's Compendium of national institutional arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (produced by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government); and annual reports by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) and other civil society organizations entitled, *Progressing National SDGs Implementation*.

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CHAPTER 2

MONITORING, FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

2.1. Introduction

Monitoring, follow-up and review systems and processes, and the use of the information they produce, contribute to an effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They inform policymaking and enhance learning by facilitating understanding of why and how implementation actions are successful, and providing insights on how to improve the links between policy decisions and outcomes. Moreover, they promote stakeholder collaboration, transparency and accountability by providing information on the delivery and results of public programmes to implement the SDGs.[1]

The 2030 Agenda highlights the importance of SDG follow-up and review as an accountability mechanism, and sets clear principles to guide it. It promotes "a robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework [that] will make a vital contribution to implementation and will help countries to maximize and track progress [...] to ensure that no one is left behind."[2] The Agenda calls for a process that goes beyond measuring progress towards targets, and emphasizes ongoing mutual learning. It also recognizes the contribution of multiple stakeholders, as it encourages countries to conduct "regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels", which draw on "contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes."[3]

Building on these principles, countries would ideally integrate SDG monitoring, follow-up and review into their national monitoring and evaluation systems to avoid having parallel systems. However, some countries do not have monitoring systems and when they do, they present different degrees of institutionalization and differ in their institutional set up and division of responsibilities.[4] Therefore, countries are at different stages and taking different approaches in setting SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems and processes.

This chapter illustrates such diversity, and analyses how SDG monitoring, follow-up and review connects with other monitoring processes and with key accountability institutions, how it informs policymaking and opens opportunities for stakeholder engagement. The chapter also aims to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. In addition to secondary literature and inputs received for the report, including through a survey administered by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, data used in this chapter comes from in-depth research of a sample of 24 countries as well as audit reports, evaluations and independent assessments.

Box 2.1

Defining key concepts

Monitoring – a continuous function that uses systematic data collection on specific indicators to provide information regarding progress and achievements of a public policy and/or the use of allocated funds.

Evaluation – structured, in-depth assessment of an intended, ongoing or completed policy initiative to determine the relevance and fulfilment of its objectives, and to assess dimensions such as efficiency, effectiveness, impact or sustainability.

Follow-up – broadly, it can be defined as the monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of a project or plan for management of, and communication about, its performance. In a narrow sense, it refers to actions that follow to an evaluation's accepted recommendations, including completion deadlines and the responsible implementing entity; additional longer-term, strategic and institutional level actions may also be included.

Review – decision on whether a programme needs to change and what needs to be changed based on information from monitoring, or the results of an evaluation.

Reporting – an integral part of any monitoring and evaluation framework that aims to document and present to appropriate audiences, at specified times, regular information on the implementation of a programme.

Sources: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Open Government. The Global Context and the Way Forward* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016); Paris 21, "E. M&E Reporting," National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) Guidelines, April 2018; Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (CMA), "9. Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting," in *2004-2009 Port Phillip and Western Port Regional Catchment Strategy* (Frankston, Victoria: Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, 2004); Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), "Monitoring, Evaluation & Review," SCVO. Support and Learning, January 23, 2020; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), "ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation. Policy and Guidelines" (UN ESCAP, 2017).

Section 2.2 analyses SDG monitoring, follow-up and review as a means to improving SDG implementation, and Section 2.3 as an instrument for transparency and accountability, considering different actors and levels of government. Section 2.4 focuses on the performance of SDG follow-up and review systems, considering their integration with existing monitoring and evaluation systems and the strategic use of monitoring information, among other issues. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on SDG monitoring, follow-up and review are featured throughout the chapter.

2.2. SDG monitoring, follow-up and review to improve implementation

This section examines the institutionalization of national SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems, and the development of supporting processes. Then it analyses SDG monitoring, follow-up and review at subnational level.

2.2.1. Institutionalization of national SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems

The development and institutionalization of national SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems is closely related to the process of ownership of the SDGs and their integration into national processes and systems. Over time, there has been an increase in national efforts to institutionalize and strengthen SDG monitoring, follow-up, and review.[5] Most of the 24 countries examined for this report (23 of 24) have established an institutional structure or identified responsible entities for SDG follow-up and review at the national level.

However, these systems are different depending on how the SDGs have been integrated into each country's institutional structure. First, many countries have set up an institutional structure for coordinating SDG implementation which includes monitoring, follow-up and review responsibilities. In general, these institutional structures present multiple functional levels and include coordination mechanisms. In some cases, one entity plays a steering role. These structures show different degrees of complexity based on the diverse institutionalization of processes and information and reporting flows. Countries of the report's sample in this group include Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Finland, Indonesia, Nepal, Mongolia, the Philippines and Rwanda.

In a second group of countries (e.g. Estonia, France, Kenya, South Africa, Spain as of 2017, Turkey), responsibility for coordinating SDG implementation is assigned to one lead entity which also leads monitoring, follow-up and review efforts, usually yet not always in collaboration with the national statistical office (NSO). The leading entity varies across countries (e.g. office of the president, planning department, environment and sustainable development ministry). In a few cases (e.g. Georgia, Nigeria), the responsible entity is not a ministry.[6]

In other countries (e.g. Canada as of 2017, Mauritius, Morocco, Republic of Korea), multiple entities have competing monitoring, follow-up and review responsibilities without clear coordination among them, and often with unclear division of roles. In Sierra Leone, as one leading entity has not articulated an institutional architecture for SDG monitoring,

Figure 2.1

SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems
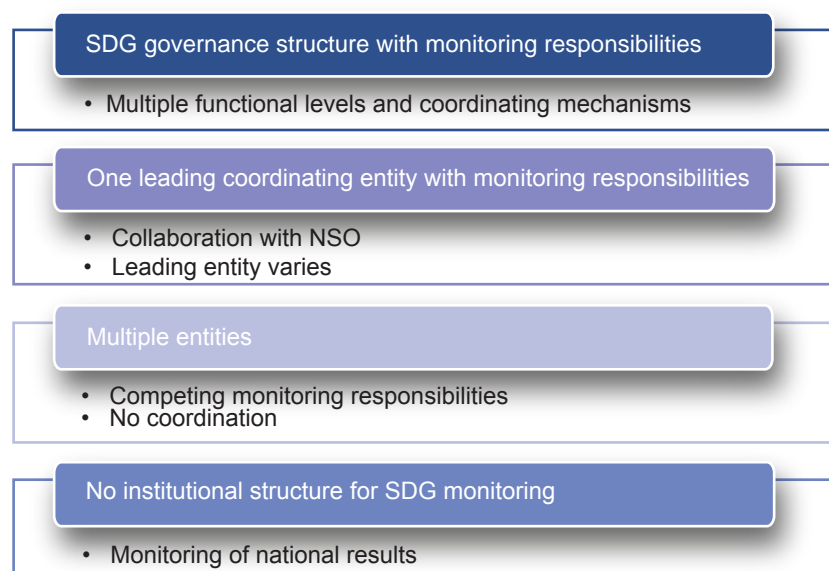
Source: Author's elaboration.

other institutions, often unaware of their roles, have competing responsibilities.[7]

Finally, some countries have not set a specific institutional structure with defined roles and responsibilities for SDG monitoring, follow-up and review. A few have integrated these functions into existing systems. For example, New Zealand's national results framework, aligned with the SDGs, is monitored by New Zealand Treasury.

Some countries have modified the SDG monitoring, follow-up and review system over time. Several factors explain these

changes, including political considerations such as changes of government that affect the level of political commitment with SDG implementation, modifying the responsibilities of different entities, as well as learning and making adjustments based on monitoring information.

While most countries have identified the institutions responsible for SDG monitoring, follow-up and review, the performance of such institutional arrangements and systems is not always conducive to effective follow-up and review. See section 2.4 below.

Box 2.2

Changes in SDG monitoring systems over time

Brazil – The National Commission for the SDGs was established in October 2016 (Decree No. 8892 of 27 October). The Commission operated for two years until its elimination in 2019 (Decree No. 9759). No other entity has been established or assigned responsibilities for SDG monitoring, follow-up and review.

Spain – The SDG governance structure experienced numerous changes between 2016 and 2020, affecting monitoring, follow-up, review and reporting. In May 2017, an Ambassador in Special Mission for the 2030 Agenda was appointed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In October 2017, a High-Level Group was created with responsibility for preparing the Voluntary National Review and presenting periodic reports on SDG implementation to the Government Executive Commission for Economic Affairs. In June 2018, the Office of the High Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda was created in the Presidency of the Government of Spain. It is responsible for following up on the actions to implement the 2030 Agenda; evaluating, verifying and disseminating evidence of progress on SDG implementation, and advancing the information and statistical systems necessary to assess SDG progress.

In April 2019, additional institutional changes sought to strengthen the governance of the SDGs including monitoring, follow-up and reporting. The High-Level Group's functions were redefined to include the follow-up on the strategies and plans needed to implement the 2030 Agenda. Two new bodies were established: the National Commission for the 2030 Agenda, responsible for facilitating cooperation and the exchange of information with subnational and local governments; and the National Council for Sustainable Development, responsible for generating evidence on SDG implementation.

Sources: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación (Spain), "Real Decreto 465/2017, de 5 de Mayo, Por El Que Se Designa Embajador En Misión Especial Para La «Agenda 2030» a Don Juan Francisco Montalbán Carrasco," *Boletín Oficial Del Estado* 108 (May 6, 2017); Resolution of 13 October 2017 of the Secretary of State for International Cooperation for Ibero-America and the Caribbean (DGPOLDES, "Primera Reunión Del Grupo de Trabajo Permanente Sobre Agenda 2030," Noticias. Cooperación Española, December 1, 2017); Presidencia de Gobierno (Spain), "Real Decreto 419/2018, de 18 de Junio, Por El Que Se Reestructura La Presidencia Del Gobierno," *Boletín Oficial Del Estado* 148 (June 19, 2018); Orden PCI/383/2019 of 2nd April publishes the Agreement of the Executive Commission for Economic Affairs on strengthening the governance of the 2030 Agenda (Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes e Igualdad (Spain), "Orden PCI/383/2019, de 2 de Abril, Por La Que Se Publica El Acuerdo de La Comisión Delegada Del Gobierno Para Asuntos Económicos de 21 de Marzo de 2019, Relativo al Refuerzo de La Gobernanza Para La Agenda 2030," *Boletín Oficial Del Estado* 80 (April 3, 2019)); Alto Comisionado para la Agenda 2030 (Spain), "Informe de Gobernanza. Informe Sobre Los Mecanismos e Instrumentos de Coordinación Para La Implementación de La Agenda 2030 En España" (Madrid: Gobierno de España, February 15, 2019).

Special feature: Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed governments' priorities to focus on the short-term health emergency and the related social and economic crises, and to manage the medium and longer-term recovery. These changes have affected governments' allocation of resources and manpower. Some government institutions may be overloaded with commitments related to the pandemic and get diverted from their SDG monitoring, follow-up and review responsibilities. For example, Chile modified the SDG governance structure in 2019 with the reorganization of the National Council for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, responsible, among other functions, for advising the President regarding monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and for coordinating SDG monitoring at the national level. The Technical Secretariat of the Council is exercised by the Ministry of Social Development (MIDESO), which is responsible for coordinating SDG monitoring and reporting processes. In the course of an ongoing audit coordinated by the General Comptroller of Chile, the auditors have found that MIDESO has been mainly focused on COVID-19 and delayed fulfilling the tasks assigned in the Decree that reorganized the Council.

Sources: Input received through the survey administered by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government in UNDESA in preparation for the World Public Sector Report; The Council was created in May 2016 (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Chile), "Decreto 49. Crea Consejo Nacional Para La Implementación de La Agenda 2030 Para El Desarrollo Sostenible" (2016)) and reorganized in May 2019 (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Chile), "Decreto 67. Reemplaza El Texto Del Decreto Supremo Nº 49, de 2016, Que Crea Consejo Nacional Para La Implementación de La Agenda 2030 Para El Desarrollo Sostenible" (2019)); Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Chile), Decreto 67. Reemplaza el Texto del Decreto Supremo No 49, de 2016, que crea Consejo Nacional para la Implementación de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible. Article 14; Personal communication with audit coordinator (Oct. 16, 2020).

2.2.2. SDG monitoring, follow-up and review processes at the national level

Effective SDG monitoring, follow-up and review requires adequate processes to ensure the timely and regular production of data and information, sound indicators to measure progress and to report on those, and a reliable assessment of actions and results, identifying bottlenecks, good practices and lessons learned and making recommendations. Many countries have not established such processes, nor support them with the adequate resources. Approximately only half of the countries in the report's sample (13 out of 24) have defined a strategy or plan for SDG follow-up and review at the national level. This section analyses national processes to define indicators and ensure the production of the necessary data to assess SDG progress. Then, it considers the role of evaluation and peer review processes. Finally, it focuses on reporting on SDG implementation and progress.

2.2.2.1. Measuring SDG progress: Defining indicators and ensuring timely data

SDG monitoring relies on an integrated framework with review processes and indicators at multiple levels that are meant to operate in synergy. As indicated in paragraph 75 of the 2030 Agenda, "the Goals and targets will be followed-up and reviewed using a set of global indicators.[8] These will be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels which will be developed by member states [...]."

Indicators

National monitoring efforts have significantly focused on the identification of indicators to track and measure SDG progress. Even countries that have not set up an institutional structure for SDG monitoring have paid attention to indicators and their availability at the national level. Nonetheless, the identification of indicators has taken time and is still an ongoing process, due to revisions of the global indicator framework as well as critical challenges in terms of statistical capacities and data quality and availability at national and subnational levels.[9] Also, the production of national metadata is a lengthy process that affects data availability.

Several factors help explain these efforts on indicators. First, the lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The monitoring, follow-up and review framework of the MDGs included 18 targets and 48 indicators initially, and 21 targets and 60 indicators after 2005.[10] Therefore, developing countries had previous experience with indicators to track results, even if data production for MDG monitoring was infrequent.[11] Second, countries with national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) or plans in place before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda (many European countries, for example) had already set national indicators to assess and measure progress on sustainable development issues. Third, the participation in the development of the global indicator framework through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs) triggered early work and focus

Figure 2.2

Levels of maturity of SDG monitoring frameworks

| No indicator framework | National indicator set updated | Sound national indicators with targets, baselines, complementary indicators, etc. | Special attention to data gaps, disaggregation, quality, etc. |
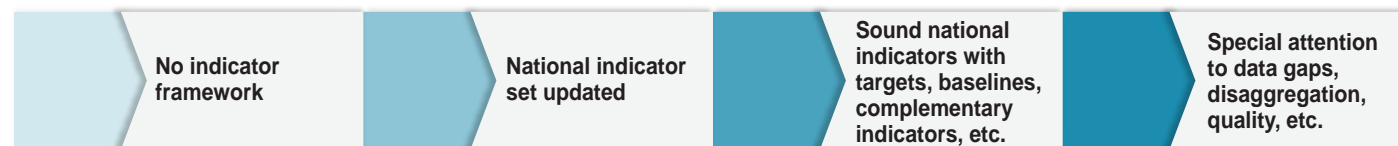
Source: Author's elaboration.

on indicators in some countries. For example, Colombia's National Statistical Office (DANE), which has participated in the IAEG, established an internal working group which led 15 national workshops with 60 entities to define national indicators for SDG monitoring.[12]

Regional indicator frameworks have also triggered work on indicators at the national level. These frameworks aim to ensure regional relevance, complement the global framework, prioritize measurement efforts and promote mutual support to enhance statistical capacities.[13] However, they show similar limitations to national frameworks, such as constraints in setting quantifiable targets and milestones, data availability and weak links between indicators and actions. See Box 2.3.

According to its own context, each country will choose the national SDG indicators that are best suited to track its own progress towards sustainable development. The robustness and maturity of the SDG indicator framework varies across countries, from those that have not yet defined a framework to those that are already paying attention to data disaggregation and quality.

Most countries have conducted assessments and prioritization exercises to identify the availability of national indicators based on the global SDG indicator framework (23 of 24 countries in

the report's sample), and have identified a national set of SDG indicators (Figure 2.3). However, some countries outside the sample still lacked an indicator framework in 2018 (e.g. Saint Lucia, Slovakia or Tanzania) and 2019 (e.g. Austria, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain).[14]

In terms of the number of indicators, a recent survey of 30 countries found that on average countries that have developed national SDG indicator sets use about 112 indicators.[15] Data collected for this chapter (Table 2.1) shows that the number of SDG indicators range from as few as 60 (Canada) to as many as 319 (Indonesia). Indonesia, for example, has a very complete national set with 319 indicators, out of which 85 are aligned with the global ones, 165 are proxies to the global indicators and 69 complement global indicators.[16] However, the number of indicators is more limited in other countries, with many sets of nationally relevant including between 100 and 200 indicators. In some countries, data is currently available to measure a smaller set of indicators.

Assessments of indicator availability have been conducted at different points in time – countries like Indonesia had already issued technical guidance on national indicators in 2016.[17] Not all the exercises use the same parameters (e.g. some countries explicitly consider the global classification in tiers

Box 2.3

Regional indicator frameworks

EU SDG indicator set – developed by the European Commission/Eurostat, the 2019 version included 99 indicators, out of which 55 were aligned with the global ones. Sixteen of these indicators had an official, quantified EU target (linked to the strategy) used as a reference for assessing progress. For the majority of the indicators, however, progress is assessed by determining whether the indicator is moving in the right direction towards the relevant sustainable development objective. The 2020 framework includes 100 indicators, with 53 aligned with the global framework. However, experts have noted that the lack of a long-term EU SDG Strategy beyond 2020 affects the robustness of assessments and does not allow to assess distance to quantifiable targets.

Regional indicators for Latin America and the Caribbean – a prioritized set of 154 indicators covering all SDGs and 94 of the 169 targets. The set includes 120 indicators from the global framework, 30 complementary indicators and 4 proxy indicators originally proposed by the technical secretariat of the Statistical Coordination Group for the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Sources: ECLAC, *Quadrennial Report on Regional Progress*; Misty Montéville and Marianne Kettunen, "Eurostat 2019 Report Shows Mixed Picture of EU's Progress on SDGs"; Misty Montéville and Marianne Kettunen, "IEEP Reviews EU's Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Ahead of HLPF 2019," *IEEP* (blog), July 8, 2019.

Table 2.1

National indicators for SDG follow-up and review

Country	Number of indicators	Developed by	National target values	Strategy, plan, actions for improving data quality	Sub-national indicators
Brazil	82	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea), National Commission for the Sustainable Development Goals (CNODS)	No	No	Yes
Canada	60[i]	Statistics Canada, SDG unit	Yes	Yes	No
Chile	134	National Council for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda's Working Group on Indicators	No	Yes	No
Colombia	156	SDG Commission's Technical Group on Indicators	Yes	Yes	Yes
Costa Rica	136	National Statistical and Census Institute (INEC)	Yes	Yes	No
Estonia	82[ii]	Statistics Estonia, the Commission for Sustainable Development, the Inter-Ministerial Sustainable Development Working Group, and Government Office	No	No	-
Finland	45 sustainable development indicators (NSDS); 158 global indicators (SF)	NSDS, Statistics Finland	Yes	No	-
France	98	Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSEE), Conseil National de l'Information et de la Statistique (CNIS)	Yes	No	Yes
India	297 (National Indicator Framework)	Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)	Yes	No	Yes
Indonesia	319	National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas)	Yes	Yes	No
Italy	130	Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kenya	131	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS)	No	Yes	No
Republic of Korea	214	Statistics Korea	Yes	No	Yes
Mauritius	219[iii]	Statistics Mauritius	No	No	-
Mongolia	244[iv]	National Statistical Office (NSO)	Yes	Yes	No
Morocco	102[v]	High Commission for Planning (HCP)	Yes	Yes	No
Nepal	237	Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Zealand[vi]			Yes	No	No
The Philippines	155	The Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rwanda	150	National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda	Yes	No	No
Sierra Leone	176	Statistics Sierra Leone	Yes	Yes	No
South Africa	128	Statistics South Africa	Yes	No	Yes
Spain	125	High Level Group and National Institute of Statistics	Yes	No	Yes
Turkey	215[vii]	Turkish Statistical Institute	-	Yes	No

Source: Author, from desk research. Empty cells indicate unavailable or indeterminate information. The table is based on self-reported information from countries which is not always equivalent—while some countries include all indicators relevant for the country (independently of their current availability), others distinguish those from the indicators for which data is available. Clarification was provided when available.

[i]   In draft form at the time of writing.

[ii]   Not including 5 indicators for Viability of Cultural Space that Estonia reports with the rest of SD indicators based on SDG indicators (see Statistics Estonia, *Indicators of Sustainable Development* (Tallinn, Statistics Estonia, 2018)).

[iii]   As of 2019, data was available for 155 indicators.

[iv]   Of those, 118 were available in 2018.

[v]   Indicators currently being produced; as of 2019, 33 were available. (Cf. Haut-Commissariat au Plan, Morocco, "Analyse de La Cohérence et Des Interdépendances Entre Les ODD," nd.)

[vi]   New Zealand has indicators for living standards developed by its Treasury, and its statistics office developed wellbeing indicators, designed to measure SDG progress, but no specific SDG indicators. (Stats New Zealand, "Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand – Ngā Tūtohu Aotearoa and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals" (New Zealand Government, July 2018). Indicators are available at https://wellbeingindicators.stats.govt.nz/?_ga=2.237475392.1316205276.1612199595-820308203.1612199595.)

[vii]   Identified. As of 2019, 83 indicators were available. (Government of Turkey, "Strong Grounds towards Common Goals. Turkey's 2nd VNR 2019. Sustainable Development Report," 2019.)

Figure 2.3

National indicators for monitoring SDG implementation and progress (%)

Assessment of availability of national indicators based on global framework	96%
National indicators for SDG targets based on global indicator framework	96%
National SDG targets	79%
Additional national indicators for complementing global indicators	42%
Strategy to strengthen national statistical capacities	58%
Specific actions to strengthen data availability, disaggregation, reliability and quality	63%

Source: Author. For a sample of 24 countries across regions.

based on data availability and methodology while others do not) and they have been conducted through different channels – in some countries the NSO took the lead (e.g. France, India), sometimes in consultation with other departments (e.g. Chile, Estonia); in other countries, the SDG coordinating entity led the process (e.g. Indonesia); some consulted with stake-holders (e.g. Brazil, Colombia, India, Indonesia), while others did not.

Most countries in the report's sample have identified a national set of SDG indicators, but fewer have identified national targets, baselines and benchmarks (19 of 24).[18] This is consistent with findings from the 2019 VNRs, which showed that 17 of 47 countries reported the selection of national targets compared to only 7 in 2018.[19] Most seem to rely on international sources (including the UN, Eurostat, etc.) and only 10 countries in the sample have identified national proxy indicators or purely national indicators in addition to the global ones (e.g. Colombia, Estonia, Finland, Indonesia, Italy). There is also limited information on the alignment of national to global indicators. This is a critical issue, as illustrated in Box 2.4.

Some SDGs present specific challenges in terms of metho-dology and data availability. Few countries have identified national indicators for SDG 16 because of significant con-straints in terms of data production, which affects the ability to identify national targets, baselines and milestones.[20]

For SDG 16 targets such as participation, recent work on governance statistics advises countries to consider relevant global indicators as a minimum to be complemented with additional statistics and indicators in order to assess specific dimensions such as measures to strengthen the participation of disadvantaged groups.[21] There are also significant gaps in national indicators for the environmental SDG targets.[22] Countries have started addressing these gaps. For example, Armenia has assessed global SDG16 indicators and

conducted a survey (using a survey module developed by UNDP, UNODC and OHCHR) on data collection, availability and interoperability as part of efforts to develop national SDG16 indicators.[23] Still at an early stage, Costa Rica's national environmental information system (SINIA) relies on several sources of information, and has a dedicated area for SDG indicators.[24]

Data availability and quality

The 2030 Agenda calls for quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data to measure progress towards the SDGs and to ensure that no one is left behind.[25] However, data availability and quality to measure and report on SDG indicators is a major challenge. In 2020, more than 20 VNR countries identified data gaps and insufficient data as major challenges in monitoring SDG progress.[26] While most countries explicitly recognize such constraints, they do not systematically report on what they lack,[27] nor have many defined specific strategies or action plans to address data problems. Only 14 countries in the report's sample have defined a strategy or plan, or taken specific actions to enhance data availability, quality, and disaggregation, and 15 countries have a structured process or instrument to improve data collection from several sources. See Figure 2.3 above.

Data production capacity varies across countries and SDGs, with developing countries generally reporting greater challenges.[28] Overall, it is difficult to conclude how the adoption of the global SDG indicator framework has affected efforts to enhance national statistical capacity to produce more and better indicators. In Latin America and the Caribbean, according to ECLAC, most nations increased their average production capacity in 2018 compared to 2017 (e.g. Costa Rica and Panama 20 per cent on average), and others conducted feasibility analyses to improve the coverage of some indicators (e.g. Chile).[29] However, other studies have highlighted

Box 2.4

Assessing national SDG indicators in Colombia

CONPES 3918 (2018) defined Colombia's SDG national implementation strategy. The document prioritized 147 targets and 156 indicators that would only depend on national policies. Among those, it further prioritized 16 SDG national tracing targets with baselines, intermediate targets, responsible entities and related indicators.

An evaluation of the alignment of CONPES 3918 with the SDG global targets and indicators by the Colombian SAI found that 18 of the 147 SDG targets were aligned to the global targets (12 per cent), 59 were partially aligned (40 per cent), and 70 were not aligned (48 per cent). The greatest alignment would be on SDGs 8, 10 and 12, while the lowest would be on SDGs 15, 14, 16, 17 and 2.

Among the factors explaining the lack of, or limited alignment of national indicators, the evaluation identified the limited availability and sufficiency of information to develop indicators that would measure the targets in an integral way as well as the lack of additional sources of information or measurement instruments that would enable further disaggregation at the local level and timely data production. The evaluation also highlighted challenges in terms of data disaggregation. Finally, it noted that the definition of national targets based on historical trends might fall short of the transformational ambition of the 2030 Agenda. While Colombia has identified specific national indicators for the global SDG targets, 52.7 per cent of the global targets were not reflected in CONPES.

Sources: CGR, "Revisión de la integración de los ODS en el Documento CONPES 3918 de 2018", 2019; https://www.dnp.gov.co/Paginas/Las-16-grandes-apuestas-de-Colombia-para-cumplir-los-Objetivos-de-Desarrollo-Sostenible.aspx; Colombia, "Presentación Nacional Voluntaria de Colombia. Los ODS como instrumento para consolidar la paz" 2016, pp. 9-10.

persistent challenges in data availability. A review of the 2017-2019 VNRs shows that only 15 countries report having more than 60 per cent available data to measure SDG progress.[30] These challenges have been exacerbated in the COVID-19 context.[31] Nevertheless, some countries have made data availability gains over time. For example Mongolia increased the availability of data from 20 per cent to 48 per cent of indicators available from 2015 to 2018,[32] and Guatemala from under 20 to 71-80 per cent from 2017 to 2019.[33] There are also increasing efforts to use alternative data from the private sector and civil society to complement existing official data (see section 2.3.3). Central statistics producers maintain, however, a critical role to ensure the quality of alternative data sources.

Sectoral statistical capacity affects data availability across the SDGs. National readiness varies significantly. In Colombia, the greatest gaps were related to SDGs 6, 12 and 14.[34] In Mongolia, an assessment found between 62 to 76 per cent data insufficiency for health (SDG 3) or education (SDG 4), and between 45 to 55 per cent data insufficiency for poverty (SDG 1), food and nutrition (SDG 2), water (SDG 6), or governance (SDG 16).[35] Although it is difficult to establish trends, some studies have found generally more availability for socioeconomic goals.[36]

There is a need to strengthen national statistical systems to fill indicator gaps, particularly in developing countries. While existing strategies have not necessarily been updated or aligned to the SDGs (e.g. Finland's strategy does not mention the SDGs),[37] some countries have used them for advancing SDG monitoring. Colombia's National Statistical Plan 2017-

2022[38] considers five strategies for enhancing SDG data, including promotion of access to statistical information, identification and promotion of the statistical use of administrative records, and strengthening territorial statistical capacity.[39] Costa Rica's National Statistical Plan 2018-2022 also includes a specific action plan to improve SDG indicators' methodology and estimations.[40]

Following an assessment of national statistical capacities, some countries have defined new strategies and action plans to address the constraints. In Mongolia, the NSO developed a roadmap to implement the Monitoring and Reporting System for the SDGs and the Sustainable Development Vision 2030.[41] In 2020, Costa Rica was developing an action plan to respond to SDG information needs.

While countries generally recognize the 2030 Agenda principle of leaving no one behind, very few countries report specific efforts to implement it through data disaggregation and improved measurement.[42] Data disaggregation challenges are mentioned in VNR reports, particularly by developing countries, although the issue still receives limited coverage.[43] Most mentions refer to challenges rather than actions taken to address them. For example, in 2020, 15 countries of 45 referred to this issue.

There have been some efforts to enhance data disaggregation on gender (13 of 45 VNR countries in 2020 indicated efforts in this area[44]), but challenges persist. For example, in Mongolia, a sustainability assessment found that the statistical system should incorporate needs for gender-disaggregation of

Table 2.2

Sample of indicators available by SDG and disaggregation criteria in Costa Rica

SDG	Data available	Disaggregation by								
		Sex	Area	Territorial unit	Planning region	Activity	Age	Disability	Province	Other
Total	136	41	21	1	16	5	26	1	17	60
SDG1	10	4	4		4	3	3		1	3
SDG3	24	12	1		1	2	12		11	10
SDG6	8	1	2	1	1		1		1	5
SDG14	1									1
SDG15	4									3
SDG16	11	5	1				2		1	6

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (2019), cited in Government of Costa Rica, "Segundo informe nacional voluntario Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible Costa Rica 2020", p. 106.

existing and new data sources, and identify the institutions responsible for data collection, analysis, and use in order to ensure adequate quality, comparability, and timeliness of gender data for monitoring SDG progress.[45]

Some countries are trying more systematic approaches to enhance data disaggregation across SDGs, considering several disaggregation criteria such as the territorial dimension or special population groups (e.g. indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities).[46] Costa Rica has developed instruments to produce indicators according to sectoral requirements and national goals, and to enhance data disaggregation based on several criteria,[47] including initiatives on disability and ethnicity (National Survey on Disability 2018-2019; redesign of household surveys; 2020 Census).[48] (Table 2.2)

Special feature: Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the functioning and operational continuity of National Statistical Systems at a time when data are more needed. Simultaneously, there has been an increased interest in real-time or near real-time data and the general public is requiring timely and reliable information to navigate, cope with, and respond to the impacts of the global pandemic more than ever. The response measures to the global pandemic, which involve physical distance and remote work, have affected data collection efforts in many countries and have revealed systemic weaknesses in data collection processes.

Disruptions to ongoing or planned household surveys, censuses and other crucial data collection processes that require in-person visits have been significant. Statistical offices have responded to ensure continuity of operations and key statistical programmes, including those that affect SDG monitoring (e.g. conducting surveys by phone). More generally, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the data value chain, as responding to an increased data demand while managing those systemic constraints may generate problems in the availability and quality of data, which in turn may affect public trust as well as the quality of public policies (e.g. targeting of social policies). The pandemic has revealed the need to build the skills and infrastructure to rely more on alternative administrative data sources and remote collection methods, as well as to strengthen coordination of national statistical systems. On the positive side, the response to the pandemic has also accelerated innovation and helped forge new partnerships to advance statistical processes and operations related to SDG monitoring.

Sources: Responses to a survey conducted by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government of UNDESA as an input for the World Public Sector Report 2021; UNDESA Statistics Division COVID response (https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org).

It is early to evaluate the impact of actions to improve statistical production and data availability and quality, since it takes time to collect and standardize officials statistics - especially when there is no agreement on the conceptualization and methodologies of indicators - and to adopt new statistical procedures to produce better information.[49] Supporting these efforts is a significant component of capacity-building on SDG implementation (Chapter 3).

2.2.2.2. Assessing progress and outcomes through evaluation and peer review

Evaluation of SDG implementation

Countries are increasingly recognizing that effective SDG monitoring, follow-up and review requires additional information beyond indicators.[50] It is critical to evaluate the policies, strategies and programmes that explain why targets are achieved or not, and how and whether they relate to one or multiple SDGs.[51] Evaluation as well as performance audits (see Sections 2.3.2 and 2.4) provide an evidence base to improve implementation, therefore facilitating innovation and ongoing learning.[52]

However, few countries have incorporated the evaluation of SDG implementation in their follow-up and review cycles. Only four countries (17 per cent) in the report's sample of 24 have included provisions for a country-led SDG evaluation. Other countries with well-established national evaluations systems

are laying the foundations for using them to conduct SDG evaluations.

Despite the small sample, there are differences across countries in terms of the frequency, scope, and approach of the evaluations, who is responsible for conducting them, and what processes they are aimed at informing. In developing countries, the process will likely rely on support and collaboration from international organizations (e.g. UNICEF in Nigeria[53]). Some of these differences are systematized in Table 2.3 below.

Finland plans to conduct regular evaluations every four years, aligned with the electoral cycle to maximize the intake of the evaluation recommendations and keep the SDGs in the policy agenda.[54] In 2018, the government of Finland commissioned the first independent and comprehensive evaluation of national sustainable development policies. The evaluation focused on the state of sustainable development policy in light of national indicators, sustainable development objectives and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and sustainable development in foreign policy.[55] An interdisciplinary team from three Finnish organizations conducted the assessment, with the Expert Panel on Sustainable Development playing an advisory role.

The findings pointed out limitations in the SDG monitoring framework and processes. For example, the evaluation

Table 2.3

Emerging features of SDG evaluations

Institutionalization	Add-on linked to SDG implementation plan (e.g. Canada, Finland)	Mainstreamed into national evaluation systems (e.g. Costa Rica)
Frequency	Periodic (e.g. Finland every four years)	Variable (e.g. Spain end of action plan and then linked to new NSDS)
Who conducts the evaluation	External organization (e.g. Finland)	Evaluation agency (e.g. Costa Rica, Spain)
Scope	Whole-of-government approach (e.g. Canada, Finland, Spain)	Specific SDGs or SD topics (e.g. Costa Rica)
How it informs the policy cycle	To inform SDG reporting process (e.g. Spain)	To inform other stages of the SDG policy cycle (e.g. formulation and implementation in Finland)
Legitimization	No stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder engagement (e.g. Costa Rica, Finland)

Source: Author's elaboration.

highlighted that there is rich information on sustainable development, yet indicators and data are rarely used to inform policy/making. The report recommended to define an SDG roadmap and called for a better definition of national sustainability targets and more systematic tracking of them.[56]

Nigeria is in the process of conducting evaluations focused on specific SDGs aligned with national priorities (SDGs 1, 3 and 4). A technical working group on SDG evaluation was created to prioritize evaluations and address capacity gaps.[57] The findings of these evaluations will be used to improve the quality of the VNR reports.[58]

Other countries have institutionalized SDG evaluations. Canada, Indonesia, and Spain have included provisions in their SDG strategies and/or regulatory frameworks to conduct evaluations, although they have not yet materialized. In Indonesia, regulation No. 7 of the Ministry of Planning calls for an evaluation once a year or at any time necessary.[59] Canada's 2019 interim document "Towards Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy" includes actions to support independent review mechanisms and peer review processes to improve SDG implementation.[60]

Spain plans to conduct an independent evaluation of the SDG Action Plan at the end of each implementation cycle.[61] The first would have been conducted in 2020, yet the COVID-19 context may have affected its implementation. The High-Level Group for SDG implementation is responsible for ensuring coherence and coordination of all evaluation activities, and the newly created Institute for Public Policy Evaluation,[62] within the structure of the Ministry of Territorial Policy and Public Service, is responsible for establishing a coordination system, working with the evaluation units in the different ministries, and for aligning the evaluation methodologies with the OECD and the EU.

Some countries with well-institutionalized national or sectoral evaluation systems have sought to create synergies and align the evaluation and SDG follow-up and review systems. However, there are challenges in terms of coordination, information exchange and integration, which may create duplications (see Section 2.4 and Box 2.5).

Costa Rica's National Development and Public Investment Plan 2019-2022 refers explicitly to evaluation, and is complemented with a highly institutionalized National Evaluation Policy 2018-2030.[63] A multi-stakeholder National Platform of Evaluation, led by the Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN)[64], provides all stakeholders with opportunities to be consulted, participate in evaluation processes and access information about the implementation of the recommendations.[65] The platform is responsible for monitoring the implementation of an Evaluation Action Plan 2019–2023.[66] The National Agenda of Evaluations includes 15 evaluations of programmes and policies selected based on their alignment with the SDG goals and targets.[67] The first evaluation with an SDG perspective focuses on priority SDGs and other goals related to climate change and biodiversity.[68] However, a recent audit by the General Comptroller found that this evaluation was significantly delayed.[69]

Box 2.5

Challenges of mainstreaming SDGs into Colombia's national evaluation system

Colombia's 1991 Constitution recognized the need for an evaluation system to assess the results of government's policies and projects. The National Evaluation and Results Management System (SINERGIA) aims to improve the effectiveness of public policies related to the National Development Plan (NDP); measure and evaluate the implementation and impact of policies and programmes; generate information for the allocation of resources, and improve accountability. However, this evaluation system has not been integrated with the SDG follow-up and review. In 2018, the General Comptroller of Colombia (CGR) found that although SINERGIA evaluates the strategic policies included in the NDP, the reports are organized by sector, entity, programme and indicators, but not according to the targets and indicators that are linked with the SDGs. This departs from the national SDG implementation strategy (CONPES 3918), which highlights the importance of standardized follow-up and review between the SDGs and SINERGIA. The CGR recommended the development of an action plan to evaluate SDG implementation and its incorporation into SINERGIA or the online SDG platform. Moreover, it also recommended the articulation of information available on SINERGIA on progress on the NDP's targets and indicators that are aligned with the SDGs with information available on the SDG portal, ensuring interoperability between both.

Sources: Departamento Nacional de Planeación (DNP, Colombia), "¿Qué Es?," SINERGIA. El Sistema Nacional de Evaluación de Gestión y Resultados, n.d.; and CEPAL, "Planificación de Colombia," Observatorio Regional de Planificación para el Desarrollo de América Latina y el Caribe, n.d. Contraloría General de la República de Colombia, "Evaluación de la preparación para la implementación de la Agenda 2030 y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible" (Bogotá, Colombia, December 27, 2018), 106-7.

Peer review processes

Peer reviews have been used to monitor progress and implementation of National Sustainable Development Strategies (e.g. Belgium, the EU, France, Ghana, Mauritius, the Netherlands, the UK) as well as of national statistical strategies.[70] Peer reviews may involve different tools and activities, while keeping one main feature – the involvement of experts from other countries to review an existing plan or strategy and to make recommendations based on their experience. In some regions, peer review processes have been institutionalized for a long time (e.g. African Peer Review Mechanism of the African Union since 2003).[71]

There are few examples of peer review processes related to the SDGs (the most significant of which is Germany). Most processes are peer exchanges oriented towards improving and informing the VNR. Some virtual peer exchanges have also been used to support the use of alternative data for official SDG reporting.[72] In the report's sample of 24 countries, only Canada, Estonia, Finland, Costa Rica and Sierra Leone have planned or conducted some form of peer exchange.

Building on previous experience with peer reviews in 2009 and 2013, a peer review of the German sustainability strategy was conducted in 2018 in the context of the SDGs. Peer reviewers from Canada, China, the EU, France, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, and the UK participated. Some recommendations aimed to strengthen the monitoring, follow-up and review framework, including the need to address off-track indicators, expand budgets for indicators and activity on tracking progress, and strengthen parliamentary scrutiny by improving access to sustainability assessments and empowering the relevant legislative committee.[73]

The Estonian and the Finnish National Sustainable Development Commissions have held virtual peer exchanges on their respective VNR processes and the results of the sustainable development action plans.[74] Finland also participated in a virtual peer review with Switzerland and Mozambique to get external inputs for the VNR.[75] In February 2020, Costa Rica hosted a three-day peer review exchange with representatives from Belize, Costa Rica and Georgia to share inputs on each country's first VNR, the roadmap for the second VNR, and stakeholder engagement.[76] Sierra Leone is currently engaged in a similar exercise in preparation for the 2021 VNR.

Peer reviews represent an area of opportunity for strengthening SDG monitoring and implementation. However, it is still too early to assess how the findings and results of these processes may inform the SDG monitoring, follow-up, and review systems in practice.

2.2.2.3. Reporting on SDG implementation, progress and outcomes

National reporting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda has improved over time.[77] Countries are now regularly reporting on integration of the SDGs into national plans and strategies, and more systematically engaging stakeholders in reporting. However, there are areas which are less covered in SDG reports and asymmetries in the attention and detail of reporting on different SDGs. This section examines SDG reporting at the global and national levels, including online tools.

Figure 2.4

Reporting on SDG progress (%)

Process of reporting on SDG process at national level	63%
VNR reports produced	100%
Structured process ro report to Parliament	21%
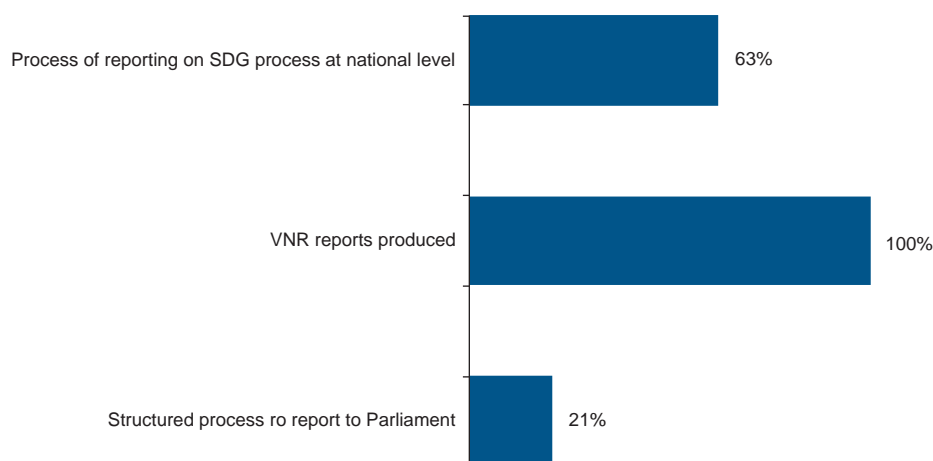
Source: Author. From a sample of 24 countries across regions.

Global reporting

The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) is a centrepiece of the SDG follow-up and review system. Global reporting is a voluntary process led by countries according to the principles set in paragraph 74 of the 2030 Agenda. Countries submit Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports to the HLPF. VNRs are not conceived as an accountability mechanism among countries but to citizens, and an opportunity for learning and knowledge sharing. The VNR process consists not only of the reports, but also the participatory and inclusive process through which the reports are developed.

Figure 2.4 shows that all countries in the report's sample have produced VNR reports, while only 15 (63 per cent) have defined a national process for reporting on SDG progress beyond the VNR. And only 5 countries (21 per cent) have a structured process to report to Parliament. Countries that have not defined national reporting processes often refer to the VNR as a national reporting tool.

