



The case for stronger alignment of actors and efforts for effective SDG governance in Kenya

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Introduction

This policy brief contains insights from a multi-country project focused on aligning development actors and their efforts for inclusive and effective governance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in East Africa, with Kenya as one of the three focus countries. It points out the challenges with the current SDG governance framework which is far from ideal, highlighting the presence of multiple decision-making centers, various actors who are simultaneously implementing the SDGs, and the complex interaction of the 17 SDGs. We propose four broad alignment mechanisms for coordinating the efforts of these actors, express a recommitment the SDGs and accelerate progress towards their attainment.

Highlights

- The **17 SDGs interact in complex ways** and there is a need to **enhance positive interactions** (synergies) and reduce or **manage negative interactions** (trade-offs) for their effective implementation and to avoid cherry-picking given that all SDGs are critical for development.
- **Cross-sector and cross-level alignments** between government departments, donors and actors in the public and private sectors are required to manage the complex interaction of SDGs.
- The **interaction of SDGs has an implication on the financing of SDGs** and therefore alignments are critical given the limited financial resources available to implement SDGs.
- Development actors need to devise **appropriate financing & coordination mechanisms** that are not just critical at different stages of the policy cycle but also hold **the greatest potential for accelerating the attainment of the SDGs**.

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Governance of SDGs: In search of a new 'how'

In the past three decades or so, there has been an acknowledgment of the development challenges that the world faces and a need to coordinate ways to solve them. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formalized in 2000 as a blueprint for addressing global development challenges by 2015. The Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development encapsulated in the 17 SDGs was yet another optimistic take on global development. However, the 2024 Sustainable Development Goals Report by the UN points out that with only 6 years to 2030, only 17% of the SDGs are on track to be achieved with 18% of the 169 indicators showing stagnation and another 17% showing regression below baseline levels in 2015 (United Nations, 2024). The question of why the current SDG governance approaches have not yielded significant results in the attainment of the SDGs yet there has been a multiplicity of actors working on the same for nearly a decade therefore bears reflection. This policy brief suggests mechanisms by which actors and efforts can be coordinated to accelerate the attainment of the SDGs.

There are multiple actors at different levels and sectors implementing SDGs in Kenya. Some of their efforts are easy to perceive while some are often opaque, accounted for or even ignored, such as development work at the community level which is crucial but often undervalued. Kenyans granted themselves the constitution 2010 which changed the governance system, establishing 47 autonomous devolved units (Counties) with differentiated functions from those handled by the central government. Devolution has had implications on the financing of SDGs; counties each get a portion of the shareable national revenue to finance devolved functions like healthcare, early education, agriculture, water services

and others based on a revenue-sharing formula, while the national government retains portions of it to finance national functions. This sharing of revenue has not been without challenges. Devolution has also had implications on how donors have fashioned their programmes and aid. The presence of multiple decision-making centers has resulted in significant duplication of efforts, resource misuse and even conflict between development actors. Refreshingly, there has been some effort in coordinating action on SDGs in Kenya, especially by actors within government structures. There are more actors, however, and therefore there is a need for more alignment between the public and private sectors, among donors and between recipients and donors.

There is growing acknowledgment that the 17 SDGs interact in complex ways and development actors need to be circumspect about how they implement SDGs. SDGs interact positively -where action on one goal contributes positively towards another. An example of a positive interaction is securing boreholes in rural areas to prevent water-borne diseases in line with SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) which has a positive relationship with SDG 3 (good health and well-being). Alignment in this case aims to identify synergetic opportunities between actors' efforts to accelerate the attainment of the related SDGs.

SDGs also interact negatively – action on one goal contributes negatively towards another. An example of a negative interaction is efforts aimed at reducing methane emissions from the livestock sector that cause global warming in line with SDG 13, the Global Methane Pledge and the Paris Agreement. This is substantively at odds with efforts aimed at increasing livestock population to aid attainment of SDG 2 (zero hunger) given

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that the sector is critical in food production for a growing population and SDG1 (no poverty) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) given that the livestock sector is a source of livelihoods for many Kenyans and revenue for the country. Alignment in this regard is to manage the interaction to arrive at a net-positive or win-win-win situation.

Indeed, the complex interaction of SDGs has implications on how we finance and implement SDGs. There is, therefore, a continuous need to enhance positive SDG interactions (synergies) and reduce or manage negative SDG interactions (trade-offs) to accelerate progress and help actors in Kenya avoid 'cherry-picking' SDGs to implement. There are a few studies ongoing in Kenya under the 'Governing SDGs interactions Project'. The project aims to explore how cross-level and cross-sector alignment enables development actors to address trade-offs and build synergies in the governance and implementation of SDGs to accelerate their attainment. Similar studies in Ethiopia and Uganda under the project have also yielded insights into alignments that are required to make progress in achieving the SDGs and the following section of this brief will summarize the same.

Alignment mechanisms

In considering the alignments needed for efficient governance of SDGs, it is critical to think about the key actors who are simultaneously involved in implementing SDGs. Here, we consider alignments between the government, including government departments, ministries and agencies, the donor community and the private sector in different sectors. The key issue, however, remains the need and ways to align the efforts of these actors. Daniel Wiegant, Art Dewulf and Josephine Van Zeben who are part of the governing SDG interactions project, in their recent publication in the World Development Journal identify 10 specific mechanisms which they cluster into

4 broad categories (Wiegant et al., 2024). Below is a description of the 4 broad alignment mechanisms the study proposes which are relevant to Kenya.

