

»» How to ensure an ambitious implementation and monitoring of the SDGs?

No. 12, 30 March 2016



Author: Dr Julia Sattelberger
Editor: Simone Sieler

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the international community agreed on a comprehensive system of global development goals. However, the prioritisation of goals, the definition of specific levels of ambition and the actual implementation of the goals are the responsibility of each individual country.

In order to track the implementation process of the SDGs and to provide an incentive for ambitious national measures, the United Nations Statistical Commission (STATCOM) adopted a set of indicators for monitoring the achievement of the goals at the global level. In addition, a political review process was established through the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

230 indicators for measuring progress at the global level

Following several months of discussions, the UN Statistical Commission adopted a set of 230 indicators for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs in March this year. A minimum of one indicator was defined for each of the 17 goals and their 169 targets. Some indicators are used more than once to monitor different goals.

In accordance with the 2030 Agenda's ambition to 'leave no one behind', these indicators should, where possible and feasible, be disaggregated by social group and gender. Key challenges for STATCOM included relying as much as possible on existing data and coming to an agreement on universal definitions for the global indicators. The result is a compromise.

Data on individual indicators will be collected at the national and regional level and will be brought together at the global level by UN organisations. Not only, but particularly in poorer countries, considerable efforts are needed to ensure that national statistical offices can provide data in the required quality. For many indicators it will be necessary to rely on

estimates – as it has been the case in the past. The globally aggregated indicators should eventually form the basis for progress reports to be issued under the auspices of the UN system.

Annual progress reporting at the High-Level Political Forum

The global indicators now set a comprehensive framework to measure and report implementation progress. Governments are now encouraged to define their own SDG priorities as well as levels of ambition for national indicators in accordance with their particular challenges, current situations and opportunities.

National goals, implementation plans and progress will be reported at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on a voluntary basis. The HLPF is an annual meeting of high level representatives from UN Member States. In addition to monitoring the implementation of the SDGs and formulating recommendations and suggestions for an enhanced implementation, the meeting shall ensure that political pressure for the ambitious implementation of the SDGs remains high.

The HLPF has the mandate to assess the implementation of the SDGs on a global scale and to request national or thematic reviews that will reflect different themes each year (2016: Ensuring that no one is left behind). The precise modalities of the monitoring and review mechanism are currently under discussion.

The first HLPF meeting to review the SDG implementation will take place in New York from 11 to 20 July 2016. 22 states have volunteered to report their action taken to integrate the SDGs into their national sustainability and development strategies, including China, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Togo, Switzerland and Germany.

National reports should

- provide a brief insight into the implementation status of each individual SDG;
- present the difficulties in achieving the SDGs;
- discuss in detail specific SDGs that are particularly relevant in the national context;
- and reflect the national implementation efforts in light of the respective HLPF theme.

The UN encourages Member States to primarily report on how they have started to incorporate the SDGs into their national institutional frameworks and how their activities reflect the three dimensions of sustainability defining the core of the 2030 Agenda.

Challenges for monitoring the SDG implementation

The development of a meaningful monitoring framework and reporting system, which offers guidelines for measuring progress and provides a platform to discuss challenges and shortcomings in implementing the SDGs, is essential for maintaining the political pressure required to implement the 2030 Agenda.

Key challenges that remain include

- providing incentives for formulating and implementing ambitious national objectives and
- creating a sound statistical data basis for monitoring the SDGs, without creating excessive bureaucracy.

The first HLPF in July will show what direction countries will take in this regard. ■