The VNR process has gained significant traction, with 205 VNRs presented from 2016 to 2020. (Figure 2.5) The process has brought focus on SDG monitoring, follow-up and review beyond indicators, and triggered action at the national level, including mirroring processes at subnational level. Moreover, it has opened opportunities for more systematic engagement of stakeholders, strengthening national ownership of the SDGs. Since 2016, 38 countries have reported more than once to the HLPF. Regionally, most of the repeat VNRs come from Africa and the Americas (11 countries each), followed by Asia (10 countries), and Europe (5 countries).[78]

Overall, countries have improved the preparation of the VNRs and the reports themselves, increasingly reporting on most aspects of SDG implementation.[79] However, recent studies have found decreased reporting on critical areas such as international public finance, local processes, best practices and stakeholders' contributions.[80]

In general countries rely on the existing institutional structures for SDG coordination to lead the preparation of the VNR reports (e.g. Colombia, Estonia, Mauritius). The multi-sectoral nature of many of these institutional arrangements facilitates the collection of information. In some cases, the entities responsible for the VNR report have changed, reflecting modifications in the SDG institutional structure (e.g. in Morocco the first VNR was led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while the Committee for the Follow-up and Monitoring of the SDGs, part of the National Commission for Sustainable Development, led the 2020 VNR).[81]

A few countries have defined detailed processes for their VNRs. For example, Finland has committed to submit a VNR every four years, and defined a process that extends for about ten months, starting with a kick-off meeting and a call for written inputs, until the official approval and publication of the report. The process includes multiple opportunities for stakeholder engagement and contributions.[82] (Figure 2.8)

Over time, countries have tended to diversify the tools used to gather information and to engage stakeholders. Consultations are widely used (e.g. Colombia, France, India, Indonesia, Mauritius, Morocco). Some countries combine different tools to enhance the diversity and quality of the information. In 2017,

Figure 2.5

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) presented to the HLPF by year and region
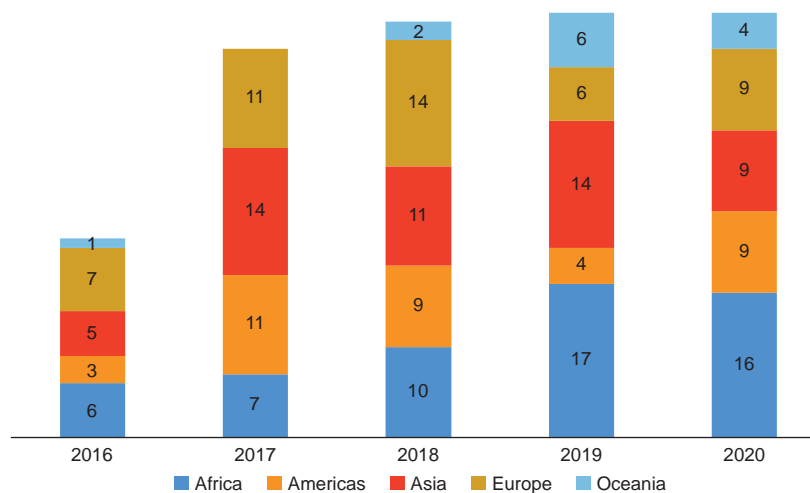
Source: Author, based on data available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/index.php?str=indicators#results_area.

Costa Rica designed data collection templates and conducted semi-structured interviews with senior government officials and consultation and validation workshops with vulnerable groups.[83] For the 2020 VNR, the tools used included online consultations, reports and inputs from several organizations, a questionnaire from the private sector, and two surveys to identify good practices, challenges and lessons learned.[84]

Some countries open the draft VNR report to review before finalizing it. Indonesia held online consultations and workshops to validate the 2019 VNR.[85] Costa Rica shared the draft 2020 VNR report with different stakeholders for feedback.[86] In Colombia and Mauritius, public institutions and the general public were invited to provide feedback and comments on the draft report.[87] Rwanda conducted three rounds of validation of the draft VNR report to incorporate inputs from diverse stakeholders.[88]

There are a few examples of independent assessments of the VNR process. An assessment of Canada's 2018 VNR highlighted some strengths (e.g. information about efforts at different levels of government and by various stakeholders and consistent attention to leaving no one behind), but noted that the report was not approved by parliament, could have been prepared in a more inclusive way, and did not commit to regular reporting.[89] Also, global organizations and researchers have been producing annual independent syntheses and analyses of VNRs (e.g. Canadian Council for International Cooperation, CEPEI, Partners 4 Review). At the UN, DESA produces an annual synthesis of VNRs,[90] and the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) an annual report on how VNRs addressed selected themes.[91]

Figure 2.6

The VNR process in Finland

Source: Finland Prime Minister's Office, "Voluntary National Review 2020 Finland. Report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development" (2020), p. 15.
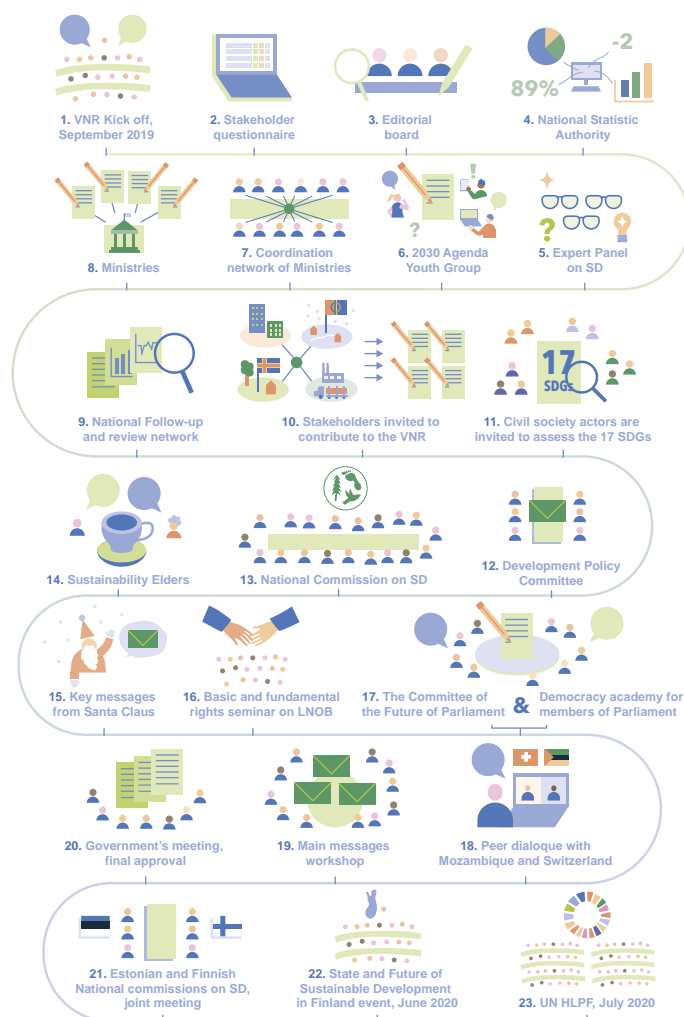
Analyses of the VNR process have highlighted different limitations. First, the VNR reports include rich information on national efforts to implement the SDGs but they are an exercise in self-reporting and therefore, they do not usually highlight weaknesses or include a self-assessment on the performance of institutional mechanisms and policies.[92] Evidence from evaluations and audits is not systematically integrated into the reports to complement and balance the government's own account. Corroborating and triangulating the VNR information with other sources is a challenge, since there are still asymmetries in the information available to non-state actors.

A second limitation relates to the continuity of the reporting process.[93] Although countries increasingly report on progress since the previous VNR (e.g. Chile, Indonesia, and Sierra Leone in 2019),[94] overall, repeat reports do not provide a systematic and dynamic account of progress, explaining the causes of changes.[95] VNR reports are conceived of as a snapshot of SDG progress and implementation at a certain point in time, rather than part of a continuous review cycle, highlighting what is different from the previous report and why.[96] Moreover, with some exceptions, the reports do not include information on follow-up to previous commitments.

Another challenge relates to the focus and contents of the VNR reports. They tend to provide an account of activities implemented and outputs produced, without evaluating them against the SDG targets and without linking programmes and policies with results.[97] Also, the integration of regional and local perspectives remains challenging.

Finally, while the VNR process is frequently the starting point for national SDG monitoring, follow-up, review and reporting, there are opportunities to further embed the VNR process at the national level, facilitating the continuous involvement of stakeholders and including actions and milestones between reporting periods to keep track of progress, assess impacts and strengthen the capacity to identify challenges and enabling factors.

National reporting beyond VNRs

Reporting progress on SDG implementation is important for ensuring accountability to citizens. However, while countries have developed a variety of systems for measuring and monitoring SDG progress, standardized or routine national reporting and reporting to Parliament present opportunities for improvement. (See Figure 2.6 above.)

Despite these limitations, some countries have established periodic and regular reporting processes at the national level (e.g. Colombia, Finland, Indonesia, Spain). Forty VNR countries provided information on national reporting in 2019,[98] and 2020 VNR countries show a slight increase in the production of periodic SDG progress reports (e.g. Argentina, Bangladesh,

Special feature: Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the VNR process in different ways. In 2020, 39 of 47 VNR countries explicitly mentioned the impact of COVID-19, and many included a separate section on the impact and responses to the pandemic. Many countries have reiterated their commitment to the SDGs as a roadmap for recovery (e.g. Austria, Georgia, Honduras, Peru). The 2021 edition of the UN handbook on preparation of the VNR recommends that reports include a section on the pandemic's impact on SDG implementation and measures taken to ensure a sustainable, green recovery.

The pandemic has disrupted VNR preparations, triggering postponements, cancellations and changes in planned activities as a result of social distancing and lockdown measures. Innovation and digital technologies have been key to address these challenges and to reach a wider audience. Many national governments (e.g. Bangladesh, Benin, Costa Rica, Malawi, Moldova, Nepal, Panama, Uganda) have made efforts to set online platforms and arrange online discussions and virtual sessions. For example, Malawi used different consultation platforms to engage stakeholders, including those in the hardest to reach areas. Virtual means included phone-in radio programmes and interviews, among others. While ICTs lower the costs of VNR preparations, there are barriers for some countries and certain populations to access and be engaged through these tools. For example, to include those without Internet access, Comoros undertook sight visits respecting social distancing. In addition to stakeholder engagement, the pandemic has also affected information and data collection (e.g. Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Samoa).

Sources: Irena Zubzevic, "Impact of COVID-19: Perspective from Voluntary National Reviews," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Policy Briefs, October 14, 2020; UCLG Community of Practice on VLRs and UN Habitat, *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews. Volume 1. A Comparative Analysis of Existing VLRs* (Barcelona: UCLG and UN Habitat, 2020); United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), "Handbook for Preparation of the Voluntary National Reviews. The 2021 Edition" (New York: United Nations, 2020); Partners 4 Review, "2020 Voluntary National Reviews," 15–17.

Benin, Comoros, Estonia, India, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Uganda).[99] In some countries, the national reporting process is planned, but has not been effectively implemented yet (e.g. Canada, Chile). And, as noted above, some countries see the VNR as the national reporting process, which is also shared internationally, and have not issued any separate national report.

Some countries already had a system of regular reporting related to other national processes, while others have taken advantage of the SDGs to initiate periodic reporting.[100] One difference is whether countries report on the SDGs only (e.g. Spain since there is no NSDS in place), or combine reporting on the SDGs with reporting on pre-existing, or otherwise independent, national sustainable development strategy and indicators or development plans with (e.g. Estonia, Finland, Italy). Among the latter, another difference is whether the reporting processes and resulting reports are separate or integrated in any way.

For example, Colombia has two reporting processes for the SDGs and a separate system for reporting on the National Development Plan.[101] The High-Level Inter-Institutional Commission on SDGs must present an annual report, which includes information on progress for each SDG and the respective targets. In addition, all entities identified in the country's SDG strategy (CONPES 3918) must report on the Action and Follow-up Plan every six months. This information is consolidated according to guidelines provided by the National Planning Department (DNP). By end of 2030, there will be a final report on the implementation of CONPES 3918. Regarding the National Development Plan, the DNP systematizes information on progress based on the evaluation of public entities' four-year plan and annual action plans, and prepares an annual report in the national monitoring and evaluation system (SINERGIA).[102]

Box 2.6

Reporting on SDG progress at the national level in Finland

In 2017, Finland established a sophisticated and structured four-year monitoring cycle to report on SDG progress, including annual and quadrennial reports (see figure). Every year, all line ministries are required to compile their policies and measures on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda into the government's annual report to the parliament. Also every year, the national indicators are updated during the second and third quarters, and the data is accompanied with interpretative text. Indicators and interpretative texts are published on the website hosted by the National Commission on Sustainable Development and the Prime Minister's Office.

Every four years, the government is committed to commissioning an independent evaluation of national implementation of the 2030 Agenda to produce fact-based content on sustainability issues and progress on SDG. The first evaluation was published in Spring 2019 and the next one is expected in Winter 2022-2023.

Source: Finland's Voluntary National Review 2020.
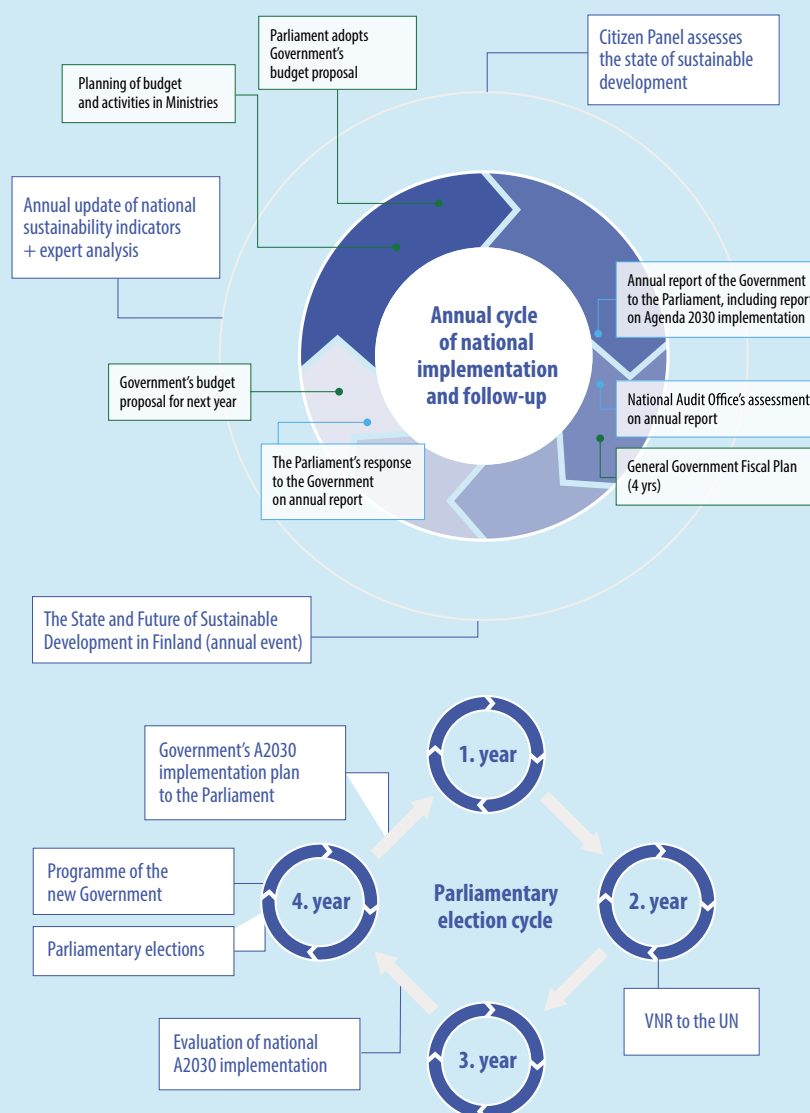
Countries differ on their SDG national reporting processes along several dimensions, including the frequency, responsible entities, and the contents and focus of the reports. Countries also differ regarding whether they provide technical support and guidance for reporting, and whether the SDG leading entities coordinate the reporting process.

In terms of frequency, some countries have committed to producing an annual report. However, not many have included the report as part of a longer cycle of monitoring and reporting. One exception is Finland, where the annual report is part of a four-year monitoring and reporting cycle (Box 2.6). Some countries aim to issue biennial progress reports (e.g. Kenya), and a few (e.g. Chile) have planned issuing a report every three years. As for the responsible entities, countries generally attribute reporting responsibilities to the entity or body leading SDG implementation for comprehensive reports (e.g. Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Finland, Spain) or to the NSO for monitoring reports focused on data to report on progress (e.g. Canada, Estonia, Italy, Kenya, South Africa), or to both (e.g. India).

Some countries have identified several reporting entities and rely on annual meetings to complement the collection of information. In Spain, each entity included in the SDG governance structure prepares its own annual report, in particular the High Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda. The reports include information on the work and contributions of all actors and territorial institutions to implement the SDG

National Action Plan. An annual high-level meeting, with the participation of the High Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda, representatives of the High-Level Group, the Council of Sustainable Development, the National Commission for Agenda 2030 and the Bicameral Legislative Commission, will contribute to prepare the national report.[103]

Regarding the contents of the SDG reports, most countries report on all SDGs and only a few focus on the SDGs reviewed at the HLPF.[104] Some countries focus on reporting progress against SDGs or targets based on indicators (e.g. Estonia, Italy), whereas others have additional more in-depth reports including information on initiatives and contributions of different entities to SDG implementation, and the national SDG action plan if it exists (e.g. Colombia, Spain). Countries like Germany combine both, and report on progress based on indicators every two years, while the federal government reports on progress more generally every four years.[105]

Only a few countries have defined specific reporting procedures, including timelines, technical guidance, and reporting templates and formats. In Indonesia, reporting procedures are regulated for the different levels of government as well as non-government programmes.[106] Mongolia's Ministry of Finance has developed formats for line ministries to report on the Law on Development Policy Planning, although there are challenges in integrating the reporting processes for Mongolia's Development Vision and the SDGs and reporting for other development policies.[107]

Box 2.7

Indonesia's reporting process in a nutshell

At the national level, entities submit progress reports to the Ministry of National Development Planning (BAPPENAS) using a pre-determined format. The four Working Groups of the SDG implementation team review and validate the progress reports, in coordination with the Secretariat. Each Working Group assisted by the Secretariat submits the entire report and results of its review to the Chairperson of the Implementation Team, who then submits the entire report to the Implementing Coordinator, i.e. the Head of BAPPENAS. The Implementing Coordinator reports on progress of the SDG targets at the national level to the President as Chair of the Steering Committee at least once a year and at any time if necessary.

At the regional level, every six months, the National Working Groups assisted by the Provincial SDGs Secretariat are supposed to coordinate a discussion on SDG progress, which "encompasses programs and activities to achieve each target and indicator as well as budget allocations", together with non-governmental organizations (including district and city level). The Working Group, assisted by the Provincial SDGs Secretariat, reports to the Governor as Representative of the Central Government and forwards it to the Central SDGs Secretariat. The Governor submits a progress report to the Head of BAPPENAS and the Minister of Home Affairs. Then, the process is similar to national programmes.

For non-governmental activities, reporting is voluntary and based on a self-assessment tool. The Working Groups assisted by the SDGs Secretariat review the reports and submit their conclusions to the SDGs Implementation Team. The evaluation mechanism for non-governmental organizations is "carried out through an independent panel of experts formed by the SDGs Implementation Team, consisting of members from stakeholders who are recognized for their competence, experience and integrity".

Source: Ministry of Development Planning (Indonesia), "Pedoman Teknis."

Reporting tools

Online reporting has increased, as countries leverage a variety of ICT tools to communicate on SDG progress and implementation. Some countries (e.g. Chile, Colombia, Mexico) have developed SDG websites to disseminate information on the 2030 Agenda and to report on progress, including data on SDG indicators. Colombia's SDG online platform[108] provides information on progress of SDG goals and indicators at the national level, considering the national tracing targets and available national indicators, and disaggregated by sex, area and age groups.[109] It also provides an overview of SDG progress by SDG and territory, including information on subnational development plans. Finally, it provides access to an SDG corporate tracker that monitors the contribution of the private sector (launched in June 2020, no information was available at the time of writing).[110]

In some cases, websites maintained by NSOs focus on SDG indicators and data (e.g. Belgium, Estonia, Mauritius, South Africa). Other countries have invested efforts in developing SDG dashboards (e.g. Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Uganda). Mongolia has developed a data dashboard to facilitate access to disaggregated data, provide a comprehensive picture on progress and identify specific areas that need support.[111] In Indonesia, an interactive dashboard hosted on the central SDGs website maintained by the Ministry of National Development Planning provides access to national SDG indicators by region.[112]

Open data is being leveraged to facilitate use and reuse of data on SDG progress and implementation (e.g. Colombia, Mauritius). For example, Colombia's SDG Commission has aligned regulations and government policies on Big Data and Open Data to support monitoring and measurement of SDG indicators.[113] All information on the online SDG platform is provided in open source. The general open-source platform OpenSDG is used in approximately 20 countries, including Kyrgyzstan and Rwanda.[114] Kyrgyzstan's reporting platform (Open SDG platform) includes data and metadata for 102 global and 57 national SDG indicators in open data format and several languages.[115]

2.2.3. SDG monitoring, follow-up and review at the subnational level

Engagement of subnational (including local) governments in SDG monitoring, follow-up and review is a critical component of any localization strategy to implement the 2030 Agenda.[116] Subnational governments bring specific knowledge, experience, data and practices, and have showed strong commitment to strengthening SDG monitoring, follow-up, review and reporting. However, they also face significant challenges due to less developed planning and results-based processes and limitations in data availability, among others. Some of these challenges relate to institutional frameworks,

including weak coordination and different priorities across levels of government. There are also asymmetries in terms of subnational governments' capacities and resources for SDG implementation.

2.2.3.1. Institutionalization of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review at subnational level

The institutionalization of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is less advanced at the subnational than the national level. In the report's sample, only 8 of 24 countries show evidence of any SDG monitoring, follow-up and review system at subnational level and just 7 at local level. Examples of structured processes for reporting on SDG implementation have been identified in 10 countries at subnational level, and 7 at local level. Similarly, there are only examples of subnational and local indicators to monitor SDG progress in 9 countries. (Figure 2.7)

There is no conclusive evidence on whether and how the organizational structure of the system of government may affect the institutional arrangements for SDG monitoring, follow-up and review.[117] Although federal or highly decentralized states usually present more institutionalized monitoring systems (e.g. Spain), there are also examples of unitary states with strong subnational monitoring frameworks (e.g. Rwanda).[118] Also, both federal and non-federal states show diverse coordination models for engaging subnational governments.[119]

Nonetheless, recent devolution and decentralization processes (e.g. Kenya, Nepal) have contributed to advancing subnational monitoring. In Kenya, an SDG Liaison Office within the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers facilitates coordination between the national and the 47 subnational governments. Other institutional spaces for coordination include a Summit, co-chaired by the President and the Chair of the Council of Governors, the Inter-Ministerial Forum, and the Intergovernmental Sector Forums.[120] The National Government, in collaboration with the Council of Governors,[121] has prepared County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) to guide local SDG implementation. The Council of Governors has established an SDG unit and works with the national Monitoring and Evaluation Department (MED)[122] to support local monitoring efforts.[123]

Subnational governments have experienced challenges in the definition of roles and responsibilities for SDG monitoring, follow-up and review and in their operationalization. In Morocco, the Court of Accounts has highlighted the need to clarify the distribution of roles and responsibilities at national and local levels.[124] The website of the General Directorate of Local Authorities (*Direction Générale des Collectivités Locales*) does not provide any information on the engagement of local governments in SDG monitoring and evaluation.[125] In Sierra Leone, an SDG audit highlighted the lack of an SDG monitoring and review system at the local level.[126] These challenges are

Figure 2.7

Subnational and local SDG monitoring, follow-up and review (absolute numbers)[i]
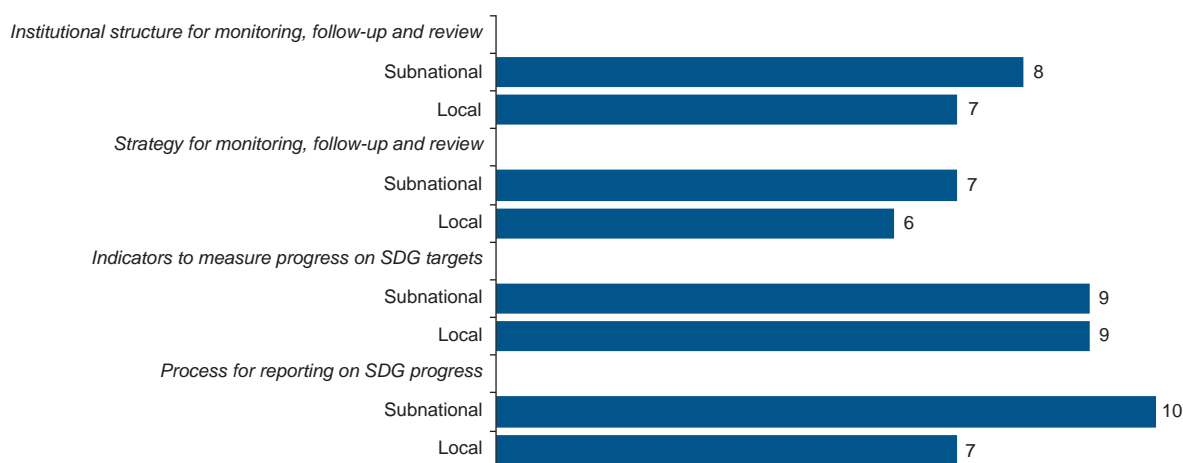
Source: Author. From a cross-regional sample of 24 countries.

[i]   Reports the existence of at least some examples and initiatives of monitoring, follow-up, and review at the relevant level of government. It does not imply homogeneous institutionalization across the territory.

compounded by great variation in the institutionalization of SDG implementation at the subnational level, which requires tailor-made solutions. Nepal, for example, has recognized the need to introduce variations in the monitoring and evaluation framework to cater to the different sizes and requirements of subnational governments.[127]

2.2.3.2. Systems and processes to assess SDG progress at subnational level

Strengthening subnational SDG monitoring, follow-up and review is critical given the challenges for national indicators to capture the complexity of subnational contexts and the obstacles for subnational governments to engage in national monitoring processes. Additional efforts are needed for localizing SDG targets and indicators, and enhancing data availability at subnational level.

Indicators and data

Incomplete or unavailable disaggregated and localized data, as well as resource and capacity constraints, have compromised the ability of subnational governments to use indicators for monitoring SDG progress. The responses to these challenges vary significantly depending on support from networks and associations of subnational governments, as well as on the extent of collaboration with national governments.[128]

There are different approaches to the definition of subnational indicators. While subnational governments in some regions are trying to adapt national indicators to local realities or using national systems, others are more focused on developing their own indicators.[129] In some cases, the definition of subnational indicators is driven by national governments. For example, in Nepal, the government has identified 117 SDG indicators for

Table 2.4

Approaches to developing subnational SDG indicators

Nationally-driven	Locally-driven
• National government identifies indicators for subnational/local level	• Subnational/local governments adapt official indicators
• Subnational governments may prepare own baselines	• Relevant local indicators and data that relate to or are proxies for official indicators
	• Local qualitative assessments with some hard data

Source: Author's elaboration.

Table 2.5

Indicator systems at subnational level in Spain

Subnational government	Work on indicators
Andalucía	Andalucía's Strategy of Sustainable Development (June 2018) includes 43 indicators, many of which correspond to the global SDG indicators. They come from official statistics, ensuring quality of the data.
Aragón	Indicator panel in the Transparency Portal with visualizations in real time.
Catalunya	In 2016, through the Government Plan for the XI legislative period, commitment to elaborate a National Plan of SDGs and an integrated system of targets and indicators to assess progress. In April 2019, the Statistical Institute of Catalunya and the Advisory Council on Sustainable Development started the estimation of the 99 SDG indicators of Eurostat for Catalunya.
Euskadi	The Agenda Euskadi Basque Country 2030 includes 50 indicators. Annual reports to inform on progress.
Galicia	The Galician Strategy of Sustainable Development would include a battery of indicators adapted to Galicia and based on the SDG indicators.
Navarra	The region has developed a system of regional indicators based on the proposal of the EU indicators and incorporating some additional indicators. The indicators should be disaggregated by gender as appropriate. The first progress report would include a proposal for territorializing the indicators.
Murcia	Development of SDG Regional Strategy 2020-2030, which will include performance indicators and follow-up and review mechanisms.
Valencia	Monitoring and follow-up map identifies baselines and reflects all the indicators related to the SDGs to inform Progress Reports at regional level.

Source: Author's elaboration.

the seven provinces.[130] Provincial governments have either published or were preparing their SDG baseline reports.[131] In the Philippines, through the Department of Interior and Local Government, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) aims to localize the national and regional indicators by identifying provincial and municipal-level indicators for the SDGs.[132]

Many cities, particularly those engaged in Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR), are developing their own monitoring and evaluation tools. Based on UCLG data, out of 38 subnational/local reports, 74 per cent use indicators and only 10 reports (26 per cent) do not rely on indicators.[133]

Three main approaches can be identified when the process is locally driven.[134] First, some governments have adapted official indicators to the subnational context, reworking terminology, methods and sources. For example, the Chinese city of Deqing

rely on the UN official indicators; Buenos Aires selects some UN official indicators. Second, some governments use the SDGs or their themes to present a qualitative assessment, sporadically accompanied by hard data (e.g. Helsinki, New York). Finally, some local reviews look as systematically as possible for a correlation between "official" indicators and relevant datasets or local indicators to complement them (e.g. Bristol, Los Angeles, Mannheim, Mexico City). For example, since 2012, Barcelona has regularly monitored a set of 28 indicators of urban sustainability, which have been adapted as a preliminary measurement for SDG compliance while the city proceeds to localize more indicators. Cape Town merges "domesticated" indicators as close as possible to the official ones with additional local indicators, while Spain's subnational governments have followed a diversity of approaches in setting SDG indicator systems (Table 2.5).

Associations of subnational governments and other organizations (e.g. UN Habitat, LSE Metropolis, OECD Territorial Initiative) support the development of indicators. For example, the association of major cities and metropolitan areas (Metropolis), in collaboration with the London School of Economics–LSE Cities, has collected a limited set of indicators.[135] UN-Habitat's City Prosperity Index includes several SDG indicators, and UN-Habitat is also supporting data production in countries like Botswana, Colombia, Ecuador and Tunisia.[136] Associations have played a critical supporting role in several countries (e.g. Brazil, Costa Rica, the Flanders region of Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands).[137] In Brazil, the National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM) has developed the SDG Mandala, an SDG dashboard accessible to municipalities.[138]

Several local governments, local government associations and international institutions participate in a Cross-Institutional Working Group on local SDG indicators and monitoring supported by UCLG and UNDP-ART. The group conducted an in-depth study and systematization of several SDG monitoring and indicator systems developed by different stakeholders.[139] Civil society has also supported local monitoring efforts (see Box 2.8).

Reporting processes at local level

Subnational reporting provides an opportunity to know how SDG implementation is progressing at the subnational level, allows subnational governments to connect with global stakeholders, and can help advance subnational administrative reforms to support SDG implementation.[140] However, reporting processes are not well entrenched at the subnational level, with the exception of countries where subnational governments had previous experience with Agenda 21 (e.g. France).[141] Further, in some countries, territories have the legal obligation to report on sustainable development. For example, in France, all the territorial collectivities of more than 50,000 inhabitants are required to report on progress in sustainable development.[142] Some recent reports refer to the SDGs (e.g. the Aquitaine region since 2016).[143] (Box 2.9)

Following the model of the VNR, a significant number of subnational governments have committed to developing Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR). VLRs contribute to national and subnational SDG monitoring and promote knowledge-sharing and emulation between subnational governments.[144] Their impact goes beyond monitoring and reporting to becoming processes for addressing SDG implementation challenges.[145] For example, in Los Angeles, the local review process has allowed the city to understand the SDGs in the local context, and to communicate implementation efforts and community-led SDG initiatives on an ongoing basis.[146]

The city of New York has been one of the leaders of the Global VLR Movement,[147] engaging other subnational governments. In 2019, the Voluntary Local Review Declaration was launched during the United Nations General Assembly to incentivize subnational governments to develop SDG localization reports.[148] As of May 2020, 208 local governments have endorsed this commitment.[149] In practice, 39 local and 6 subnational reviews had been developed by 2020.[150] Subnational governments in several countries in the report's sample have developed VLRs (e.g. Brazil, Costa Rica, France, South Africa, Spain).

Most reporting processes are focused on the local context without explicit recognition of relations with the national level.[151] For example, Barcelona, the Basque Country, Malaga, and Valencia have conducted local reviews in Spain,[152] but none of them refer to the national SDG implementation strategy and reporting. Among those reports with links to

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Box 2.8

Contribution of civil society to monitoring local SDG implementation in Colombia

The Colombian Network of Cities (*Red Como Vamos*, RCCCV) is an alliance between civil society and the private sector, focused on generating reliable, impartial and comparable information on sustainability in Colombian cities. Over 35 municipalities (including 13 capital cities) and more than 130 regional partners collaborate on 16 programmes. Since 2016, RCCCV has supported the territorialization of the SDGs in the country, including the development of reliable and standardized information for monitoring the SDGs. RCCCV has supported several initiatives such as the creation of a national body for SDG follow-up in the cities, a territorial statistical plan to strengthen local statistical capacities, and a digital open data platform for follow-up and monitoring. It has developed two synthetic indexes based on objective and subjective indicators to assess development issues at local level (the Social Progress Index and the University Cities Index). The 2017 report "5 Urban challenges: Towards a new urban agenda in the cities of Colombia" established the first baseline for SDG monitoring in Colombian cities. The analysis identified that 78 of the 169 SDG targets were relevant and had information available or could be produced in the short term. The study revealed challenges for measuring some SDGs in urban contexts (such as SDG 12 and 13).

Sources: https://redcomovamos.org; http://www.ciudatos.com.

Box 2.9

Subnational reporting on sustainable development: The French Département of Gironde

The Département of Gironde has been involved in Agenda 21 for more than 15 years. The subnational government has built a strategic vision of sustainable development, carried by the Vice-Presidents in each of their areas of intervention. The structure of the annual report on sustainable development has changed over time. Currently conceived as an "accountability report on sustainable development commitments," it aims to take stock of how objectives linking social and environmental responsibility are taken into account. The Department draws on the experience of the business sector and the ISO 26000 standard (Social Responsibility). Since 2016, the report has examined the commitments related to the SDGs.

Source: https://e-ceser.grandest.fr/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/contribution-sur-le-rapport-sur-lasituation-en-matiere-de-developpement-durable-adoptee.pdf.

national processes are, for example, the Japanese cities of Tomaya, Shimokawa, Hamamatsu and Kitakyushu, which were directly linked to the VNR.[153] Other reports include references to national SDG strategies (e.g. Mexico City, Cape Town, Busia, Besancon) or VNR processes (e.g. Chimbote, Canterbury).[154]

VLR reports are heterogeneous.[155] Some follow the guidelines and format of the VNR, but many are spontaneous reports, SDG localization or implementation reports, or reports on sustainable development strategies, visions or action plans. The institutional models, methodologies and approaches are also diverse. In general, local executive branches take the lead, although there are some examples of bottom-up approaches.[156] In Winnipeg, Canada, the SDGs have been integrated into a community-based indicator system.[157] The 2019 Our City report focused on Winnipeg and the SDGs. The initiative is led by non-governmental organizations, although the local government is represented in the Advisory Group and provided some of the initial funding.[158]

Despite their diversity, an analysis of 10 selected VLRs conducted for this report shows some level of standardization on the topics covered.[159] Still, most reports do not cover all Goals and targets, but focus on priority SDGs. This allows for a more in-depth analysis of the different dimensions of sustainable development, individually or connected to each other.

Voluntary subnational reviews are more recent. They have taken place on a country-wide pilot basis in Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kenya, Mozambique and Nepal. Some of these reports have been referenced in their countries' VNR (Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Kenya).[160] These reviews identify SDG monitoring, follow-up and review challenges at the subnational level. Kenya's report stresses counties' collaboration with the national Monitoring and Evaluation Department to develop an SDG county monitoring and evaluation framework.[161] Five counties have undergone their own reporting processes and published their own VLR, while another one has disaggregated

relevant SDG indicators with the support of Kenya Statistics Unit.[162] Reports from Benin and Ecuador highlight the need to improve the national statistical and information systems and disaggregate key indicators to track SDG progress at subnational level.[163] In Costa Rica, Ecuador and Nepal, the reports call for strengthening coordination between national and local governments, and supporting mechanisms for local monitoring of the SDGs.[164] Mozambique's report also highlights the need to tailor monitoring mechanisms and indicators at the local level.[165]

Engagement in national reporting processes

Although it has improved over time, the involvement of subnational governments in national institutional mechanisms for SDG monitoring, follow-up and review, including VNRs, is still insufficient.[166] In 2019, only five VNR countries reported having integrated subnational governments into monitoring, and one planned to do so.[167] According to UCLG (Table 2.6), subnational governments declared to have participated in the reporting process and the preparation of VNRs in 92 of 205 (45 per cent) reporting countries for the 2016-19 period. The number of countries with weak or no consultations with subnational governments has diminished, but the percentage of countries with consultations had not exceeded 55 per cent by 2020.[168]

Subnational involvement in the VNR process takes place at different stages and forms. In some cases, subnational governments have contributed to the VNR with written inputs (e.g. Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nepal), or written the relevant sections of the VNR (e.g. Burundi, Comoros, Finland, Kenya).[169] In some countries, they have attended meetings or workshops, or responded to surveys (e.g. Austria, Bangladesh, Estonia, India, Morocco, Panama, Peru, Uganda).[170]

Independent assessments highlight the need to strengthen coordination in monitoring and reporting at the subnational level and with the national level. This aspect has been stressed,

Table 2.6

Subnational participation in VNRs (2016-2020)[i]

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		Total	
Total countries reporting per year	22	100%	43	100%	46	100%	47	100%	47	100%	205	100%
Mid/high LRG consultation	10	45%	17	40%	21	46%	18	38%	26	55%	92	45%
Weak LRG consultation	6	27%	10	23%	7	15%	11	23%	5	11%	39	19%
No LRG consultation	6	27%	14	33%	13	28%	10	21%	5	11%	48	23%
No elected LRG (1)			2	5%	4	9%	5	11%	8	17%	19	9%
No information available (2)					1	2%	3	6%	3	6%	7	3%

Source: Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, *Towards the Localization*.

[i] Data available up to 28 June 2020.

for example, in Finland's independent evaluation,[171] as well as in the section on SDGs at the local level in the 2020 VNR report contributed by the Swedish Federation of Municipalities.[172]

Some countries have strengthened the institutional spaces for collaboration in SDG monitoring and reporting across levels of government. For example, in Spain, the National Commission for the 2030 Agenda was created in 2019 as an institutional space for inter-governmental collaboration.[173] Spain also highlights collaboration with subnational governments in SDG reports, including the 2018 VNR (with a detailed section on SDG localization in each region and at local government level),[174] and national implementation reports.[175]

2.3. SDG monitoring, follow-up and review to ensure accountability

2.3.1. Legislative oversight

Parliaments' involvement in overseeing SDG implementation is uneven across countries, and detailed information is still scarce. Only a few countries require governments to regularly report to Parliament on SDG implementation. Some Parliaments use dedicated bodies to oversee the SDGs and a few have their own institutional strategies to integrate them. Still, most focus on awareness-raising, and engage in relevant international activities.

Figure 2.8

Role of Parliaments and supreme audit institutions (SAI) in SDG monitoring, follow-up and review (%)
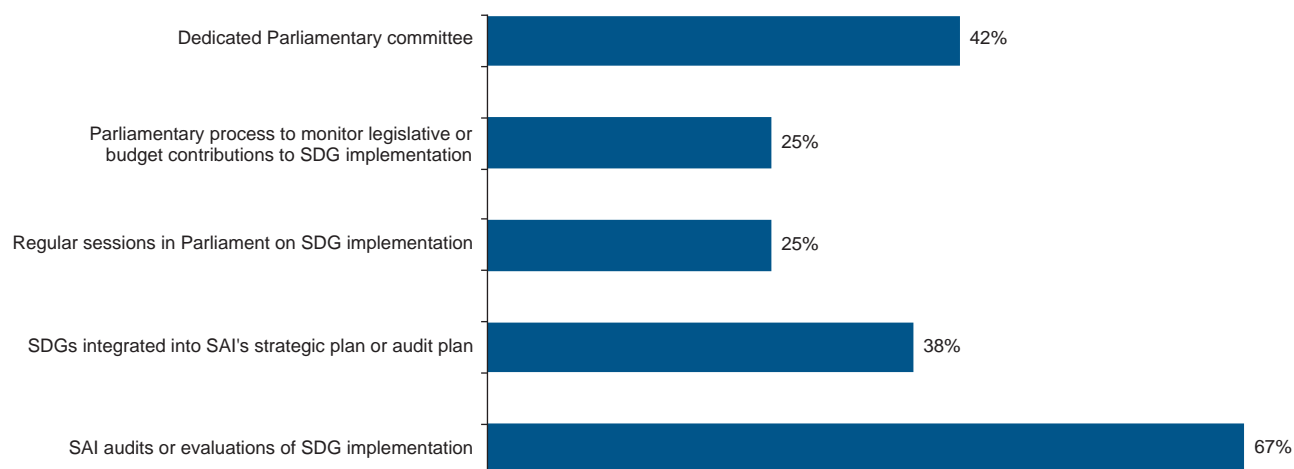
Source: Author. From a sample of 24 countries across regions.

From the report's sample of 24 countries, 42 per cent have a dedicated legislative committee on SDGs (including Costa Rica, Finland, Italy, Kenya, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Spain). However, only 25 per cent have defined a process to monitor legislative or budget contributions to SDG implementation. Regular sessions on SDG implementation (hearings, information or oversight sessions) are held in only a quarter of countries. See Figure 2.8.

An IPU survey of 89 countries conducted in 2019 found that 52 per cent reported at least one new formal parliamentary mechanism for SDG oversight.[176] Three main models of institutional set up emerge: dedicated oversight committees or sub-committees; mainstreaming SDGs into existing committees, and a decentralized model, such as SDG focal points or networks. Although the first two models are not mutually exclusive, less than a third of Parliaments reported having both.[177]

In Chile and the United Arab Emirates, parliaments have focal points.[178] In Chile, focal points from both chambers participate in the 2030 Agenda National Network, and contribute to review all public actions (including legislation) related to the SDGs. However, there are no specific provisions on government accountability and reporting to Congress.[179]

The IPU survey indicates that only 43 per cent of 89 Parliaments have mainstreamed the SDGs into relevant committees. Canada and Indonesia are examples from this report's sample. In Canada, SDG issues are addressed by committees according to their responsibilities,[180] while in Indonesia they are entrusted to existing committees coordinated by an Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Committee.[181] Countries like Finland, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, Mongolia, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago have dedicated committees. For example, Sierra Leone's Parliament has a

Departmental Oversight Committee on SDGs.[182] Since 2017, Finland's Committee for the Future is mandated with SDG monitoring and follow-up, receiving relevant government reports.

A few Parliaments have integrated the SDGs into their institutional strategies or developed specific strategies. The Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica signed the National Pact on SDGs and has been actively engaged in SDG monitoring (Box 2.10). The Assembly also took measures to inform the public about its SDG oversight functions, including participatory mechanisms.[183]

Reporting is critical for enabling legislative oversight of the 2030 Agenda. A limitation of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review processes has been the lack of articulation of the institutional oversight system to ensure accountability. This is evident in the limited provision of regular SDG implementation reports to Parliament. According to IPU data, only 51 per cent of 89 respondents indicated that governments had submitted reports. Some governments report on the SDGs as a whole, while others report on specific SDGs.[184] In addition to Spain (Box 2.11), countries with regular reporting to Parliament include Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, and the United Arab Emirates. In France, the 2019 SDG Roadmap foresees an annual progress report to Parliament.[185]

Parliaments receive reports and information from a variety of sources in addition to government, including Supreme Audit Institutions. In 2017, the Netherlands' Parliament received information from both the executive and the Court of Audit. The Court informed the House of Representatives of the results of a review of the preparation to implement the SDGs.[186]

The need to improve reporting to Parliament has been highlighted in independent assessments. In Belgium, the Court of Accounts has indicated the need to monitor strategic

Box 2.10

A multi-stakeholder National Pact for the Advancement of the SDGs in Costa Rica

Costa Rica signed a National Pact for the Advancement of the SDGs in 2016. The three branches of government (including Parliament), the Supreme Court of Elections, local governments, public universities, faith-based organizations, civil society, workers' unions, and the private sector committed to mobilize resources, plan, budget, build institutional capacities, and be accountable for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A key goal of the pact is to carry out the accountability process on an intersectoral basis. In 2018, the UN System in coordination with the country's SDG Technical Secretariat conducted a Survey for the Advancement of the SDGs among signatories. It collected information on progress, good practices, challenges and lessons. 66 per cent of respondents valued the National Pact as a joint working tool to provide guidance for institutional activities and facilitate intersectoral strategic alliances, facilitating convergence at the national level.