(i) Inter-departmental alignment

This alignment mechanism relates to the state agencies, ministries and directorates working in concert to achieve SDGs. This can be done through inter-departmental collaboration which ensures alignment in efforts within government, given different government departments have different mandates which have some convergence. At the core of this alignment effort in Kenya is the SDG Secretariat under the State Department of Devolution and Planning whose core mandate is to coordinate whole-of-government action in the achievement of SDGs. There is also considerable effort in collaboration among government departments, ministries and agencies through the multi-stakeholder Inter-Agency Technical Committee on SDGs, the parliamentary caucus on SDGs and Business and the sub-cabinet committee on SDGs as well as the Council of Governors SDG Unit.

Inter-departmental alignment can also be ensured through policy integration. Notably, there has been integration of the SDGs into national, county and other sectoral policy documents. In particular, SDGs have been domesticated in the Kenya Vision 2030 through successive medium-term development plans as well as the County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs).

(ii) Donor–recipient alignment

This alignment refers to the co-ordination between different types of donors and recipients of development assistance. Some of this is already ongoing through budgetary support to recipients. For example, some donors provide grants to the national and county (sub-national) governments which have been factored in their respective budgets. For example, in the area of capacity building, donors such as the European Union

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and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) have provided financial support to aid the localization of SDGs in County development plans while the UNDP has supported a recent national policy gap analysis study for SDGs. Various donors are supporting key flagship programmes and projects under the national and county development plans.

The donor-recipient alignment also manifests through a sector-wide approach to donor assistance through varied financing mechanisms. In the health sector, for example, donors such as USAID and others work with the national and county governments on a variety of health programmes relating to HIV AIDS, maternal, neonatal and adolescent health, immunization, malaria, and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis through campaigns such as 'Komesha TB'. This sector-wide approach by donors is also replicated across other sectors.

(iii) Inter-donor alignment

The multiplicity of donors working on various focus areas at the national, sub-national and even the community level, and given the complex interaction of SDGs suggests that alignment mechanisms are required to leverage complementarities between donors' work. Such inter-donor alignment can help avoid unnecessary duplication of effort, make optimal use of limited resources and forestall challenges with project and programme implementation. This alignment mechanism also seeks to cure the sometimes-uneasy co-existence and conflict between development actors which could potentially hinder the delivery of benefits to the intended beneficiaries.

This alignment can be realized through efforts such as donor working groups at the national and county levels as well as across sectors, an effort that is already ongoing in Kenya.

(iv) Public-private alignment

The foregoing emphasis on sustainability and 'profit with purpose' emphasizes the importance of the private sector in partnering with public sector actors in the attainment of the SDGs. This is critical given that the private sector exists within society and that good corporate citizenship obliges the private sector players to their part in building a sustainable future. One way that Kenya has made steps in engendering alignment between private sector and government is through collaborative governance. public participation, a critical constitutional principle of governance under the 2010 Constitution. This constitutional provision allows the private sector and other actors like civil society and academia to participate actively in policy and law-making processes. There is therefore a need to have collective voices present in discussions touching on SDGs as this will inevitably impact not only business but also society at large. A more practical way that this has been done is through the enactment of the Public Private Partnerships (PPP) Act, 2021 which provided for the setting up of the Directorate of Public Private Partnerships whose role it is to manage PPPs which is offered as a viable alternative to public investment. PPPs recognizes the limitations of both government and the private sector while at the same time allowing them to leverage on their strengths and facilitate smooth delivery of projects and initiatives. A number of flagship projects have already been completed under PPP arrangements including major road projects such as the Nairobi Expressway and the Thika Super-highway and energy projects such as the Lake Turkana Wind Power Project, Menengai Geothermal Power Plant Project. Wiegant et al (2024) assert that such collaborations can enable Kenya to realize progress in infrastructure development faster, more efficiently and at scale than what government or private sector would have done on their own.

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Final reflections

- As there are limited resources to implement SDGs, cross-sector and cross-level alignment mechanisms provides the best chance for better financing of SDGs given that actors are able to align their financing priorities.
- An examination of the effectiveness of the alignment mechanisms is critical in re-orienting policy and programmatic approaches to the SDGs by unlocking policy deadlocks and bottlenecks in implementation of programmes.
- There is a need for alignment mechanisms across different sectors given the complex interaction of SDGs which result in trade-offs and synergies which need to be managed to bring about the best possible outcome.
- There is a need for alignment across different governance levels where decisions on SDG implementation are made e.g. global, regional, national and county levels. Cross-level alignment duplication of efforts of different actors and inefficiency which delays progress on attainment of SDGs.

Conclusion

This policy brief has drawn our attention to four alignment mechanisms that are relevant to Kenya, which if given more attention have the potential to accelerate progress towards the realization of the SDGs. The idea of 'leaving no one behind' as espoused in the

Agenda 2030 requires that all actors be involved in the realization of the SDGs. Further, the efforts of these actors need to be aligned as a way to manage the complex interaction of the SDGs as well as the complexities imposed by a fragmented SDG governance system. Public resources alone will never be adequate to implement SDGs. There is a need to rope in the donor community and private sector in mobilizing financial resources requisite to realize the SDGs. In this view, there is a need to consider opportunities for better cross-sector, cross-level alignment of these actors and their efforts to make the most out of the time left and financial resources available to implement SDGs. Further insights from the project on alignment mechanisms will hopefully invoke some thinking about a more inclusive and effective governance system for development goals post-2030.

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