



## How can alignment mechanisms be strengthened to enhance the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? A case of the WEFH nexus in Uganda

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### Executive summary

Achieving Uganda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 requires effective alignment across government ministries, private sector, and international donors. Without alignment, efforts risk inefficiencies, resource wastage, and slow progress towards achievement of the SDGs. This policy brief highlights Uganda's progress in SDG alignment but identifies challenges such as bureaucratic delays, conflicting interests, and over-reliance on external aid. Improving alignment can enhance resource use, streamline sector coordination, and strengthen Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). Key recommendations include investing in data systems, establishing cross-sectoral committees, prioritizing socially driven PPPs, and improving donor coordination. These actions are vital for achieving the SDGs and ensuring Uganda's long-term sustainable development.

### Key findings

1. Alignment across ministries, private sector, communities, and donors improves SDG implementation.
2. Public-private partnerships enhance infrastructure and service delivery, especially in healthcare.
3. Streamlining donor efforts with Uganda's priorities ensures efficient resource use.
4. Challenges such as bureaucratic delays, over-reliance on external aid, and conflicting interests persist during SDG implementation.

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## Introduction

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is critical for Uganda's socio-economic growth and long-term stability. However, fragmented efforts among government ministries, the private sector, and international donors often hinder progress, leading to inefficiencies, wasted resources, and delayed achievement of the 2030 targets. The interconnected nature of the Water-Energy-Food-Health (WEFH) nexus is particularly critical, as misaligned actions in one sector can undermine progress in others. Alignment mechanisms are essential for fostering coordination, optimizing resource allocation, and addressing trade-offs while maximizing synergies across SDG targets, particularly within the WEFH nexus. This policy brief highlights the importance of strengthening alignment mechanisms within the WEFH nexus to ensure integrated and sustainable development, minimize sectoral conflicts, and accelerate SDG implementation in Uganda.

## Context and Background

Uganda has demonstrated its commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through strategic frameworks such as the National Health Sector Development Plan, National Development Plan III, and Vision 2040. However, realizing these goals requires more than policy commitments; it demands coherence in objectives, instruments, and implementation modalities across sectors. Cross-sector coordination is particularly vital for addressing interlinked SDGs such as Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), and Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3). The Water-Energy-Food-Health (WEFH) nexus highlights the need for alignment to leverage synergies and address trade-offs. For instance, solar-powered water pumps can simultaneously advance SDG 6 and SDG 7 by improving water access and energy

availability, demonstrating the potential for synergies when policies and implementation efforts align. Conversely, trade-offs arise from misaligned actions; for example, heavy reliance on charcoal for cooking may enhance energy and food security (SDG 2) but undermines Climate Action (SDG 13) and Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) by contributing to deforestation, air pollution, and respiratory illnesses. These challenges underscore the importance of effective governance and institutional frameworks to align efforts, optimize resources, and manage inter-sectoral trade-offs. Through fostering coherence and strengthening alignment mechanisms, Uganda can unlock the full potential of the WEFH nexus to accelerate SDG implementation while ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

## Research Approach

This brief synthesizes insights from a comprehensive review of scientific literature, Uganda's development initiatives, and global best practices. It builds on findings from the Dutch Research Council-funded project, "Beyond Cherry-Picking: Aligning Development Actors for Inclusive SDG Governance in East Africa," and ongoing studies in Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, and the Netherlands.

A key feature of this approach is the incorporation of interviews with stakeholders across sectors, including government officials, private sector representatives, and development partners, to ground the analysis in practical, real-world applications of alignment mechanisms. These interviews provide context-specific insights into how the ten alignment mechanisms identified in Wiegant's (2024) paper can be effectively implemented to bridge sectoral gaps, harmonize governance structures, and address synergies and trade-offs between SDGs in East Africa.