Source: SDG Technical Secretariat in Costa Rica, *Sustainable Development Goals, Costa Rica 2020. Sustainable Development in Action: the Route to Sustainability* (San José, Mideplan, 2020).

Box 2.11

Legislative oversight of SDG implementation in Spain

Spain's Parliament has played a central role in SDG follow-up and review. According to the SDG Action Plan, the government must submit an annual progress report to the bicameral committee on the implementation of the action plan and the SDGs. In the exercise of its competences, the Parliament can hold an annual plenary debate to oversee progress on the 2030 Agenda. In addition, the government must respond to requests for legislative oversight at the sector level from the competent committees. Initially, the committees on development cooperation in the Senate and Congress (lower chamber) debated and issued several non-legal proposals to steer government action. Then, in February 2018, a bicameral legislative committee was established. The legislative committee held three meetings between February and March 2019, before the dissolution of the Parliament. After general elections, once the new Parliament took office, the committee had four meetings in 2020. Before setting the bicameral committee, the High Commissioner on the 2030 Agenda had reported twice to the International Cooperation Committees of both chambers.

At the subnational level, some Autonomous Communities, like Cantabria and Navarra, have also assigned their Parliaments an active oversight role. In November 2016, the regional Parliament of Navarra requested the government to prepare a report on the actions, policies and programmes undertaken to implement the 2030 Agenda. In response, in March 2017, the government created an intersectoral commission to prepare it.

Sources: Gobierno de España, "Informe de España 2018," 15, 130; Gobierno de España, "Informe de Progreso," 11; Gobierno de España, "Plan de Acción Para La Implementación de La Agenda 2030. Hacia Una Estrategia Española de Desarrollo Sostenible," 2018, 113; Congreso de los Diputados (Spain), "Comisión Mixta Para La Coordinación y Seguimiento de La Estrategia Española Para Alcanzar Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS)," n.d.; Gobierno de Cantabria (Spain), "Estrategia de Desarrollo Humano Sostenible de La Comunidad Autónoma de Cantabria 2018-2030," 2018; Parlamento de Cantabria (Spain), "Comisiones Permanentes."

plans and measures for SDG implementation to ensure regular reporting to Parliament.[187] Finland's National Audit Office has noted that the government's reports to Parliament are not structured like the report on sustainable development (on which the NAO issues an opinion), making it difficult to monitor implementation.[188]

Parliaments are also conducting their own assessments on SDG implementation. The Environmental Audit Committee of the UK House of Commons published *SDGs in the UK follow up: Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the UK* in 2019,[189] which highlights conclusions in consonance with work by UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development.[190] In Costa Rica, the Legislative Assembly has developed a methodology to measure SDG progress.[191] It has also reported the intention to create an online tool to assess progress towards the SDGs. Its Department of Technical Services conducts legal, economic, and social studies of bills to analyse their links to the SDGs. A guide and manual for monitoring and tracing SDGs in the review of bills for incorporation in technical reports has been developed with UNDP support.[192]

Parliaments have also engaged in extra-parliamentary activities related to the SDGs, such as multi-stakeholder dialogues (e.g. Mongolia); international activities,[193] including participation in national delegations to the HLPF (e.g. Peru);[194] cooperation with government, including providing inputs to VNR reports (e.g. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia);[195] and cooperation

with civil society (e.g. Sierra Leone). Globally, 24.8 per cent of 153 UN Member States have engaged in some form of extra-parliamentary involvement, according to recent data.[196]

2.3.2. External oversight by supreme audit institutions

Supreme audit institutions (SAIs) produce relevant assessments of the strengths and limitations of government entities, processes and policies, including in relation to SDG implementation.[197] The International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions' (INTOSAI) strategic plan 2017-2022 has contributed to advance SAIs' role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.[198]

SAIs are not usually part of the national institutional arrangements for SDG implementation.[199] Therefore, in most countries, they have not been formally integrated into the SDG monitoring, follow-up and review cycle. However, there are cases such as Finland, where the 2017 action plan for implementing the Agenda identified national audits as part of the four-year monitoring cycle.[200] Even without a legal or formal provision, SAIs have actively contributed to the follow-up and review process in many countries.[201] First, integrating SDGs into internal processes and audit plans. Second, auditing government preparedness to implement the SDGs and the implementation of specific SDG goals and targets. Third, contributing to the VNR process and providing inputs to the SDG monitoring, follow-up and review system.

SAIs' engagement with the SDGs permeates the organizational strategy in some countries. Finland's National Audit Office increased the allocation of resources on performance work around the 2030 Agenda, and is developing a model for integrating the SDGs into all external auditing.[202] Costa Rica's SAI has integrated the SDGs into its Institutional Strategic Plan 2013-2020 and conducts audits on key public services to support SDG implementation.[203] SAI Argentina also integrated the SDGs into its strategic plan and mandated to include at least five SDG-related audits in the annual audit plan.[204]

SAIs' commitment has translated into a wealth of initiatives to provide an independent assessment of SDG implementation, including monitoring, follow-up and review systems (INTOSAI[205] reported 73 initiatives as of December 2020).

sixteen SAIs in the report's sample of 24 countries (67 per cent) have conducted audits or evaluations related to the SDGs. (Figure 2.8) These initiatives include audits to assess the governments' preparedness to implement the SDGs (conducted mainly in 2017 and 2018, with reports available the following years).[206] Most of these audits assessed the preparation of the centre of government to implement the 2030 Agenda, but some focused on specific Goals or targets (e.g. 11 Latin American SAIs centred on preparedness for target 2.4, and 16 SAIs from Latin America and Spain for SDG 5).

SAIs are currently auditing the implementation of programmes to advance specific SDG targets. The Office of the Auditor General of the Seychelles carried out a special review on Coastal Management in line with the SDGs, specifically SDG

Table 2.7

Relevant findings on SDG monitoring, follow-up and review in selected audit reports

SDG monitoring, follow-up and review	Reports with findings	Examples
Integrated follow-up and review system	11 (including 1 regional)	Bhutan, Botswana, Chile, Costa Rica, Ghana, India, Micronesia, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Regional report audit 2.4 (11 countries)
Assignment of roles & responsibilities	23	Algeria, Austria, Bhutan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Chile, Costa Rica, Fiji, Finland, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Maldives, State of Palestine, St. Lucia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Uruguay, Zambia
SDG indicators	29 (including 1 regional)	Austria, Belgium, Bhutan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, Georgia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Micronesia, State of Palestine, the Philippines, Poland, St. Lucia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Regional report audit 2.4 (11 countries)
Quality, availability and disaggregation of data	23	Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Bhutan, Botswana, Colombia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Maldives, Mauritius, Micronesia, State of Palestine, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Uruguay
Reporting processes and/or tools	15 (including 1 regional)	Austria, Belgium, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Chile, Colombia, Fiji, Georgia, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, the Philippines, Poland, Regional report audit 2.4 (11 countries)
Report to Parliament	3	Belgium, Finland, Spain
Evaluation	1	Belgium
Engagement of stakeholders in follow-up & reporting	8	Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Tuvalu, Uruguay

Source: Author, based on the review of a sample of 43 audit reports (including two regional reports).

14.[207] Brazil's Court of Accounts is coordinating an audit (including SAIs from Latin America, Portugal and Spain) on the implementation of selected targets of SDGs 14 and 15.[208] Costa Rica's CGR has conducted audits on: water service delivery (SDG 6) for vulnerable populations,[209] SDG 3 with a focus on policies related to mental health,[210] SDG 7 with a focus on renewable energy,[211] and SDG 2 with a focus on national availability of food.[212] IDI is supporting an audit of strong and resilient national public health systems, linked to target 3.d, in 40 countries, to be conducted in 2021. With IDI support, SAI Costa Rica is leading a coordinated audit on the implementation of target 12.7 on sustainable public procurement in Latin America.[213]

Assessments of national indicators and data systems are still incipient, but there are some examples. SAI Sudan assessed the national capacity to produce data to monitor SDGs.[214] In 2020, Costa Rica audited the quality of the information reported for 33 targets of the National Development Plan, 24 of which are related to the SDGs.[215] SAI Colombia has evaluated the alignment of SDG national indicators to the global ones and plans to assess the availability and quality of data for SDG monitoring in 2021.[216]

These audits have produced relevant information and findings on critical dimensions of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems. (Table 2.7 and Box 2.12.)

Integration of audit information into the SDG follow-up and review system

In some countries, SAIs have contributed to the VNR process and engaged with governments to strengthen SDG implementation. Around 30 per cent of the 2020 VNR countries reported on engaging SAIs in the VNR process or SDG implementation efforts. This represents an increase compared to 2019, when SAI engagement was below 15 per cent.[217] In addition to providing inputs to VNR reports, SAIs have participated in consultations (e.g. Bangladesh[218]), joined national delegations to the HLPF (e.g. Brazil, Indonesia), and validated draft VNR reports (e.g. in Palestine, based on findings of the preparedness audit).[219]

Contributions to VNR reports are diverse. In Chile, the VNR includes an annex summarizing initiatives and contributions of the General Comptroller.[220] Costa Rica's VNR has information on the audits conducted by the SAI and their findings, but also on how the government has responded and whether the recommendations have been addressed. SAIs also reported on their initiatives in the VNRs of Argentina, Indonesia (2019) and Samoa.[221]

There are different views on whether SAIs should audit the VNR process. While some SAI organizations, like AFROSAI, recommend it to their members, there are no examples of this

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Box 2.12

Examples of audit findings related to SDG monitoring, follow-up and review

Brazil: need to establish integrated mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

Canada: need of a monitoring and reporting system.

Costa Rica: need of an integrated approach to SDG5 indicators, which are isolated from national strategies related to gender equality.

Georgia: need to identify entities responsible for producing data for 32 indicators.

Indonesia: need of an adequate monitoring system, with reliable indicators and feedback mechanisms.

Jamaica: improve coordination between National Statistics Office and other entities, as well as consider data from non-sate actors and from the subnational level.

Mauritius: monitoring, measuring and reporting systems, important in tracking progress, are either not functioning appropriately or not yet been implemented.

Sierra Leone: need to design a system for monitoring, review and reporting on SDG progress and to make government institutions aware of their roles and responsibilities in this area.

Sudan: Central Bureau of Statistics' data need improvement.

Source: Author's elaboration based on audit reports.

kind of work yet. Nonetheless, many audits on government preparedness to implement the SDGs have made an assessment of the reporting process, including the VNR.[222]

SAIs have also engaged with governments based on audit information and findings, and audit recommendations have been leveraged by other stakeholders to improve SDG implementation. Several SAIs have engaged with ministries of planning and SDG steering bodies to discuss the results of the audits (e.g. Botswana, the Philippines, Sao Tome).[223] SAI Guatemala has signed an agreement with the Department of Planning (SEGEPLAN) to monitor the National Development Plan aligned with the SDGs.[224]

Ensuring that audit reports and recommendations are communicated to the parliament and to relevant stakeholders is critical to strengthen accountability.[225] The SAIs of Bhutan, Georgia, and Slovakia disseminated the conclusions of the SDG preparedness audit through the media. SAI Uruguay reported that civil society organizations welcomed the results of the audit.[226]

SAIs' engagement with Parliaments to strengthen SDG oversight is subject to the same challenges that affect engagement around all audit reports. As reported by IPU in 2017, only 66 out of 100 Parliaments had procedures in place to review audit reports.[227] There are, however, some exceptions. In the Netherlands, the report of the Court of Audit on government preparedness to implement the SDGs contributed to strengthening collaboration with legislators on the SDGs.[228]

2.3.3. Independent monitoring, follow-up and review by non-state stakeholders

A positive result of increased attention to SDG monitoring, follow-up and review has been more institutionalized engagement with non-state actors. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have been incorporated into national frameworks for SDG monitoring (e.g. Spain); have contributed to VNRs or developed their own complementary reports (see below), and are signatories of national implementation plans (e.g. Costa Rica; see Box 2.10). Further research is needed on whether and how stakeholders' inputs are incorporated into government plans and actions beyond VNR reports.

Special feature: Impact of COVID-19

SAIs provide critical oversight of the government responses to the pandemic, identifying challenges and potential risks (e.g. in public financial management and procurement). At the same time, they have also experienced specific challenges in their operations as a result of the measures to contain the pandemic. Operationally, many SAIs have moved to telecommuting. While many have adapted, some SAIs have not been able to maintain regular operations, weakening public oversight. Limited access to ICTs has been a significant challenge for some SAIs. Other SAIs have seen their budgets affected and their mandates put into question, thereby undermining their functional independence.

Nonetheless, SAIs in all regions have reacted quickly. They are auditing the use of emergency assistance funds to reduce the risks of corruption and mismanagement and ensure that funding achieves the intended purposes and beneficiaries (e.g. Brazil, Jamaica, New Zealand, Peru, USA). SAIs have also audited and provided guidance on public procurement (e.g. Brazil), and highlighted the importance of collecting reliable data and providing clear and consistent communication. Some SAIs (e.g. Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru) have launched online platforms to enhance transparency of government responses to the pandemic.

An important question going forward is how SAIs' audit plans will balance work related to COVID-19 responses and recovery plans with longer-term priorities, such as SDG auditing. It is important to define the scope of SAIs' work related to the pandemic and consult with legislatures and stakeholders to define appropriate plans that maximize relevant and opportune oversight, and balance short and long-term priorities. Potential entry points would be assessing whether and to which extent governments' recovery plans are aligned with the SDGs, the integration or mainstreaming of the SDGs into recovery programmes, and how the emergency and related responses have affected progress towards national SDG targets.

Sources: Aránzazu Guillán Montero and David le Blanc, *Resilient Institutions in Times of Crisis: Transparency, Accountability and Participation at the National Level Key to Effective Response to COVID-19*, UNDESA Policy Brief 74 (NY: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2020), 3; International Organization of Supreme Audit Institution (INTOSAI) Policy Finance and Administration Committee's COVID-19 Initiative, "Coronavirus Pandemic: Initial Lessons Learned from the International Auditing Community" (Government Accountability Office (GAO), September 2020).

Figure 2.9

Participation of non-state stakeholders in SDG monitoring, follow-up and review (%)
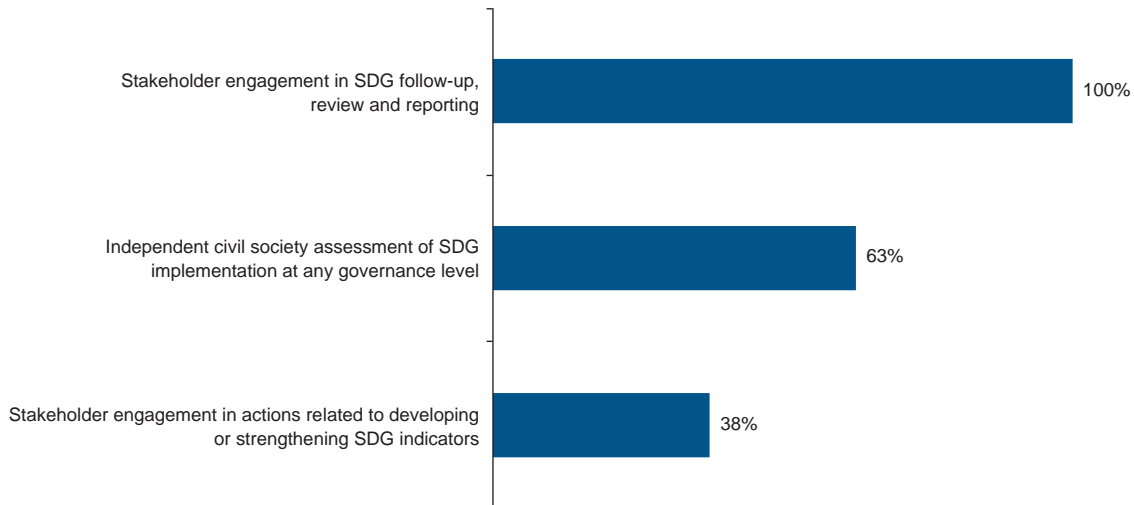
Source: Author. From a cross-regional sample of 24 countries.

Stakeholder participation, from both civil society and other non-state stakeholders,[229] can play a valuable role in the follow-up and review of the SDGs. It contributes to collecting alternative and disaggregated data,[230] and strengthens government accountability. In consonance with a whole-of-society approach, some governments have engaged civil society and the private sector to leverage their monitoring and data collection capacity. In Nepal, for example, the Implementation and Monitoring Committee fully incorporates the private sector, cooperatives, and civil society side by side with government agencies.[231]

Evidence suggests an increased level of social involvement SDG monitoring and accountability. All countries in the report's sample (Figure 2.9) have some form of stakeholder engagement in SDG monitoring, follow-up, and review. Independent assessments of progress have been conducted in 63 per cent of the countries, while stakeholder engagement in the development or strengthening of SDG indicators is less common.

CSO contributions to the monitoring, follow-up and review of the SDGs

Civil society's contribution to SDG monitoring, follow-up and review can take different forms and follow diverse context-driven strategies. While much of civil societies' work occurs at the national, subnational and local levels, international coalitions and global forums—including those related to the global follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda—have provided CSOs with an opportunity to promote government accountability, mobilise and organise in support of the SDGs (e.g. Cameroon, Kenya, Togo),[232] and to gain legitimacy as government counterparts (see Box 2.13).

International networks and agencies have supported civil society engagement. For example, UNDP, in collaboration with the Open Government Partnership and USAID, led a pilot initiative to support inclusive processes and methodologies for monitoring SDG 16 in El Salvador, Georgia, Indonesia, South Africa, Tunisia and Uruguay.[233] Regional mechanisms have also supported the participation of civil society in SDG monitoring. With support from ECLAC, the "Mechanism for Civil Society Participation in the Sustainable Development Agenda and in the Forum of Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development" has served to structure and coordinate their participation in SDGs' follow-up and review in the region.[234]

Instances of CSO participation in SDG monitoring, follow-up and review at the national level, initiated or facilitated by governments, include workshops on Citizen-Generated Data organized by the Philippines' Statistics Authority, and Indonesia's One Data Policy. The Indonesian National Secretariat of SDGs developed the SDG indicators metadata guidelines with the participation of stakeholders.[235] They include reporting flows for monitoring and evaluation, including CSOs' sources.[236] Stakeholders have used these guidelines in collecting their own data.

Engagement strategies for contributing to national VNR processes vary across contexts. Some CSOs and coalitions have engaged in the VNR preparation by government invitation (e.g. India);[237] other initiatives have been initiated by CSOs but aimed to engage with the government (e.g. Finland),[238] and others have emphasized civil society's independence (e.g. Denmark).[239]

Figure 2.10

Modalities and entry points for civil society participation in SDG follow-up and review

Global level

Contributions to VNRs

Participation in HLPF & side-events

Shadow or Parallel Reports to the HLPF

Regional

Participation mechanisms in regional sustainable development forums

National

Data collection

Contribution to indicator development

Participation in monitoring and accountability mechanisms

National CSO reports

Subnational & local

Data collection

Subnational and local reports

Contributions to Voluntary Local/Subnational Reviews

Source: Author's elaboration. The image "Participation in monitoring and accountability mechanisms" used in the National level was taken from Laura van den Lande and Catarina Fonseca, *Global Review of National Accountability Mechanisms for SDG6* (London: End Water Poverty, 2018).

Civil society has also helped map efforts to advance the SDGs (e.g. Colombia), collected alternative and complementary information and examples (e.g. North Macedonia), and provided independent assessments of SDG implementation. In some cases, like Brazil, civil society groups, working in networks with other actors, were among the main catalysts for SDG monitoring and evaluation.[240] In other countries, civil society has undertaken social monitoring initiatives to generate additional information on SDG implementation.[241] The Colombian Network of Cities, How We Go (RCCCV) has produced analysis of indicators, baselines and reports on sustainable development at the local level.[242]

People's Scorecards

CSOs' independent contributions to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda rely on multiple tools. Since 2016, Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD), a global civil society platform in support of the 2030 Agenda,[243] has promoted the use of surveys or People's Scorecards to evaluate SDG progress at the national level from a civil society perspective.[244] More than 20 national civil society coalitions responded to the 2020 survey, which was designed to provide an overview of progress on the SDGs in the first five years of implementation.[245] Overall, the report indicates that CSOs perceive limited progress towards the achievement of SDG targets. For countries in this report's sample, for instance, the overall average progress score ranges from 40 per cent in Nepal, Brazil, India and South Africa, to 50 per cent in Kenya and Spain, 60 per cent in Indonesia, and almost 80 per cent in Finland. [246]

Parallel reports from civil society

At the HLPF, civil society organizations and coalitions have presented shadow, parallel or spotlight reports that independently review national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.[247] Some include their own indicators for the implementation of the SDGs. A4SD has made available 83 shadow reports and reflections from 66 countries since 2016 (see Figure 2.11).[248] Three countries (Brazil, Nepal and Togo) have reports in three separate years, while two reports are available for other 11 countries. Though the period is short, the number of reports per year seems to be declining, even allowing for the difficult context of the pandemic in 2020.

A review of 43 reports suggests continuity in civil society's general concerns about SDG implementation,[249] and interest in monitoring progress. The sophistication and structure of the reports vary widely; some are just general assessments or responses to surveys, while others are quick evaluations with recommendations. Some have followed the scorecard format, the structure of the Agenda, or the SDGs institutional structure.

Figure 2.11

Shadow reports and reflections presented by civil society (by year and by region)[i]
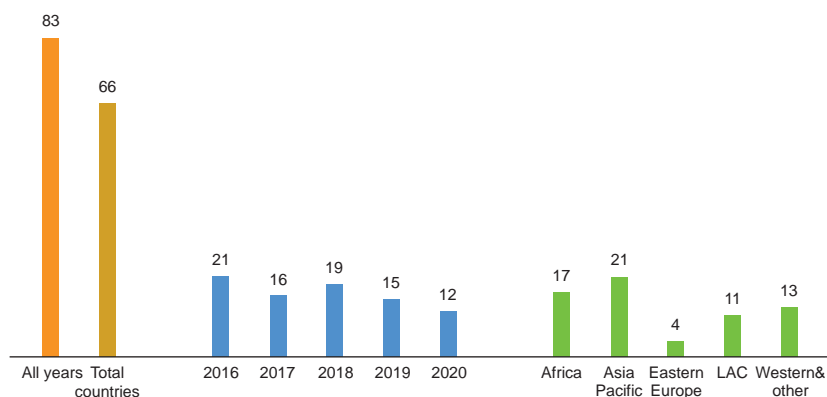
Source: Author, based on Action for Sustainable Development, *Resources and Toolkits* (https://action4sd.org/resources-toolkits/). Figure shows: for each year, the total number of reports or reflections presented that year, and for region, the number of countries from that region that have presented at least one report or reflection.

[i]   In 2019, an additional report focused on SDG 16 was presented for Nepal.

The most recurrent issue in the reports is the demand for increased engagement between government and civil society, especially the establishment of formal mechanisms for integrating stakeholders' inputs into national SDG processes.

There is an emphasis on meaningful participation in monitoring, reporting and the formulation of recommendations. Several reports stress issues of leaving no one behind, engagement, and ownership.

Box 2.13

Engagement of civil society in SDG monitoring through CSO Forums in Africa

CSO forums on the 2030 Agenda have been established in Cameroon, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Togo. They share a common emphasis on constructive dialogue with the government, and have been effective in gaining legitimacy as government counterparts. Their inputs have been included in their countries' VNRs.

The SDGs Kenya Forum for Sustainable Development, established in 2015, aims to mobilise and coordinate civil society advocacy for the achievement of the SDGs through partnerships, citizen engagement, capacity-building, policy dialogue, and campaigns. From the start, it argued that "the Kenyan government should be encouraged, supported and constantly reminded on the essence of data collection and the importance of timely release of accurate data void of regional politics." The Forum co-chairs, with a private sector alliance, the Inter Agency Technical Committee (IATC) which oversees the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the SDGs. The Forum works closely with the government at national and subnational levels in monitoring SDG progress. It has published several reports on the SDGs and provided inputs to Kenya's 2017 VNR. Civil society is also organized in a similar network in Cameroon.

In Togo, the Ministry of Planning and Development kickstarts the VNR process by circulating Terms of Reference among stakeholders. The Ministry distributes a draft report, based on consultations, for comments. A revised VNR, incorporating the feedback, is validated at a national workshop with stakeholder participation. In this context, CSOs created the Civil Society Forum on SDGs. It is considered a unique opportunity to collaborate and overcome silos. For the government, the collaboration has an added value, as some information is only available to civil society. It has contributed to including civil society inputs in the VNR, strengthening civil society, and levelling of the playing field among different actors. The model of the Forum has already been adopted in other countries, such as Benin.

Sources: Based on National CSOs Consultative Forum on Post 2015/CAP/SDGs Agenda (Kenya), "Enhancing Accountability, Ownership and Partnerships for the Post- 2015 Development Agenda" (Silver Springs Hotel, Nairobi, May 15, 2014); SDGs Kenya Forum for Sustainable Development, "Annual General Meeting Report 2020" (Azure Hotel, Nairobi, January 30, 2020); Partners 4 Review, *Cameroon*; and Partners 4 Review, Togo: *Mobilising Civil Society for the SDG Review* (Bonn: GIZ, 2020).

Another recurring issue is the demand for more complete government assessments of SDG implementation, and for follow-up information and mechanisms. More and improved indicators, including disaggregated data, and monitoring and reporting at every level of government are consistent concerns across reports. The inclusion of global and national mechanisms for follow-up and review was hailed from the beginning as a key element of the Agenda, and has also prompted civil society's demands for continuous improvement. The international aspects of sustainable development are also mentioned, considering developed countries' commitments and responsibilities in supporting sustainable development abroad (e.g. Denmark, Ireland), as well as the need for international support of efforts in developing countries.

The shadow reports presented at the 2020 HLPF addressed the ongoing pandemic, generally highlighting the potential impact on progress and expressing concern that SDG implementation may fall behind (e.g. Denmark, Nepal, Peru). Some reports (e.g. Denmark, Slovenia) also expressed concern for a perceived reduction in civic space.

Another substantive contribution from global civil society to SDG monitoring, follow-up and review is an annual series of reports assessing SDG progress based on the content of the VNRs presented at the HLPF.[250] The 2020 edition indicates that a whole-of-society approach seems to be translating into gains in non-state stakeholders participation in formal processes for engagement. Since 2016, 70 per cent of reporting countries included non-state actors in institutional mechanisms for SDG implementation, and direct engagement of non-state actors in preparing the VNRs increased from 29 per cent in 2018 to 53 per cent in 2019—although the actual inclusion of stakeholders' recommendations in the final reports is less verifiable. The report also expresses concerns with the reduction of civic space around the world.[251]

Special feature: COVID-19 and virtual stakeholder participation in SDG monitoring and reporting

The global pandemic imposed new challenges to the participation of stakeholders in SDG monitoring, follow-up and review. Some countries' CSOs (e.g. Denmark) have warned of new risks created by the pandemic, for example in reducing opportunities for participation. Virtual tools have allowed to continue promoting participation and inclusion, while also highlighting inequalities in access.

Many countries that consider stakeholder participation in the preparation of reports, for example, were just entering the stage of consultations when the emergency started in 2020. Resorting to other mechanisms to collect information (such as virtual consultations, online surveys, and inputs and feedback gathered through email) was a common response. However, limitations in communications and digital infrastructure can limit the effectiveness of these solutions.

Overall, the shift toward virtual participation at the 2020 High-level Political Forum was generally perceived as having a positive impact in stakeholder engagement. A survey among major stakeholders conducted in August 2020 found that participation seems to have increased compared to previous years. For 46 per cent of respondents the event was more inclusive or much more inclusive, while for 31 per cent it was less or much less inclusive. Further, 46 per cent considered that the HLPF had allowed more engagement of national actors, while 33 per cent perceived the opposite. Still, a large majority thought the official program did not provide sufficient room for participation. Limitations in terms of local connectivity were highlighted, with half of respondents having either a variable internet connection or technical challenges to connect.

While the efforts to organize a virtual HLPF seem to have had positive results, there are challenges related to limitations in communications infrastructure, engagement capacity across time zones, and in terms of active engagement and dialogue. Actions to bridge the digital divide, particularly for disadvantaged groups, and the adoption of additional mechanisms and tools to allow meaningful input and participation (e.g. online pooling, written Q&A) have been highlighted. Recommendations also include maximizing the potential for crowdsourcing ideas and ensuring inclusion; adopting blended formats; and setting pre- and post-HLPF national follow-up processes.

Sources: Input from Partners for Review in response to a survey administered by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government of UNDESA in preparation for the World Public Sector Report; Danish 92 Group and Global Focus, *Denmark's Challenges*, 3; Javier Surasky, *High-Level Political Forum 2020 Analysis: Beyond Virtuality* (Bogotá, Colombia: CEPEO, 2020); and Action for Sustainable Development, "Inclusion of Civil Society in the Virtual HLPF 2020. Feedback from a Survey of Stakeholder Participation" (A4SD, September 2020). The stakeholder survey was addressed to all major stakeholders through Action for Sustainable Development's Coordination Mechanism, received 130 responses from 48 countries, with most respondents self-identified as NGOs, women, or children and youth. (Action for Sustainable Development, *Inclusion of civil society in the virtual HLPF 2020).*

2.4. SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems: Strengths, challenges and opportunities for improvement

Independent evaluations and audits offer an evidence-based assessment of areas where SDG monitoring, follow-up and review can be strengthened. This section, first, discusses opportunities for improving basic elements of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review, and then analyses critical monitoring dimensions including coordination, links with performance-based systems, and the use of evidence to improve SDG implementation.

The analysis is based on selected audit reports from SAIs (41 national audit reports, two regional reports of coordinated audits, and one global report based on audit findings), one SDG evaluation, as well as inputs from different stakeholders received for this report. While some problems identified in audits may have been addressed since their publication, they signal potentially relevant bottlenecks across countries.

2.4.1. Core dimensions of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review

Roles and responsibilities

While most governments have assigned responsibilities to monitor, follow up, review and report on the SDGs, some countries have failed to do so (e.g. when they had pre-existing arrangements for development policies). For example, although Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Commission did not have a clear mandate on SDG implementation, another entity for the SDGs was not established.[252] Moreover, responsible entities are not always operational (e.g. due to lack of capacities or resources), and the performance of existing institutions may not be conducive to effective SDG monitoring, follow-up and review. (Figure 2.12)

Unclear or fragmented responsibilities, as well as coordination problems, also undermine the performance of SDG follow-up and review systems (e.g. Sierra Leone).[253] Active involvement of NSOs is key to address statistical issues and ensure data quality, but the role of NSOs and their coordination responsibilities on SDG monitoring are not always clearly defined. For example, an inter-ministerial working group was established in Austria in 2016 to coordinate SDG reporting but not implementation. Moreover, in 2018, the Federal Chancellery and the Ministry of Finance were about to establish their own monitoring and reporting systems without apparent coordination.[254]

In some countries, responsible entities may not have supporting mechanisms and processes to perform their functions effectively. In Costa Rica, the government identified responsible entities for SDG monitoring and reporting, but the lack of supporting processes created uncertainty regarding the monitoring frequency, strategy, and data to be used, among other factors.[255]

Figure 2.12

Opportunities for improving institutionalization of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems based on external audits (number of findings)
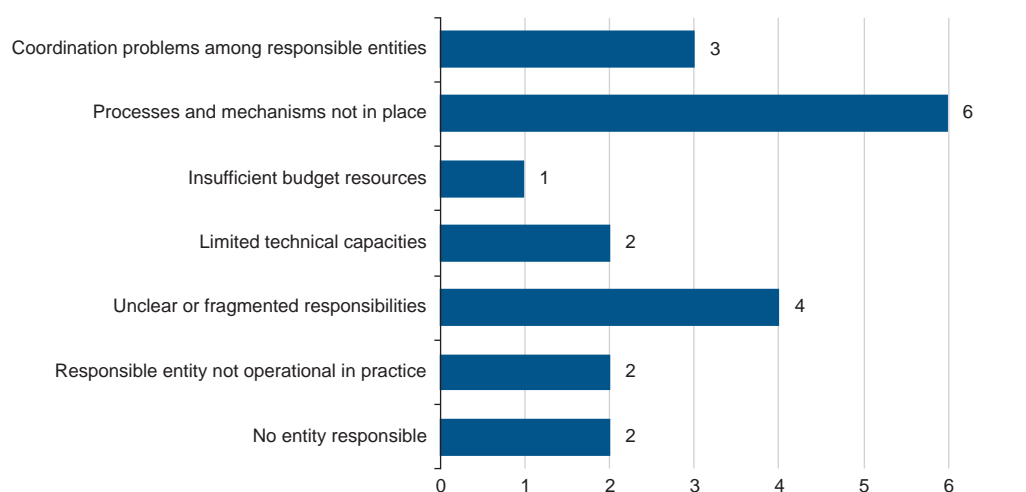
Source: Author, based on findings identified in 25 audit reports.

Indicators

Despite improvement, significant challenges affect capacity to assess SDG progress through national indicator frameworks. Some countries still lacked an SDG indicator framework in 2019. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovakia had not yet defined national targets and measurable indicators.[256] In Slovakia this was due to delays in approving a long term vision document.[257] Similar situations were identified in Poland, Saint Lucia and Tanzania in 2018.[258] In countries with SDG indicator frameworks, specific problems may undermine their effectiveness. Diverse factors explain the deficiencies, including lack of appropriate legal statistical frameworks (e.g. Zambia), existing indicators not updated to align them with the SDGs (e.g. the Philippines), and capacity and resource constraints (e.g. Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Tanzania).[259]

SAIs have identified a limited number of SDG indicators in some countries (e.g. Belgium, Bhutan), problems in the scope of the indicator framework (e.g. Finland), and inadequacy or lack of baselines and milestones (e.g. Costa Rica, India, Indonesia), among other challenges. Lack of appropriate survey and census data may explain problems to generate baselines (e.g. Indonesia).[260] In Costa Rica, the existing baseline was outdated because it was based on a national survey conducted in 2003 and no budget had been allocated to conduct a new one.[261]

The coordination among stakeholders and across levels of government needs to be enhanced. For example, Belgium's territorial governments developed SDG indicators each in their own way and these were not necessarily aligned with those defined by the federal statistical authority.[262] Coordination problems among the NSO, sector departments, state governments and NGOs were one of the causes of the inadequate identification of indicators in Micronesia.[263]

Audits in countries like Colombia, India, and Spain have highlighted that adequate indicators are not always available at subnational level. SAI Spain recommended using consistent indicators and baselines across levels of government to carry out reliable follow-ups. Consistency is relevant in countries like India, where monitoring at state level is based on State Indicator Frameworks (SIF) that reflect subnational priorities, data requirements, infrastructure and resources. In 2020, the government reported that 60 per cent of the states had developed SIFs, and 30 per cent had developed District Indicator Frameworks' (DIFs).[264] In 2019, SAI India found uneven progress in the development of state indicator frameworks and identification of data sources.[265]

Data availability and quality

There are constraints in data availability, disaggregation, as well as in data coordination, harmonization and interoperability. SAIs have identified data collection challenges and data gaps in several countries, including Austria, Belgium, Colombia,

Figure 2.13

Opportunities for improving SDG indicator systems based on external audits (number of findings)

Source: Author, based on findings identified in 32 audit reports.

Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, and Uganda. Data gaps differ across SDGs. For example, in Mauritius, a 2018 audit report found that more than half of the data for SDGs 11, 13 and 16 was not available.[266]

Non-existent or incomplete data sources, inadequate capacity and resources, ineffective collection systems (e.g. lack of guidelines, inadequate frequency), among other factors, may explain these constraints. In Austria, data was incomplete because submission from ministries was voluntary.[267] In Mauritius,[268] some government entities neither provided the required data nor analysed data inconsistencies. Coordination problems also explain data collection challenges. For example, in Belgium's Walloon region, multiple data providers release their data without coordinating timelines.[269]

Data quality issues have been identified in audits in Ghana, Solomon Islands and the Philippines.[270] Other countries have highlighted this concern in their 2020 VNRs.[271] SAI Ghana reported that the government had partnered with Statistics South Africa to develop a data quality assessment framework.[272] Further, the limited availability of disaggregated data is a significant challenge recognized by most 2020 VNR countries[273] and highlighted in audit reports. Countries like Uruguay and Botswana found that national surveys and censuses did not provide enough disaggregation according to gender and other characteristics.[274] In Costa Rica, draft guidelines to ensure data disaggregation based on gender were available but had not been adopted by 2018.[275]

Coordination and interoperability of data is another constraint. In some countries, there is no clear obligation for different entities to share data in order to make information on SDG indicators available in a single place. Asymmetries in statistical knowledge across entities and lack of inter-institutional trust affect coordination. In Indonesia, the SAI recommended reviewing the draft presidential regulation to strengthen the authority of Statistics Indonesia to coordinate statistical resources and strengthen coordination in data provision.[276] SAI Mauritius[277] noted that Statistics Mauritius had relatively good data collection, but data in some areas was not interoperable; either fragmented across institutions or collected in different forms. The report recommended to strengthen networking among data producers and users; to review, harmonize and strengthen data collection, including review and enforcement of the law for data collection; to address data gaps, and to improve the compilation of complex indicators.[278]

Reporting processes

SAIs have found that problems with reports relate to both processes and their scope and contents. Two critical problems are reporting on SDG implementation at subnational level and on actions undertaken by non-state stakeholders, as well as challenges in relating actions and programmes to the SDG framework. Belgium's federal law requires several reports, but they just state the actions implemented without evaluating them against the SDGs.[279] In 2017, the Austrian Federal Chancellery published a first national progress report

Figure 2.14

Opportunities for improving SDG data frameworks based on external audits (number of findings)
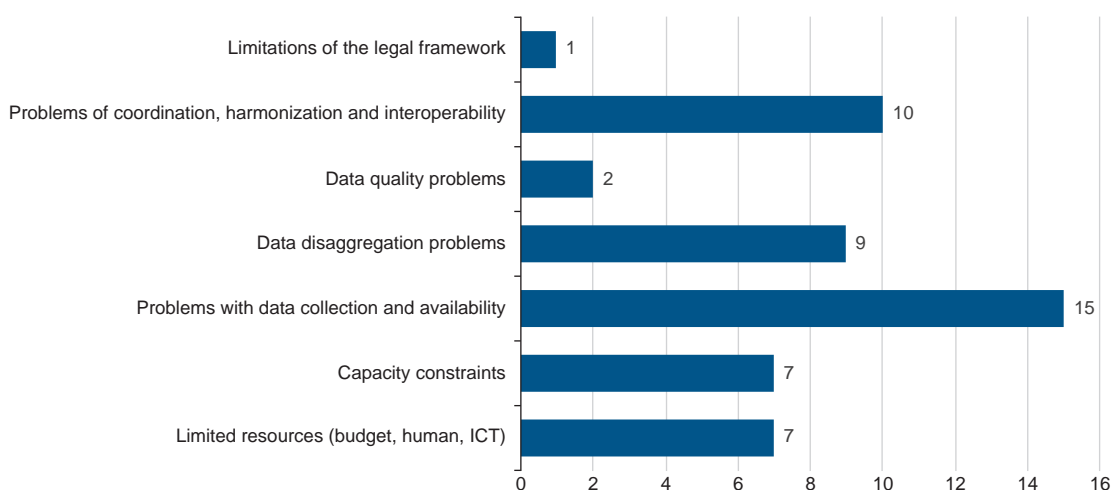
Source: Author, based on findings identified in 28 audit reports.

on the implementation of the Agenda. However, the report did not provide a concise overview of the implementation nor contained measures by provinces, municipalities, civil society or contributions by experts.[280]

Countries are leveraging ICTs (online platforms and dashboards) to make available information on SDG implementation. However, some audits (e.g. Mauritius) found that countries may be replacing a proper assessment of implementation with information on indicators.

Stakeholder engagement

Limited transparency and information is an obstacle for stakeholder engagement in SDG monitoring, follow-up and review. In Indonesia the website with information on the SDGs did not provide information on implementation progress because the government considers that this information may contain state secrets/documents. The SAI concluded that the unavailability of easily accessible information on SDG implementation made community participation in these processes less than optimal.[281]

Moreover, according to some audits, the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement is often undermined by the lack of a map of relevant stakeholders who can contribute to follow-up and review. Coordination problems and lack of technical guidance are other relevant challenges.

2.4.2. Some critical dimensions for effective SDG monitoring, follow-up and review

Specific factors have a profound effect on the effectiveness of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review. These include the integration of SDG follow-up and review systems into other monitoring systems, the link with performance measurement systems, and how monitoring information feeds back into the policy cycle to strengthen SDG implementation.

Integrated monitoring, follow-up and review systems

Existing national monitoring and evaluation systems, when available, should ideally be the foundation for integrating SDGs into national monitoring, follow-up and review.[282] Adapting those systems to monitor and report on SDG progress is important to avoid parallel systems and ensure that national systems generate relevant and timely information. Given the diversity of systems,[283] this requires tailor-made approaches to reviewing and adapting processes, criteria and institutional mechanisms, considering nationally prioritized SDGs, and strengthening coordination.

The integration of the SDGs with existing monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems can be strengthened. Only three out of 24 countries in the report's sample seem to coordinate or integrate to some extent SDG follow-up and review with existing monitoring systems. (Figure 2.16) Audits have identified multiple opportunities for improvement in this area.

Figure 2.15

Opportunities for improving SDG reporting processes and tools based on external audits (number of findings)
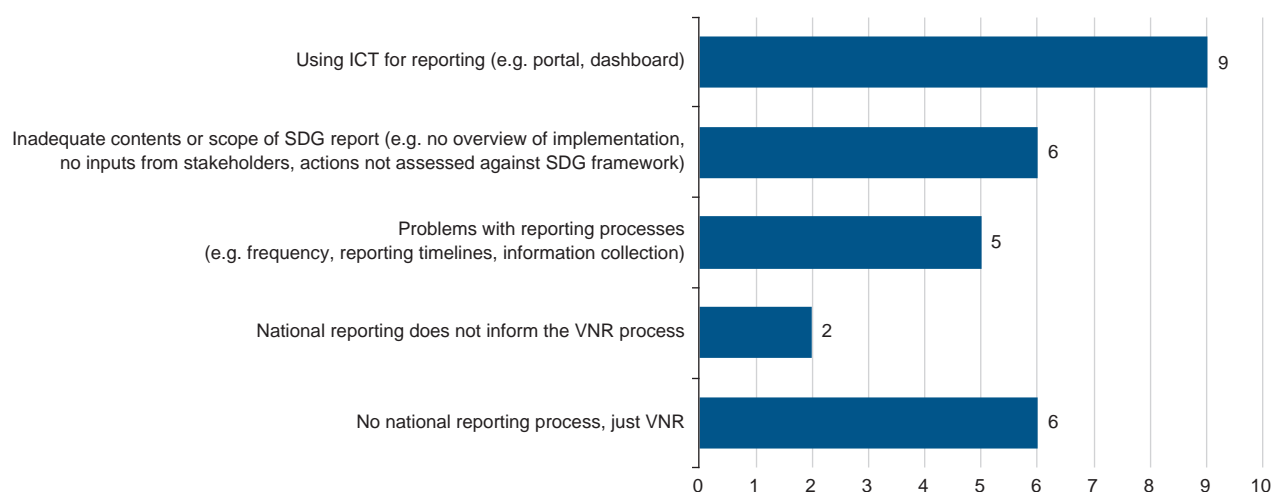
Source: Author, based on findings identified in 15 audit reports.

Countries with pre-existing national indicators to assess and measure progress on sustainable development strategies have faced challenges in updating, revising, aligning or using them to measure SDG progress.[284] Two sets of indicators coexist in Finland,[285] which has been regularly monitoring and reporting on a set of sustainable development indicators since the 2000s. The indicators are updated annually and published in a national report.[286] The latest update in 2017 included 45 indicators organized in ten thematic baskets. Approximately a third of them correspond to global SDG indicators.[287] In 2019, an independent evaluation concluded that the multiple sets of indicators for measuring progress generates confusion.[288]

In some countries, there is no national integrated monitoring and evaluation system to be used for tracking progress on SDGs. For example, in Jamaica, an audit identified three different monitoring mechanisms at different stages of development to track progress of programmes to implement the SDGs.[289] Even when there is an institutional framework to monitor and evaluate national development policies and strategies, it is often unclear whether and how it is used to monitor and report on SDG progress and/or if a separate system for the latter exists (e.g. the Philippines). This may create parallel monitoring processes for different programmes, coordination problems, as well as make it difficult to connect programmes with SDG indicators.

Costa Rica's Ministry of Planning has proposed a long-term evaluation mechanism to assess the contribution of sectoral results to progress on national targets and the SDGs.[290] However, although the NDPIP 2019-2022 is aligned with the SDGs, there are challenges in performance-based management and in defining processes for monitoring progress. Respondents to surveys conducted for the 2020 VNR highlighted problems to link national initiatives to SDG indicators (61 per cent indicated they work with indicators related to SDG targets but not to their indicators; 39 per cent answered they did not consider indicators or had challenges linking initiatives to specific indicators). As a result, public officials have to provide the same data to various entities and processes at different times, creating perceptions of low monitoring efficiency.[291] Respondents mentioned limited capacity and lack of national targets and indicators among the reasons for such challenges.[292]

In specific sectors or policy areas (e.g. environment, health, gender), the integration of the SDG monitoring, follow-up and review with existing systems is also problematic, leading to parallel systems. Even where sector ministries have monitoring and evaluation systems in place, these often predate the 2030 Agenda and may have not been aligned with the SDGs. In Spain, there are institutional mechanisms for monitoring gender equality policies that should be used for the follow-up and review of SDG 5. However, duplications, limited coordination and problems in the operation of such mechanisms undermined their effectiveness.[293]

These integration challenges affect the frequency and quality of the information produced, create problems to coordinate and exchange data, and often lead to a disconnect between existing programmes to implement the SDGs and the SDG targets and indicators. As a result, monitoring systems do not provide the information for appropriate follow-up and review. (See Box 2.14.)

Figure 2.16

Performance of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems (absolute numbers)[i]
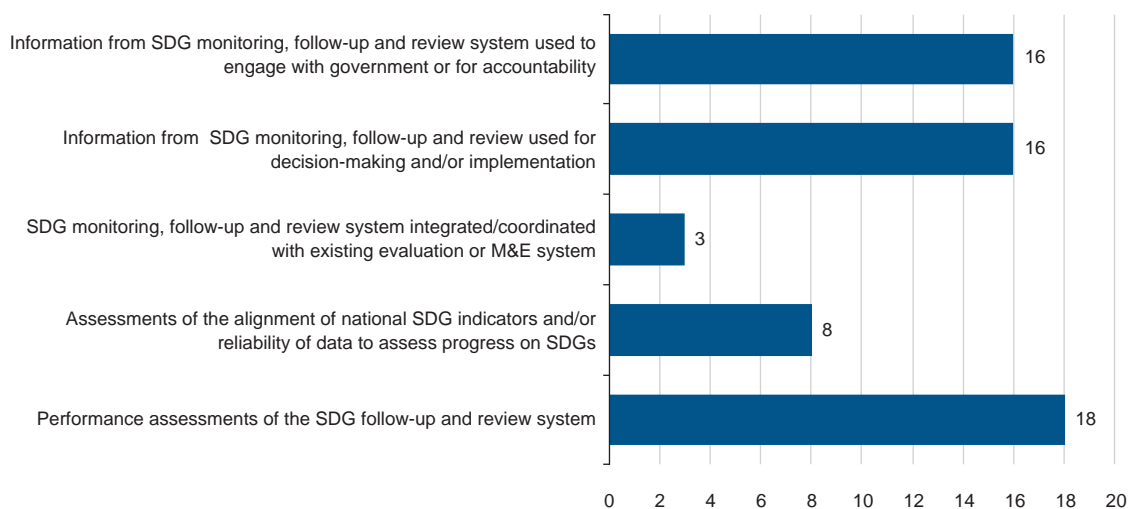
Source: Author. From a cross-regional sample of 24 countries.

[i] First two categories include audits, evaluations and other relevant assessments.

Box 2.14

Integration challenges for monitoring progress on SDG target 2.4 in Latin America

A coordinated audit on the preparation of Latin American governments to implement SDG target 2.4 found significant monitoring challenges in 2018. In Costa Rica, the audit stressed the lack of any strategy and mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and inter-institutional relations between the entities that formulated and managed public policies related to target 2.4. Two key policies were not aligned to the SDGs. Thus monitoring could not be linked to progress on target 2.4 or be used for improving decision-making. The audit concluded that "the lack of an integrated monitoring and evaluation strategy generates the risk that progress on SDG implementation goes undetected, affecting monitoring, follow-up and oversight." These findings are consistent with information in the 2020 VNR.

In Chile, the SAI found that both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Environment had identified responsibilities and institutional mechanisms for 15 programmes and policies that contributed to progress on target 2.4. However, these mechanisms had not been created in the context of the 2030 Agenda nor aligned to the SDGs. Therefore, the entities were not monitoring them in relation with this target. Moreover, some key public programmes, such as the National Programme of Sustainable Consumption and Production, had not been linked to target 2.4. The Ministry of Environment was not reporting on any related actions as part of monitoring progress on target 2.4.

Sources: Contraloría General de la República de Costa Rica, "Informe de Seguimiento de la Gestión del Centro de Gobierno para la implementación de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible" (San José, Costa Rica: CGR, 2018); Secretaría Técnica de los ODS en Costa Rica, "Segundo Informe Nacional Voluntario," 87-88; and Contraloría General de Chile, "Informe Final 825 Respecto a Las Acciones de Preparación Para La Implementación de La Meta 2.4 de Los ODS" (Santiago de Chile: Contraloría General de Chile, June 2018).

Effective SDG monitoring, follow-up and review requires collaboration and coordination across levels of government.[294] However, integration across levels of government and with existing subnational systems has been challenging, affecting the alignment of indicators, tracking of progress and capturing data from the subnational level, and the integration of subnational inputs into national reports. For example, in Micronesia, an audit highlighted that national and state governments should establish a consolidated system to capture all sectoral data from states and local governments for monitoring the implementation of projects related to the SDGs.[295]

There are also challenges for integrating SDG monitoring, follow-up and review with existing subnational monitoring and evaluation systems. In Nepal, the district coordination committees, the main monitoring and supervising bodies for local development works, have been encouraged to align their functions and perform them in a way that contributes to SDG implementation.[296] Independent assessments have stressed obstacles to mainstreaming SDGs into plans and programmes at provincial and local levels and to align them with SDG targets and indicators.[297]

To address these challenges, Kenya established a highly institutionalized monitoring and evaluation system at the subnational level. The County Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (CIMES) includes both levels of government, non-state actors (development partners, private sector, civil society organizations) and citizens.[298] CIMES was established to address the lack of integration between monitoring and evaluation at the national and county levels, which had led to inadequate data collection and reporting.[299]

It aims to provide evidence to inform county performance management and inputs to the national monitoring and evaluation system.[300] Several institutional mechanisms aim to integrate planning, monitoring, oversight and participation.[301] The County Intergovernmental Forum links national and county governments. This performance management system needs to be integrated with the SDGs "so that it will be clear to all stakeholders why it is important to collect data, how the information will be used to inform the efforts of the county government and civil society to achieve the SDGs, and what information needs to be collected."[302]

Link with performance systems

Most countries have revised or updated their indicators based on the SDGs. However, they have rarely established links between the SDGs and existing performance-based systems and indicators (e.g. performance-based budget and management systems, beyond GDP indicators). In Austria, 80 per cent of federal ministries' outcome targets in 2017 (81 of 102) covered the SDGs in substance, but the explanations of the performance targets failed to refer to the 2030 Agenda.[303]

While some countries—such as Belgium, France, Italy or New Zealand—aim to make such links, reporting systems still seem quite disconnected albeit with attempts to increase alignment over time (for example, in France, planned SDG reporting and the ongoing beyond-GDP indicators reports).[304] Also, although some existing performance indicators are reported to Parliaments for budget purposes (e.g. Italy, New Zealand), legislators do not frequently use this information for accountability in connection with the SDGs.[305]

Figure 2.17

Monitoring and evaluation at county level in Kenya
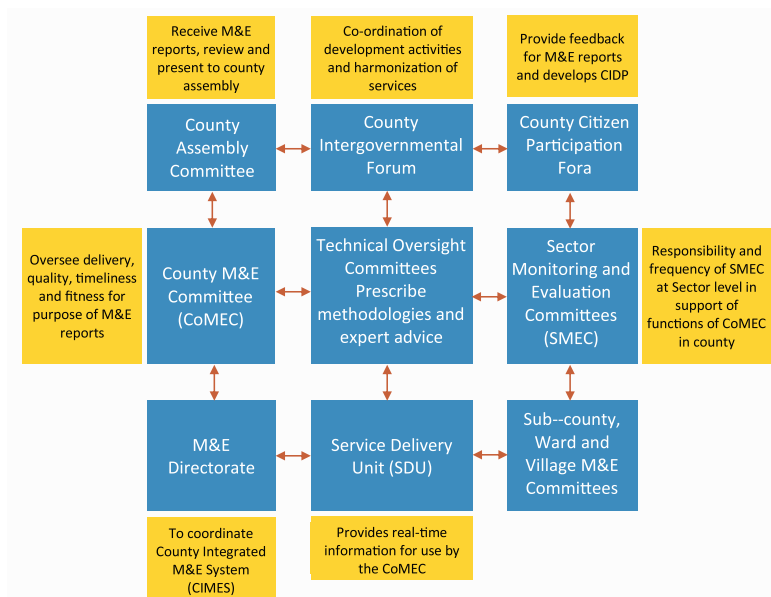
Source: Government of the Republic of Kenya, "Guidelines for the Development of County Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System" (Nairobi, Kenya: State Department for Planning and Council of Governors, April 2019), 34.

More generally, performance orientation and the use of performance information in public administration is a challenge in many countries. For example, despite improving the quality of reporting systems to strengthen a performance focus, monitoring and performance orientation in Mongolia are still weak.[306] Government agencies must report on performance according to standardized results-based monitoring formats, and the Ministry of Finance has developed reporting templates to integrate financial and performance reporting from line ministries. However, there are systemic constraints such as understaffing and limited capacity in monitoring and evaluation departments, lack of coordination to share data, and lack of linkages between development strategies and budgets, which result in line ministries having separate reporting and monitoring mechanisms. Therefore, reporting remains output oriented, and performance information is feeding back into policymaking and budget prioritization to a limited extent.[307]

Feedback loops between evidence and policy

Another relevant challenge is the use of information from monitoring, follow-up and review to inform government decision-making in order to strengthen SDG implementation. The conclusion of Finland's independent evaluation is illustrative. It notes that policymakers rarely use sustainable development research findings and indicator data when formulating policies, and that more narrow perspectives and interests – often economic ones – prevail instead.[308]

In the report's sample, 16 countries of 24 seem to have used data from monitoring processes to inform and improve SDG implementation. The results are similar for information from other state actors. Driven by the high acceptance of the recommendations and findings of SDG audits, in more than half of the countries the information has been used to engage with government on SDG implementation and/or for accountability. (Figure 2.16)

Governments can adjust SDG implementation based on several sources, including evaluations, external audits, legislative oversight, and inputs from civil society. The timing of the inputs is critical to incorporate feedback into decision-making. In Finland, the findings of the SDG evaluation were published during the electoral campaign, and additional time dedicated to communicating them to the main political parties. As a result, the leading party adopted the 2030 Agenda as the basis of its government programme. It endorsed two of the evaluation's recommendations: adopting the 2030 Agenda as a base for government policy and developing a national roadmap to achieve the SDGs.[309]

Parliaments can use information from SDG monitoring for both oversight and legislative activities. Finland also provides a good practice in terms of using monitoring to inform legislative discussions. Since 2016, the government has reported on progress on sustainable development as part of its government annual report, whose findings are discussed in parliament, giving its members the opportunity to monitor measures for sustainable development.

There are few examples of changes in response to legislative inputs or requests. In 2016, the regional Parliament of Navarra (Spain) requested the Government of Navarra to prepare a report on the actions, policies and programmes undertaken to implement the 2030 Agenda. In response, the Government created an intersectoral commission to prepare the report.[310]

Audits have triggered changes in SDG implementation. Overall, most SAIs have reported that audit recommendations have been accepted by governments. In countries like Botswana, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Georgia, Ghana, Malaysia, the Philippines, Slovakia, Spain, and Tonga, the reports were well received by audited entities.[311] Costa Rica included information about the response to audit recommendations in its 2020 VNR: all but one of the recommendations of the SDG preparedness audit related to SDG5 had been implemented, and the audit led to the development of a study on gender equality.[312] The government reported that actions to implement the recommendations of other SDG audits were under consideration.[313]

As a result of audit findings and recommendations and/or SAI engagement with governments during the audit process, some countries have taken specific actions.[314] Chile and Costa Rica reported that, after the audit on government preparedness to implement SDG 5, several institutions approved gender policies and improved internal procedures. The government of Spain changed the composition of the highest coordinating body on SDGs, following one of the audit recommendations.

2.5. Conclusion

SDG monitoring, follow-up and review has gained increased attention. Progress is evident in areas such as the institutionalization of follow-up and review systems, and the traction of the VNR process and its spillover effects at the subnational level. Stakeholder engagement has increased and more diverse stakeholders are interested in contributing to SDG follow-up and review. Albeit with challenges, there has also been progress in setting national indicator frameworks. However, the chapter has also identified significant opportunities for improvement going forward. These include coordination and integration of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review with existing monitoring systems, and strengthening subnational participation in SDG monitoring as well as subnational reporting processes. Other constraints relate to data gaps, disaggregation and quality, coordination of data producers and the capacity of local governments to collect and analyse data. The need to embed VNRs as part of a continuous cycle of national monitoring, follow-up and review also deserves attention. Annex 1 summarizes findings from this chapter.

Endnotes

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239 Danish 92 Group and Global Focus, *Denmark's Challenges in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In the Shadow of the COVID-19 Crisis. Spotlight Report. English Summary* (Copenhagen: Danish 92 Group & Global Focus, 2020).

240 Some of the main working groups in this area are Estratégia ODS, mostly financed by the European Union (http://www.estrategiaods.org.br/); Civil Society Working Group for the 2030 Agenda (GT Agenda 2030, https://gtagenda2030.org.br/); and Rede ODS Brasil (https://www.redeodsbrasil.org/). Working groups focused on particular goals or targets include Rede Nacional de Primeira Infância, focused on goals and targets related to children and young people (http://primeirainfancia.org.br/); SDSN Amazônia, focused on the sustainable development of the Amazon (https://www.sdsn-amazonia.org/); and SDSN Brasil, focused on sustainable urban development (https://www.sdsnbrasil.org.br/).

241 Secretaría Técnica de la Comisión ODS (Colombia), *Reporte Nacional Voluntario 2018. Colombia*, 91.

242 Confederación Colombiana de ONG (CCONG), *Cuarto Monitoreo Ciudadano a Las Recomendaciones Presentadas al Gobierno Nacional Para La Adopción, Ejecución y Monitoreo de Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible En Colombia* (Bogotá, Colombia: CCONG, 2019); Confederación Colombiana de ONG (CCONG), *Quinto Monitoreo Ciudadano. Seguimiento a Las Recomendaciones Presentadas al Gobierno Nacional Para La Implementación de Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible* (Bogotá, Colombia: CCONG, 2020).

243 Website at https://action4sd.org/who-we-are/. See also, Amy Lieberman, "Civil Society Looks to Independent Review of SDGs, beyond Government Reporting," Devex, August 7, 2018.

244 Progress is graded from 1 (no progress) to 5 (on track) for each of the SDGs. Cf. Action for Sustainable Development, *Toolkit for a People's Scorecard on National Delivery of the 2030 Agenda* (A4SD, 2018).

245 Action for Sustainable Development, "People's Scorecard Summary" (A4SD, September 2020). Scorecards were filled for Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, Finland, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mauritania, Nepal, Nigeria, Peru, Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain, Togo, and Uganda.

246 Action for Sustainable Development, 11.

247 See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), "Summary of Side Event: Shadowing SDG Implementation. Civil Society Action for Meaningful Participation and Accountability. High Level Political Forum (HLPF)" (HLPF, 2016); and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), "Shadowing SDGs Implementation: Civil Society Action for Implementation. Side Event. High Level Political Forum (HLPF)," UNDESA Sustainable Development, July 2016.

248 In 2016, the members of the civil society group on the High Level Group on the 2030 Agenda published "Champion to Be? Making the 2030 Agenda a Reality" (Stockholm: CONCORD Sweden, 2016). The group stated that "the CSO group also has a watchdog role, to make sure that the nine governments show leadership and become true champions, not only in implementing the Agenda but also in monitoring and reviewing it."

249 The Resources & Toolkits page of the Action 4 Sustainable Development website provides access to the individual civil society country reports and reflections for the High Level Political Forum between 2016 and 2020 (https://action4sd.org/resources-toolkits/). The sample analysed included 43 reviews (10 from Africa, 14 from Asia Pacific, 3 from Eastern Europe, 9 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 6 from Western Europe and Others).

250 See Bond, "Progressing National SDGs Implementation: Fourth Edition. An Independent Assessment of the Voluntary National Review Reports Submitted to the High-Level Political Forum in 2019," Bond (UK), 2020; and Cooperation Canada, "Fourth Edition of Progressing National SDGs Implementation," Cooperation Canada, n.d.

251 Kindornay and Gendron, "Progressing National SDGs," iv.

252 Royal Audit Authority of Bhutan, "Performance Audit Report on the Preparedness for Implementation of the SDGs" (Thimphu, Bhutan: Royal Audit Authority of Bhutan, October 2018), 22.

253 Audit Service Sierra Leone, "Performance Audit Report on the Preparedness," 34.

254 Austrian Court of Audit, "The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," 4.

255 Contraloría General de la República de Costa Rica, "Informe de La Auditoría Operativa Sobre La Eficacia de La Preparación Para La Implementación de Los ODS Con Énfasis En Género (ODS5)" (San José, Costa Rica: CGR, December 2018), 26.

256 Audit Office of the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Preparedness of the Institutions," 31–34.

257 Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic, "Performance Audit," 22.

258 Office of the Director of Audit of the Government of Saint Lucia, "Performance Audit," 28–30; National Audit Office of the United Republic of Tanzania, "Performance Audit," 9, 36–37; and Supreme Audit Office of Poland, "Performance Audit Report on Preparedness to Implement the SDGs in Poland" (Warsaw, Poland: Supreme Audit Office of Poland, June 2018), 37–38.

259 Audit Service Sierra Leone, "Performance Audit Report on the Preparedness," 10; Solomon Islands Office of the Auditor General, "Performance Audit Report on Preparedness by the National System of Solomon Islands Government to Implementation of SDGs" (Honiara: Solomon Islands Office of the Auditor General, 2018), 39–40; and National Audit Office of the United Republic of Tanzania, "Performance Audit," 36–37.

260 Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia (BPK RI), "Performance Audit," 46.

261 Contraloría General de la República de Costa Rica, "Informe de La Auditoría Operativa Sobre La Eficacia de La Preparación Para La Implementación de Los ODS Con Énfasis En Género (ODS5)," 27.

262 Belgian Court of Audit, "2030 UN Agenda," 4.

263 Office of the National Public Auditor of the Federated States of Micronesia, "Performance Audit Report on the Preparedness for Implementation of the SDGs" (Federated States of Micronesia: Office of the National Public Auditor of the Federated States of Micronesia, July 2019), iv.

264 Partners 4 Review, "2020 Voluntary National Reviews," 54.

265 Comptroller and Auditor General of India, "Audit of Preparedness for the Implementation of the SDGs" (Delhi, India: Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2019), 28–29.

266 National Audit Office of Mauritius, "Performance Audit Report on Preparedness for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade" (Mauritius: National Audit Office of Mauritius, February 2019).

267 Austrian Court of Audit, "The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," 6.

268 National Audit Office of Mauritius, "Performance Audit."

269 Belgian Court of Audit, "2030 UN Agenda," 57–60.

270 Ghana Audit Service, "Performance Audit Report of the Auditor-General on Government of Ghana's Preparedness for Implementation of the SDGs" (Ghana Audit Service, May 2018), 33–34; Commission on Audit (the Philippines), "Performance Audit of Preparedness for Implementation of SDGs" (Manila, the Philippines: Commission on Audit, 2018), 32; and Solomon Islands Office of the Auditor General, "Performance Audit," 41.

271 Partners 4 Review, "2020 Voluntary National Reviews," 53.

272 Ghana Audit Service, "Performance Audit," 34.

273 Partners 4 Review, "2020 Voluntary National Reviews," 53.

274 Office of the Auditor General of the Republic of Botswana, "Performance Audit on Preparedness for Implementation of the SDGs" (Botswana: Office of the Auditor General of the Republic of Botswana, March 2019), 21; and Tribunal de Cuentas de la República Oriental del Uruguay, "Auditoría de Desempeño de La Preparación Para La Implementación de Los ODS, Con Énfasis En El ODS5" (Montevideo, Uruguay: Tribunal de Cuentas de la República Oriental del Uruguay, 2019), 36.

275 Contraloría General de la República de Costa Rica, "Informe de La Auditoría Operativa Sobre La Eficacia de La Preparación Para La Implementación de Los ODS Con Énfasis En Género (ODS5)," 28.

276 Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia (BPK RI), "Performance Audit," 58.

277 National Audit Office of Mauritius, "Performance Audit," 21.

278 National Audit Office of Mauritius, 4.

279 Belgian Court of Audit, "2030 UN Agenda," 4.

280 Austrian Court of Audit, "The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," 6.

281 Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia (BPK RI), "Performance Audit," 60–61.

282 D'Errico, Geoghegan, and Piergallini, *Evaluation to Connect*; and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Governance as an SDG Accelerator*.

283 Including loose networks of national, sectoral and subnational institutions; systems based on parliamentary oversight; centralized systems within or independent from government, or a mix of the above. World Bank Independent Evaluation Group, "The Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI)."

284 In the EU context, 10 countries would have updated their indicator sets after the adoption of the SDGs. Niestroy et al., "Europe's Approach," 21.

285 For example, the 2020 VNR report included two statistical annexes – one with the SDG indicators for Finland and another one reporting on the basket of indicators related to the National Sustainable Development Strategy. Cf. Government of Finland, "Voluntary National Review 2020," annexes 1 and 2. (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26263VNK_2020_Annex_1_Statistics_Finland.pdf, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26264VNR_2020_Annex_2.pdf).

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287 Prime Minister's Office of Finland, "Towards the Finland We Want by 2050. The State of Sustainable Development in 2020 in Light of Indicators and Comparative Studies" (Helsinki, 2020), 5.

288 Berg et al., "PATH2030," 56.

289 Auditor General's Department of Jamaica, "Jamaica's Preparedness for Implementation of the SDGs" (Kingston, Jamaica: Auditor General's Department of Jamaica, September 2018), 35.

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291 Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE, Costa Rica) and UN Environment Programme (UNEP), 13.

292 Secretaría Técnica de los ODS en Costa Rica, "Segundo Informe Nacional Voluntario," 47.

293 Tribunal de Cuentas de España, "Informe de Fiscalización Operativa de La Preparación Para La Implementación Del ODS5," 38.

294 United Nations, "Working Together: Integration, Institutions and the Sustainable Development Goals," World Public Sector Report 2018 (New York: Division for Public Administration and Development Management, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, April 2018).

295 Office of the National Public Auditor of the Federated States of Micronesia, "Performance Audit," iv–v.

296 Government of Nepal, "National Review of Sustainable Development Goals" (Singhdurbar, Kathmandu: National Planning Commission, 2017), 9, 17; and Government of Nepal, "Nepal. National Review," 17.

297 SDGs National Network Nepal, "Voluntary Peoples," 7; and NGO Federation of Nepal, "Accelerating Localization of SDGs in Nepal (CSO Report 2019)" (Kathmandu: Nepal SDG Forum, National Secretariat, September 2019), 16.

298 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), "Compendium," 106.

299 Government of the Republic of Kenya, "Guidelines," 14.

300 Government of the Republic of Kenya, 15.

301 Government of the Republic of Kenya, 34.

302 Government of the Republic of Kenya, 20.

303 Austrian Court of Audit, "The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," 6.

304 Niestroy et al., "Europe's Approach," 26.

305 Niestroy et al., 28.

306 UNDP et al., "Development Finance Assessment for Mongolia," 68.

307 Government of Mongolia, "Mongolia VNR 2019," 68.

308 Berg et al., "PATH2030," 2, 39.

309 D'Errico, Geoghegan, and Piergallini, *Evaluation to Connect*, 21.

310 Gobierno de España, "Plan de Acción," 113.

311 INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI), "Are Nations Prepared," 10.

312 Secretaría Técnica de los ODS en Costa Rica, "Segundo Informe Nacional Voluntario," 87–88.

313 Secretaría Técnica de los ODS en Costa Rica, 87–88.

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CHAPTER 3

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF PUBLIC SERVANTS TO IMPLEMENT THE 2030 AGENDA

3.1. Introduction

It is widely understood that in order to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), capacity-building will be needed not only in governments at all levels, but also for all actors involved in SDG implementation, follow-up and review. This is recognized in the 2030 Agenda itself, where capacity-building figures as an integral part of the means of implementation for the SDGs. Target 9 of Goal 17 recognizes the crucial importance of capacity-building in support of national plans to implement all the SDGs.[1] The Agenda and the SDGs also highlight numerous thematic areas as needing strengthened capacities (see Box 3.1).

Since 2015, considerable efforts have been made by national governments, non-governmental actors, international organizations and other actors to raise SDG awareness and build capacity for SDG implementation, both within and outside government. This chapter focuses on capacity-building efforts directed to public servants at the national level, where public administration is understood in a broad sense (see below section 3.1.1).

The importance of building the capacity of public administration at all levels for implementing the 2030 Agenda has been recognized since the beginning of the implementation of the Agenda. Achieving the Goals hinges in a large measure on competent and effective national public administrations. Among other things, public servants at all levels need the capacity to steer and support the transformations called for by the 2030 Agenda.

The term "capacity-building" is broad, and needs to be further defined for operational purposes. It is recognized that the term covers a hierarchy of needs, going from institutional structures, systems and roles, to individual staff and infrastructure, to individual skills, and finally to tools. All these levels, as well as the broader institutional and cultural contexts, need to be considered for capacity-building actions to be effective. Action at the level of structures, systems and roles is generally more difficult and changes in these domains take longer to implement.[2] This is particularly relevant in the light of the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda.

The initial objective of this chapter was twofold. First, it aimed to describe the landscape in terms of actions to build capacity for SDG implementation directed at public servants at the country level, looking at efforts from a broad range of national and international actors. Second, the chapter aimed to assess the results and impacts of actions from all actors, and evaluate the extent to which they have met the needs of countries. In trying to fulfil this task, the chapter set out to investigate the following questions: What has been done by governments and other actors to raise awareness of the SDGs among civil servants? What has been done to assess capacity needs and

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Box 3.1

Capacity-building in the text of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Capacity-building is mentioned in several parts of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and is included in several targets.

Within Goal 17, target 17.9 reads: "Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation". Capacity-building is also mentioned in target 17.8 in the context of "ensuring full operationalization of the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017", as well as in target 17.18 in relation to increasing availability of high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data, and target 17.19 on statistical capacity in developing countries.

The need to strengthen capacity in relation to specific sectors is underscored in targets 2.4, 3.d, 6.a, 8.10, 11.3, 12.a, 13.1, 13.3, 13.b, 14.a, 15.c, 16.a, and 17.1. Many of these are "letter" targets, which were drafted to refer to means of implementation, complementing to some degree the other targets under each goal.

Capacity-building is mentioned in general terms in paragraphs 41 and 63 of the Agenda, as part of the means of implementation. It is also mentioned in other paragraphs in relation to climate change (paragraph 32), data collection for the follow-up and review of the SDGs (paragraph 57), the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (paragraph 62), trade (paragraph 68), science, technology and innovation (paragraph 70), SDG follow-up and review (paragraph 74), and strengthening statistical systems (paragraph 76).

Source: United Nations General Assembly, "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", A/RES/70/1, 2015.

gaps for SDG implementation in public administration and to develop strategic responses to address such gaps? How have different actors contributed to building the capacity of civil servants for implementing the SDGs? As of 2020, what has been the scale of the capacity-building efforts, and are there any measurable results and impacts? And finally, what are achievements and challenges in terms of enhancing the capacity of public servants to implement the SDGs, and how could the shortcomings be addressed? As will become clear, answers to these questions cannot, in many cases, be given with confidence, given the limited information that is publicly available on capacity-building initiatives in all relevant areas. Nonetheless, the available information is sufficient to paint a general picture and draw some lessons and recommendations.

The chapter is built as follows. The remainder of the introduction defines the scope of the chapter and presents the methodology used to collect information. Section 3.2 takes stock of existing assessments of capacity needs and gaps and national strategies for building capacity in relation to SDG implementation in national public administration. Section 3.3 briefly describes the actors operating in this field. Section 3.4 provides an overview of capacity-building products found in key thematic areas. Section 3.5 highlights general findings from the research undertaken for the chapter. Section 3.6 concludes.

3.1.1. Scope of the chapter

Defining the scope of "capacity-building for SDG imple-mentation" faces a basic practical difficulty. The Sustainable Development Goals cover a very broad scope. They are an umbrella framework under which almost every sector of human activity is represented. For instance, because agricultural productivity is the subject of SDG target 2.3, capacity needed to increase agricultural productivity can be considered as part of the capacity needs to implement the SDGs. The same argument can be made for all the sectoral issues covered in SDG targets. Hence, in a broad sense, capacity for SDG implementation encompasses the capacities necessary to implement all the SDG targets. This interpretation is not only valid from a conceptual point of view; it is, undoubtedly, fully relevant when trying to assess critical capacity gaps in relation to specific targets of the SDGs. Indeed, this is the perspective that many countries choose to reflect in their voluntary national reviews (VNRs). However, efforts to build capacity in different sectors have existed long before the SDGs were adopted, and may not have been radically altered because of the SDGs. In many cases, they are relatively well known.

Another interpretation stems from seeing the SDGs as a programme of action and focusing on the capacities that will be needed to implement it, in addition to capacities needed at the level of specific goals or targets. This encompasses both functions that are an intrinsic part of the implementation of the SDGs (for example, SDG localization, SDG indicators, SDG reporting processes) and functions that come in direct support

of SDG implementation, such as planning. This perspective leads to a focus on systemic, cross-cutting functions and capacities for SDG implementation, which include, for instance, transformative change, policy integration, science-policy interfaces, as well as planning and budget processes that allow governments to steer SDG implementation. This interpretation is useful in order to focus on "what is different" with the SDGs, or, in other words, what capacities are needed to enable, steer and support the transformations required to achieve the SDGs.

This chapter adopts this latter perspective (see Figure 3.1). It focuses on capacities needed to implement the SDGs seen as a programme of action. Therefore, the research undertaken for this chapter focused on capacity-building for cross-cutting functions, and left aside capacity-building at the sector (or goal) level.

Of course, the boundaries between these two domains are not always clear-cut. For instance, some issues such as accountability and transparency, as reflected in target 16.7, are cross-cutting in nature. Similarly, areas relating to core functions of government such as planning, budgeting, the functioning of local governments and their interactions with higher levels of government, all pre-date the SDGs. They can be seen from a generic standpoint that goes well beyond SDG implementation, but are also directly relevant to the latter, for instance when considering the alignment of national development plans with SDGs, SDG localization, and SDG evaluation. A focus on capacity to implement the SDGs as a programme ought to examine most closely activities and functions of public administration where the advent of the SDGs has required the most change. Given these conceptual and practical difficulties, the approach to including capacity-building activities in the scope of this chapter was heuristic, rather than based on a priori criteria (see section 3.1.2 below).

An exception to this general rule is that the chapter does not consider capacity-building in relation to financing the implementation of the SDGs. Although this is an area where needs have been consistently highlighted by countries in their voluntary reviews presented at the United Nations, the offer in terms of capacity-building in this area is relatively recent and little was found in the research done for this report in terms of country-level activities.[3]

As discussed above, within this thematic scope, the focus of the chapter is limited to capacity-building activities targeting public administration and public servants at the country level. This includes activities initiated and implemented by any actor or combination of actors, public or not, and both national and international. A general caveat is that recipients of capacity-building activities are often not clearly identified in publicly available sources. Whenever capacity-building activities appeared to feature parts of public administration among their recipients, they were considered as potentially relevant for this chapter.

Figure 3.1

Thematic scope of the chapter

SDGs as a programme

Capacities needed to implement the SDGs as a "programme"
Examples: SDG indicators, VNRs

Capacities in "systemic", cross-cutting areas of activity directly supporting SDG implementation
Examples: Planning, budgeting, science-policy interfaces, integration/ policy coherence

Focus of the chapter

SDGs as mapping
the sustainable development universe / policy areas

Individual SDGs

| SDG 1 | SDG 2 | SDG 3 | ... | SDG 16 | SDG 17 |

Capacity-building that supports the implementation of specific goals, targets and combinations of them.

Examples: capacity for agricultural extension; capacity for health system management; capacity for managing protected areas

Very important, but not the focus here

Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.1.2. Methodology

In order to capture a picture of the landscape in terms of capacity-building on SDGs for public servants, the research aimed to identify capacity-building products, understood as the combination of activities associated with specific tools and delivery modes.[4] As far as possible, for each activity, an attempt was made to identify the provider (the institution producing or delivering he activity) and the recipient within public administration. The research focused both on country-level documents, primarily in the 24 countries included in the report's sample, and on information published by key institutions providing capacity-building for SDG imple-mentation (including international organizations, NGOs, think tanks, etc.). The former provided insights into the "demand-side" of capacity-building for SDG implementation. The latter provided a perspective on the "supply-side" of capacity-building. Triangulating information from these two main sources is important, as information is often patchy and incomplete (see below).

In order to describe the landscape of capacity-building for SDG implementation, the next step was to classify the information found in different thematic areas. There is no commonly agreed classification for capacity-building for SDG implementation (see Box 3.2). This is hardly surprising, given the blurry boundaries of what can be considered "capacity-building for SDG implementation" described above.

Given this, the elaboration of a thematic classification of the capacity-building activities identified in the research was heuristic and based on a back-and-forth between normative frameworks and the collected data. The normative framework that served as a point of departure is the set of principles of effective governance for sustainable development elaborated by the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) and adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council in 2018.[5]

Box 3.2

Classifications of capacity-building needs and gaps for SDG implementation

Various classifications of capacity-building needs, gaps and activities have been used by global and regional studies since 2015. A common feature of many studies is that they adopt a priori classifications, which they use to elicit answers (in the case of surveys) or analyse documents (in particular, the voluntary national review (VNR) reports presented by UN Member States at the high-level political forum on sustainable development).

For instance, a report commissioned by the UN Division for Sustainable Development Goals and based on the analysis of 111 VNR reports used the following categories: policy and legislative capacity for implementing the 2030 Agenda; institutional capacity; monitoring and reporting capacity; human resources and leadership capacity; financing capacity; and information and technology capacity. When looking at capacity-building for SDG implementation in Canada, Kindornay and Kocaata (2019) use the following categories: Leaving no one behind; leadership, governance and policy coherence; awareness, engagement and partnership; indigenous knowledge, self-determination and reconciliation; communities, municipalities and cities; and learning, knowledge and research.

Sources: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Capacity Development for 2030 Agenda Implementation: Needs and Gaps from the VNRs", Division for Sustainable Development Goals, (New York: United Nations, 2019); Shannon Kindornay and Zeki Kocaata, "Capacity development for 2030 Agenda implementation in Canada", Good practice in 2030 Agenda implementation series, Vancouver and Ottawa, British Columbia Council for International Cooperation and Canadian Council for International Cooperation, 2019.

While all of the CEPA strategies are relevant to governance in general, some of them were found to have been the subject of a large amount of capacity-building activities in the context of SDG implementation since 2015, while others did not seem to have received as much focus. Other areas not identified as individual strategies in the CEPA framework have witnessed extensive activity in relation to capacity-building for SDG implementation, and were added to the framework.

All the examples of capacity-building activities and products found in the research for this chapter can be grouped under three broad clusters, which can be labelled as long-term transformation; policy integration; and incorporating the SDGs into the rules, processes and routines of public administration. These three clusters can be divided into narrower themes. Under the first cluster, long-term transformation, we grouped activities that contribute to raising awareness of the SDGs, aim

Box 3.3

CEPA's strategy guidance notes on the principles of effective governance for sustainable development

The United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) has developed a set of principles of effective governance for sustainable development. The essential purpose of these voluntary principles is to provide practical, expert guidance to interested countries in a broad range of governance challenges associated with implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The principles, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council on 2 July 2018, highlight the need for pragmatic and ongoing improvements in national and local governance capabilities to reach the SDGs. To this end, the principles are linked to a variety of commonly used strategies for operationalizing responsive and effective governance (62 in total).

In this context, guidance notes have started to be developed for individual strategies. The guidance notes aim to provide a primer to individuals in government ministries and agencies who may not be familiar with the topic, and to help them to identify how to adjust elements of their practice to achieve better results and to better embed and institutionalize the strategy in their organizations. The notes provide links to major learning, capacity-building and development cooperation initiatives in the areas they cover, thus serving as first-stop hubs for capacity-building resources.

Source: See United Nations Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, "Principles of Effective Governance", https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/CEPA/Principles-of-Effective-Governance.

to change values, norms and attitudes in the public service, and seek to inform the policy process through science-policy interfaces. The second cluster, policy integration, covers activities that fall under the three dimensions of horizontal integration - the promotion of collaboration, coordination and new ways of working together across organizational boundaries, vertical integration - the collaboration between different levels of government, and engagement with stakeholders.[6] A third cluster comprises activities that promote the integration of the SDGs into the norms, rules, and practices that govern public administration, including SDG localization, planning, monitoring and evaluation systems, and other domains of administrative practice.

While this clustering is useful in order to classify capacity-building initiatives and products, these categories and themes intersect, and there are often close interlinkages among them. Specific capacity-building activities can support several of them. For instance, capacity-building initiatives based on academic or government work on interlinkages among the SDGs supports the science-policy interface, planning and policy integration, while also being relevant to SDG monitoring. Electronic SDG platforms or SDG hubs support SDG monitoring, evaluation and reporting while also promoting awareness-raising. This interconnectedness is important to keep in mind when reading this chapter, as initiatives presented under one label are often relevant to other categories as well.

3.2. Capacity needs and gaps for SDG implementation in public administration: what do we know?

This section reviews the available evidence in terms of assessments of capacity needs and gaps for SDG implementation in public administration at the national level, from different sources.

3.2.1. National capacity needs assessments

Capacity-building is presented as a priority by many countries in their voluntary national reviews both in general and in relation to specific sectors, with or without reference to the SDGs. This reflects the perspective of SDGs seen as an overarching umbrella for sectors.

There is a relative scarcity of information on capacity needs and gaps for SDG implementation at the national level. The widely recognized importance of capacity-building in public administration in relation to SDG implementation could have translated into capacity needs and gaps assessments at the country level, focusing on different levels of government and public administrations, from national to local. However, research done for this report indicates that such assessments are rare, at least at a whole-of-government level. Among the 24 countries examined in depth for this report, few appeared to have conducted a comprehensive, government-wide assessment of critical capacities needed in public administration to implement the SDGs.

Box 3.4

Morocco's key capacity-building requirements for implementing the SDGs

Morocco's 2020 Voluntary National Review (VNR) identified key capacity-building requirements, including:

- Strengthen the capacities of administrations and local authorities in planning and implementation of the SDGs as well as monitoring and reporting on progress;

- Consolidate the framework and mechanisms ensuring the coherence of public policies for the effective and efficient implementation of the SDGs;

- Strengthen the integration of the SDGs and their targets in the budget process;

- Further develop the organizational capacity of the national statistical system.

Source: Morocco, "Examen National Volontaire de La Mise En Œuvre Des Objectifs de Développement Durable," VNR Report, 2020, 20, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26406VNR_2020_Morocco_Report_French.pdf.

In some cases, SDG capacity needs assessments have informed the preparation of VNR reports. For example, in Costa Rica, an assessment identified, among others, the lack of technical capacity to integrate the SDGs into organizational actions and the need to strengthen longer-term planning for national development aligned with the 2030 Agenda.[7] In Mauritius, an assessment of the institutionalization of the SDGs noted the capacity gap for broad coordination with stakeholders as a challenge to policies alignment with the SDGs.[8] In other cases, assessments evidenced institutional capacity bottlenecks at all levels of government as a major impediment to ensuring implementation and support SDG monitoring and accountability,[9] or the need to develop the capacity for integrating the SDGs into planning, programming, budgeting and implementation processes at the national, provincial, and local levels, as well as for strengthening the monitoring and evaluation system.[10]

In several countries, external audits of government preparedness to implement the SDGs have provided insights on key capacity needs and gaps for SDG implementation at the national level.[11]

In the report's sample, several countries have assessed the capacity of the national statistical system in relation to the production of SDG-relevant data. For instance, the High Commission for Planning of Morocco has assessed the capacity to support data generation required for monitoring SDGs progress.[12] The Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica has identified several capacity gaps regarding SDG indicators, including data analysis; use of data communication technologies; and strengthening coordination capacity.[13]

Supreme audit institutions have also assessed capacity gaps within the national statistical system, identifying weaknesses such as lack of qualified statisticians in relevant Ministries, the lack of action to establish baseline data for SDG indicators, and the absence of coordination mechanisms across the national statistical system.[14]

3.2.2. Global and regional assessments

At the global and regional level, studies of capacity needs and gaps in relation to SDG implementation have been produced. Some are based on the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) presented by UN Member States each year at the high-level political forum. Others are based on ad hoc surveys.

Despite the limited information provided by individual VNR reports on capacity needs and gaps and capacity-building activities in public institutions, global syntheses of the reports can produce an aggregate picture that is helpful in order to understand needs and gaps.[15] The capacity needs and gaps highlighted every year have not varied much over time, and include institutional capacity-development, capacity for coordination across government departments and between different levels of government, SDG monitoring, evaluation and reporting capacities, data and national statistical systems, mobilization of financing for the SDGs.[16] By and large, these reflect the areas singled out in the 2030 Agenda as needing capacity strengthening (see Box 3.1 above).