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## SDG implementation progress

Uganda has made notable progress in aligning its national development priorities with the SDGs, particularly through strengthened collaboration between government ministries and international partners. Key successes include improved inter-departmental coordination (i.e. Initiatives like the establishment of SDG coordination frameworks under the Office of the Prime Minister have facilitated collaboration between key ministries, enabling cohesive planning and policy integration), enhanced resource pooling (i.e. Platforms such as the Uganda SDG Partnership Platform have aligned donor efforts with national development plans, ensuring resources are strategically allocated to high-priority areas like clean water access (SDG 6), and the involvement of the private sector in Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) (i.e. PPPs have contributed to the expansion of solar energy projects, improving rural access to electricity while advancing SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action)), notably in infrastructure and healthcare. Donor coordination has also improved, aligning efforts with national development plans. Despite these achievements, several challenges remain. Coordination barriers, such as overlapping mandates and weak inter-agency communication, persist. Competing stakeholder interests often result in fragmented priorities, while bureaucratic inertia and resource constraints limit the scalability of successful initiatives. These issues highlight the need for robust alignment mechanisms to bridge sectoral divides, enhance synergies, and address trade-offs in SDG implementation.

## The Potential of Aligning Development Efforts:

### A Focus on the WEFH Nexus

Aligning development efforts across sectors, public-private partnerships (PPPs), donors, and recipients is essential for advancing Uganda's Sustainable Development Goals

(SDG) implementation, particularly within the Water-Energy-Food-Health (WEFH) nexus. Real-world examples highlight both the synergies and trade-offs in this context and underscore the need for enhanced coordination mechanisms:

**Inter-departmental Alignment:** Coordination between the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and the Ministry of Water and Environment is critical for promoting sustainable agricultural irrigation systems (SDG 2: zero hunger) and water access (SDG 6: clean water and sanitation). For example, the introduction of solar-powered irrigation systems by the Uganda Solar Energy Association, with support from the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), has improved agricultural productivity while reducing water scarcity. However, gaps in inter-ministerial collaboration often lead to fragmented implementation and inefficiencies. Therefore, alignment strategies like Joint Policy Frameworks (e.g., inter-ministerial agreements) can formalize coordination across sectors to ensure policy coherence and streamline implementation. Integrated Monitoring Systems, such as shared databases for tracking water and energy use, could further enhance alignment

**Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** PPPs are instrumental in scaling innovative solutions within the WEFH nexus. A notable example is the collaboration between Uganda Breweries Limited and WaterAid Uganda, which jointly developed a water harvesting and storage system to address water scarcity in semi-arid areas. This initiative contributes to SDG 6 (clean water) and SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) by incorporating renewable energy for pumping and storage. However, such projects can face challenges when private sector interests conflict with long-term social goals, such as equitable access. Therefore, Social Impact Agreements can align private sector projects with social goals by embedding accountability measures. Stakeholder Engagement Platforms can also bring together public and private actors to co-

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create solutions that balance profit motives with community needs

**Donor-Recipient Alignment:** International donors like the World Bank and USAID have supported Uganda's efforts to integrate clean water access with health outcomes (SDG 3: good health and well-being) through projects like the Integrated Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (IWASH) initiative. These programs have successfully linked water access with reductions in waterborne diseases. However, misalignment between donor priorities and national needs sometimes results in resources being allocated to donor-driven agendas instead of long-term local priorities. Joint Planning and Budgeting Tools can ensure donor funding is tied to Uganda's development plans. Needs Assessment Frameworks, conducted collaboratively, can help prioritize projects that align with national and local objectives

**Inter-Donor Alignment:** Donor coordination is vital for ensuring efficient resource allocation across the WEFH nexus. For instance, the Rockefeller Foundation's Smart Power Africa initiative, which focuses on decentralized renewable energy solutions, complements UNICEF's WASH programs. These projects can create synergies by integrating clean energy with water access and sanitation efforts. However, a lack of shared frameworks sometimes leads to duplication or conflicting priorities. Collaborative Platforms for Donor Engagement, such as SDG-specific working groups, can promote information sharing and reduce duplication. Harmonized Reporting Standards can align monitoring and evaluation across donor programs to ensure consistency and complementarity.