A report commissioned by the UN Division for Sustainable Development Goals reviewed the content of 111 VNR reports from 102 countries published from 2016 to 2018 for information on capacity needs and gaps. In order to analyse the thematic

Figure 3.2

Number of countries reporting capacity gaps in VNR reports (2016-2018)
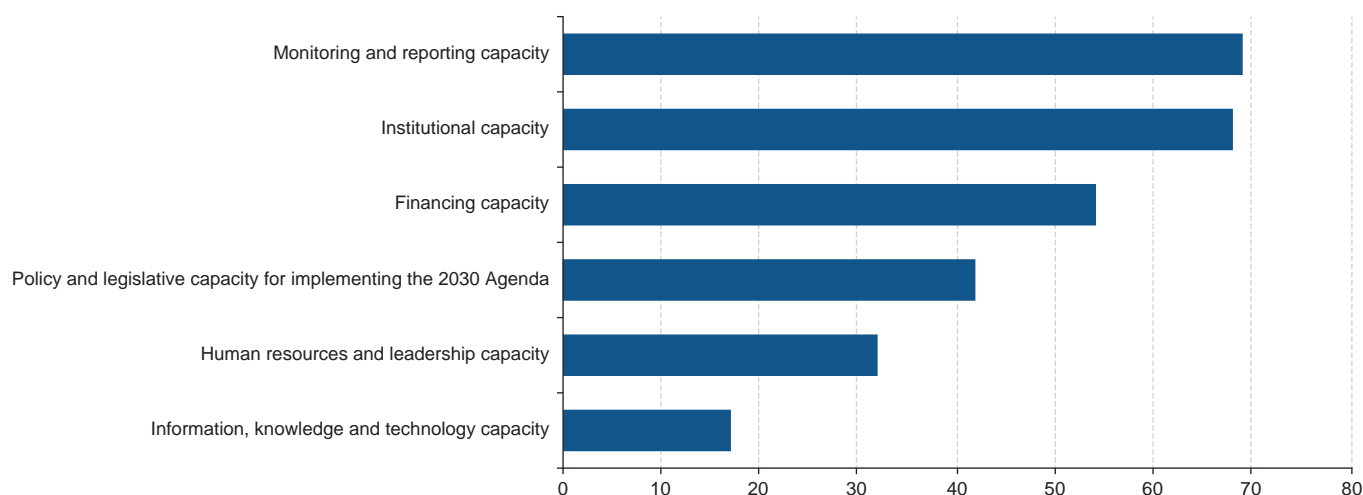
Source: UNDESA/ Division for Sustainable Development Goals.

areas put forward by countries, the report used the following categories: policy and legislative capacity for implementing the 2030 Agenda; institutional capacity; monitoring and reporting capacity; human resources and leadership capacity; financing capacity; and information and technology capacity. The number of countries found to have mentioned capacity gaps falling into these broad categories is shown in Figure 3.2 above.[17] More detailed analysis showed that over 30 countries reported capacity gaps in terms of challenges to integrated policy-making and addressing synergies and trade-offs; horizontal coordination; statistical systems, including data generation, data quality, and data disaggregation.

Capacity assessments focused on specific SDG areas have been conducted by international organizations. For example,

assessment of SDG 11 targets;[18] assessment of capacity needs and capacity plans on gender-responsive planning and budgeting and gender statistics;[19] and the integration of environmental dimensions of the SDGs into national policy, plans, and programmes.[20]

3.2.3. National strategies for building capacity for SDG implementation in public administration

As of 2020, capacity-building strategies and plans for SDG implementation at a whole-of-government level are extremely rare. Among the 24 countries examined in depth for this report, Spain stands out as having adopted a government-wide approach to strengthening the capacity of public administration for SDG implementation at the national level.

Box 3.5

Spain's government-wide approach to strengthening the capacity of public administration for SDG implementation at the national level

Spain has adopted a government-wide approach to strengthening the capacity of public administration for SDG implementation at the national level. Providing public officials with the knowledge and capacities to implement the SDGs is one of the ten cross-cutting transformational measures to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda identified in Spain's Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (adopted in June 2018).[a] The Ministry for Territorial Administrations and Public Function is responsible for this measure.

According to the Action Plan, by 2022, 100 per cent of public officials of the General State Administration[b] will have knowledge of the 2030 Agenda and those with direct implementation responsibilities will have the capacities to support the implementation process. The Plan identifies three specific targets at the national level: (1) By 2022, all selection processes to access the civil service will incorporate contents related to the 2030 Agenda (by 2020 for all processes managed by the National Institute of Public Administration, and by 2022 for all groups of civil servants in central public administration); (2) By 2020, all selection processes to access the highest levels of the civil service (groups A1 and A2) will incorporate the development of capacities and skills related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and (3) By 2019, all capacity-building plans for public officials in the General State Administration will incorporate contents related to the 2030 Agenda.

Rather than based on an assessment of capacity-building gaps, the cross-cutting measure seems to have been identified as a way to leverage the existing capacity-building institutions and programmes for supporting SDG implementation by integrating contents related to the 2030 Agenda.[i]

In the framework of this government-wide approach, in 2019 the government reported on some of the actions undertaken and progress on the capacity-building targets. According to Spain's Progress Report 2019,[c] specific contents related to the SDGs have been incorporated into exams to access some groups and levels of the civil service. In one ministry (Ministry of Labor, Migration and Social Security), contents related to the SDGs have been incorporated into the exams to access all groups and scales of the civil service.

Sources:
a   Spain, "Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Towards a sustainable development strategy", 2018, http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/SalaDePrensa/Multimedia/Publicaciones/Documents/PLAN%20DE%20ACCION%20PARA%20LA%20IMPLEMENTACION%20DE%20LA%20AGENDA%202030.pdf. On its approval, see https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/consejodeministros/Paginas/enlaces/290618-agenda2030.aspx.
b   As defined in Law 40/2015 (Régimen Jurídico del Sector Público), article 55.
c   Spain, "Progress report. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Spain", 2019, 35, 36. http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/PoliticaExteriorCooperacion/Agenda2030/Documents/Informe%20de%20Progreso%202019.pdf.

Note:
i   The transformational measures were identified as low hanging fruits with great potential to make a difference in the implementation process. See Spain, "Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Towards a sustainable development strategy", 2018, 145.

Spain's Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, adopted in June 2018, includes measurable targets in this regard, which, when implemented, would deeply institutionalize the SDGs into national public administration (see Box 3.5 above).

In some countries, Parliaments have been supporting the institutionalization of capacity-building in relation to the 2030 Agenda. For instance, in Mongolia, a resolution adopted by the Parliament in November 2016 mandates the Government to support central and local administrative bodies by providing overall management and methodological advice on formulating the development policy planning documents and strengthen the institutional capacity within the context of the country's Sustainable Development Vision 2030.[21]

In contrast to the dearth of government-wide capacity-building strategies around SDG implementation, many countries have incorporated SDG-related concerns into capacity-building strategies and plans at the sector or thematic level. A prominent example of this is national strategies for the development of statistics, which aim to build capacity across all elements of the national statistical system. In the report's sample, examples include Mongolia, the Philippines, and Rwanda. Closely related, strengthening capacity to generate data for monitoring the SDGs is also a priority reflected in many voluntary national reviews. These two areas of focus do not come as a surprise, given the importance given in the 2030 Agenda to strengthening national statistical systems and building effective national SDG follow-up and review systems (see Box 3.1 above).

3.3. Actors involved in capacity-building for SDG implementation in the public sector

Capacity-building for SDG implementation for public servants at the national level is delivered by an impressive variety of actors, both national and international. Figure 3.3 illustrates the range of actors involved, based on the desk research conducted for the report.

At the national level, government institutions and schools of public administration are prime "natural" providers of capacity-building activities on SDG implementation targeted at public servants (see section 3.4.3 below). In many countries, academia plays a key role, often operating in collaboration with governments. Academia has been involved in developing SDG curricula; training public servants on SDG-related issues; maintaining SDG platforms; and strengthening the science-policy interface on SDGs. Non-governmental organizations have also been active, and their role varies depending on the country, with a very visible presence in capacity-building in countries like Italy (see below).

Many other actors have provided training and especially tools and reference material that is highly relevant. Such material tends to target specific capacity needs, based on the specialization of the actors. For instance, association of municipalities have been very active in developing capacity-building material on SDG localization.

Box 3.6

National Strategy for Development of Statistics and capacity-building in Mongolia

The link between capacity assessment and strategic action is often unclear. An exception is the case of Mongolia, where after comprehensive assessments of the statistical system were conducted in 2014 and in 2017, a Mapping and Assessment of the Data Ecosystem was published.[a]

In response to constraints identified in the capacity of the statistical system in general and for monitoring of the Sustainable Development Vision and the SDGs, a National Strategy for Development of Statistics (NSDS) was approved in 2016, to address capacity-building across all elements of the national statistical system.

The strategy focuses on user needs as well as capacity-building measures on data production and the use and application of data for policymaking. It also takes steps to reinforce the effectiveness of monitoring systems at local levels in alignment with the central-level monitoring system.[b]

Sources:
[a]   United Nations Development Programme et al, "Development Finance Assessment for Mongolia. Diversifying finance for sustainable development 2018", 2018, 83; Mongolia, "Mongolia Voluntary National Review 2019: Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals" (Ulaanbaatar, 2019), 12, 44.
[b]   United Nations Development Programme et al, "Development Finance Assessment for Mongolia. Diversifying finance for sustainable development 2018", 2018, xvii, 59.

Figure 3.3

Main actors involved in capacity-building on SDG implementation directed at public servants, as found in the research

National level	International level
Central government – Ministry or agency leading SDG implementation	Actor-based international networks, associations, organizations (e.g. IPU, UCLG, groupings of supreme audit institutions)
Central government – other Ministry	Civil society organizations, networks
Parliaments	Global, regional think tanks
Supreme audit institution	Academia – international networks
Subnational governments (e.g. states, regions, districts or equivalent)	Schools of public administration – regional and global networks
Local governments	UN system: includes UNDP, specialized agencies, UNDESA
Professional associations	Other international organizations (e.g. OECD)
Actor-based national networks, associations	Bilateral development agencies (e.g. GIZ)
Civil society	
Academia	
Schools of public administration	
National think tanks	

Source: Authors' elaboration.

At the international level, many organizations have been very active. Early in the SDG implementation period, the United Nations Development Group came out with guidance for United Nations country teams to mainstream the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Successive versions of the guidebook[22] introduced a range of capacity-building tools and approaches in critical areas highlighted in the 2030 Agenda such as awareness-building, multi-stakeholder approaches, adapting SDGs to national, subnational and local contexts, horizontal and vertical policy coherence, monitoring and reporting, and others. This approach has resulted in the production of multiple guidelines and in the delivery of capacity-building at the country level, mostly focused on government actors. The early start of capacity-building activities for SDG implementation benefited from past activities in support of the Millennium Development Goals, which already had a strong focus on strengthening planning and monitoring capacities in developing countries. Recent developments include the development of the SDG Integration Toolkit, maintained by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which provides a repository of numerous tools that directly support capacity-building for SDG implementation. [23]

Other actors such as bilateral development agencies and international networks focus on specific types of national

institutions. For instance, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions Development Initiative (IDI), and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) have also given high priority and visibility to capacity-building for SDG implementation.

Many capacity-building activities described in this report involve collaboration among actors operating at different levels. Examples include collaborations between UNDP, other UN agencies and governments, sometimes with other national and international organizations; collaboration between UN agencies and other international organizations; and collaborations between civil society organizations and bilateral development agencies.

3.4. Overview of key capacity-building initiatives and products

Since 2015, governments either individually or in partnership with local, national and global actors, have carried out a broad range of initiatives, to enhance skills and raise awareness of the SDGs among public servants. This section illustrates capacity-building initiatives and actions in different thematic areas, focusing on those where the highest number of initiatives were found in the research.

Box 3.7

Delivery channels used for capacity-building activities on SDGs

A broad range of channels and methods are used to deliver training and capacity-building on SDGs to public servants. Channels for delivery for awareness-raising material include brochures and posters, game-playing material, meetings and townhalls. More elaborate content is delivered through conferences and seminars, workshops, along with traditional training sessions (initial and continuous). Digital channels have been increasingly used to publish official information and SDG data dashboards; deliver traditional online courses and massive open online courses (MOOCs); and maintain repositories of practices, including guidelines and toolkits. During the pandemic, electronic channels have largely replaced more traditional channels for delivering training and capacity-building (for instance, webinars have replaced workshops), which has created both opportunities and challenges.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.4.1. Raising awareness of the SDGs among public servants

Several channels are used to raise civil servants' and public officials' awareness of the SDGs. Many initiatives entail the organization of workshops, seminars, and annual events, and use a broad range of awareness-raising products.

SDG dissemination and sensitization materials have been developed by public agencies and civil society. In France, the "kit pédagogique sur les Objectifs de développement durable" was issued by the Ministry of the ecological and solidary transition and Agence Française de Développement (AFD) in May 2017. Conceived for all actors, it consists of pedagogical support material on SDGs including flashcards, board games, stickers, etc. with seven documents that provide information on different topics (presentation of the SDGs, SDG indicators, bibliography, and others.[24] Similar kits are found in many countries.

In India, nine States have prepared capacity-building resources materials. Different tools have been used such as manuals on SDGs, training modules, information booklets and toolkits.[25] In Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tripura and Bihar, the State government has organized a series of workshops and meetings to sensitize government officials on SDGs. The State of Haryana has prepared an SDG Communication Strategy to build awareness amongst all stakeholders, including particularly State Government Departments.[26]

Content developed by the United Nations and other global actors has been translated into national languages.[27] A prominent example of this is the SDG icons, which have been translated in many languages. In Sierra Leone, simplified versions of the 2030 Agenda are distributed, for instance to members of parliament.[28] Examples of SDGs awareness-raising products include a two-page brief on the 2030 Agenda and the core principles underlying it,[29] as well as a short video on the Agenda, its five dimensions and the 17 SDGs.[30] Other products include SDG posters distributed free of charge to Finnish schools[31] or put up in ministries, departments, and government agencies in Sierra Leone,[32] and photo exhibitions.[33]

Some awareness-raising products targeting public servants are delivered using websites and online platforms. Modalities and structure vary according to country context. For example, the judiciary in Costa Rica uses online channels to raise SDGs awareness among its staff.[34] Spain has developed online sessions on specific SDGs and targets.[35] Social media communication platforms including Facebook and WhatsApp are also being used to disseminate the 2030 Agenda and the Goals, for example in Kenya.[36] Another product in this range is the MOOC *"Objectifs de développement durable: relevons le défi!"*, produced by the Université Virtuelle Environnement et Développement Durable (UVED). While the MOOC does not explicitly target public servants, its content is clearly relevant to those. [37]

An example of awareness-raising product at the subnational level is the website of the Trentino Municipality in Italy,[38] which has examined, on a weekly basis, different aspects related to the achievement of the SDGs in the region.

In general, the results achieved by awareness-raising activities on the SDGs do not seem to be systematically evaluated. Existing evaluations, often from preparedness audits conducted by supreme audit institutions, have pointed to weaknesses of awareness-raising initiatives, which may be implemented often without a specific plan,[39] may not reach officials outside capitals with fewer awareness-raising campaigns directed at local authorities,[40] or may not be comprehensive, sufficiently focused or sustained.[41]

3.4.2. Capacity-building on SDGs for teachers in school and university

Schools and universities can help build capacities for students and professionals to understand and address the SDGs, develop evidence-based solutions, facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue and action and support the design of SDG based policies, among others.[42] Several capacity-building activities focus on the role that universities, and academia more generally, can play through teaching, research, operations and leadership, in contributing to the 2030 Agenda.

Teachers are a central target of capacity-building activities on the SDGs. Capacities related to SDGs are built through the introduction of the SDGs in the school and university curricula. An example is the training of teachers in the municipality of São Paulo on the SDGs and the development of SDG Learning Guidelines, with the support of UNESCO, as part of a new curriculum aimed at promoting education for sustainable development.[43] Another example is an education website that includes information, exercises and videos and guidance for Finnish teachers on including the material in class curricula.[44] Teachers' capacities are also developed through e-learning courses on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs (see Box 3.8).

There are several examples of guidelines to foster the engagement of schools and universities in SDGs implementation (see Table 3.1). Guidelines for the schools, generally, aim at making resources available to teachers to help them understand the SDGs, impart learning and access educational resources and case studies for each SDG. The guidelines developed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) for universities, for example, provide guidance on embedding the SDGs in the work of institutes of higher education, starting with building the case for university-wide engagement (in terms of impact, partnerships, access new funding, etc.).

Box 3.8

Material on SDGs available to teachers in Italy

In Italy, the Italian National Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) has developed a sustainable development e-learning course on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs to enhance schoolteachers' knowledge of SDGs. The course consists of 20 thematic modules, illustrating current progress on all SDGs and targets.

Over 70,000 trainees (including 61,000 educators) have so far benefitted from the course. The e-learning is also available to 800,000 teachers throughout the country through the online platform of the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research. The course is also available to about 70 universities within the Network of Universities for Sustainable Development.[i]

Since 2019, a self-learning portal titled School 2030: education for value creation, allows teachers to access self-training contents, resources (documents, photos, visualizations, etc.) and self-training materials for an education inspired by the values and vision of the 2030 Agenda.[ii]

Another resource available to Italian teachers is the Italian translation of the UNESCO manual, Trainer's guide on sustainable development education to attain the SDGs.[iii]

Notes:

[i]   Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS). "Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals", Rome, 2019, 64, see also: https://asvis.it/corso-e-learning-l-agenda-2030-e-gli-obiettivi-di-sviluppo-sostenibile/ and http://www.indire.it/2020/03/06/educazione-allo-sviluppo-sostenibile-apre-a-tutti-il-corso-gratuito-online-di-asvis-su-agenda-2030/ It appears that individuals other than teachers need to pay a fee to accede to this e-learning.

[ii]   The initiative is the result of a memorandum signed between the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) and the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), http://scuola2030.indire.it.

[iii] The resource is the result of a partnership between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Turin University and ASviS, http://www.unesco.it/it/News/Detail/440.

Table 3.1

Examples of SDG guidelines for schools and universities

Title	Developed by	Purpose	URL
Getting started with the SDGs in Universities	SDSN regional network Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific	Practical guidance and tools to assist universities to engage with the SDGs, map existing activities, engage with stakeholders, and report on SDG contributions	https://resources.unsdsn.org/getting-started-with-the-sdgs-in-universities http://ap-unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/University-SDG-Guide_web.pdf
Educação para o desenvolvimento sustentável na escola:	Government of Brazil	Nine guidelines on the SDGs to support teachers with videos and a general introduction to the 2030 Agenda	Guide on SDG 2: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375077
Sustainable foundations: a guide for teaching the Sustainable Development Goals	Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, Canada	Information, educational resources, and other support, including on incorporating SDG issues into and across curricula	http://mcic.ca/pdf/SDG_Primer_FINAL.pdf
Education for Sustainable Development Goals: learning objectives	UNESCO	A guide on learning objectives on the SDGs, goal by goal. The guide exists in the 6 official Un languages plus Korean and Portuguese	https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444

Source: Authors' elaboration based on desk research.

3.4.3. Incorporating the SDGs in the initial and continuous training of public servants

In many countries, government departments have developed training material and deliver training activities on SDGs. In Indonesia, the Ministry of National Development Planning, with support from UNDP Indonesia and the Tanoto Foundation, has set up the SDG Academy Indonesia, a learning platform for government officials that include programmes such as an SDG Leadership Certification, Mobile Learning, among others, covering governance and policy, innovative solutions, monitoring and reporting.[45] The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development in Sierra Leone and the State Department for Planning of Kenya have conducted training on the SDGs respectively to build the capacity of key ministries, departments, and agencies on implementing the Goals[46] and serve as trainers to build capacity in their organizations.[47] The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Mauritius has published a "Basic Course on Sustainable Development".[48] Costa Rica has an overall strategy or plan to build the capacity of public officials.[49] There are standardized training plans for public officials joining the public administration, and capacity-building is a requirement for career advancement (see Box 3.9).

In some countries, training on the SDGs has been organized for members of parliament. For example, the Lower House of the Indian Parliament has organized workshops on SDGs in July 2015, August 2016 and December 2016 for parliamentarians from both Houses.[50]

In virtually all countries, schools of public administration are playing a critical role in the initial and vocational training of civil servants. The extent to which schools of public administration have engaged with the SDGs varies from limited to very active. In the report's sample of 24 countries, schools of public administration have used the following channels to engage with the SDGs: incorporating SDGs in existing curricula for future and current civil servants; developing specific SDG-related curricula for initial or continuous training; developing SDG-related products for broader audiences, such as massive online open courses (MOOCs); and setting up repositories of SDG-related content produced by other organizations and institutional actors. In this context, schools of public administration often work with partners. Schools of public administration have also organized events or summer courses addressing the SDGs.

Box 3.9

SDGs in the training of the civil service in Costa Rica

The Centre for Capacity Building and Development *(Centro de Capacitación y Desarrollo, CECADE)*, under the General Directorate of the Civil Service, is responsible for implementing capacity-building strategies, plans and programmes for civil servants to advance the professionalization of public administration and the delivery of quality services to citizens.[a] The 2020 capacity-building plan includes sustainable development as part of its 12 thematic priorities. All the training activities included in the 2020 plan have been aligned to the targets of the National Development and Public Investment Plan (NDPIP) and the SDGs. Links with specific SDGs are identified for all training activities.[b]

The Ministry of Planning's (MIDEPLAN) online platform for knowledge management and capacity-building was launched in July 2019. The catalogue of online and face-to-face training courses includes several offerings related to sustainable development and the SDGs. Among the face to face offerings, there are short seminars on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Index 2017, and the NDPIP, among others.[i]

The judiciary, with UNDP support, after designing virtual contents, organized several online courses in May 2020:

1) Online course on SDGs to be delivered through the online platform C@pacitate. It would be a mandatory learning course focusing on relevant aspects of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, including initiatives by the Judiciary.

2) Several online courses delivered on relevant topics related to the SDGs including on access to justice, citizen participation, gender, anti-corruption

3) Also, there are several offerings of training and capacity-building courses in an online format on different topics related to environmental management.

Sources:

a   Costa Rica, "Regulation of the Civil Service Regime", Chapter XIII, Article 155, published on 6/11/2017 through Decree 40608-MP.

b   Centro de Capacitación y Desarrollo, "Oferta de capacitación 2020", 2019, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1v_cV_nihX1JFXn6XoETROPJ gidM3QV6rwKq5wOPXZCc/edit.

Note:

i   See https://www.presidencia.go.cr/comunicados/2019/07/plataforma-virtual-fortalecera-capacidades-en-el-sector-publico/; https://www.mideplan.go.cr/oferta-de-capacitacion; https://capacitacion.mideplan.go.cr.

In Brazil, the National School of Public Administration (Enap) has been one of the main catalysts for promoting capacity-building initiatives aimed at different stakeholders. It has been working on building a repository of knowledge and information about the 2030 Agenda in Brazil[51] as well as preparing and delivering courses on the Agenda for public sector officials[52] and making some of them available online for anyone interested[53]. Some of its materials and actions include the launch of a handbook on the "Challenges and conditions for the implementation of the SDG agenda in the Brazilian Federal Public Administration"[54], and the presentation of several seminars on the 2030 Agenda and specific SDGs[55]. In 2018, UNDP signed a technical cooperation agreement with the National School for the Training and Improvement of Labor Magistrates (Enamat) with the aim of developing studies and research focused on understanding the way in which different countries organize their labor jurisdiction, through comparative analysis focused on SDGs 4, 8 and 16[56]. In its 2017-2018 report,

the National Commission on the Sustainable Development Goals (CNODS) brought attention to the number of initiatives offered to the Commission's partners in local governments, ranging from training for managing the 2030 Agenda to supporting the implementation of diagnostics for local development planning[57]. One partnership highlighted in the report is the capacity-building partnership built with the National School of Public Administration (Enap), that aims at capacitating local actors for the management of the SDGs at the subnational level[58].

In Canada, the National School of Public Administration of Quebec (ENAP -Québec) and the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), through its subsidiary body the Institut de la Francophonie pour le développement durable (IFDD), have developed a MOOC in French on "taking the SDGs into account in public policies". A first delivery of the MOOC took place in 2020.[59]

In Italy, the National School of Administration (SNA), within the Prime Minister's Office, assessed that 45 per cent of its training programmes have a direct relationship with at least one of the 17 SDGs and the entire training plan covers the totality of the goals.[60]

The Civil Service College (CSCM) of Mauritius has a course titled "Strategic thinking for 2030" (linked to Vision 2030) aimed at top management to enhance planning for the achievement of the SDGs.[61]

In the Indian State of Maharashtra, the government has directed YASHADA, the State Level Administrative Training Institute, to incorporate academic curricula on SDGs in their existing training modules for government officers. Likewise, in Tamil Nadu, trainings on SDGs have been incorporated in the regular training programmes of the State Training Institutions.[62]

National schools of public administration also collaborate with governments departments. In Kenya, for instance, the collaboration with the Kenya School of Government and other leadership training institutions, aims to undertake transformative leadership competency training and capacity-building.[63] In Mauritius, the collaboration between the Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reform (now the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms) and the Civil Service College aims to mainstream inclusive green economy and the SDGs into existing courses. In Spain, the

activities and capacity-building plan of the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP) have been aligned with the SDGs and communicated to the line ministries that deliver capacity-building on related topics.[64] In Nepal, the National Planning Commission and the Nepal Administrative Staff College have organized trainings on SDGs localization and deployment of trained facilitators in eleven municipalities on a pilot basis.[65]

Schools of public administration are also collaborating with universities in the development of SDG-related curricula. In Spain, the INAP has developed specific content and curricula considering the skills and capacities that public officials need to implement SDGs, including a module of the Certified Public Manager programme and the curriculum of a new master on public management and leadership, which takes into consideration the skills and capacities needed to implement SDGs.[66] In Sierra Leone, integrating the SDGs into curricula is done through a partnership with universities and schools of public administration.[67]

International networks have played an active role in supporting the capacity-development role of national schools of public administration in relation to the SDGs. Supported by UNDESA, the Global Initiative on Governance for the SDGs engages schools of public administration and regional associations of public administration through a Global Network of Schools of Public Administration (see Box 3.10).[68]

Box 3.10

Global initiative on Governance for the SDGs

In 2017, The United Nations Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) established the Global Initiative on governance for the SDGs (https://unpan.un.org/capacity-development/global-initiative-on-governance) to facilitate the mainstreaming of the SDGs in the curricula of the schools of public administration and knowledge sharing. The Global Initiative aims to develop the capacities of governments and public servants (in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and mindset) to support the implementation of the SDGs. It also aims to support North-South and South-South exchange of good practices to ensure cross-fertilization and mutual learning. The Global Initiative brings into collaboration the directors and trainers from schools of public administration, civil service colleges, and similar training institutions to set the foundation for a holistic, participatory, and action-oriented learning system, which is essential for generating positive change in the public service and for sustainable development. DPIDG, in collaboration with schools of public administration and other partners, is finalizing a Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs, which includes inter-connected training-of-trainers toolkits on key dimensions of governance related to the SDGs. The toolkits are intended for 5-days capacity-development workshops or virtual capacity-development activities. Schools of Public Administration participating in the Initiative are part of a global task force (https://unpan.un.org/communities/gtfs) that aims to strengthen the advocacy of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs among all stakeholders and create, expand, and exchange knowledge on the 2030 Agenda and develop individual, organizational and institutional capabilities.

Source: United Nations Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government.

The OECD Global Network of Schools of Government has operated for several years and organised meetings centred on the SDGs, among other activities.[69] Regional public administration networks and associations of schools of public administration have also been active in this area. For instance, the Virtual Campus of the CLAD School offers training courses on cross-cutting themes of the SDGs.[70] The United Nations System Staff college has also conducted training for civil servants related to the 2030 Agenda, including in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa[71]. Finally, the United Nations Institute of Training and Research (UNITAR) has also been active in this area, proposing a range of e-courses on various aspects of the 2030 Agenda, including e-courses and MOOCs.[72]

Since 2016, public administration umbrella associations and networks at the global and regional levels have explored the capacity-building dimensions of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in their conferences and other activities. The International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) and its affiliates such as the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administrations (IASIA) have worked with UNDESA in this regard, as have the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), the Africa Public Sector Human Resource Managers' Network (APS-HRMnet) and the Africa Local Governance Academy. These activities directly inform the work of academia and schools of public administration that train public servants.

3.4.4. Guidelines for integrating the SDGs into daily practice in the public service

A key component of strategies to build the capacity of public servants to implement and contribute to the 2030 Agenda is to provide them with general guidance and guidelines that enable them to incorporate the SDGs in their daily work. This can range from basic awareness-raising products that aim to inform public servants in the context of their own institution or organization, to training sessions, to more detailed guidance material that describes how the SDGs should be integrated in

the various processes of an organization, from procurement to reporting to communication.

Some governments were quick in recognizing this need. For instance, in Belgium, in 2017 the Government of Flanders published a manual for government organizations that describes the implications of the SDGs for their daily practices.[73]

Guidance can be provided through training. For example, the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica has trained legislators and parliamentary staff (administrative and political) on implementing the SDGs in the legislative work. Ad hoc training has been provided to legislative committees, according to the SDGs related to each committee's work.[74]

In France, available sensitization tools include a web-based self-evaluation questionnaire developed by the national standard organization, AFNOR, which French organizations and local governments at different levels can use to understand their positioning on each of the SDGs.[75] Another web-based tool - that includes practical sheets with associated toolkits and resources - helps French local governments, among other actors, to evaluate the contribution of their actions to the SDGs.[76]

Guidance on integrating the SDGs into daily practice has also focused on specific SDG areas and specific actors. For example, the Sustainable Cities Programme is structured in 12 thematic axes aligned with the SDGs. It offers tools and methodologies to support public management and urban planning in the framework of SDG 11. It also provides a database of good practices as well as guides and publications to support public managers and civil society in building inclusive policies and monitoring data and indicators (see Box 3.11).[77] In France, the association of presidents of universities published a guide on the roles of higher education facilities in promoting the SDGs – through a mapping of the functions of the different professions operating therein vis-à-vis the SDGs – as a way to enhance the commitment of a university to SDG implementation. The guide was translated into English.[78]

Box 3.11

UN-Habitat's SDG Project Assessment Tool

The SDG Project Assessment Tool developed by UN-Habitat is an offline, digital and user-friendly instrument that guides city authorities to develop more inclusive, sustainable and effective urban projects. The SDG Tool aims to: improve the quality of urban projects in the planning, development and design phase to enhance sustainability and inclusiveness; promote an enabling environment that ensures the feasibility and viability of the projects in the medium and long term; and steer a participatory process between local authorities and their partners to develop strategies to optimize a project's alignment to the SDGs.

Source: https://www.globalfuturecities.org/sdg-project-assesment-tool.

Box 3.12

Support to gender-responsive planning by UN Women

Since 2015, UN Women has provided ongoing capacity strengthening for ministries of finance, sectoral ministries and local governments in gender-responsive planning and budgeting. This work is directly linked with the strengthening of national development plans and public finance systems to target resources for the implementation of gender equality policies and programmes.

This capacity-development work typically focuses on technical-level staff, including planners and budget officers, so that they can translate their new skills and learning into daily practice. However, it has become increasingly clear that capacity-development targeted at senior public administration officials supports stronger political buy-in and institutional engagement for gender mainstreaming in public administration. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance between working with higher-level officials and technical focal points within ministries.

Source: UN Women, input to the 2021 World Public Sector Report.

3.4.5. Long-term development planning and SDG domestication

Long-term development planning is one of the areas that has received continuing attention since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. As noted previously, the domestication of the SDGs to national contexts, envisioned in paragraph 55 of the 2030 Agenda, has been a key activity in most countries since 2015, and in some cases even before (see chapter 2). It was also a key priority area for support and capacity-building by the United Nations System, in particular the United Nations Development Group and UNDP (see section 3.3 above). National governments have been very active in this area, as have been international institutions and in particular the UN system, which have provided assistance to developing countries for related activities.

National governmental institutions have taken actions to enhance long-term development planning capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda. In Indonesia, the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas, as coordinator for SDG implementation, has conducted capacity-building activities on mainstreaming the SDGs in development plans and also on action plan formulation.[79] The Ministry of Planning of Costa Rica has developed a course that aims to integrate the operationalization of the SDGs into planning processes at different levels in order to enhance governmental capacity for the formulation and implementation of development plans.[80] The National Planning Commission of Nepal has developed knowledge products to serve as resources for

provincial planning commissions to strengthen, among others, development planning informed by the SDGs.[81] In Mongolia, an easy-to-use policy screening tool helps to mainstream consideration of environment-related SDGs into socio-economic development policies at the planning stage. The tool contributes to strengthening the capacity of policy practitioners to implement the SDGs, ensuring policy coherence, and planning in an integrated manner.[82]

At the subnational level, a range of capacity-building tools have been developed by governments and non-governmental actors to support planning in line with the SDGs (see Table 3.2).

In some countries, for instance Indonesia, capacity-building has targeted the mainstreaming of the SDGs in local development plans. Prior to the formulation of mid-term development plans, government officials from provinces, districts and municipalities were trained in mapping national SDGs targets and regions development priorities.[83] In South Africa, senior and middle management officials at the municipal level attended seminars on the 2030 Agenda to foster the alignment of the municipality's operational programmes to the SDGs.[84] In Kenya, a collaboration between the representative body of all governors and the national government was instrumental in the organization of capacity-building on the SDGs for planning and budgetary officers at the subnational level.[85] In Chile, a collaboration between the National Council for SDG Implementation and regional authorities helped to identify topics of sustainable development relevant in each region (see Box 3.13).

Table 3.2

Examples of tools to support planning at the subnational level in line with the SDGs

Title	Developed by	Purpose	URL
Fundamentals for 2030 Cities, Nações Unidas Brasil 2020	Santa Catarina Council of Architecture and Urbanism, Brazil	Guidance to support the formulation of participatory municipal master plans in line with the SDGs	https://www.causc.gov.br/post/onu-habitat-apoia-evento-sobre-planos-diretores-participativos-e-ods/
Mainstreaming SDGs in County Integrated Development Plans and Annual Development Plans	National Government in collaboration with the Council of Governors, Kenya	Training to strengthen officials' capacities in mainstreaming SDGs in planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring and the development of SDGs based strategies, tracking and reporting	https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26360VNR_2020_Kenya_Report.pdf; p. 19
KILA centre for SDGs and local governments	Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), India	Tools and capacity-building programmes on mainstreaming the SDGs in local development planning	https://sdgactionawards.org/initiative/1912
SDG Academy	National Development Planning Agency, UNDP and Tanoto Foundation, Indonesia	Guidance to develop a Regional Action Plan on the SDGs in the Riau province	https://www.bloomberg.com/press-releases/2019-10-10/sdg-academy-indonesia-to-fast-track-the-nation-s-sdg-progress
Sustainable development in Trentino	Italian Alliance on Sustainable Development, Italy	Training on the 2030 Agenda focusing on a provincial strategy on sustainable development	https://agenda2030.provincia.tn.it/In-evidenza/Formazione-Agenda-2030-dedicata-alla-Strategia-provinciale-per-lo-Sviluppo-Sostenibile
The Territorial Coherence Scheme (SCOT)	Regional Directorates of Environment, Planning and Housing, France	Guidance on urban planning to bring sectoral policies into coherence (in terms of habitat, mobility, commercial development, environment and landscape)	http://www.nouvelle-aquitaine.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/boite-a-outils-odd-scot-r4583.html

Source: Authors, based on desk research.

Box 3.13

Dialogues around SDGs among levels of government in Chile

The Technical Secretariat of the National Council for SDG Implementation has organized Regional Dialogues and Dissemination Workshops in each region of the country in collaboration with subnational authorities. The aim of these capacity-development activities is to raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda, identify topics of sustainable development relevant in each region and enhance coordination to advance actions to implement the SDGs. Each workshop has addressed sustainable development issues relevant to each region. Autonomous coordination bodies were also set up to promote actions in favor of the SDGs. Workshop sessions have been streamed via the web.

Source: Chile, "Informe de Diagnóstico e Implementación de La Agenda 2030 y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible en Chile", 2017, 26.

3.4.6. SDG localization

SDG localization is a capacity-development area that has received sustained attention since 2015. Among the numerous existing products, training-of-trainers modules have been developed by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) to help to share knowledge about the SDGs localizing process. The modules are primarily targeted at members of local and regional governments.[86] They include an introduction on localization that allows facilitators to run workshops for the SDGs awareness-raising as part of local strategies. A second module on the alignment of public policies and SDGs provides a guide from planning to the implementation of local public policies.[87] A third module focuses on reporting.[88] It gives examples, exercises and tools for preparing Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). An upcoming module will focus on decentralized cooperation and SDGs.[89]

The localizing the SDGs platform (local2030.org) was developed as a one-stop-shop on SDG localization resources and tools for stakeholders.[90] It includes documents, tools, guidelines, solutions and instruments developed by the United Nations, national and local governments, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other partners to support the development, implementation, monitoring and review of SDG actions at the local level. A toolbox[91] allows local government officials to access resources for initializing SDG processes, enabling institutional arrangements for SDG implementation and capacity-development.[92] The platform also allows users to interact by offering a space to post updates on activities implemented in terms of SDGs localization and related events.

National governments have been active in this area. In India, in Tripura, district Magistrates have been requested to identify Training Managers in Blocks and Districts for intensive training to localize the SDGs. In Gujarat, about 100 senior district level officers including District Planning Officers and District Statistical Officers from all districts have been trained on localizing SDGs at sub-state level. A team of government officials from Jammu and Kashmir has been trained on SDGs at the National Statistical System Training Academy. Similarly, in Lakshadweep, a training programme has been conducted for officials dealing with statistics for monitoring of the SDG targets. In Mizoram, a Technical Committee has been set up for assessment of the capacity of line Departments to implement programmes to achieve SDGs as one of its core functions. The Committee has held training for officers of government departments, district level officers and selected NGOs.[93]

Confederations of Municipalities have played an active role in enhancing the capacity of local governments to implement the SDGs. The Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, in its role as the SDG Local Observatory, has developed online and face to face courses related to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs for local government officials.[94] The Association of Local Governments of Chile has organized a summer school to train 45 mayors and councillors on SDGs localization.[95] The National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM) of Brazil has developed a website to provide information on capacity-building, monitoring and evaluation on SDG localization.[96] CNM has also published a "Guide for Locating the SDGs in Brazilian Municipalities - What Municipal Managers Need to Know"[97] and a "Guide for the Integration of SDGs in Brazilian Municipalities"[98], which served as essential manuals for introducing the SDGs to the local authorities. The Mandala Tool, developed by CNM and translated in multiple languages, supports capacity-development for monitoring SDG localization.[99] It includes both visualizations of primary data at the municipal level and an online toolkit[100] that allow to examine data alignment with the SDGs and provide a guideline for local governments to initiate monitoring and evaluation processes.

Guidance documents help navigating the types of localization and provide practical cases to institutionalize the SDGs at the local level.[101] Tools support the integration of the Goals into territorial strategies in France[102] and assist local authorities to implement the SDGs, for instance in Brazil[103]. Some tools help municipalities to engage in a participatory approach to sustainable development on their territory to contribute to the SDGs. An example is a toolkit that is a combination of educational and communication material, meeting plans, and practical guidelines helping to identify relevant actors and stimulate their engagement.[104]

Capacity can also be developed by learning from concrete examples of how the SDGs are localized at the state and city levels (for instance, in India[105] and in Morocco, see Box 3.14).

In this domain too, there is limited information regarding the scale and results of capacity-building efforts. It is unclear whether the impact of SDG localization tools can offset challenges experienced by local governments in some contexts in accessing knowledge.

Box 3.14

Mapping municipal plans and projects to the SDGs in Morocco

In 2017, with support from UCLG, municipal staff and community leaders of the city of Chefchaouen, Morocco, were trained to conduct joint monitoring and the evaluation of municipal actions. A methodology for the localization of the SDGs helped participants to prioritize municipal projects based on a set of criteria, which enabled visualization of the social, economic, environmental, cultural and human dimensions of actions and municipal investment.

An ad hoc tool helped them to analyse priorities of municipal projects against the SDGs, particularly in vulnerable neighbourhoods of the city, among others. Key steps were the alignment of the municipal projects with one or more SDG targets and the classification of municipal projects following a set of criteria for sustainability, defined based on the city's priorities. The exercise resulted in the mapping of 63 projects contained in the Communal Action Plan 2016-2022 and municipal budget against the SDG framework, as well as in setting priorities for the coming years.

Sources: United Cities and Local Governments, "SDGs in the municipal map", 2017, https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/the_sdgs_in_the_municipal_map_0.pdf and United Cities and Local Governments, "The Localization of the Global Agendas", 2019, 66, https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/goldv_en.pdf.

3.4.7. Strengthening national statistical systems and SDG indicators

The strengthening of national statistical systems, including for the production of SDG-relevant data, was singled out as a priority in the 2030 Agenda, and as a result has received high attention. Several countries have adopted national strategies in this regard. International organizations have supported capacity-building in this area in developing countries.

At the national level, the Government of Nepal (and other actors) have taken actions to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems to produce disaggregated data at national and subnational levels.[106] Training activities have been offered to staff of the Nepali national statistical offices to enhance capacity including on data and statistics for evidence based VNRs and SDG monitoring and for producing and developing indicators (and methodologies to improve indicators). In the context of its strategy for the development of statistics, the training centre of the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda functions as a hub for training and thought leadership in statistics and data science.[107] In the Philippines, the Statistics Authority has developed integrated frameworks on statistical capacity and action plans to improve the competence of staff in the national statistical office.[108]

In the context of SDG monitoring, there has been a need to strengthen national statistical systems, and in particular coordination and collaboration across the different official statistics producers. In many countries, a substantial share of the SDG indicators is produced by different government departments, with varying experience and knowledge of statistics production. Actions in this regard include capacity-building initiatives carried out by national statistical offices (NSOs) focusing on monitoring the SDGs for data producers and users, for instance in Morocco and in the Philippines.[109]

At the subnational level, the Colombian National Administrative Department of Statistics has provided technical support to local governments for the statistical strengthening of municipalities, districts and departments. It uses the Territorial Statistical Capacity Index as a systemic and multidimensional indicator to weigh knowledge, skills, resources and institutional environment available to produce, statistical information for development.[110]

Since 2015, global actors such as the United Nations Statistics Division, UNDP, UN specialized agencies, the World Bank, and other international organizations have supported the formulation of national strategies for the development of statistics, the strengthening of the capacity of national statistical offices in SDG indicators monitoring and reporting, as well as improved institutional mechanisms and procedures at national and local levels for the production and utilization of SDG indicators.[111] Every year, the United Nations Statistics Division has organized the United Nations World Data Forum on Sustainable Development Data (The UN World Data Forum), a large global multi-stakeholder event that brings together data and statistical experts and users to spur data innovation, mobilize high-level political and financial support for data, and build a pathway to better data for sustainable development.[112]

> **Box 3.15**
>
> **The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data**
>
> The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data is the overarching framework for global statistical capacity-development for SDGs. It was informally launched at the first UN World Data Forum on 15 January 2017 in Cape Town, South Africa, and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 48th Session in March 2017.
>
> The plan provides strategic guidance for the design and implementation of country-led statistical capacity-building needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda. It identifies six strategic areas for action: coordination and strategic leadership on data for sustainable development; innovation and modernization of national statistical systems; strengthening of basic statistical activities and programmes; data dissemination and use; multi-stakeholder partnerships; resource mobilization and coordination.
>
> *Source:* See https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Cape-Town-Global-Action-Plan/.

The United Nations Statistics Division has carried out many capacity-building activities in countries. For instance, one project works with 20 countries across Africa and Asia to improve the availability of national indicators both in terms of support to increase the number of indicators available and by making them more accessible through national data and metadata platforms for dissemination of the SDGs.[113] Other initiatives include the Data4Now initiative[114] and the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training.[115]

The United Nations has supported the strengthening of statistical information systems and mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and evaluating the SDGs in Morocco.[116] Global actors have provided technical assistance, among others, for monitoring Mongolia's progress towards the SDGs.[117]

In 2019, a multi-stakeholder community of data and statistics-focused development practitioners, technical experts, and advocates formed the "The Bern Network on Financing Data for Development".[118] The Network seeks to address the main challenges to better financing for data and statistics, and is currently developing a Clearing House on Financing Development Data for this purpose. The online platform will provide information and services to match the supply and demand of financing for data and facilitate coordination among donors and partner countries.

International support has also been offered to some countries on monitoring and reporting of the SDGs and the implementation of national sustainable development strategies through methodological tools that facilitate systemic policy reviews.[119] Global actors have also contributed to enhancing the capacities of the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies' committees in monitoring the implementation of SDGs in Nepal.[120]

Capacity-development has also taken place at the regional and sub-regional levels with the support of United Nations Regional Commissions. An example is the support provided by the Economic Commission for Africa to the African Centre for Statistics to build capacity to enhance institutional mechanisms and procedures for the production and use of SDG indicators.[121] Another example is the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's support to data and statistical capacity-building to integrate statistical and geospatial information for SDGs, diagnose national statistical capacities to produce SDG indicators and prioritize indicators for monitoring the SDG in the region. The Commission has also provided technical assistance, face to face and virtual courses on mainstreaming the gender approach in official statistical production to monitor the SDGs.[122]

Results of capacity-development activities around SDG data and indicators are reflected in the increase in availability of SDG indicators, both global and national, in many countries. For instance, the strengthening of national statistical capacities has enabled Costa Rica to increase the availability of national indicators (from 117 in 2017 to 136 indicators available in 2019) and improve data disaggregation by sex, territory, age, disability, and other characteristics. The capacities of the National Statistical System to measure and monitor progress in SDG implementation have improved.[123] In Indonesia, as part of the training provided by the Ministry of Planning on indicator development in 2016, some regions started to develop SDGs indicators that reflect their priorities.[124]

3.4.8. Reporting on progress and SDG evaluation

Because it was highlighted in the 2030 Agenda, reporting on SDG progress at the national level has received high attention since 2015, and has been the subject of capacity-building efforts, spearheaded by the United Nations System. In many countries, United Nations Country Teams have supported governments in the preparation of their VNRs. The UN Secretariat has developed a handbook for preparing VNRs, which is available in French and English and is updated each year.[125] Each year, UNDESA and the United Nations Regional Commissions conduct a series of workshops for government officials working directly on the reviews to be presented at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), in order to build the capacity of governments through exchanges with their peers.[126] Organizations such as Partners for Review have also supported capacity-development in support of national reviews of implementation of the SDGs.

As noted in chapter 2 of this report, SDG evaluation has been a rapidly developing field, with different actors at the national and international levels being involved. Training and capacity-building activities focused on evaluation are organized by government departments. In Nepal, capacity-building undertaken in the context of action plans aimed at the institutionalization of the SDGs included modules for "evaluators and commissioners" and training on impact evaluation for 200 National planning commission officials (see Box 3.16). The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP has developed an online self-assessment tool for countries, which aims to facilitate a national evaluation framework for the SDGs.[127]

Supreme audit institutions (SAIs) have been especially active in this field (see chapter 2 for a detailed overview of the role played by SAIs in the follow-up and review of SDG implementation at the national level). Since 2016, the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI) has conducted a worldwide effort to build the capacity of SAIs to conduct performance audits of government preparedness to implement the SDGs and performance audits of SDG implementation.[128] In the report's sample of 24 countries, several SAIs participated in the programme and other activities related to SDG audits, including Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mauritius, the Philippines, and Sierra Leone. In early 2020, IDI published the IDI SDG audit model (ISAM), which provides guidance for SAIs to conduct performance audits of SDG implementation.[129] From 2017 to 2019, UNDESA and IDI organized joint meetings of SAI leadership and stakeholders to share experiences on SDG audits from across the world.[130] Supreme audit institutions have also developed other relevant training material. For instance, Estonia's National Audit Office has developed massive open online courses (MOOCs) in the area of environmental auditing that address the SDGs.[131]

Some SAIs, the Comptroller General of Chile for instance, have organized capacity-development for their staff on their role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[132] In Spain, SAI staff have participated in training and capacity-building activities to strengthen their skills to conduct audits of the SDGs.[133] Aspects for the preparation of an audit programme for the implementation of the SDGs are included in the new Cuban Auditing Standards.[134] In Costa Rica, auditors have received training as part of coordinated audits related to specific SDGs.

Box 3.16

Strengthening SDG evaluation in Nepal

Nepal's National Planning Commission has developed an Integrated National Evaluation Action Plan aiming at institutionalizing the SDGs in the national monitoring and evaluation system.

The main objective of the action plan is promoting concerted efforts among various agencies in Nepal to enhance the national evaluation capacity and produce evaluation-based evidence useful for better targeting and effective implementation of SDGs.

The specific objectives are:

    (i)   To create an enabling environment for the institutionalization of evaluation in the country;

    (ii) To enhance networking and coordination in building both institutional and individual capacities in the monitoring and evaluation of SDGs;

    (iii) To expand coverage of equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluations and use in policy processes.

Source: Nepal, National Planning Commission, "Integrated National Evaluation Action Plan of Nepal (2016 - 2020)", introduction, table 2- capacity development, July 2017, https://www.npc.gov.np/images/category/Integrated_Evaluation_Action_Plan_2016-2020.pdf.

3.4.9. National SDG platforms

As documented in chapter 1, most countries in the report's sample have set up central, "one-stop" SDG platforms (sometimes called SDG Hubs) that gather information on SDGs, including official documents, guidelines, studies and reports published by various actors, repositories of tools and practices, as well as SDG-related events and news. In parallel, many countries have SDG data platforms or dashboards maintained by the national statistical office, which enable the public and government users to access statistical data on SDGs, often in open data format - for instance, on national SDG indicators, coupled with mapping functions that offer visualization of SDG indicators at the subnational level.

These platforms play a critical role in raising awareness of the SDGs, as they provide a common referential to all actors of society and facilitate access to information. They also enable capacity-building by referencing available toolkits from other countries and regions.

Table 3.3

Examples of national SDG platforms

Platform's title	Developed by	Purpose	URL or reference
L'agenda 2030 au Maroc : les objectifs du développement durable	High Commission for Planning (HCP) of Morocco	Dissemination of information on the SDGs, and access to documents including on tracking progress in Morocco	https://odd.hcp.ma/
Plateforme des ODD		SDG indicator dashboard	http://plateforme-odd.hcp.ma/ODD_HCP/fr/
Sustainable Development Goals	Indonesia, Ministry of development planning (Bappenas)	Central repository of information on SDGs, including laws, official documents, and capacity-building material	http://sdgs.bappenas.go.id/
SDG Dashboard	Indonesia	SDG indicator dashboard, with mapping at the subnational level	http://sdgs.bappenas.go.id/dashboard/
L'Agenda 2030 en France	France, Ministry of Ecological and Solidary Transition	Central repository of information on SDGs, including laws, official documents, and capacity-building material	https://www.agenda-2030.fr/
Indicateurs pour le suivi national des objectifs de développement durable	France, National Statistical Institute	SDG indicator dashboard	https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2654964
Rwanda data for Sustainable Development Goal indicators	National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda	Data on SDG indicators	https://sustainabledevelopment-rwanda.github.io/sdg-indicators/
Digo bikas	Government of Nepal	Central repository of information on SDGs, including activities of the government, data, and resources	www.digobikas.gov.np

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Other national platforms dedicated to the SDGs have been established in collaboration with a national school of public administration or a university (e.g. in in Brazil and South Africa, respectively). Some are geared to enhancing the science-policy interface for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (see section 3.4.10). There are also examples of platforms established at the subnational level. A knowledge sharing and learning platform among 47 county governments in Kenya, for example, includes the SDGs among its search options.[135]

3.4.10. Science-policy interfaces for the SDGs

The 2030 Agenda formally recognized the importance of the science-policy interface for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, by mandating a Global Sustainable Development Report, to be produced each year by a group of independent scientists. The first report was published in 2019. It is expected to generate avenues for capacity-building activities in the future. In Finland, In March 2020 the Expert Panel on

Sustainable Development published a brochure to promote a systemic transformation towards sustainable development in Finland, based on the framework of the report 2019.[136]

A key skill that is required for integrated policymaking for the SDGs is that of understanding and using systems thinking. Understanding the connections between the substantive issues of various sustainable development dimensions, SDGs and targets, and institutions operating on those issues, is a precondition to effectively managing trade-offs and nurturing synergies.

Capacity-building tools and activities in this area have stemmed from a vast amount of work done by international institutions and academia since 2015. Many websites now propose comprehensive data on the interlinkages among the SDGs, whose recognition is a key step towards integrated policymaking, and related knowledge products (see Table 3.4).[137] SDG modelling tools have multiplied and cover a

Table 3.4

Examples of toolkits and platforms linked with science-policy interfaces for the SDGs

Name	Developed by	Purpose	URL or reference
JRC Interlinkages tool	European Union's Joint Research Center	Show the interlinkages among the SDGs	https://knowsdgs.jrc.ec.europa.eu/intro-interlinkages
SDG Interlinkages Analysis & Visualisation Tool (V3.0)	IGES (Japan)	To show the causal relations between relevant SDG targets based on literature reviews and the results from relevant international consultation processes on SDG indicators	https://sdginterlinkages.iges.jp/
SDG Toolkit Individual Learner Online Course	Australian Council for International Development	Training modules on implementing the SDGs by applying systems thinking and collaborative responses for collective impact and leadership including in crisis situations	https://acfid.asn.au/learning/sdg-toolkit-individual-learner-online-course
The SDG Academy	Columbia University (USA)	Range of e-courses on sustainable development and the SDGs	https://sdgacademy.org/courses/
SDG Hub	University of Pretoria (mandated by Department of Science and Innovation)	Connect policymakers with research and innovations needed to implement the 2030 Agenda	http://sasdghub.up.ac.za/
SDGs Hub	University of Indonesia	Serve as a hub for all SDG activities and programmes and strengthen partnership and collaboration with stakeholders	iser.sci.ui.ac.id/sustainable-development-center

Source: Authors, based on desk research.

Box 3.17

South Africa's SDG Hub

Mandated by the Department of Science and Innovation, the SDG Hub (http://sasdghub.up.ac.za/) has set up an online platform aimed at connecting South African policymakers with research and innovations needed to implement the 2030 Agenda. The SDG Hub is housed at the University of Pretoria which provides office space and administrative support and receives advice by an Advisory Board with representatives from the South African government, multilateral organizations, development partners and academia.

The platform provides open access to SDG-relevant research published through universities' institutional repositories (it uses a text classification tool to identify the SDGs to which the research refers). The Hub also organizes public lectures and seminars on SDG related topics and posts SDG briefing notes developed by 26 public universities in South Africa.

Source: http://sasdghub.up.ac.za/.

range of focus areas, including: monitoring and evaluating progress on the SDGs; assessing and managing interlinkages between the SDGs; sustainability transformations to achieve the SDGs; and consistency between the SDGs and global planetary boundaries and thresholds.[138] In partnership with several international organizations and networks, the Stockholm Environment Institute is providing capacity-building in Cambodia, Colombia, Mongolia and Sri Lanka, using a toolkit based on a methodology to analyse interactions between SDG targets developed in-house.[139] The toolkit (the SDGs Synergies Approach) is being developed as a free online tool.[140]

Modelling tools such as iSDGs[141] (developed by the Millennium Institute), CLEWS[142] (initially developed by the Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden) and OSeMoSYS[143] (an open-source modelling system for long-run integrated assessment and energy planning) have been used to support capacity-building for government officials at the national level in many countries, among other things to build scenarios that take into account the interactions among the SDGs. Some of these capacity-building programmes are run in partnership between academia and various agencies of the United Nations, including the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.[144] The United Nations Development Programme offers a repository of information on several SDG modelling tools, which also offers online courses.[145]

In several countries, universities and governments departments, sometimes working in collaboration, have developed toolkits of electronic platforms specifically focusing on the science-policy interface (Table 3.4 above). Actions to promote collaboration and dialogue among science and policy have also included the organization of summer schools bringing together scientists, researchers, policymakers, local, national and international institutions, and others, and highlighting the role of research communities in the realization of the SDGs, for instance in France.[146] In Indonesia, SDG centres of excellence in universities support capacity for research and curriculum development to promote knowledge and innovation on the SDGs.[147]

3.4.11. Policy integration and policy coherence

Although they have a long history, policy integration and policy coherence have received increased attention since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda itself mentions that the sustainable development goals are indivisible and interdependent and need to be addressed together. The issue of policy coherence is addressed in a dedicated SDG target, "17.14: Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development". Most importantly, the SDGs provide a shared map for analysing synergies and trade-offs among different parts of the Agenda. In many countries, a significant amount of work has been done by national governments (especially planning ministries) to analyse synergies and trade-offs in the national context, conduct analyses of policy coherence, and seek increased policy integration.

Box 3.18

Improving policy coherence in Mongolia

The Government of Mongolia has initiated a government-wide review of the policy coherence of all strategies, plans and policies (567 policies in total). The objectives of the review are to abolish obsolete policy documents, and to amend policy documents not consistent with long-term goals. A methodology for the review was established with support from the Stockholm Environment Institute. The evaluation process will include participation from all ministries and public institutions involved in policymaking. As part of this process, the Government aims to train policy planners in all areas.

Source: Mongolia, "Assessing SDGs Interlinkages, Interactions, Synergies, Nexuses and Trade-offs", presentation by Ms. Doljinsuren Jambal, Director, Development Policy and Planning Department, National Development Agency at the Expert Group Meeting on Optimizing SDGs Implementation in the Framework of Integration and Policy Coherence, July 2019, 12, https://unosd.un.org/events/2019-expert-group-meeting-optimizing-sdgs-implementation-framework-integration-and-policy.

Capacity-building on policy integration and policy coherence has developed rapidly since 2015. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has produced a toolkit on policy coherence for sustainable development,[148] and is providing technical assistance to countries in this area. Capacity-building can be expected to be provided to national statistical offices in the context of the production of global SDG indicator 17.14.1, for which the United Nations Environment Programme is the custodian agency.[149]

In 2016, the OECD launched the PCSD Partnership, a multi-stakeholder platform.[150] Among other objectives, the partnership aims to build capacities to analyse policy coherence challenges, assess the effects of policies on sustainable development, and strengthen monitoring and reporting systems for policy coherence, including by supporting national efforts for reporting progress on SDG Target 17.14. The OECD and the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) ran two iterations of a free online course on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development in June and July 2020 and February and March 2021.[151]

In the context of external audits, dedicated tools to analyse policy coherence have existed for a long time. The US Government Accountability Office has a tool for analysing fragmentation, overlaps and duplication, which has been widely used.[152] The tool is available in the form of a guide. Among others, it covers the following aspects: how to define the scope of the review; how to collect information on programmes; how to collect and assess information on the potential effects of fragmentation, overlap, and duplication; and how to assess the soundness of the evaluation. The tool has been adapted by the Tribunal de Contas da União (TCU), the SAI of Brazil.

3.4.12. Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement has always been a fundamental component of sustainable development, as highlighted in Agenda 21. Capacity-building actions, including guidance documents, aim to help public sector officials to promote public engagement at the national and subnational levels for SDG implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Several tools are available to public sector agencies to enhance their capacity to engage with non-state actors. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) have developed a guide[153] which, in addition to providing an overview of the principles and constituencies related to meaningful stakeholder engagement for the 2030 Agenda, brings concrete examples, tools and methods that can be adapted by government representatives in setting up and implementing engagement plans. Global actors have also developed a guide on engaging with parliaments and parliamentarians to promote, support and track the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[154] UNITAR has been conducting a MOOC on Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement for the Implementation and Review of the 2030 Agenda.[155] Wagenigen University's Center for Development Innovation has developed a toolkit on multi-stakeholder partnerships.[156]

At the regional level, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has offered a number of trainings to help countries in the Asia-Pacific region implement engagement processes that support effective delivery on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.[157] The Stakeholder Engagement Planning and Assessment Tool helps define the dimensions of meaningful stakeholder engagement for the 2030 Agenda, provides indicators of meaningful stakeholder engagement, and an assessment guide. In collaboration with UNU-IAS, ESCAP has also developed guidelines for multi-stakeholder partnerships.[158] At the national level, guidelines on building multi-stakeholder partnerships for SDG implementation were published by the ministry of Planning / Bappenas in Indonesia (see Box 3.19).

Box 3.19

Indonesia: Guidelines for multi-stakeholder partnerships

The guidelines, published by the ministry of Planning / Bappenas, aim to provide accessible guidance to all stakeholders, provide a dynamic resource that will inspire stakeholders to build new partnerships and further develop existing partnerships, and support capacity-building for realizing the SDGs at all levels.

The guidelines introduce the importance of developing multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) as a strategy and action tool to achieve the SDGs. They outline key opportunities, challenges, and the enabling environment for building MSPs in Indonesia. They introduce guiding principles for building MSPs and five stages of partnerships. Each module is broken down into detailed tasks and provides corresponding principles, strategic questions, tips for success, and supporting tools.

Source: https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:7354/Panduan_Kemitraan_Multipihak_24_Februari_2019_-_Versi_Cetak.pdf.

Despite the existence of numerous toolkits and guidance on stakeholder engagement for the 2030 Agenda, research conducted for this report did not provide evidence in terms of uptake by different actors. The results of capacity-building actions in this regard are also not known.

3.5. General findings from the research

This section highlights key insights from the desk research conducted for the report on capacity-building for SDG implementation targeting public servants.

3.5.1. The limits of public sources for assessing capacity-building efforts and results

In general, the voluntary national review (VNR) reports, a prime source of information on the efforts of governments to implement the SDGs in general, devote relatively little space to describing capacity-building efforts for SDG implementation. Beyond describing capacity-building activities occurring under different goal areas, text on capacity-building in VNR reports tends to focus on thematic areas that are mentioned in the 2030 Agenda, such as domestication and localization of the SDGs, activities to support the production of SDG indicators, both international and national, and the strengthening of national statistical systems. Countries also often provide information on awareness-raising and capacity-building activities undertaken in the context of the preparation of their VNRs. The description of capacity-building initiatives in VNR reports is often piecemeal. The majority of activities reported are workshops, conferences and other meetings, mostly focused on awareness-raising on the SDGs. It is often difficult to assess the scale of capacity-building activities, their recipients, and their results.

A number of factors may explain this limited coverage, including: competition from other topics to feature in the reports; the fact that the initial voluntary guidelines for VNR reports were not very specific about how to reflect capacity-building for SDG implementation; lack of clarity on what capacity-building for SDG implementation covers; and the difficulty of assembling scattered information from a large number of capacity-building providers serving different audiences (see section 3.3).

The same limitation is also present in other publicly available government documents. In general, reporting to the public on capacity-building activities for SDG implementation taking place within central government does not seem to be a priority for governments. With some exceptions, central governments tend to highlight capacity-building activities done for the benefit of other actors, including local governments and civil society or, in the case of developed countries, recipients of development assistance, than activities targeting central government staff. Activities tend to be described in general terms, for instance, awareness-raising. Target audiences and recipients are not always clearly identified.

By contrast, some non-governmental actors and international organizations tend to give more public visibility to their capacity-building activities on SDG implementation. However, even for these providers, information on the reach and impacts of the capacity-building programmes is hard to find in public sources.

The scarcity of public information in relation to the scale, impacts and effectiveness of capacity-building activities is even greater. Information on resources spent by various actors for capacity-building for SDG implementation in public administration is not readily available. It is therefore impossible to have a consolidated view of the resources devoted to this at the country level.[159] Similarly, the research done for this report

found hardly any evidence that the efforts to enhance the capacity of civil servants, parliamentarians, and staff from other public institutions are evaluated.[160]

Hence, publicly available information does not easily allow for a consolidated picture of ongoing efforts at the level of individual countries. Doing so in the future would suppose aggregating information from internal documents from a large number of providers, something for which no clear mandate or lead actors seems to exist. Competition among the organizations delivering capacity-building does not encourage the sharing of information in this regard.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, capacity-development efforts have been impacted in different ways (see Box 3.20). One clear trend has been the shift to online channels for administering training and other activities. This is reflected in responses provided by international organizations that contributed to the report. Beyond this, however, little is known about the acceptance and embrace of distance learning practices by recipients of capacity-building activities in public administration, or about the changes in learning outcomes that may have occurred because of the shift to online activities. It would be important for governments to measure such changes, especially as the transition to digital channels observed since the beginning of the pandemic may have only accelerated a trend supported by increased digitalization in both developed and developing countries. While digitalization clearly opens new possibilities for building the capacity of public servants, for instance through the use of online regional or global training programmes and asynchronous learning, it also may have limits in terms of transferability of skills, social and institutional networking, and other important elements of capacity-building as traditionally understood.

Box 3.20

Impact of COVID-19 on capacity-building in the public sector

International organizations that provided inputs to the report noted that the pandemic has posed challenges to the delivery of capacity-building at the systemic, institutional, and individual levels.

At the systemic level, funding shortages due to the reallocation of resources to priority activities in the response to COVID-19 may have caused the curtailing of training activities. The pandemic has also affected capacity-building delivering modalities – e.g. through the increase of online instead of in-person training due to travel restrictions. Although not measured, it may have had an impact on the quality of capacity-building actions - i.e. due to a reduction of experiential training, or lower government attention to longer-term capacity-development efforts.

At the institutional level, a decrease in the number of trainers may have affected the continuity of capacity-building initiatives. Low funding levels, lack of adequate digital tools and networks as well as a weak capacity to develop effective training in online formats may have constrained the delivery of remotely accessible capacity-building programmes.

At the individual level, the need to take swift actions on multiple emergencies resulting from the pandemic may have considerably reduced the time that public servants were able to devote to learning activities. Also, low connectivity – particularly in remote areas at the local government level – and low levels of technological literacy may have reduced the effectiveness of online capacity-development.

The pandemic has also created some opportunities for further digitalization and greater innovation within public administrations to harness the potential of information and communications technology (ICT) to promote online collaboration and the sharing of learnings and good practices. In countries with robust digital infrastructure, the use of ICT may have helped increase the reach of capacity-building programmes by mobilizing large numbers of trainees in one single action, while allowing officials unavailable at the time of the training to access recordings at a later stage.

To seize these opportunities, capacity-building providers need to be nimble and able to rapidly adjust delivery approaches. The training content needs to be adapted to digital delivery, by distilling action-oriented and concise messages targeted to the learning context and audience. Emerging online training fatigue was mentioned as a concern, which may further require an innovative capacity to develop more engaging online training programmes. In the longer term, investments in ICT and the development of strategies to strengthen digital policies and the technical capabilities of public institutions and public servants are needed to fully leverage the potential of digitalization.

Sources: Inputs from various international organizations to the report.

3.5.2. A blooming but fragmented landscape

Research undertaken for this report unearthed a large number of capacity-building initiatives targeting national public institutions (see section 3.4). The volume of capacity-building activities delivered and material produced have increased significantly over time. Overall, the impression is one of proliferation. The number of initiatives found through desk research in some countries suggests that the landscape is very fragmented, with different activities targeting different ministries, agencies and public institutions, with little if any coordination among them. It may be the case that in some countries, no one actor has a comprehensive view of the range of activities implemented at a given point in time (see Box 3.21).

Fragmentation can lead to duplication of efforts and capacity-building materials. For instance, manuals in English language to conduct voluntary local reviews (VLRs) have been published by several organizations. To a degree, this may not be a cause for concern. International organizations active in a given sector usually produce their own training and capacity-building materials, even though similar products may already exist. Products with similar titles may target different audiences (in this case, cities from developed or developing countries, operating under different systems of decentralization), have

different levels of complexity and be tailored to different levels of ambition. The existence of different products aiming to serve the same niche can provide variety to users and allow them to pick the products that fit their needs best. Yet, the information that would enable users (in this case, national public institutions) to choose among them does not exist. There may be a role there for some of the organizations and alliances that are already collecting and providing repositories for capacity-building material.

Available data seems to suggest that, at least in the initial years following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, capacity-building efforts were largely driven by the supply side. International organizations started to provide capacity-building very early, both in specific goal areas and in relation to cross-cutting principles of the Agenda, including SDG domestication, integration of the SDGs into national strategies and planning documents, policy integration and policy coherence, and SDG indicators. The importance given to early capacity-building efforts may have in part been a lesson learned from the MDGs, whose appropriation by national and international actors took several years, and the desire to start early in moving SDG implementation down to the country level. However, it is also clear that some capacity-building initiatives were spurred by the framework provided by the 2030 Agenda itself. By identifying priority areas for strengthening national capacities

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Box 3.21

SDG-related capacity-building activities for public administration in Mongolia

In spite of its limited scope, research done for this report identified a large number of training and capacity-building activities directed at public institutions in Mongolia since 2015 in relation to SDG implementation.

Awareness-raising, capacity-building and technical assistance were provided by the national government, United Nations entities such as UNDP, UNDESA, and UNESCO, the Asian Development Bank, bilateral development agencies, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Recipients of training and capacity-building activities have included the National Development Agency, ministries and government Departments, the National statistical Office, local governors' offices, and Parliament. Formats varied and included workshops, seminars, consultations among ministries and agencies, and longer-term technical assistance.

Topics covered a wide range, including: capacity needs assessments for SDG implementation, accelerating SDG implementation; how to implement Mongolia's roadmap to reach the SDGs; policy alignment with the country's Vision 2030 strategy; coordination among sectoral policies; economy-wide modeling tools; inter-agency coordination; SDG monitoring and indicators, including indicators for SDG 4; indicators for Mongolia's green development agenda; and policy review and evaluation.

This wide range of activities, in addition to many others that focus on areas connected to the SDGs such as green economy or climate change, seems to suggest that international organizations that support such activities may not actively coordinate their efforts. It also raises the issue of whether the government is in a position to holistically assess the impact of capacity-building activities on the capacity of the public servants to implement the SDGs.

Source: Authors, based on desk research.

(see Box 3.1 above), the Agenda and the Goals provided a clear direction and empowered all actors, but especially international actors, to move ahead quickly. The inclusive process of elaboration of the Agenda also was conducive to appropriation by all actors, including for capacity-building. Nowhere is this more visible than for the follow-up and review of the Agenda itself. By describing expected areas of work at different levels in this regard, the Agenda enabled a quick start of activities geared to strengthening national capacities to monitor the SDGs, assess progress in a comprehensive way, and report (see chapters 1 and 2).

In general, the extent to which capacity-building efforts are now more driven by country capacity needs and gaps is not clear, as comprehensive, government-wide capacity needs assessments have remained infrequent. The proliferation of initiatives and products suggests that many initiatives are in fact ad hoc, emerging based on national circumstances rather than resulting from strategic coordination, either among international actors or among national actors.

To some extent, the breadth of scope of the 2030 Agenda and the number of actors operating in this field make fragmentation hard to avoid. Yet, from the point of view of individual countries, it would be better if more visibility were provided on the offer that exists. Beyond this, of particular concern given the lessons of capacity-development efforts in past decades is the lack of information on what levels are targeted by ongoing initiatives, from that of institutions and systems, to that of individual staff and infrastructure, to skills and tools; and how successful approaches to promote change at those different levels are.

3.5.3. Untapped potential for cross-fertilization of capacity-building initiatives?

As capacity-building material keeps emerging from around the world, products initially developed in one country or by individual organizations have started to be disseminated, translated and adapted to other countries. Prominent examples of such diffusion of capacity-building material include: general material for SDG awareness-raising, such as the SDG icons, which have been translated into many national and vernacular languages and used on a variety of supports; basic SDG brochures; and guidelines produced by international networks and translated in different languages (see Table 3.5). On a similar note, issue-based international networks, such as Local 2030 (local2030.org), which focuses on SDG localization, have constituted repositories of guidelines, training material, reports and studies relevant to capacity-building, and country examples, which provide very useful points of departure for capacity-building efforts at the national level.

This diffusion reflects the reality that, notwithstanding national differences in the capacity of national institutions to implement the SDGs, the needs in relation to specific institutions (for instance, parliaments) and functions of government (for example, planning, monitoring) share many commonalities across countries.

There seems to be an untapped potential for cross-country sharing and fertilization in this regard. Providing more resources for the translation and adaptation of existing material, rather than privileging the development of new products, could in some cases provide efficient and effective solutions to addressing capacity gaps at the country level.

Table 3.5

Examples of awareness-raising and capacity-building products adapted to different countries

Product	Adapted to	URL
SDG icons	Many countries, translated into vernacular languages	https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/
SDG mandala	Originally produced in Brazil. Translated into French, Spanish, English.	https://www.learning.uclg.org/file/themandalatoolpdf
IPU/UNDP self-assessment toolkit on SDGs for parliaments	Exists in 13 languages	https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/toolkits/2017-01/parliaments-and-sustainable-development-goals-self-assessment-toolkit
UCLG SDG localization modules	Translated into 13 languages	https://www.learning.uclg.org/sdg-learning-modules

Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.6. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter attempts to describe the landscape of capacity-building activities for SDG implementation directed at national public administration that have taken place since 2015. The relative scarcity of publicly available information makes this a difficult task. Reporting on capacity-building activities that take place in public administration has not been a consistently high priority of governments in comparison with other activities, both in voluntary national reviews presented by UN Member States at the global level, and at the national level as seen in national policy documents. Areas identified in the 2030 Agenda as needing capacity-building and support by the international community, such as the localization of the SDGs, the strengthening of national statistical systems, SDG indicators, and policy integration, have received high attention from both national and international actors. As a result, related capacity-building activities have high visibility in public documents. This does not mean that other areas do not receive attention, but that reporting on them is seen as less relevant or less urgent. As a result, the picture that emerges from the research done for this report is that of an unevenly lit landscape, and should be seen at best as an approximation. Given the importance of securing adequate skills and capacity in public administration for implementing the 2030 Agenda, strengthening the tracking and reporting of related activities in all parts of public administration would be highly relevant.

In spite of these limitations, the data collected for this report highlights some lessons and supports some recommen-ations.

On the one hand, actors at all levels seem to concur on the critical importance of strengthening capacities in public institutions for implementing the SDGs. There is clear evidence that capacity-building activities for SDG implementation targeted at national public institutions started very early after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, and have been sustained since. Capacity-building tools and training material have accumulated, produced by a wide range of actors using different formats, supports and dissemination channels, all contributing to building a comprehensive offer which national public institutions can often readily access.

On the other hand, the landscape of capacity-building initiatives appears as fragmented, with little obvious coordination among actors delivering them. To some extent, the breadth of scope of the 2030 Agenda and the number of actors operating in this field make fragmentation hard to avoid. Yet, from the point of view of individual countries, it would be better if more visibility were provided on the offer that exists; it would also be important to know the extent to which the sum of capacity-building efforts made since 2015 by all actors involved have filled initial capacity gaps, and what capacity needs remain.

As mentioned above, there is paucity of information in relation to the scale, resource used, impacts and effectiveness of capacity-building activities directed at public servants. Yet, this would be critical in order to assess the adequacy and relevance of capacity-building efforts, all the more as those appear extremely fragmented. In other words, five years after the start of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the question of the adequacy of capacity-building efforts to support governments in implementing the SDGs remains open, and more efforts would be needed to answer it.

Based on the findings of the chapter, the following recommendations can be made.

1. Countries could be encouraged to conduct regular, government-wide capacity needs and gaps assessments in relation to SDG implementation by public institutions, with support from the international community as appropriate. Such assessments should ideally become part of national SDG follow-up and review processes. They should encompass all branches of government, include the subnational level and all levels of staff in public administration.

2. Governments, in collaboration with international organizations and other national actors, could be encouraged to collect information in a systematic way on their capacity-building efforts in relation to SDG implementation (including monitoring and evaluation) by public institutions at all levels. Efforts in this regard should aim to consolidate existing sectoral information, as well as information coming from all relevant providers of capacity-building. At the minimum, information should be collected on the resources devoted to training and capacity-building; the thematic areas where capacity-building and training are provided; the number, gender and level of recipients; measures of learning and other relevant outcomes; and the continuity of capacity-building efforts over time.

3. Governments could be encouraged to conduct evaluations of the adequacy and effectiveness of their capacity-building efforts for SDG implementation, monitoring and evaluation, at different levels of government. Such evaluations could be conducted or supported by specialized institutions with experience in this regard.

4. Governments could consider making information on capacity-building activities in relation to SDG implementation more accessible within and outside government, as such information could benefit all parts of government through reuse and adaptation of training and capacity-building material, as well as benefit the variety of non-governmental actors involved in the design and delivery of capacity-building products and support synergies among them.

5. Voluntary national reviews are high-profile vehicles to communicate capacity-building assessments and needs. Countries could consider making greater use of the VNRs for this purpose. In order to promote more detailed reporting of national capacity-building efforts for SDG implementation, the UN Secretary-General's voluntary guidelines for the voluntary national reviews could be adapted and provide more detailed suggestions in this regard.

6. The United Nations system could build and maintain a mapping of capacity-building activities related to SDG implementation undertaken by different parts of the system at the country level, with a view to identifying gaps, synergies, and potential duplications and overlaps. Such mapping may be best conducted based on a common template.

7. International organizations operating in the same fields (for instance, policy integration) could consider ways to promote synergies and coherence in their capacity-building interventions at the country level. Where they do not exist, collaborative efforts could aim to establish repositories of capacity-building and training materials, and to provide information that enables users to choose the approaches and tools that fit their needs best. In areas where a large amount of material exists, more resources could be allocated to adapting and translating existing materials in different languages, in order to promote cross-fertilization and enhance the efficiency of capacity-building efforts.

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CHAPTER 4

THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter examines how the pandemic and the responses of governments to it have impacted the capacity of national institutional systems to support the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused shocks on national societies and economies of a magnitude unprecedented since the last World War. The pandemic has put stress on multiple parts of national socio-economic systems at once. As a result, societies across the world face challenges on multiple levels,

each of which is unfolding simultaneously but at different speeds: a public health emergency; an economic crisis; and the social and political impacts of the pandemic.[1]

As has now been abundantly documented, the crisis has negatively impacted progress on most, if not all, SDGs.[2] It has deeply affected governance arrangements at all levels, as reflected in SDG 16, "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". As shown in Table 4.1, the pandemic and responses put in place by governments have impacted most of the targets of SDG 16.

Table 4.1

Examples of impacts of the pandemic on targets of Sustainable Development Goal 16

SDG 16 targets	Examples of COVID-19 impact
16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	There has been reporting of increased of violence against women, and particularly domestic violence, in several countries during the pandemic. Gender-based violence has increased. Limited access to or disruptions of health care, police, justice, social services and other services make reporting of incidents of violence more difficult, and compromise survivors' access to support services.[a]
16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children	There has been an increase in children's vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse. In some contexts, economic hardship has led to increased child labour and trafficking.[b] The sustained disruption of education could also cause a rise in child labour and child marriage.[c]
16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	Response measures adopted by governments have disrupted the administration of justice, access to legal remedies and (formal or informal) dispute resolution mechanisms.[d] In many countries, emergency measures taken to respond to the pandemic have resulted in the suspension of individual liberties.[e] The adoption of emergency laws poses risks of long-term negative consequences for human rights.[f]
16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime	The fight against illicit arm flows could be hampered if resources are diverted to address the pandemic.[g] In some contexts, organized criminal groups have thrived during the pandemic. They can compromise the distribution of goods and services to vulnerable communities and engage in money laundering.[h]
16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	Health systems have proven vulnerable to COVID-19-related corruption.[i] Emergency measures focused on the health response and on longer-term economic recovery (e.g. economic stimulus packages) may create opportunities for integrity violations in the allocation and use of public resources, including in public procurement.[j]
16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	The pandemic disrupts the functioning of governments, law enforcement, and the provision of basic services. Challenges to the regular conduct of business of institutions potentially undermines legislative oversight and law-making, limits judicial enforcement and affects citizens' access to justice.[k] Lack of transparency on public policies in response to the crisis and about data being shared and used for the public good can decrease public trust.[l]
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	The pandemic has challenged the conduct of business of representative institutions, especially parliaments. In many countries, innovative solutions have been found to allow parliaments to resume business using digital tools. There have been calls for preserving the civic and democratic space during the pandemic[m] and to ensure women's leadership and participation in response plans.[n] Community-based organizations and networks need to be empowered and connected into community-led response systems.[o]

Table 4.1 *(continued)*

Examples of impacts of the pandemic on targets of Sustainable Development Goal 16

SDG 16 targets	Examples of COVID-19 impact
16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance	The impact of COVID-19 on this target is unknown.
16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration	The impact of COVID-19 on this target is unknown. Efforts to generalize legal identity where it is not yet universal may have been scaled back due to reallocation of resources due to the pandemic.[p]
16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Restrictions or suspensions of the right of access to information were noted during the pandemic. In some countries, government institutions and civil society organizations have successfully fought those limitations.[q] During the pandemic, governments have been providing information on their national portals, mobile apps or through social media platforms.[r]
16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime	The impact of COVID-19 on this target is unknown.
16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development	The COVID-19 outbreak has provoked social stigma and discriminatory behaviours against "people of certain ethnic backgrounds as well as anyone perceived to have been in contact with the virus".[s] Excessive use of force by law enforcement to enforce emergency and other measures has often fallen disproportionately on minority and low income groups, marginalized communities, and homeless populations.[t]

Sources: Authors' elaboration.

[a] Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality, *Compendium on Integrating Gender Considerations in the Response to COVID-19: Key Messages and Actions from UN Entities*, 35, 55.

[b] Biraj Swain, "Children Will Be More Vulnerable to Trafficking After COVID-19", The Wire, April 13, 2020, https://thewire.in/rights/child-rights-trafficking-covid-19; and National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Child Sex and Labor Trafficking", 2020, https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/the_impact_of_covid-19_on_child_sex_and_labor_trafficking.pdf.

[c] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19* (New York, March 2020), 9.

[d] International Development Law Organization, "A Rule of Law Based Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic", statement by Jan Beagle, 27 March 2020, 3.

[e] Aránzazu Guillán Montero and David le Blanc, *Resilient Institutions in Times of Crisis: Transparency, Accountability and Participation at the National Level Key to Effective Response to COVID-19*, UNDESA Policy Brief 74 (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, May 2020), https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-74-resilient-institutions-in-times-of-crisis-transparency-accountability-and-participation-at-the-national-level-key-to-effective-response-to-covid-19/.

[f] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, 11.

[g] United Nations, "Spread of 1 Billion Small Arms, Light Weapons Remains Major Threat Worldwide, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Tells Security Council", February 5, 2020, https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14098.doc.htm.

[h] Vanda Felbab-Brown and Ariel Fernando Ávila Martínez, "COVID-19 and Organized Crime: Latin American Governments Are in a State-Making Competition with Crime." Brookings (blog), May 12, 2020. https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/covid-19-and-organized-crime-latin-american-governments-are-in-a-state-making-competition-with-crime/.

[i] Felbab-Brown and Ávila Martínez, "COVID-19 and Organized Crime: Latin American Governments Are in a State-Making Competition with Crime."

[j] Guillán Montero and Le Blanc, *Resilient Institutions in Times of Crisis: Transparency, Accountability and Participation at the National Level Key to Effective Response to COVID-19*.

[k] Guillán Montero and Le Blanc, *Resilient Institutions in Times of Crisis: Transparency, Accountability and Participation at the National Level Key to Effective Response to COVID-19*.

[l] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity*, 6.

[m] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity*, 18.

[n] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity*, 17.

[o] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19* (New York, April 2020), 30, https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-framework-immediate-socio-economic-response-covid-19.

[p] https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/COVID-19/.

[q] Guillán Montero and Le Blanc, *Resilient Institutions in Times of Crisis: Transparency, Accountability and Participation at the National Level Key to Effective Response to COVID-19*.

[r] For April: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), *COVID-19: Embracing digital government during the pandemic and beyond*, DESA Policy Brief 62 (New York, April 2020). For November: UNDESA, *Compendium of Digital Government Initiatives in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic* (New York, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, November 2020), 1.

[s] World Health Organization, *A guide to preventing and addressing social stigma associated with COVID-19*, (Geneva, February 2020), https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/a-guide-to-preventing-and-addressing-social-stigma-associated-with-covid-19?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIyfDFtaag6gIVx9SzCh2R2QRqEAAYASAAEgLTJfD_BwE.

[t] https://worldjusticeproject.org/world-justice-challenge-2021/fundamental-rights-and-non-discrimination.

In order to examine how the pandemic has affected the capacity of national institutions to support and foster the delivery of the SDGs, this chapter distinguishes two levels.

The first level is that of the SDGs as a programme of action, which national governments have to steer. The pandemic has directly impacted the ability of national institutions to do so, through a variety of channels, which include: the risk of a loss of political salience of the SDGs, in the context of urgent priorities to fight the pandemic and manage its aftermath; the risk of decreased resources available to countries to implement the Goals and fund the institutional mechanisms put in place for their implementation; negative impacts of the crisis on the capacity of governments to coordinate and monitor SDG implementation; and risks of lack of alignment between the recovery packages put in place by countries and long-term actions to support the SDGs.

The second level is that of broader institutional systems. At all times, national institutions are a key enabler of governments' and other stakeholders' actions to foster progress on all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Institutions mediate the actions of governments and other stakeholders in a number of ways, including four that are particularly important in the context of the pandemic.

First, the quality of public institutions critically matters for the delivery of individual goals – for instance, health and education. Important criteria in this regard, among others, are adequate resources; committed leadership; and the competence, motivation and integrity of public servants. As importantly, cross-cutting dimensions of government action such as crisis preparedness, science-policy interfaces, communication, and the use of digital government, are important determinants of governments' capacity to manage crises.

Second, the capacity of national institutions to foster policy integration is critical to setting visions, strategies and plans that align with the 2030 Agenda, devising and implementing coherent policies, and allocating resources accordingly. Institutional arrangements for horizontal integration, for vertical integration and for engagement with non-state actors are critical to the delivery of the SDGs.

Third, the capacity of institutional systems to promote accountability, efficient and effective public spending and limit corruption, impacts the delivery of actions in support of the SDGs in a positive or negative way, depending on the context.

Fourth, at a broader level, the way institutions are set up and operate in practice influence the trust that people place in them and their ability to promote transformation at the societal level (for example, through changing social norms or fostering whole-of-society approaches), which is necessary to achieve the SDGs.

The pandemic and the responses adopted by governments have affected national institutions in all those dimensions. The pandemic has created major disruptions to the functioning of governments as a whole and of specific public functions, including policymaking, the provision of basic services, law enforcement and the justice system. It has severely tested the resources of institutions in individual sectors. Restrictions and social distancing measures have challenged the working methods and processes of institutions such as parliaments or courts, where face-to-face meetings are required, creating obstacles for the regular conduct of business and therefore, potentially undermining legislative oversight and law-making, limiting judicial enforcement or affecting citizens' access to justice, among other consequences.[3] Restrictions taken in response to COVID-19 have also negatively affected the possibilities for public institutions to engage with civil society, at least in the short run.

The capacity of public institutions to promote policy integration in all its dimensions has also been put to the test during the pandemic. Horizontal integration – the capacity of government departments to work together – has emerged as a critical requirement in the context of the pandemic. Vertical integration has been a key challenge in developments observed thus far, in all regions of the world. Engagement with non-state actors, another key dimension of policy integration, has also been put to the test.

As governments started to implement responses to the crisis, it has become clear that emergency responses as well as measures adopted by governments to limit the economic and social impacts of the pandemic, such as stimulus packages, can increase risks to accountability and integrity, including through greater opportunities for fraud and corruption.