## Opportunities for Enhancing Alignment in the WEFH Nexus

Effective alignment of development efforts is essential for advancing Uganda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the Water-Energy-Food-Health (WEFH) nexus. Despite significant potential,

challenges such as data gaps, fragmented coordination, and misaligned priorities hinder progress. Concrete examples highlight these issues and opportunities for improvement:

**Data Unavailability:** Reliable data is critical for informed decision-making across the WEFH nexus. For example, limited data on water quality in agricultural zones impacts efforts to mitigate antimicrobial resistance (SDG 3: Good Health and SDG 6: Clean Water). Addressing these gaps through robust data collection systems, such as expanding the Uganda Bureau of Statistics' surveys to include WEFH-related indicators, would enable evidence-based interventions.

**Inter-departmental Coordination:** Fragmentation between ministries undermines efficiency. A case in point is the overlapping roles of the Ministry of Water and Environment and the Ministry of Health in WASH programs, where parallel water infrastructure projects in rural areas lead to resource duplication. Establishing inter-ministerial task forces or joint planning committees could streamline efforts, ensuring integrated solutions for clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) and health (SDG 3).

**Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** PPPs offer innovative solutions for WEFH challenges. For instance, the Uganda Breweries-WaterAid collaboration on water access in drought-prone regions integrates clean water systems powered by renewable energy, aligning with SDG 6 (water) and SDG 7 (energy). Expanding such models to include agro-industrial waste recycling or solar irrigation can amplify impacts. Strengthening accountability mechanisms ensures alignment with national priorities.

**Donor-Recipient Alignment:** Misalignment between donor priorities and local needs often hampers SDG progress. For example, while international health funding focuses on HIV/AIDS, gaps persist in maternal health services. Collaborative planning platforms like the Joint Sector Review could align donor resources with Uganda's WEFH priorities,

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reducing external funding dependency and fostering sustainability.

**Inter-Donor Collaboration:** Donors occasionally implement overlapping initiatives. In agriculture, one donor may focus on water access while another prioritizes renewable energy without integrating efforts, leading to inefficiencies. A shared donor coordination platform, such as the Uganda Donor Partnership Forum, could foster joint initiatives that optimize resources across the WEFH nexus.

Addressing these challenges and harnessing the opportunities for better alignment will not only accelerate Uganda's progress toward the SDGs but also ensure that development efforts are more inclusive, efficient, and sustainable.

## Conclusion and Recommendations:

Achieving the SDGs in Uganda requires better alignment of efforts across government sectors, the private sector, and donors. Key barriers include data gaps and misaligned priorities, which limit informed decision-making and hinder coordination, particularly in health, agriculture, and WASH sectors. To address these challenges, the following actions are recommended:

**Invest in robust data systems:** Uganda should prioritize the development of comprehensive data systems to track progress toward SDG targets effectively. Expanding the Uganda Bureau of Statistics' surveys to include WEFH-related indicators, such as water usage, energy efficiency, food security metrics, and health outcomes, is critical. This investment will provide the evidence needed for informed decision-making, enable real-time monitoring, and identify gaps in implementation.

**Strengthen cross-sectoral coordination:** Uganda should establish formal inter-ministerial task forces or joint planning committees with representatives from key sectors, including agriculture, water, energy, and health. These bodies can foster better coordination, ensure policy coherence, and streamline resource allocation. For instance, a national WEFH task force could oversee the integration of water, energy, and food policies, reducing inefficiencies and improving program delivery.

**Refocus PPPs:** PPPs should be refocused to prioritize socially driven outcomes, such as affordable healthcare, sustainable energy solutions, and equitable access to water resources. Introducing accountability frameworks, such as performance-based contracts and social impact assessments, can help align private sector activities with national development priorities.

**Enhance donor coordination:** Establishing joint planning mechanisms, such as shared learning platforms and multi-donor coordination committees, can help align donor efforts with Uganda's national SDG roadmap. Regular stakeholder consultations and collaborative funding strategies can further ensure that aid is allocated efficiently and addresses local priorities, such as improving WASH services in underserved areas. Beyond alignment, strong governance, accountability, and local capacity building are essential to sustain progress. With these measures, Uganda can adopt a more integrated and effective approach to achieving the SDGs, ensuring sustainable development and prosperity for its citizens.

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