Finally, in the context of the pandemic, some governments have effected broader, structural changes in the political and institutional systems (such as the adoption of emergency laws that allow to rule by decree, and the suspension of individual liberties), which, depending on how they further evolve, may have longer-term negative consequences for public institutions and human rights, particularly those of marginalized groups. In many countries, the pre-pandemic balance of powers among institutions may be durably altered, with consequences for the relations between states and their citizens, and the capacity of societies to set for themselves and pathways to achieving the SDGs.

The remainder of this chapter is built as follows. Section 4.2 examines some of the impacts of the pandemic on the SDGs seen as a programme of action. Sections 4.3 to 4.6 review four channels through which the delivery of the SDGs could be impacted: the quality of selected cross-cutting institutional mechanisms; the capacity of governments in terms of policy integration; national accountability systems; and the potential for and capacity of public institutions to promote societal change. Section 4.7 concludes.

4.2. Impacts of the pandemic on the SDGs as a programme of action

In September 2015, United Nations Member States committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. The initial years of the SDGs witnessed strong political impetus and ownership of the Agenda and SDGs at all levels. The massive shock created by the pandemic has however created a range of risks to the Agenda. These risks have become more apparent as the pandemic lingered beyond its initial outbreak. This section briefly reviews some of those risks.

4.2.1. Risks of loss of political salience of the SDGs

Not even six months after the start of the pandemic, fierce debates were occurring in the public sphere about the relevance of the SDGs as a global framework for action. The debate has been most vocal in academia. For instance, a series of articles by prominent experts in the journal Nature exposed three broad perspectives on what to do with the SDGs: Should countries and the international community double down on them? Should the goals be adjusted to reflect the new post-pandemic context? Or should countries focus on a more limited set of priorities?[4] The debate responded to the realization that most of the SDGs already were not on track before the pandemic,[5] and had been further negatively impacted by it – including poverty, access to food and nutrition, health, education, and economic growth.[6]

From the beginning, the official position of the United Nations has been that the Sustainable Development Goals provide the best possible framework to responding to the crisis and rebuilding post pandemic.[7] In fact, it has been pointed that had progress on the SDGs been more advanced, the negative impacts of the crisis would have been less acute.[8]

The fact that such debate is taking place illustrates the difficulty of sustaining commitment and attention of governments and the international community to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in the face of extraordinary pressures created by the pandemic. Many governments face competing demands on their resources and equally compelling reasons to prioritize among them.

4.2.2. Impact of the pandemic on government capacity to manage and monitor the SDGs

The pandemic has negatively impacted the capacity of governments to implement and monitor the SDGs. For instance, social distancing measures may have slowed the functioning of institutions dedicated to SDG implementation, such as National Sustainable Development Councils. The resources available to those institutions may also have decreased during the pandemic.

Most of the countries presenting voluntary national reviews (VNRs) at the United Nations high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) in July 2020 referred to the impacts of the pandemic on various goals and targets, as well as to efforts made by governments to respond to the pandemic.[9] However, the impacts of the pandemic on SDG-related institutions is not the main focus of those reports.

One aspect on which data is available concerns the impact of the pandemic on National Statistical Offices (NSOs), which play a key role in SDG monitoring (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1

Impacts of the pandemic on National Statistical Offices

By August 2020, it was clear that the crisis was disrupting routine operations throughout global statistical and data systems. A survey conducted by the United Nations and the World Bank showed that 96 per cent of National Statistical Offices had partially or fully stopped face-to-face data collection. Nine in ten national statistical offices in low – and lower-middle-income countries had experienced difficulties because of funding constraints, with more than half having had funding cuts. 61 per cent of those expressed the need for external support in addressing challenges associated with COVID-19. These challenges may have lasting effects on countries' ability to produce timely and disaggregated data for a large number of SDG indicators.

Later rounds of the survey showed that many NSOs had adapted quickly to challenges raised by COVID-19, and many of them have played a major role in governments' COVID-19 response. New partnerships have been crucial in responding to new data demands, helping NSOs introduce measures that are permanently changing the statistical production process in many countries.

Sources: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), *Impact of COVID-19 on SDG progress: a statistical perspective*, UNDESA Policy Brief 81 (New York, August 2020); and UNDESA, *COVID-19: How the data and statistical community stepped up to the new challenges*, UNDESA Policy Brief 96 (New York, March 2021).

Another aspect that was covered in VNR reports in 2020 and has also been discussed among countries preparing reviews for 2021 is the impacts of the pandemic on the VNR process itself. The majority of countries reported that COVID-19 had disrupted VNR preparations, in particular stakeholder consultations, one of the cornerstones of the VNR process. Governments have put in place innovative arrangements to mitigate the constraints caused by the pandemic. This has included, among others, relying more on virtual consultations and webinars, mobilizing existing networks in government institutions and in civil society, and open consultations where the public can provide written inputs. Governments have also reported using alternative arrangements to palliate low Internet access in remote areas, for instance interviews conducted over the phone or through local radio stations. Some countries presenting reviews in 2021 decided to undertake consultations very early in the VNR process as compared to a pre-COVID timeline. While having to rely more on digital solutions has requested changes in processes and practices from government agencies and other actors, it has also allowed institutions in charge of coordinating the VNRs to realize that they could increase their reach to multiple actors, compared to traditional solutions such as in-person workshops. In this regard, the pandemic seems to have constituted an opportunity for governments to broaden the range of outreach tools that they use in VNR preparation.[10]

4.2.3. Risk to resources needed to implement the SDGs

The pandemic has caused a shock to national economies that is unprecedented since the last World War. Declines in gross national products in 2020 have been massive, and much larger than those witnessed during the 2008 financial crisis. Negative impacts due to decreases in economic activities have translated in losses of revenues from taxes. Especially relevant to developing countries, there is a high risk that official development assistance would decrease in coming years.[11]

At the same time, governments have had to incur extraordinary expenditures in critical sectors such as health, education, public service delivery, social safety nets, and public administration. Other public services such as public transport, whose continued operation is critical in any country, have generated huge deficits due to lower use during the pandemic.[12]

To mitigate the negative impacts of partial closures of national economies, governments have resorted to extensive fiscal support measures. Governments across the world have now put in place even larger recovery packages.

These developments have translated into large increases in public debt. The international Monetary fund estimates that between 2019 and 2020, gross government debt at the global level increased from 83.7 to 97.3 per cent of GDP.[13] In a sample of 7 countries in Latin America, the stock of public debt had increased by 7.7 to 20.2 percentage points of GDP between the end of 2019 to the end of 2020.[14] Such increases have raised alarms in developed countries and even more in developing countries, where growing public debt was a concern even before the start of the pandemic.[15]

Beyond questions of financial sustainability, the massive fiscal pressures observed since the beginning of the pandemic also carry high opportunity costs, as spending today decreases the fiscal and policy space that will be available to future generations. This, by itself, could put the realization of the SDGs in peril. It is therefore of utmost importance to ensure that the recovery packages that governments are putting in place are aligned with long-term actions that support the delivery of the SDGs. Among other things, ensuring government accountability on these expenditures will be critical.

Like other crises in the past, the pandemic has seen some governments implement legal and regulatory changes that could pave the way for negative outcomes on some of the SDGs in the future. This has been observed in particular in relation to environmental regulation (see Box 4.3).

4.2.4. Drawing lessons from previous crises

In order to realistically assess the perspectives for recovery packages to support the realization of the SDGs, it may be useful to look at past crises. It is not the first time that a crisis is touted as the occasion to "hit the reset button". The financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath saw calls for green

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Box 4.2

Some impacts of the pandemic on education

COVID-19 has substantially exacerbated educational inequality, with the pandemic causing "the largest disruption of education systems in history." Its greatest impacts have been on children who already experience the highest levels of education inequality. At the peak of the first wave of the virus, 1.6 billion children and young people were out of school and university – over 90 per cent of the world's total – with a four-month school closure expected to cost learners $10 trillion in lifetime earnings. Finance is now likely to be diverted from the sector, with the World Bank predicting a "triple funding shock" as governments, households, and international donors cut expenditure.

Source: Steven and Williams, *Governance and COVID-19: A background paper for the SDG 16 Conference.*

Box 4.3

Rollback of environmental regulation during the crisis

During the pandemic, several countries have rolled back environmental regulation, paving the way for negative environmental outcomes in the future. For instance, in the USA, during the first month of the pandemic, federal agencies, among other measures, eased fuel-efficiency standards for new cars; froze rules for soot air pollution; proposed to drop review requirements for liquefied natural gas terminals; sought to speed up permitting for offshore fish farms; and advanced a proposal on mercury pollution from power plants that could make it easier for the government to conclude that regulations are too costly to justify their benefits. The government has also relaxed reporting rules for polluters during the pandemic.[a] In March 2020, the Environment Protection Agency announced that it would cease oversight of the nation's polluters during the pandemic.[b]

Sources:
[a]   https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/10/trump-environmental-blitzkrieg-coronavirus.
[b]   https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/30/public-lands-sale-trump-coronavirus-environmental-regulations.

transformation similar to those voiced today. With several years of insight, it had become clear that business as usual had largely prevailed and more was needed in order to accelerate the transformation of the global economy to support sustainable development.[16]

The 2008 financial crisis triggered only short-term stimuli. It was followed by a "decade of austerity", which saw 127 countries – home to 80 per cent of the world's population – cut public expenditure. More than a hundred countries aimed to rationalize their social protection systems in ways that ran "a high risk of excluding large segments of vulnerable populations at a time of economic crisis and hardship."[17] Social and economic exclusion, in turn, contributed to undermining political consensus. According to a multi-country study, austerity had a pronounced impact on polarization, making it harder to "build stable government coalitions and agree on sustainable policy solutions, both of which are needed to govern in times of economic insecurity."[18]

On a more positive note, in response to the East Asian crisis of 1997, the region's governments rebuilt the social contract by investing heavily in social protection systems, although groups such as informal workers remain largely excluded.[19] These policies were influential at a global level, as both governments and international organizations accepted "the urgency of finding new means of protecting populations from adverse events."[20]

What inspiration can governments and the international community draw from this not so distant past, to really make it beyond this pandemic with more resilient, effective and accountable institutions? One lesson is that shocks like the pandemic need to be approached from a resilience perspective, and considered as potentially recurring events over the long term, rather than as exceptional events that justify postponing integrated action on longstanding

challenges of sustainable development such as poverty, growing inequalities, climate change and loss of trust in public institutions.[21]

4.3. The quality of public institutions and the impacts of the pandemic

In response to the epidemic, temporary changes in rules and processes have been implemented by governments in order to protect people at risk and ensure the delivery of critical functions. Specific institutions (such as national education systems) have had to adapt their procedures in response to the crisis at the level of whole countries, within very short time frames. Beyond specific sectors, a range of cross-cutting dimensions impact governments' capacity to manage crises. Among other relevant dimensions, this section briefly considers the following: governments' preparedness for the pandemic; human resources; science-policy interfaces; communication; and digital government.

4.3.1. Crisis preparedness

As time elapses since the beginning of the pandemic, reports have increasingly underlined the lack of preparedness of governments to the pandemic (see Box 4.4).

In many developed countries, national risk assessments or similar procedures had warned that the risk of a major pandemic was high; in several countries, extensive simulations and role playing games had modelled the outbreak and spread of viruses such as the coronavirus, exploring impacts on government and options for response. Such warning were often not taken up at the political level or translated into preparations in public administration.[22] At the global level, in 2019 the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board published

Box 4.4

Government preparedness for the pandemic: conclusions from the French Senate and the United Kingdom's National Audit Office

In France, a report from the Senate published in December 2020 analysed the gaps in government preparedness for the pandemic. The report conclusions pointed to a lack of preparation of the public health system to the risk of an epidemic, which focused too exclusively on hospitals. Even so, the report concluded that hospitals were insufficiently prepared for the crisis. The report points to failures in communication with health professionals not working in hospitals. It recommended the reinforcement of strategic piloting of inter-ministerial coordination on health emergency preparedness and responses, in particular through the elaboration of a dedicated plan to increase the responsiveness of public administration to health emergencies. Finally, the report recommended to strengthen capacities for anticipation and evaluation in the main public agency involved (Santé publique France).[a]

In the United Kingdom, the National Audit Office found that pre-existing pandemic contingency planning did not include detailed plans for identifying and supporting a large population advised to shield; for employment support schemes; for financial support to local authorities, and for managing mass disruption to schooling on the scale caused by COVID-19. The report advised that more detailed planning for the key impacts of a pandemic and of other high-impact low-likelihood events can improve government's ability to respond to future emergencies, and may also bring other benefits, such as creating new relationships and improving understanding between organizations.[b]

Sources:

[a] République Française, Sénat, *Rapport fait au nom de la commission d'enquête pour l'évaluation des politiques publiques face aux grandes pandémies à la lumière de la crise sanitaire de la covid-19 et de sa gestion*, No 199, Tome 1, session ordinaire de 2020-2021 (Paris, December 2020).

[b] National Audit Office of the United Kingdom, *Initial learning from the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic* (London, May 2021), https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Initial-learning-from-the-governments-response-to-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf.

a report that exhorted national governments and the international community to ramp up and sustain their efforts to prepare for a pandemic.[23]

The lack of preparedness exacerbated the difficulty of decision-making in the initial phase of the pandemic. Some countries that were supposedly well equipped to cope with a major epidemic have experienced high levels of infection and mortality,[24] suggesting that expectations of what preparedness looked like did not match what was needed in reality.

Lessons from COVID-19 demonstrate that public health preparedness assessments did not adequately account for the governance dimensions of response and recovery at national and international levels.[25] Beyond the health impacts, decision-makers had limited research and few effective case studies to draw on when dealing with the economic consequences of such a crisis.[26]

The pandemic has made clear that many countries in Asia were better prepared to respond to such an emergency. Among other things, this has been attributed to the recent experience of the region with SARS, the willingness of populations to follow government instructions, and cultural familiarity with masks. This list illustrates the importance of social and cultural factors in societies' preparedness, going beyond technological and administrative dimensions.

4.3.2. Human resources: civil servants and the pandemic

The pandemic abruptly disrupted the regular functioning of public institutions and affected key government functions and processes, undermining the effectiveness of government action. Reductions in the public administration workforce due to the imperative to limit contagion affected the capacity of public administration at all levels to deliver its functions. Restrictions and social distancing measures challenged the working methods and processes of all public institutions and the delivery of public services. Options available to implement participatory processes were drastically limited (see Box 4.5). Specific institutions of government (such as the police or the education system) were directed to adapt their procedures in response to the crisis. Beyond individual institutions, the pandemic has affected whole institutional systems and the way public institutions interact with people.

As soon as the first initial containment measures were decided, public administrations and civil servants worldwide set to adapt, leveraging and redeploying human resources (for instance to increase manpower in the health sector), devising new ways to keep delivering public services on the ground, and adapting administrative processes to allow for speed and flexibility in those extraordinary circumstances, for example for public procurement. Public administrations also quickly put in place information systems in order to manage the sanitary and other aspects of the pandemic. They used digital tools to

Box 4.5

Initial impact of the pandemic on participatory processes: participatory planning in Ankara, Turkey

When the first news and official explanations of the pandemic appeared on the media, the Citizens Assembly of the City of Ankara was in the process of planning thematic participatory meetings. Since the activities of the assembly relating to the city's agenda and urban issues are based on face-to-face interaction and various types of meetings such as general assemblies, focus groups, and advisory bodies, announcements about stopping such meetings for an indefinite period sent a mild shock among the Assembly's stakeholders, as well as among the civil servants and municipal administrators with whom the Assembly was working closely. The sense of being stripped of ordinary collective cultural and administrative skills later mixed with the hardships of getting the job done without spreading the virus. Nevertheless, the initial anxiety in executive and managerial ranks was quickly replaced with agile organization movements, especially in healthcare and crucial logistical sectors.

Source: Amelia Compagni, Alberto Ricci and Francesco Longo, "Italy: Experiences of Multi-Level Governance with the COVID-19 Crisis", in Joyce, Maron and Reddy, Good Public Governance in a Global Pandemic, 105-107.

reach out to citizens and to mobilize the energy and resources of non-state actors to co-create solutions to issues created by the pandemic.

In many countries, public servants have been quick to adapt and re-adjust the way in which services are delivered to minimize the negative impact of the pandemic on individuals and communities. For example, in many places where medical facilities have been overwhelmed by high numbers of COVID-19 patients, online tools, such as telemedicine and telehealth, were set up or enhanced to provide non-emergency medical services. In these cases and others, public servants have demonstrated versatility in service delivery that has benefitted service users amidst challenges caused by the pandemic.[27] Many public servants put their lives at risk in order to continue serving the public throughout the pandemic. As

of September 2020, a study put the global death toll among health workers alone at more than 7,000.[28]

COVID-19 responses have seen innovation in the public service flourish. From the development of drive-thru testing sites and contact tracing apps in the Republic of Korea, to the use of robots to carry out medical tasks such as temperature taking so as to minimize contact between infected patients and healthcare workers in Rwanda, public servants have leveraged innovation and creativity, often on a shoestring budget, to come up with unique and quick responses to the crisis.[29] Due to the society-wide impacts of the pandemic, much of this mobilization and innovation occurred from within and organically, with little guidance available. Public administrators could not rely on the traditional planning and implementation cycles that guides them in usual circumstances.

Box 4.6

The pandemic changed the context in which managers in public administration operated: example from Italy

In Italy, as put by an observer, *"managers became, on the ground, policymakers and strategists, having to transform overnight the capacity mix and the competence allocation within their organizations. Decisions that usually take months (or years) of analysis and discussion with internal and external stakeholders had to be taken in a very short span of time, and directly by managers, without the possibility to wait for guidance from policymakers. This provided top management teams with a high degree of discretion and managerial autonomy…. Managers also operated in a situation of financial uncertainty […]. While normally this would have stopped them from acting, during the crisis it forced mangers to take on themselves the full responsibility of resource allocation".*

Source: Amelia Compagni, Alberto Ricci and Francesco Longo, "Italy: Experiences of Multi-Level Governance with the COVID-19 Crisis", in Joyce, Maron and Reddy, *Good Public Governance in a Global Pandemic*, 105-107.

COVID-19 has posed staffing challenges across public administrations. To support business continuity, and fluctuation and future spikes in demand for public services, governments are increasingly investing in surge capacity, as well as staff re-mapping and reassignment based on transferable skill sets in the immediate term.[30]

In general, the pandemic reinforced the legitimacy and the role of the state, at least initially. It has also, through myriad examples, highlighted the essential role played by civil servants, as well as their dedication and relevance. How the lessons from this experience can be capitalized by governments to promote innovation in the public service and promote society-wide transformation in support of the SDGs will be a critical issue in coming years (see section 4.6.4 below).

4.3.3. Science-policy interfaces

The pandemic has revealed the importance of well-functioning interface mechanisms between science and policymaking, what are commonly known as "science-policy interfaces". It has also revealed limitations of existing science-policy interfaces in relation to the government's management of the pandemic.

The extent to which policymaking is shaped by scientific evidence and by technological possibilities varies across governments and societies, and can be limited. There is also a wide variety of national science advisory systems across the world, including in times of national emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which can trigger the installation of ad hoc, dedicated advisory mechanisms.[31] The remit and powers conferred to science advisory panels also varies significantly across countries, as does their institutional setting and practical organization.[32]

In the context of the pandemic, science-policy interfaces have received uncommon exposure to the public eye, due to the evident material impacts of decisions related to the control of the pandemic such as lockdowns but also to the rapid changes in health, economic and social conditions, which have implied continuous operation of these mechanisms and frequent advice and reports.[33] Academia has also commented on the adequacy and relevance of existing science-policy interface mechanisms, almost in real time.[34]

Science advisory mechanisms have played a range of roles that have benefited the government and the public during the pandemic, from the analysis in real time of the accumulating scientific evidence on the coronavirus and its effects, to the production of scenarios for the spread of the pandemic under different responses, to recommendations on health policies and pandemic management such as lockdowns, to directly informing the public through reports or daily briefings. At the same time, public controversies and perceived government failures on effective health care protocols, tracing and testing policies, on closing or re-opening economies, have illustrated the limits facing science-policy interfaces, as well as the learning

curve for scientists due to the virus being novel. As put by an academic editorial early in the developments of the pandemic, *"That so many advanced countries with highly capable science advisory ecosystems had failures and were unable to act wisely and early is astounding. This outcome is especially surprising since the worldwide public health community was very much aware of the threat of pandemics coming from experience with 2003 SARS, MERS, Ebola, Avian Flu, and knowledge of pandemics throughout history"*.[35]

At a first level, the pandemic has been an occasion for calls for data-driven decision-making, for "following the science", and for strengthening science-policy interfaces – in the area of health risks but not only. However, as the crisis unfolded, it has become clear that governments cannot just "follow the science". Decisions that have to be made during the pandemic involve significant chances and trade-offs, and therefore are eminently political. Commentators have pointed to the behavior of governments that legitimize their courses of actions by referring to the recommendations of advisory panels when they support their own choices, but disregard those recommendations when not politically expedient.[36] In the same vein, as already mentioned, in many countries existing science advisory mechanisms had pointed to the risks linked to a pandemic, without their recommendations being implemented by governments.

On another level, the scrutiny of existing science advisory mechanisms in different countries has led to comments on their legitimacy and adequacy, and pointed to potential improvements for the future.[37] Some of the scientific panels were criticized for featuring experts from a limited range of disciplines, whereas the cross-cutting impacts of the pandemic and the corresponding trade-offs warrant a broad range of expertise. Others were criticized for their lack of independence from the governments, or their limited remit. In several countries, lack of transparency of the government on the science advice they received has also been a source of concerns.[38]

4.3.4. Communication

Communication has proven critical during the crisis, not the least as a key mediator of trust between governments and citizens. For citizens to trust institutional responses to the COVID-19 crisis, they must know what governments are doing and have access to reliable information, including: the facts about the virus; the main figures in relation to the propagation of the epidemic and its impacts, and the public policies in response to the crisis as well as the assumptions and scenarios on which they are based.[39]

During the pandemic, most governments have been providing information on their national portals, mobile apps or through social media platforms. According to global surveys done by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

86 per cent of government portals had COVID-19 information in April 2020, and 97 per cent did so in November 2020.[40]

Governments have put in place direct communication channels dedicated to the COVID-19 situation. In the Republic of Korea, for example, the government provided two daily briefings to explain the evolution of the epidemic and government's responses.[41] In that country, one of the lessons of the MERS experience was that risk communication was a determining factor. In the current crisis, political interference in risk communication has been minimized, and this seems to have contributed to enhancing public trust in government.[42] In Indonesia, the governor of the state of Central Java has used social media to communicate personally with the public during the pandemic, including delivering messages on infection rates and prevention measures.[43]

In many countries, websites are providing real-time, localized information on the evolution of the epidemic. Depending on the country, these websites can be managed by the government, academia, or civil society; many result from collaboration among different actors, including the private sector.[44] In countries like Bulgaria, Indonesia, Mongolia and South Africa, governments have developed online resource portals to enhance transparency by providing a single entry point to information and resources on COVID-19.[45]

Communication from governments to their citizens around the pandemic has not been without hiccups. Criticism of government communication efforts has pointed to the desire of governments to control the narrative about the pandemic and government response, which resulted in one-way, top-down communication that failed to reflect a plurality of perspectives. Depending on the country, this may have gone from incorrect or inconsistent messages regarding the state of preparedness of the government and recommended health measures, to frequent U-turns and incoherent communication across the government on strategy and policies. In some contexts, it has been argued that some governments were initially reluctant to communicate broadly about the risks of the pandemic during the initial months of the spread of the virus, in spite of increasing attention from the media. In some countries, Government communication was criticized for holding back information seen as crucial for local governments to effectively fight the pandemic, such as occurrence of cases broken down by regions and localities. The content and tone of government communication have also been criticized.[46]

From the beginning of the pandemic, a challenge for government and other actors has been to counter the "infodemic": incorrect and potentially damaging information on the virus and the government response to the pandemic that is disseminated widely through various media platforms and social networks. Recent months have seen a surge in misinformation and disinformation campaigns around the pandemic, hampering an effective response to COVID-19.[47]

Disinformation campaigns increasingly reach cross borders and can only be tackled through collective action.[48] Social media platforms can counter these through active flagging and removal, while also promoting accurate, validated information based on trusted sources such as the World Health Organization's (WHO) myth busters.[49] Prominent public figures have an especially important role, as their posts generate far greater social media engagement. Such efforts will continue to be urgent during recovery in both the immediate and medium term, including in dealing with attitudes against the acceptance of vaccines in many countries.

4.3.5. The promises and limits of digital government in pandemic response and recovery

The pandemic has increased demand for virtual service delivery and public sector operations, with digitalization moving from a nice-to-have to a must-have. Examples include widespread remote working, agile tools to reallocate the workforce, financial management and procurement, and streamlined and technology-enhanced people management processes such as recruitment and training.[50]

In the months following the start of the pandemic, digital government has been hailed as a key solution to addressing the pandemic. Digital applications were put in place to manage contact tracing. Digital procedures were adopted by public institutions such as parliaments to continue to function during the pandemic. Telecommuting was encouraged in the public and private sectors. Many public sector organizations around the world have digitalized services to enable them to keep functioning during lockdowns, while strengthening their internal systems to allow for teleworking. Whole education systems were abruptly shifted from in-person to remote learning.[51]

Governments, often in collaboration with non-state actors, have deployed an impressive range of digital solutions in response to the pandemic. For instance, through a call to governments in mid-2020, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs received more than 500 examples of digital initiatives set up in the context of the pandemic, covering the domains of information sharing, e-participation, e-health, e-business, contact tracing, social distancing and virus tracking, working and learning from home, digital policy, and partnerships.[52]

Beyond sector-specific, ad hoc initiatives, the pandemic spurred many governments to accelerate the push for the digitization of administrative processes and public services. It also inspired governments to use innovative methods of engagement with non-state actors, such as crowdsourcing, open calls, challenges and hackatons, in order to solve problems caused by the pandemic.[53]

However, the enthusiasm around digital government as a solution to many problems created by the pandemic has

been dampened by the realization that many barriers and constraints are at play. First, the reality of digital divides, in developing but also in developed countries, has meant that digital solutions are not equally accessible or beneficial to all in society. Lack of digital access and proficiency and the lack of an option to work remotely are correlated with poverty and other deprivation measures (see Figure 4.1 for an illustration on education). Hence, the use of digital solutions has in many cases aggravated inequalities.

Second, rapid moves to digital solutions across whole institutional systems may face capacity constraints and other barriers. For instance, the pandemic has accelerated the shift towards the use of digital technologies in education. However, the least privileged students are least likely to benefit from online learning. Remote learning has also created governance challenges for public education systems. Public sector education systems have struggled to implement these systems effectively, with "few (if any) education systems, even the most high performing … well equipped to offer online learning for all students at scale, quickly."[54] The limits of digital approaches have become important concerns, in this sector as in others.

Governments have been cognizant of these risks, and many have put in place measures to limit the negative impacts of digital solutions adopted during the pandemic on inequality. For example, a number of countries have supported the switch to online learning, through providing schools with online resources and guidance, providing computers and tablets to students, and ensuring that Internet access is available in education facilities for students who do not have easy access from their home. The government of Costa Rica is providing hard copies of learning materials to students who do not have internet access.[55]

As the pandemic is brought under control, it will be important to ensure that digitalization does exacerbate inequality by making it harder for vulnerable groups to access services. Efforts will be needed to narrow existing digital divides, including by increasing digital literacy and digital skills.[56] Other concerns, such as those relating to security and surveillance by governments and private companies, will have to be addressed.

Potential negative impacts of digitalization, however, go beyond immediate gaps in access, digital skills, and outcomes. Whole models of socialization through education and work, which are bedrocks of modern societies, have been abruptly challenged by the pandemic. The consequences in terms of domestic violence, mental health issues, and polarization of societies have started to be documented, but will only become evident over the long term.

In the longer term, it will also be crucial to address worrying trends noted before the pandemic in relation to digital government and inclusion, for example in terms of discrimination stemming from the use of artificial intelligence in various

Figure 4.1

Percentage gap in access to different study devices between the poorest and richest students in selected countries of Latin America
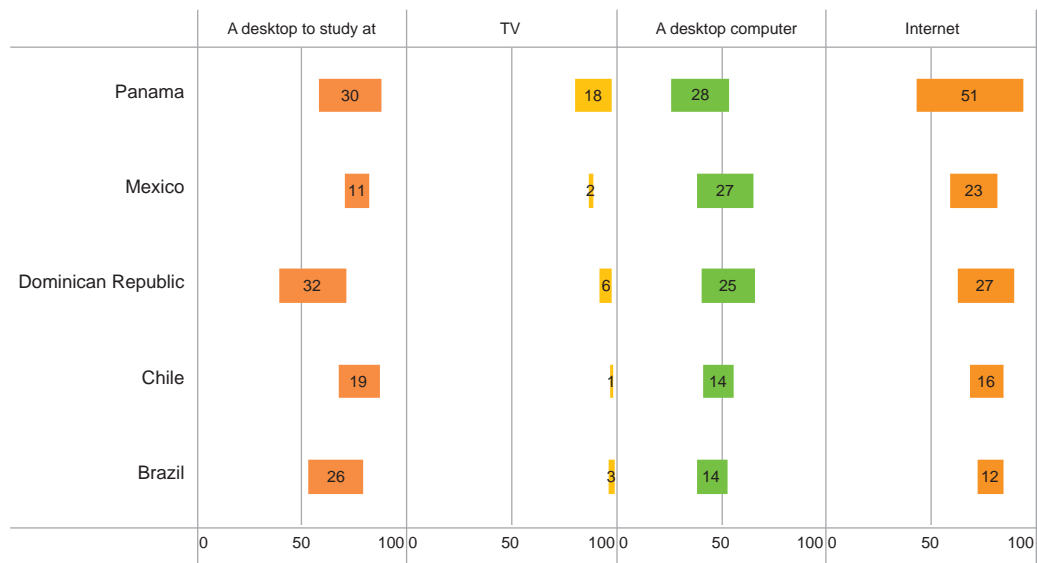
Source: Luis Felipe Lopez-Calva, "Hey teachers, (don't) leave the kids alone! Connectivity and education disparities in times of COVID19", Blog "Graph For Thought" (April 27, 2020), https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/presscenter/director-s-graph-for-thought/hey-teachers---dont--leave-the-kids-alone--connectivity-and-educ.html.

administrative and commercial systems, and as regards the "digital welfare state". The potential for such systems to infringe on human rights and stigmatize vulnerable population has been forcefully noted, for instance in reports from the United Nations Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.[57]

In a sense, because of the pandemic, the year 2020 has witnessed a social experiment on a global scale, through which a large portion of the global population has had to accommodate accelerated digitalization. Care will be needed by governments and other actors to avoid negative long-term changes that this could bring, including amplified income and class inequality and alienation of people from their families, fellow citizens and their governments. Lessons from the past decades in the areas of digital inclusion, e-participation, protection of individual rights, and e-government more generally can be useful in this regard.

4.4. The crucial importance of policy integration during and after the pandemic

Policy integration is one of the fundamental tenets of sustainable development.[58] The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have put considerations of policy integration and policy coherence on a new level, by emphasizing indivisibility and interdependence among the goals and targets. Integration is about effectively addressing tensions and trade-offs that exist across policy areas, as well as exploiting synergies among those. It can be analysed through multiple lenses. Three dimensions are particularly useful in this regard: horizontal integration, which refers to the capacity of government departments to work together; vertical integration, which refers to the consistency, coordination and collaboration of actors operating at different jurisdictional levels; and engagement of governments with non-state actors.

4.4.1. Horizontal integration

Horizontal integration – the capacity of government departments to work together – has emerged as a critical requirement in the context of the pandemic. Managing the spread of the epidemic, implementing the measures adopted to combat it and their progressive lifting requires coordinating policies and actions across policy areas as diverse as health, policing, public transport, education, economic policy, and a range of social safety nets. In addition to national governments, local governments have played critical roles in addressing the pandemic and its impacts through policy integration, by bundling sectoral policies, shifting resources between task areas and addressing the crisis from a holistic territorial perspective.[59]

By putting stress on multiple parts of national socio-economic systems at the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed new tensions and trade-offs among policy areas, and exacerbated already existing tensions. Such tensions have been observed both in developing and in developed countries, and are all the more visible in country that have suffered heavily from the pandemic. Challenges to policy integration are present at all levels of government.

In order to illustrate the challenges caused by the pandemic in terms of horizontal integration, this section focuses on three dilemmas: managing the trade-off between containing the virus and keeping economies open; limiting and counteracting the impacts of the pandemic and policy responses to it on inequality; and inter-generational equity.

Managing the trade-off between containing the virus and keeping economies open

Perhaps the biggest question facing governments in countries heavily affected by COVID-19 is that of managing the tensions between keeping the pandemic under control and keeping national economies afloat. The example of many European countries, which reopened their economies including the tourism sector after the first wave of the pandemic, has shown how difficult it is to find a balance between the two. Many countries where the diffusion of the virus was thought to be under control by June 2020 later entered second waves, in some cases more massive than the first. This, in turn, led to partial closures of economies, eventually leading to a series of cycles of closure and reopening of national economies.

Governments have managed this tension in different ways, even among countries at similar levels of development, as documented in cases studies from developed countries such as Germany, New Zealand, Australia, and Norway. Within individual countries, the tension between the two objectives has evolved over time.[60] Many have, in fact, declined to acknowledge that there is a trade-off between economy and health. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has described the idea of a tradeoff between saving lives and saving livelihoods as a "false dilemma."[61] Yet, the trade-off has been clearly perceived by people and the press alike. Governments have faced pressure from interest groups and individual citizens to keep economies open, while many have experienced intense debate within government over the pace and intensity of public health measures that limit economic activity.

Beyond finding effective means to durably control the spread of the virus, there are no easy solutions to resolving this tension. In societies that are not able to control the spread of the virus, cycles of contagion, lockdown, reopening of schools and economies, leading again to increased contagion, could be expected until large proportions of national populations are vaccinated.

Box 4.7

Managing the economy versus virus spread trade-off: the cases of Australia and New Zealand

New Zealand moved very quickly to put in place measures to protect the public from the virus entering the country as a result of international travel. In the New Zealand case, the speed of government action in terms of measures to control international travel may be seen as an indicator of the political will underpinning the priority of protecting the lives and health of New Zealanders. The toughest restrictions were later being relaxed incrementally, although external borders remained closed. In exiting the crisis, new debates have exposed tensions about the economic-health trade off and the position of people lacking social and employment support, and new uncertainties and anxieties have emerged about the possibility of a second wave and economic prospects in a recession.

In Australia, protecting the economy was a central issue from an early stage, but it did not displace the primacy given to health questions. The New Zealand approach of eliminating the virus was not followed because of its potential economic impact. The balance between health and economics has been changing with the flattening of the infection curve and the reality of recession.

Source: Joyce, Maron and Reddy, *Good Public Governance in a Global Pandemic.*

Limiting and counteracting the impacts of the pandemic and policy responses to it on inequality [62]

Limiting and counteracting the impacts of the pandemic and policy responses to it on inequality is another issue that demands policy integration. In general, the pandemic has been shown to negatively impact the most vulnerable groups and individuals more, thereby tending to aggravate existing inequalities. This has been observed in developed as well as developing countries. With regard to the health impacts of the pandemic, populations that were already marginalized have been rendered especially vulnerable, due to socioeconomic disadvantage, weak access to healthcare, and systematic patterns of discrimination and disadvantage.[63] In both high and low-income countries, people living in poorer areas or those in minority ethnic communities have experienced more serious health impacts than others.[64] But what makes this a policy integration issue is that negative impacts of the pandemic affect vulnerable groups in multiple dimensions, including jobs, education, access to health, and other basic needs and rights. For instance, people occupying low-paying or informal jobs have been less able to socially isolate and to work remotely. People living in crowded conditions are less able to adopt social distancing measures. Communities with more crowded housing, lower incomes, and higher proportions of residents from minority groups have tended to become infection hotspots.[65] Ethnic minorities and other excluded groups have faced disproportionate health risks, while young people and women are bearing the brunt of the economic impacts. Low-income groups have lower access to the internet, and are less likely to be reached by online education systems put in place during the pandemic.[66]

Many countries lack the social protection systems needed to mitigate the vulnerabilities at play. In many countries, a large majority of the population has very little protection from social or economic risk in normal times. In 2019, 55 per cent of the world's population were unprotected by a single social protection benefit,[67] with women less likely than men to have access to safety nets such as unemployment insurance.[68]

During the pandemic, many countries have implemented emergency interventions to tackle these gaps. According to the World Bank, by September 2020, more than 200 countries and territories had put in place over 1,000 social protection measures, with average expenditures per capita at levels well above levels seen during the 2008 financial crisis.[69] Cash transfer programmes alone were scaled up to reach 1.3 billion people, or 17 per cent of the world's population.

However, addressing the compound effects of the pandemic on multiple vulnerabilities requires integrated policies. Policy responses in many countries have fallen short of this, limiting their responses to collections of sectoral measures, which taken together may not be sufficient.

Inter-generational equity as a policy coherence issue

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted intergenerational equity issues in an acute way. The death toll from the virus has been much higher for older persons than for middle-aged and young persons. Many public health systems were initially taken off guard as regards older persons living in nursing and retirement homes, where high mortality rates were observed and linked with lack of effective strategies to prevent the spread of the virus in those establishments and to treat infected patients. Negative impacts of the pandemic on older people have included denial of health care for conditions unrelated to COVID-19; neglect and abuse in institutions and care facilities; increases in poverty and unemployment; impacts on well-being and mental health; and the trauma of stigma and discrimination.[70] The loss of large numbers of older people, among other things, entails the loss of human capital

and deprives societies from the work, child care, community support and social and cultural activities provided by older people.[71] At a macroeconomic level, the impacts of the crisis have affected the transfer of resources between generations, including the fiscal flows upon which developed economies base the financing of their pension systems. These negative impacts are already visible in many countries.[72] Young people have also faced adverse impacts from the crisis, with gaps in education, more difficult entry in active life, and rises in unemployment, among others. Addressing issues of inter-generational equity in the recovery phase of the pandemic will entail delicate balancing acts, which will ideally need to be widely consulted within each country.

4.4.2. Vertical integration

Vertical integration has been a key challenge in developments observed thus far, in all regions of the world. The pandemic also forced multiple levels of government to work together, with subnational authorities playing an essential role.[73] Coordination across levels of government was critical in order to ensure coherence in response measures, support local health systems that are at the front line, and ensure the delivery of assistance packages to local communities. Lack of vertical integration can cause disruptions in all these areas, especially when responsibilities are left unclear. This is especially the case where local governments do not have administrative autonomy or the financial means to implement functions or services that they are supposed to provide.[74] Completely decentralized approaches can force subnational and local governments to compete against each other for critical equipment, as observed during the first months of the pandemic in several countries. Decisions taken by the central government without consultation with lower levels of government can create confusion on the rules that apply

and the strategies to follow, sometimes creating major social issues for local governments, as observed in countries where lockdowns forced thousands of informal workers to leave cities where they could not work anymore.

The coordination of responses to the pandemic across levels of government is shaped by the frameworks that govern the relationships between local and central governments. Those vary considerably across countries, going from very centralized models to highly decentralized ones. Within countries, they are also subject to changes in cases of national emergencies (see Box 4.8).

In many countries, the balance between a perceived need for coordinated action across all levels of governments and the need for flexibility in local responses appears to have fluctuated over time. For instance, in Germany, *"the first phase of the pandemic management was marked by a rather un-coordinated and decentralized enactment of ad hoc containment measures dispersedly implemented by some Länder and local governments. In the second phase, by contrast, more vertically and horizontally coordinated actions were taken in compliance with the recommendations of the federal authority (Robert Koch Institute, RKI). The narrative of uniform action across levels with "one voice" became predominant."*[75]

In some countries with highly decentralized systems, joint guidelines to be followed at different levels of government were issued as a way to bypass the impossibility for the central government to impose decisions on lower levels of governments. This solution was used in Germany.[76] In Norway, in late March 2020, 134 municipalities established local restrictions on movement into the municipalities or regions to avoid infections in areas with low health care

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Box 4.8

The variety of legal frameworks governing the relationships between the levels of government in relation to health and health emergencies

In the federal government structure of India, health is a subject that falls within the jurisdiction and authority of the provinces or states. To tackle the pandemic, the provisions of the National Disaster Management legislation were invoked and power vested to the national government to issue orders, guidelines and protocols, which the states must follow.

Spain has a highly decentralized system of distribution of competences and administration at the territorial level. The seventeen Autonomous Communities (regions) have broad political autonomy. Healthcare responsibilities (primary care and hospital management) are in the hands of the Autonomous Communities. In the days prior to the declaration of the state of alarm, the Autonomous Communities and local entities carried the weight of the fight against the pandemic, using their own regulations and powers, and in some cases approving lockdowns, closure of schools and university centres, or the closure of leisure spaces. With the declaration of the state of alarm, powers to combat the pandemic have been centralized in the central government, especially in health and police matters.

Source: See Joyce, Maron and Reddy, *Good Public Governance in a Global Pandemic*, various pages.

capacity. The national government at first did not recommend these local rules. Then national guidelines were established that had strong support from employers' and employees' organizations, but the government stopped short of making them mandatory, which meant that some municipalities stuck to their local rules.[77]

Subnational governments have faced financial difficulties since the pandemic began. This has resulted both from the loss of revenues from own sources and from the sharing of national taxes.[78] Concomitantly, many local governments have faced the need for increased expenditures in order to fight the pandemic, for instance in the health and education sectors. In some countries, the central government stepped in and provided support to local governments to compensate lost revenues.

In some cases, central government decisions made during the pandemic drew controversy among municipal leaders as local governments lost important revenue sources.[79] The decisions made about allocation of revenues between the central and local governments have sometimes been part of a political tension between the two, for instance in countries where large cities are governed by different political parties than the central government.[80]

Lack of vertical integration of responses to the virus in many countries has been linked to political tensions among the various levels of government. In some cases, heavily centralized responses stemmed from the prevailing political and administrative culture. In others, they have been linked to recent or ongoing decentralization reforms, or to states of civil unrest or post-conflict, with low levels of trust among public officers at different levels putting civil servants in the middle of political tensions that impeded collaboration among different tiers of the government. In several countries, the tensions between levels of government became part of a "blame game" to deflect the responsibility about the performance of the government in managing the response to the pandemic.[81]

Such situations have sometimes resulted in efforts from different levels of public administration counteracting one another.[82] Civil servants had to mitigate these political and administrative tensions. They also had to find innovative solutions to incompatible administrative processes. As reports by national oversight institutions on the government management of the pandemic become available, it is likely that examples of such tensions and how they impacted countries' performance in dealing with the pandemic will multiply.

The lessons from the pandemic in terms of the capacity of states to manage similar crises in the future do not seem to yield simple responses in terms of the degree of decentralization that works best. On the one hand, some experts have highlighted the difficulties inherent in coordinating responses across different levels of government. They have pointed to gaps between the organization of crisis responses as codified in national law, and what has happened during the pandemic. However, it has been pointed out that even in situations of political tensions between layers of government, the competition among them has sometimes resulted in welfare enhancing initiatives. On the other hand, examples from highly decentralized countries such as Germany and Norway have shown that a high degree of coordination on decisions affecting public health and civil liberties could be achieved through concertation.[83]

Going forward, national experiences from the pandemic may result in changes in the balance of powers among levels of government during crises through re-hauling of the legal frameworks governing the management of crisis situations, or even in "normal" times, through constitutional changes. It remains to be seen how this could foster a culture of concertation and cooperation across government levels, and ultimately impact the realization of sustainable development objectives post pandemic.

Box 4.9

Tensions among government levels over education systems during the pandemic

From an institutional perspective, education is a complex sector, as its delivery often involves two, three or more layers of government, from the most local where education is delivered, to various intermediary levels of government to the national government, which interact on educational mandates, curricula, budgets, taxes and subsidies, teacher training and mobility issues, and safety issues, among many other issues. The pandemic, by forcing whole education systems to abruptly shift to remote learning, has raised issues in all these dimensions. It has also increased the costs of education, while resources available to governments were decreasing. In some countries, this has been a source of tensions between levels of governments.

Source: Marcin Matczak, "When Politics Mixes with Fighting the Virus: Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Poland", in Joyce, Maron and Reddy, *Good Public Governance in a Global Pandemic*, 349-359.

Box 4.10

The relationships between levels of government in France during the pandemic: evaluation by the Senate

A recent report published by the French Senate on the government's management of the pandemic has examined the issues of vertical coordination during the pandemic.

The report found that the organization of "deconcentrated" services from the central government was reactive but ill adapted to managing the crisis. It pointed to lack of fluidity in the interactions between the prefects and the regional health agencies (Agences Régionales de Santé, ARS), and to an insufficient attention to local realities by the ARS.

The report pointed to lack of consultations with local governments before decisions impacting the local level (for example, the closure of green public spaces) were taken. It highlighted the need to better involve local governments in crisis management, including by reinforcing their involvement in decision-making, by better linking with local elected officials, and by mandating local preparedness plans for pandemics.

Source: République Française, Rapport fait au nom de la commission d'enquête pour l'évaluation des politiques publiques face aux grandes pandémies à la lumière de la crise sanitaire de la covid-19 et de sa gestion.

4.4.3. Stakeholder engagement[84]

As governments have been challenged to respond to the coronavirus emergency risks, collaboration with civil society, experts, entrepreneurs and the private sector, as well as the engagement of citizens, have proved extremely valuable to provide innovative responses to COVID-19 and to help enhance public trust. Participatory response strategies, the development and use of new digital platforms and tools to enable engagement, engaging people in the collective development of digital tools and solutions (e.g. through crowdsourcing, hackathons) and the use of social media to connect with people are some of the approaches used in different countries.[85]

Civil society around the world has also mobilized and self-organized in response to the pandemic. Citizen-led community responses, including volunteer groups and associations of neighbours, businesses, clergy, teachers or other actors, online assemblies and campaigns, and social platforms and movements have helped inform the public on the risks of the pandemic and provided essential services such as food and care. For example, in countries like Italy and Spain or in the City of New York, volunteer groups have self-organized to tutor children, provide mental health services and deliver food to vulnerable groups such as older people or people with underlying illnesses.[86] From campaigns to disseminate hand sanitizers, masks, and information on health and rights in informal settlements, to community kitchens which have distributed millions of meals to the most vulnerable during lockdowns,[87] much of the response in the least affluent communities has often been led by civilians, often but not always with support from governments. In some countries, increasing digitization of participation has seen citizens participating in COVID-19 policymaking via WhatsApp and Facebook question and answer sessions, and assisting with virtual mapping of outbreaks and food insecurity hotspots.[88] These responses can be leveraged by public institutions to ensure effective and inclusive responses to the pandemic.

Participation and engagement have also been key dimensions of local governments' responses to the pandemic. Collaboration with residents, community leaders, experts, entrepreneurs and the private sector have proved extremely valuable for local governments to provide innovative responses to COVID-19. Among various contributing factors, Viet Nam's focus on public engagement and awareness was key to COVID-19 response, engaging traditional and mass media, government sites, grassroot organizations, "posters at hospitals, offices, residential buildings, and markets, as well as phone and text messages".[89]

In April 2020, the city of Milan published its draft strategy of adaptation to COVID-19, as a document open for the inputs and feedback of residents for one month. Three weeks after the draft was posted, several hundreds of proposals had been received from residents.[90] The "Decide Madrid" citizen participation web portal, which has been in use for a number of years and engages citizens on a number of issues, has been used to encourage citizens to propose solutions and to provide information on essential services.[91]

Going forward, societies have an important opportunity to sustain and leverage the massive engagement of citizens,

Box 4.11

Whole-of-society approaches: the case of Singapore

Singapore went through the onset of the pandemic without closing schools and shutting down businesses, through rigorous screening, contact tracing, isolation orders, social distancing, safe measurements. These responses earned Singapore early praise. However, cases later rose rapidly due to outbreaks in migrant workers dormitories housing the 300,000 migrant workers, leading to partial lockdown. These outbreaks not only undermined earlier efforts, they exposed how a vulnerable group had been overlooked in the pandemic response plan.

As a whole, Singapore has been successful in controlling transmissions in the community. A coordinated whole-of-government approach enabled the deployment of manpower and resources across agencies efficiently, as well as the autonomy for respective agencies to work with their stakeholders. This approach works in Singapore because of the long-time investment in time and effort to nurture inter-sectoral networks to co-design policies and provide public services, which has fostered an environment of trust between the state and society.

Source: Celia Lee, "Responses of Singapore to COVID-19 Pandemic: The Whole-of-Government Approach", in Joyce, Maron and Reddy, *Good Public Governance in a Global Pandemic*, 205 -219.

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communities and civil society that has been witnessed during the pandemic. Finding ways to durably incorporate effective innovative practices for inclusion, public service delivery, and civic engagement explored during the crisis, should be a priority for governments in this regard.

4.4.4. Conclusion: The even greater importance of policy integration for recovery

Policy integration and policy coherence will be more needed than ever to realize the SDGs post-COVID. Engaging the whole of society in discussing the trade-offs and opportunities ahead and finding consensual ways to address them should be an overarching concern for governments in coming months. Preserving civic space and government accountability during and after emergency periods is a key requirement for better integrated policy responses.[92]

4.5. The role of national accountability systems[93]

The coronavirus pandemic has created unique challenges for transparency and accountability. National and international actors have responded fast and forcefully to these challenges. In some countries, accountability institutions, such as supreme audit institutions and access to information and privacy oversight bodies, have been monitoring and disseminating information about the impact of policies and regulations adopted by governments in response to the crisis. Civil society is playing a key monitoring role of government action and proposing innovative solutions - sometimes working collaboratively with governments - to strengthen the resilience of institutions. International organizations and networks are also playing a critical role, collecting examples of innovative

practices and supporting countries in their efforts to sustain the essential functions of public institutions through different tools, including online repositories, discussion forums, guidance and knowledge-based products.

4.5.1. Transparency and access to information

Transparency is critical for accountability and for public trust in government. For citizens to trust institutional responses to the COVID-19 crisis, they must know what governments are doing and have access to reliable information, including: the facts about the virus; the data in relation to the propagation of the epidemic and its impacts, and the public policies in response to the crisis as well as the assumptions and scenarios on which they are based.[94]

Effective transparency requires proactive communication strategies that reach vulnerable and at-risk populations with the information they need in accessible formats. The Government of Mexico, for example, has created a microsite to provide information on COVID-19 to persons with disabilities.[95] Citizens and civil society have provided the government with multiple recommendations to improve and enhance the website.[96] In other countries, non-state actors are working to make information on the coronavirus accessible. In Argentina, the Civic Association for Equality and Justice in collaboration with University Torcuato di Tella and University of Buenos Aires have launched an initiative to make legal information on COVID-19 accessible to vulnerable populations. The project has analysed regulations related to COVID-19, particularly those that affect the most vulnerable; translated such information into easily accessible language, considering the needs of specific groups (persons with disabilities, people living in slums, children and youth); and identified gaps in such regulations and advocated for government to address them.[97]

Transparency is also critical for accountability and for public trust in local authorities. Many cities have put in place websites that provide one-stop information points on COVID-19. For instance, the city of Rome has created the RomaAiutaRoma website, accessible from the homepage of its institutional portal, as a single access point to all information on COVID-19, ranging from real-time updates on the services provided by the city to information on transport and online schooling to psychological support.[98] Transparency helps building residents' trust in local governments, which can facilitate social acceptance of intrusive measures taken by the latter to halt the spread of the epidemic. Constant and relevant communications are a key part of this strategy, as has been noted in the case of Seoul Metropolitan Government.[99]

Transparency is also important at the international level to better coordinate global responses, share experiences and lessons learned, and support countries to tailor responses to their own circumstances. Since the epidemic began, international organizations and networks have been active in this regard. The WHO/EU Health System Response Monitor[100] documents responses to the crisis, including on prevention of transmission, health workforce management, resources, and governance systems, for a sample of countries with very little time lag, and facilitating comparison across countries. The UN COVID-19 Data Hub makes data relevant to COVID-19 response readily available as geospatial data web services, suitable for the production of maps and other data visualizations and analyses, and easy to download in multiple formats.[101] The Inter-American Development Bank has developed a dashboard on Latin American policy responses to COVID-19 and analyses their impact in the region.[102] The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also has a one-stop repository of information on impacts, country responses, and other dimensions of the epidemic.[103] The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has an online policy database with information on governments' economic and non-economic responses to combat the pandemic.[104]

In several countries, measures taken in response to the crisis have impacted the national framework that regulates the right of access to information and its enforcement. Civil society has been monitoring these changes and exceptions to transparency and access to information legislation.[105] Although such exceptions have in general resulted in limitations to the right of access to information, in some countries, government institutions have fought those limitations. In Argentina, after the government passed emergency decrees which suspended administrative deadlines, the Information Commissioner issued a resolution lifting or cancelling that suspension in relation to access to information and privacy.[106] The resolution refers to relevant international standards and notes that there are conditions for states of emergency under international law which have not been met in Argentina as justification for lifting the suspensions. It also notes that the Commissioner will take the exceptional situation into account and be reasonable in

processing appeals. In Canada, the Information Commissioner issued a message on the importance of respecting the right to information in the current circumstances, calling upon heads of federal institutions to set an example. The Commissioner further stated that "institutions ought to display leadership by proactively disclosing information that is of fundamental interest to Canadians, particularly during this time of crisis when Canadians are looking for trust and reassurance from their government without undue delays."[107] In the European Union, the Commission and the Council have maintained the 15-day deadline to respond to public information requests while acknowledging that delays may occur in the current circumstances.[108]

Guidance and materials have been developed to support public officials and citizens in the implementation and exercise of the right to access information during the emergency. Georgia's Institute for Development of Freedom of Information has published guidelines on public information that is recommended for proactive publication by government agencies during the COVID-19 crisis.[109] In Spain, Access-Info has developed a guidebook to help citizens understand the effects of the declaration of the state of emergency and explain how to exercise the right of access to information.[110]

4.5.2. Accountability and anti-corruption

Strong legislatures are crucial in an emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic to balance power and ensure independent oversight, represent people's needs and demands, and pass legislation to deploy public resources to those in need. However, restrictions on large gatherings and other social distancing measures adopted to limit the spread of the epidemic have impacted the regular functioning of parliaments. Parliaments across the world have had to find innovative ways to work around this constraint. Legislatures in Albania, Colombia, the Maldives, and Mongolia have amended their plenary procedures to allow virtual discussions.[111] A Remote Deliberation System has enabled, through video and a secure personalized app, the continuity of debates and votes in the Brazilian Senate.[112] Legislators in different countries (e.g. Armenia, Indonesia) are using social media to provide updates on the pandemic and engage with their constituencies.[113] The Interparliamentary Union (IPU) is supporting Parliaments in their responses to the emergency, including by sharing country-by-country information on how Parliaments are responding; providing questions and answers for parliaments;[114] developing guidance for legislators; and technically supporting Parliaments on remote working methods.[115]

The members of OPeN (Open Parliament e-Network) are crowdsourcing and sharing country data on citizen participation and open parliament paths during COVID-19 times.[116] ParlAmericas and Legislative Directory have published a paper on legislative good practices and recommendations during COVID-19 in the Americas.[117]

Box 4.12

Challenges faced by supreme audit institutions during the pandemic

Supreme audit institutions (SAIs) have faced challenges of both internal and external nature during the pandemic, as revealed by surveys. Internally, a key operational challenge has been the lack of necessary information technology to conduct remote audits. Of the 49 SAIs who responded to an INTOSAI Donor Cooperation's survey, 47 per cent said they have insufficient number of laptops. In addition to operational impacts, some SAIs had their financial budgets reduced, thereby limiting their operational independence. The INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI) reports indications of SAI independence coming under increasing pressure during the pandemic as it relates to their mandates, independence, access, and capacity, which may have affected the ability of some SAIs to respond. Examples of these threats include cutting funding, questioning of SAI mandates to conduct audits, declaring SAIs non-essential services, and designating emergency funds as off budget items, thereby preventing SAI audits. Despite difficult circumstances, many SAIs have continued their work to provide oversight and accountability for their citizens.

Source: US Government Accountability Office, *Coronavirus pandemic: Initial lessons learned from the international auditing community, report for external stakeholders from the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions Policy finance and Administration committee's COVID-19 initiative* (Washington, D.C., September 2020), https://intosaicovid19.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/LESSONS_LEARNED_FINAL.pdf.

Supreme audit institutions (SAIs) have played a key role in providing independent oversight of government actions during the pandemic. They have adapted their methods of works in order to provide timely oversight of pandemic-related spending. In addition to a number of ongoing audits of pandemic responses, The USA's Government Accountability Office is mandated to report to the Congress on a bimonthly basis on pandemic spending.[118]

As part of the response to the crisis, the General Comptroller of Costa Rica has developed an online platform to enhance transparency on the government responses to the coronavirus, including on public procurement.[119] In June 2020 the Comptroller's Office launched the website #MonitoreoCGR, to provide updated information and analysis of public budgets and state finances.[120] This platform is available on the official website of the Comptroller General and provides information by year, according to the budget cycle. The reports periodically published by the Comptroller's Office are migrated to this platform. All the information on the state's finances is now centralized and available in a timely manner. Topics of interest are addressed through short and concise publications that, without sacrificing depth of analysis, seek to facilitate the reader's understanding of the issues, and offer the option to download information in various formats. The website offers the option to download information in various formats. The Brazilian Court of Accounts has launched a special programme (Coopera), including a monitoring plan to identify risks, weaknesses and deviations in the use of public resources, procurement processes, economic stimulus actions, social programmes, and actions at the centre of government to respond to COVID-19. Information, guidance, resources and an online monitoring panel are available through a dedicated

website.[121] In the Czech Republic, the supreme audit office has published a website that provides a detailed analysis of public funds spent in connection with the epidemiological situation in the country.[122]

An increasing number of SAIs have now published audits or reviews of the use of public funds in relation to the pandemic. For example, SAI Jamaica published initial findings in May 2020 on the country's temporary cash transfer programme to individuals and businesses to cushion the economic impact of COVID-19. The SAI of New Zealand is closely monitoring government spending on COVID-19, and as of July 2020, found that Cabinet decisions approving new spending were made correctly. In South Africa, the Auditor-General has published two special reports on the financial management of the government's COVID-19 initiative. The first report highlighted that the country's multi-billion relief package was introduced in an already compromised environment. The SAI has issued reports warning of inadequate financial management controls and lack of accountability, among other issues, in the government sectors tasked with implementing the emergency response.[123] The Comptroller General of the Republic of Costa Rica has published a number of special audit reports in relation to COVID-19.[124] The European Court of Auditors published two reviews of the European Union's response to the pandemic.[125]

As part of the 2030 Agenda commitment to building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, SDG 16.5 promises to "substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms."[126] Corruption was extensive before the pandemic struck, with estimated costs as high as 5 per cent of global GDP.[127] The pandemic has created significant new risks.

Fundamental safeguards of government accountability can be challenged or disregarded by institutional responses to an emergency (for example, ruling by decree without legislative oversight). Emergency procurement programmes for healthcare supplies can be captured by vested interests. Moreover, economic rescue and recovery packages may create opportunities for integrity violations in public organizations, in the allocation and use of public resources, and in core government functions such as public procurement.[128] A survey has found that COVID-19 response plans have paid "little attention to governance- and corruption-related matters," while anti-corruption bodies have seldom been at the heart of multisectoral action.[129] Emergencies and subsequent rapid responses as well as other measures focused on the longer-term economic recovery (e.g. economic stimulus packages).

These risks are compounded by the fact that health systems in many countries suffer from systemic weaknesses that make them particularly vulnerable to corruption. Relevant corruption risks in the context of COVID-19 are associated with emergency funding and procurement, opacity in workforce governance, recruitment, and management; pilfering available supplies, price gouging, resale on the grey and black markets; increase in substandard and falsified products entering the market; petty corruption at the delivery front-line; and opacity in research and development, among others.[130]

Legislative oversight can help mitigate the opportunities for integrity violations and maladministration. The Parliament of Kenya, for example, requested specific information to the Ministry of Health on the allocation and use of public resources to fight the epidemic, the distribution of medical resources and the procurement of medical goods and equipment, among other topics. The Ministry submitted a written brief to the Parliament in response to the legislators' questions.[131] As many governments are operating under emergency powers, the oversight role of parliaments is more important than ever, and they may need additional support to cope with the speed at which policies are implemented and the difficulty of vetting policies during periods of confinement.[132]

Internal and external auditors play a critical role in identifying potential risks in public financial management and procurement systems, providing assurance on transactions, enhancing transparency and providing critical information and data for holding governments accountable. During the pandemic, supreme audit institutions and other accountability actors have explored innovative ways of collaborating and innovating to continue to ensure effective oversight, including on governments' responses to the pandemic.

Oversight bodies can play a key role in monitoring and exposing cases of corruption and abuses if they are given the remit and resources to adapt to changing circumstances during and after the pandemic. In the United States, the government included additional funding for the Government

Accountability Office (the national supreme audit institution) in its economic stimulus package, to strengthen its capacity to assist Congress in overseeing government expenditure during the COVID-19 crisis.[133]

Leading transparency and anti-corruption organizations have called on public authorities to ensure transparency to prevent corruption and to strengthen whistleblower protection during the state of emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The signatories of an open letter highlight the need for transparency so that citizens can scrutinize governments and businesses, and point to examples of wrongdoing that have already been exposed in different areas, including health system management and public procurement.[134] Civil society organizations, such as the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, have also developed guidelines on transparency of public procurement related to COVID-19.[135] In Uganda, the high Court ruled that legislators must pay back money received in their personal accounts as part of a package of 2.4 million euros approved to fight the coronavirus in their constituencies.[136] Similarly, leading organizations working on accountability in Liberia have called for increased transparency and oversight of resources allocated to legislators as part of an emergency and economic stimulus package as well as of foreign aid resources received to fight the pandemic.[137]

Openness to citizen engagement in developing policies and overseeing their implementation may make it more likely that corruption and other abuses will be exposed. The Open Government Partnership, for example, encourages governments to commit to transparency and accountability in policy implementation and citizens, civil society, and business to ensure the commitments are met.[138] Opening up data to public scrutiny has helped citizens to track whether the implementation of recovery packages is honest and fair. Paraguay and Ukraine introduced open contracting policies during the COVID-19 emergency, where information on tenders and contract awards is made available to the public.[139] Protecting rather than stifling or attacking the media has also been important in ensuring instances of abuse are exposed.[140]

The experience from recent health and humanitarian emergencies (e.g. Ebola outbreak, Hurricane Katrina) shows the importance of addressing corruption risks as well as integrity and accountability vulnerabilities, and provides valuable lessons for the present. In a recently published report, the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI) recalls lessons and examples from previous crises regarding the management of global health funds, corruption over health emergency aid, and anti-corruption approaches in the health sector.[141]

Successful models for responding to corruption and other abuses will be of utmost relevance in coming years as societies rebuild after the pandemic. There is potential for progress on corruption, capitalizing on pre-pandemic initiatives and political leadership at national and international levels,

including by the World Bank and the G20, that have raised the profile of anti-corruption and provided support to countries that face capacity deficits in this domain.[142] In the context of the pandemic, respected stakeholders from outside government, such as religious leaders or former heads of state, have also played an important leadership role in advocating for anti-corruption.[143]

4.5.3. Conclusion: the importance of transparency and accountability in recovery

Most countries are still striving to limit the spread of the epidemic, manage immediate health risks and mitigate broader economic and social impacts. As countries transition from the immediate response to the crisis to longer-term recovery efforts, it will be critically important to take stock of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected key dimensions of national institutional systems such as accountability, transparency and participation, in order to prevent reversals of progress on these critical institutional dimensions and to avert longer-term consequences on public institutions and human rights. Together with other key principles embodied in Sustainable Development Goal 16, these institutional dimensions can provide signposts for increasing the resilience of national institutions to external shocks in the future.

In this context, it will also be important to take stock of how the pandemic and the response measures taken by governments have affected the wider institutional systems of accountability, reconfiguring relations and changing dynamics among stakeholders and opening new opportunities for collaboration.

4.6. Trust in public institutions and the capacity of institutions to promote societal change[144]

4.6.1. State-citizen relationships and trust in public institutions

In his 2020 Nelson Mandela Lecture, the UN Secretary-General called for a new social contract to "enable young people to live in dignity… ensure women have the same prospects and opportunities as men… and protect the sick, the vulnerable, and minorities of all kinds."[145] The COVID-19 pandemic, he said, was an opportunity to build more sustainable and inclusive societies that "can address inequality and the fragilities of our present world."

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) defines the social contract as an agreement through which "everyone in a political community, either explicitly or tacitly, consents to state authority", as people "comply with the state's laws, rules, and practices in pursuit of broader common goals."[146] This agreement is maintained through processes of governance

which allow "citizens and groups [to] articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations, and mediate their differences."[147] Through this lens, good governance provides the foundation for inclusion and sustainability. It allows a society to support the levels of collective action that are needed to tackle complex challenges and deliver public goods, and to mediate and resolve conflicts peacefully and productively.

Conversely, weak and illegitimate institutions erode the capacity of societies need to cope with internal and external stresses.[148] The breakdown of the social contract between state and citizens is exacerbated by grievances that develop when groups that feel excluded from access to power, public services, and security, creating threats to both peace and development.[149]

The 2030 Agenda places the onus on governments and institutions to trust people. Leaders underline their commitment to "common action and endeavor" to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals,[150] and explicitly promise to invite all sectors of society and "all people" into the Agenda's implementation. But there is little evidence that governments have faith in their people's capabilities. Levels of public sector trust in citizens are low and may be declining, as many governments use increasingly sophisticated tools to monitor their citizens and shift the "burden of proof" onto the public in areas such as eligibility for social assistance or responsibility for paying taxes.[151] As well as giving the lie to governments' 2030 Agenda pledges, this undermines the reciprocal nature of trust.

At the national level, the pandemic has highlighted the fundamental role played by the social contract. As a complex and protracted emergency, it has stressed all sections of society, while causing disproportionate health and economic impacts for already disadvantaged groups. Public health restrictions and other government policies have led to widespread restrictions on individual freedoms, which have required the compliance of all sections of society.

Pressure on institutions to deliver comes at a time when they are often viewed with suspicion by the public. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, government is less trusted than business (which is seen as more effective than government), and than non-governmental organizations (which are seen as more ethical).[152]

The need for trustworthy institutions has come into sharp relief during the pandemic.[153] In some contexts, government responses to the pandemic have increased trust, at least in the short term.[154] People became highly reliant on institutions to support them during the crisis, while governments were also motivated to place their trust in citizens to comply with emergency regulations. As a result, trust became "a two-way street… for both citizens and public authorities."[155]

But the pandemic also exposed and aggravated existing weaknesses in the relationship between people and their institutions.[156] Both public distrust of governments and government distrust of publics have made it harder to maintain consensus behind public health restrictions.[157] Some countries experienced an increasingly polarized response, with divisions emerging over whether to limit economic activity in the short-term in order to reduce the spread of infection.[158] Such polarization could undermine the social contract over the long term.[159] While the pandemic is still ongoing and lessons on its impacts on trust in public institutions can only be drawn *a posteriori*, some countries seem to have succeeded in keeping the level of trust in public institutions high. This supposed a delicate balancing act and navigation through the many trade-offs that the pandemic exposed (see section 4.4 above). Norway is frequently mentioned as a successful example in this context (Box 4.13).

4.6.2. Political inclusion and civic space

SDG 16.7 makes a promise to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels."[160] The 2030 Agenda also emphasizes the importance of political participation for women and girls, and identifies young people as "critical agents of change" who should use the 2030 Agenda to "channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world."

According to the World Bank, engagement in the political process is key to improving governance when it strengthens incentives for leaders to provide critical public goods, but has a negative impact when it promotes patronage and increases polarization.[161] In turn, more inclusive institutions, in which large numbers of citizens participate, promote norms that underpin collective action. Inclusive politics may also make societies more resilient to systemic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic hit at a time when civic space was being reduced in many countries.[162] During the pandemic, in many countries, the right to peaceful assembly and protest has been curtailed. Policies such as emergency powers, curbs on media freedom, and bans on political campaigning have closed the space for participation.[163] There have been signs, however, of civic resilience. Many protests took place during the pandemic, whether linked or not with governments' management of the crisis. One multi-country study demonstrates how youth-led groups have met the needs of communities where governments have failed to act, while also seizing opportunities to advocate for longer-term policies needed to build more inclusive societies.[164]

On the other hand, some governments have encouraged participation during the pandemic. For instance, Denmark has encouraged continuing public participation during the pandemic by exempting "opinion-shaping assemblies" such as political meetings and demonstrations from the law prohibiting public gatherings.[165] Some countries have provided space for citizen participation by encouraging non-governmental stakeholders to propose and implement solutions, while others have used citizens' panels and other social dialogue mechanisms to inform and reach consensus over the response to the virus (Box 4.14).[166]

The question is to what extent societies will institutionalize opportunities for citizens to identify longer-term priorities and to influence the design and development of policies.[167] Governments now have an opportunity to take a strategic approach to participation and to institutionalize models for including people in decision-making, releasing the pressure

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Box 4.13

Preserving the social contract during a pandemic: the case of Norway

The alleged success of the Norwegian case is about balancing crisis management capacity and democratic legitimacy. Overall, the main decision-making style was consensual and based on a pragmatic collaborative approach combining argumentation and feedback, which reflected a common political culture. The authorities appealed to solidarity and citizens' trust in government, which was mainly loyally followed up by the population.

There were some challenging debates about such issues as: how to balance political decisions and expert advice; the process related to the exception law; the balance between national standardized measures and leeway for local adaption and flexibility; transparency; and the timing for lifting health regulations taken to fight the pandemic.

Overall, citizens' trust in government increased significantly from an already high level during this crisis. Trust in government, in the health authorities, parliament and national and local politicians increased, as did trust in the prime minister. The citizens' satisfaction with democracy had increased from 57 per cent to 72 per cent from January to April 2020, a very high rating internationally.

Source: Christensen and Lægreid, "The Norwegian Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic", various pages.

Box 4.14

Institutionalized participation in COVID-19 policymaking

In Kenya, the senate committee responsible for overseeing the COVID-19 response invited public submissions on how the pandemic is affecting them and how they thought the response should be managed. The submissions were considered while drafting a pandemic response and management bill.[a]

The Netherlands consulted 30,000 citizens on the options for easing lockdown measures. Participants were informed of the likely impacts of each option and asked which recommendations they favored.[b]

Sources:

[a]   Senate of the Republic of Kenya, *Ad Hoc Committee on the COVID-19 Situation In Kenya: 2nd Progress Report* (Nairobi, April 14, 2020), http://sakaja. co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID19-2nd-Progress-Report.pdf.

[b]   Niek Mouter, Jose Ignacio Hernandez and Anatol Valerian Itten, "Public Participation in Crisis Policymaking. How 30,000 Dutch Citizens Advised Their Government on Relaxing COVID-19 Lockdown Measures," *MedRxiv* (November 12, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.11.09.20228718.

felt by citizens and channeling discontent towards playing a productive part in the rebuilding process.[168] There are risks, however. As the economic effects of the pandemic deepen, protests many intensify. Some governments may become less tolerant of dissent and less open to engaging others, undermining the social contract and "reinforcing the perception that there is no viable alternative to violence for expressing grievances and frustration."[169]

4.6.3. Social and economic inclusion

A central principle of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no-one behind.[170] In committing to the Agenda, countries committed to endeavoring to reach the furthest behind first and to promoting "the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status." Social and economic inclusion are the starting point for a social contract, providing the basis for political participation in society and giving all peoples and groups opportunities for meaningful action as they seek to exercise their rights and protect their interests.

Until now, less affluent population groups have borne the brunt of the health and economic costs of the pandemic.[171] If governments are to rebuild the social contract, efforts will be needed to share the burden more equitably.

Social protection systems defend people against poverty, but they also help defend both people and societies against risk. When safety nets are lacking, social cohesion is threatened at the moment when it is most needed, exacerbating impacts on vulnerable groups while also reducing incentives for political leaders to mount a robust response.[172]

The wave of temporary social protection measures taken by governments during the pandemic has two interrelated implications for the social contract. In some cases, it has led to significant increases in coverage for excluded groups.

Some countries have extended access to healthcare, provided income support for informal sector workers, or extended coverage to migrants or people without legal identity.[173] Second, it has created space for longer-term use of social protection measures to tackle inequality, reflecting awareness of increasingly compelling evidence that social protection can reduce economic, social, and political exclusion.[174]

At present, however, the majority of social protection measures implemented are temporary. As in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, countries face challenges regarding financial sustainability, with a financing gap of $1.2 billion in 2020 for providing universal social protection coverage, or 3.8 per cent of developing-country GDP.[175] Following the precedent of the East Asian crisis, the pandemic may mark the acceleration of the push towards universal protection through the lifecycle, as countries institutionalize temporary measures, continue to expand coverage to excluded groups, and mainstream participatory mechanisms for programme design and accountability. In the best case, this will create an institutional architecture that can respond to current need and adapt to future challenges. Alternatively, many governments may limit their efforts to providing minimalist "safety nets" and stopgap measures during a period of fiscal retrenchment, leaving large gaps in protection which would undermine the social contract and reduce resilience to future crises.

A key component of social and economic inclusion strategies for governments is the fight against discrimination by public administration. The pandemic has exposed many instances of discrimination against minority groups, often continuing pre-existing patterns of discrimination. For example, use of excessive force by law enforcement to enforce emergency and other measures has often fallen disproportionately on minority and low-income groups, marginalized communities, and homeless populations. However, there are examples of governments' emphasis on the continued enforcement

of employment non-discrimination laws while ensuring consistencies with public health guidelines.[176] Public agencies have also issued guidance on workplace safety and preparedness to address discrimination based on disability, age, race and national origin.[177] Addressing discrimination in a systematic way offers an opportunity to reimagine public service, with many reforms proposed focused on enabling trust and accountability through more formal participation and partnerships between community members and public administration.

In building back better, addressing patterns of exclusion and discrimination in the public service as well, making it more inclusive and representative of the population at large at all levels of public service – including senior civil servants, legislatures, public employees, public service commissions, the justice system and the police – provides a further opportunity to reimagine public service, as diversity can foster changes in behaviour and advance change.[178]

4.6.4. Fostering the capacity of the public service to promote societal change

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the relevance of the state, and vindicated the actions of civil services across the world. Not only has the power of governments to legislate and implement rapid change when the need arises been highlighted. States have confirmed their critical positions as rule-makers, and their capacity to mobilize the contributions of other parts of society.[179] Public administrations, their managers and staff have displayed qualities of flexibility and creativity that may have changed popular perceptions about their governments and what societies can collectively achieve under duress.

The post-pandemic period creates an opportunity to transform governments to end the current emergency, meet long-term needs, and increase resilience in the face of future shocks. Looking beyond the immediate impacts of the pandemic, the challenge for governments is to re-imagine themselves as platforms for enabling more sustainable and resilient patterns of development, promoting open and collaborative approaches that aim to be more responsive to the peoples' needs, and mobilizing the skills and energy of all the relevant stakeholders. Experiences from the pandemic in terms of engagement and innovation can be mobilized to this end. Because the pandemic has submitted national institutions and public administrations to high levels of stress, successful adaptations and innovations made during the pandemic can help identify institutional or administrative processes that need reform. They can indicate new ways to institutionalize transparency and accountability, to promote participation and stakeholder engagement, and to use digital government in a welfare-enhancing fashion. They can also provide indications of critical capacity gaps in the public service. Conversely, the trends observed during the pandemic can also be used

by all actors to identify potential risks in terms of social and economic exclusion, curtailment of individual freedoms, and corruption, which could materialize if left unchecked.

A notable feature of the pandemic has been the massive investment by many international organizations and networks in documenting its impacts, and most importantly the changes made by governments in policies and working processes during the crisis. This wealth of information can become an invaluable source for governments seeking to benefit from lessons learned in other countries.

4.7. Conclusion and recommendations

National institutions are key enablers of governments' actions on all the Sustainable Development Goals. In all countries, the pandemic has affected key government functions and processes, undermining the effectiveness of government action. Reponses taken by governments through emergency measures have often included changes to existing rules and regulations across the institutional landscape. The need to respond quickly has created additional risks for institutional processes and organizations. Beyond individual institutions, the pandemic has affected whole institutional systems and the way public institutions interact with people.

The pandemic has exposed weaknesses and vulnerabilities of national institutions to society-wide shocks such as COVID-19. The stress put on national institutions and their capacity to cope has varied across countries. In some cases, the shock of the pandemic has compounded pre-existing vulnerabilities.

The crisis has shown the importance of investing in the public sector and strengthening the capacity of public institutions. The capacity of governments and societies more generally to sustain the functions of institutions and make them more resilient to shocks will strongly condition the possibility for delivering the SDGs. The influence of institutions on whether the SDGs can be achieved could go both ways, making projections most uncertain.

On the one hand, the current stress faced by national institutions, when added to other negative impacts of the crisis (for instance, lasting setbacks in employment levels and incomes and high levels of public debt), could easily jeopardize the capacity of governments to foster progress on all the goals. In the worst case, societies face a vicious cycle where crises multiply, public institutions lose capacity and are starved of finance, and governance failures lead to further erosion of trust. In such a scenario, the basis for collective action would be undermined both within and between countries, making it progressively harder to tackle current and future challenges.[180]

On the other hand, the current and post-pandemic periods present a unique opportunity to reimagine the role of

institutions, to promote new governance norms and shift to transformative pathways that strengthen resilience and accelerate action to achieve the SDGs. Sustaining and leveraging the massive engagement that has been witnessed from public servants and civil society in most countries, and finding ways to durably incorporate innovative practices for inclusion, public service delivery, and civic engagement explored during the crisis, should be a priority for governments in this regard. A lesson from the past is that systemic crises are fertile ground for governance innovation, with the potential to lead to new constitutional settlements, marked reductions in inequality, shifts in the balance of political power, and effective efforts to rebuild the social contract.[181]

Institutional principles highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal 16, including transparency and access to information, accountability and anti-corruption, participation and engagement, non-discrimination) are key to understanding how national institutions have been impacted by the pandemic, remediating negative impacts in the medium term, and strengthening the resilience of national institutions over the longer term. More generally, the principles of effective governance for sustainable development, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 2018,[182] can inform the efforts of governments in this regard.

While the scope of action for governments during recovery from the pandemic is immense, based on the arguments developed in this chapter, the following limited set of recommendations can be made:

In the short term:

- Ensure that national policies and programmes taken in response to the pandemic focus on alleviating its negative impacts on the most affected groups in society, and that public institutions execute them in a way that effectively protects people living in poverty and vulnerable groups.

- Proactively publish information on the outbreak and government responses to COVID-19 in accessible formats and through multiple channels, leveraging the potential of ICTs and considering the needs of specific groups and vulnerable and at-risk populations.

- Limit exceptions to the legal deadlines for responding to access to information requests, prioritizing requests related to COVID-19 and response measures, and ensure the operation of oversight bodies and appeals processes in relation to the right to information.

- Establish or leverage existing legislative committees to oversee and independently evaluate the responses to COVID-19, and support open parliament solutions that facilitate live access to parliamentary sessions and meetings and the publication of information on

legislative oversight of budget resources allocated to COVID-19 responses and economic stimulus packages.

- Ensure that supreme audit institutions have the financial, technical and human resources needed to conduct independent audits and oversight of short-term responses to COVID-19.

- Promote collaboration between public institutions, stakeholder groups and communities to generate innovative, proportionate and evidence-based responses to COVID-19 and help enhance public trust.

In the medium term:

- Ensure that public institutions, in their implementation of recovery efforts, are guided by principles of inclusiveness, responsiveness and non-discrimination, and contribute to addressing inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic.

- Strive for horizontal integration in government action, ensuring that policies enacted to speed up recovery from the pandemic take into account cross-sectoral impacts and interlinkages among the SDGs, and that the actions of different parts of governments are coordinated and coherent.

- Draw lessons from the pandemic as regards the effectiveness of national frameworks governing the relationships among levels of government, including in cases of national disasters and emergencies, and pursue enhanced coordination across levels of government (vertical integration) in terms of policies, budgets, implementation and monitoring and evaluation for the recovery from COVID-19.

- Strengthen the application of risk analysis in public administration in order to increase the resilience of national institutional systems to pandemics and other external shocks.

- Ensure that national oversight institutions have the financial, technical and human resources needed to support governments' longer-term responses, including through risk-based approaches.

- Governments, working with Parliaments and all other relevant stakeholders, should assess how the COVID-19 pandemic and response measures have affected key dimensions of national institutional systems such as accountability, transparency and participation, in order to prevent reversals of progress on these dimensions and to avert negative consequences on public institutions and human rights.

- Take stock of successful practices in terms of engagement, collaboration and partnerships for the delivery of

public services involving non-government actors and tried during the pandemic, with a view to sustaining the mobilization of civil society organizations, communities and individuals for delivering the SDGs.

• Leverage the efforts made by various global organizations during the pandemic to share experiences and lessons learned in terms of institutional innovation and adaptation and public administration practices, not only at the level of individual initiatives, but also at that of whole institutional systems.

Endnotes

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Annex 1

Overall strengths and challenges of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review

Dimension	Strengths	Challenges
National institutions	• Increased institutionalization of SDG monitoring, follow-up and review systems, with diverse institutional designs. • Wide definition of roles and responsibilities for SDG monitoring, follow-up and review.	• Unclear, fragmented, duplicated monitoring responsibilities in some cases. • Monitoring responsibilities not always supported with adequate processes and resources. • Changes in SDG monitoring, follow-up and review not always conducive to stronger systems.
Data and indicators	• Strong focus on identification of indicators at the national level, conducting assessments and prioritization exercises to identify indicator availability and gaps. • Some gains in the availability of indicators over time in specific countries. • Increased awareness and knowledge of tested set of tools for data collection. • Regional complementary frameworks. For example, the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development includes indicators instrumental for the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda through a regional lens. • Emerging efforts to enhance data disaggregation through more systematic approaches. • Multiple initiatives and efforts to support the development of indicators and enhance data availability at subnational level.	• Definition of national targets, baselines and benchmarks. • Identification of additional national indicators to complement the global indicator system. • Align existing national indicator systems and national statistical strategies to the SDGs. • Coordination and consistency of indicators across levels of government and across subnational governments. • Specific challenges on availability of indicators for SDGs such as SDG 16 and environmental SDGs. • Data lags (data being outdated) and data gaps (data being unavailable for many indicators). • Lack of expertise and capacities at the national/subnational/local/city levels to collect, analyse and interpret all the data collected for the various indicators. • Building alliances and effective coordination between traditional data producers (such as National Statistical Offices and national level ministries/agencies) and local authorities, private sector and the academia.
Subnational (including local) government	• Increased consultation of subnational governments to develop VNRs. • Increasing number of localization activities. • Positive impact of VLRs (and subnational reviews) beyond monitoring and reporting, as levers for transformation and grounding subnational sustainable development strategies on disaggregated and localized data.	• Foster systematic participation of subnational governments in SDG coordination and monitoring, follow-up and review mechanisms at the national level. • Support subnational institutions to set up and strengthen SDG monitoring, follow-up, review systems. • Apply common definitions of urban concepts and standards for monitoring and reporting on the performance of cities within and across countries. • Strengthen reporting processes at subnational level.
VNR process	• Traction of global reporting, with increasing number of countries submitting more than one VNR. • Diversification of tools to collect information for VNR. • More systematic engagement of stakeholders in VNR process. • Increased compliance with global voluntary guidelines. • Spillover processes at subnational level. • A few examples of well-defined processes for the VNR.	• VNR process not understood as a continuous cycle - weak linkages between successive VNRs. • Lack of follow-up activities to the VNR process. • VNR process not well integrated with national reporting processes. • Some areas receive less attention in VNRs (e.g. local processes, international public finance, good practices). • Foster independent assessments and validation of VNR process and reports, and to incorporate such information into VNRs.

Dimension	Strengths	Challenges
National reporting	• Increased attention to reporting processes, driven by VNR success and drawing on existing reporting processes in some countries. • Increased leverage of ICTs for reporting and communication with the public.	• Definition of specific processes for national reporting (e.g. frequency, responsibilities, templates). • Subnational, national and global reporting not coordinated/integrated. • Limited reporting to legislatures, undermining oversight and accountability. • Failure to report on actions from subnational level and non-state stakeholders. • Challenges to link actions to results in national reports.
Stakeholder engagement	• Increasing stakeholder involvement & number of different stakeholders in the VNR process. • Diversification of stakeholders' tools for conducting independent assessments of SDG implementation, including shadow reports. • Interest to engage in SDG monitoring by private / state actors (e.g. business and finance sector). • Increasing use of digital solutions for stakeholder involvement and data monitoring, both in the VNR process and other monitoring frameworks. • Stakeholders' contributions to development of indicators. • Positive spillovers from independent assessment and reporting by stakeholders (e.g. networking, engagement with government, inputs to official reports).	• Attention to challenges to civic space and other enabling conditions for stakeholder engagement. • Limited transparency and information on SDG implementation efforts create asymmetries and undermine effective engagement of stakeholders. • Government mapping of relevant stakeholders. • Development of technical guidance and tools for engagement.
Policy coherence & integration	• Creation of some institutional spaces for collaboration across levels of government in SDG monitoring and reporting. • Emerging convergence between SDG reporting and performance-based reporting and indicators. • Some efforts to align national evaluation systems to use them for SDG evaluations.	• Foster coherence and coordination in SDG monitoring, reporting and follow-up, across levels of government and with existing national monitoring/evaluation systems. • Alignment of existing policies and their monitoring and evaluation frameworks with related SDG targets and indicators to enable linking implementation with results and reporting on progress. • Monitoring and reporting on synergetic delivery of multiple SDGs. • Reporting and monitoring on impacts outside national borders (i.e. spillover impacts) and factoring these into overall national progress on SDGs. • Capitalize synergies, and address linkages and tradeoffs between the SDGs in monitoring and reporting. • Strengthen alignment of existing performance systems and indicators with SDG frameworks to report on progress.
Feedback loops	• Good practice of alignment of independent SDG evaluation with electoral and legislative cycles, which favors uptake of recommendations into government programmes and accountability. • Strong uptake of SDG audit findings and recommendations, with some examples of changes in SDG implementation and governance.	• Limited use by governments of information and evidence from SDG monitoring to strengthen SDG implementation. • Limited use of performance information for decision-making and for accountability purposes.

Sources: Based on analysis presented in this chapter, data collected and inputs received in preparation for the report.

Institutions are paramount to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Five years after the start of the implementation of the Agenda, governance issues remain at the forefront. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted even more the importance of national institutions for the achievement of the SDGs. The World Public Sector Report 2021 focuses on three dimensions of institutional change at the national level. First, it documents changes in institutional arrangements for SDG implementation since 2015. Second, it assesses the development, performance, strengths and weaknesses of follow-up and review systems for the SDGs. Third, it examines efforts made by governments and other stakeholders to enhance the capacity of public servants to implement the SDGs. Based on in-depth examination of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation in a sample of 24 countries in all regions, the report aims to draw attention to the institutional dimension of SDG implementation and provide lessons for national policymakers in this regard. The report also takes stock of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on national institutions and their implications for delivering on the 2030 Agenda.