



Why Are Alignment Mechanisms Key for SDG Success? Lessons from Ethiopia's Landscape and Forest Restoration Initiatives

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Executive Summary

Achieving the 17 SDGs requires implementing the goals using integrated approaches, which needs the establishment of alignment mechanisms to create policy coherence among development actors and effectively reconcile the inherent synergies and trade-offs in the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the goals. Establishing alignment mechanisms also helps to reduce the likelihood that the development actors will selectively implement their most desirable SDGs only, thereby, leading to more integrated SDG implementation in the country.

Key Findings

1. **Inter-departmental alignments** can be enhanced through the use of central government efforts, inter-departmental collaborations, policy integration, and regulatory impact assessments.
2. **Collaborative governance and integrated reporting methods** help to create alignments between public and private actors.
3. **Budget support and sector-wide approaches** are important tools to create donor-recipient alignments.
4. **Trust funds and Donor working groups** help to create inter-donor alignments.

What's At Stake

Ethiopia allocates over 45% of its national budget to priority sectors such as education, health, road construction, water, and agriculture, significantly contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the past 10 years, the country has invested over \$1.2 billion annually in land restoration initiatives alone (Abera et al., 2020; Adimassu, Langan, & Barron, 2018). In December 2024, Parliament also approved a bill to establish and manage a special fund for the green legacy and rehabilitation of degraded lands,

requiring 0.5 to 1 percent of the total government budget each year. These efforts highlight Ethiopia's commitment to combating land degradation and protecting natural resources. However, the effectiveness of these investments towards achieving the SDGs depends on the alignment of efforts and resources among various stakeholders, including government departments, private sector players, and international donors.

This policy brief outlines essential mechanisms for creating alignment of efforts & resources and enhancing collaboration among public, private, and donor actors. By implementing alignment mechanisms among stakeholders, Ethiopia can successfully leverage the synergies and manage the trade-offs inherent in the SDGs. By identifying areas where initiatives can complement each other, stakeholders could engage collaboratively to advance multiple SDGs. Trade-offs occur when activities promoting one SDG or more hurt other SDGs. Here, stakeholders should also collaborate to reduce these negative effects to realize more balanced and inclusive progress. The alignment mechanisms can also reduce the risk of selective implementation of the SDGs among various stakeholders, ensuring holistic implementation of the SDGs in the country.

So, the important question is: what mechanisms enable development actors, located in different sectors, in different jurisdictions, and at different governance levels, to align their efforts to advance the integrated implementation of SDGs? Researchers from Wageningen University, Governing SDG interactions in the East-Africa team have provided answers to the question by conducting a literature review (Wiegant, Dewulf, & Van Zeben, 2024). The study identified ten alignment mechanisms that are broadly categorized into four groups of development actors: A) between government departments; B) between public and private actors; C) between donors and recipients; and D) between donors. Regarding their practicality, the study shows examples of how each of the alignment mechanisms works out in practice using Ethiopia's forest and landscape restoration governance arrangement as a case study point.

The Stakes

1. Resource Limitations: No single entity has the necessary resources and expertise to achieve all SDGs independently. Collaborative efforts are essential to pool resources effectively.
2. Complex Interactions: The SDGs exhibit both synergies and trade-offs.
3. Inclusivity: Engaging diverse stakeholders, including marginalized communities & private actors, is crucial.

Research Approach

This policy brief presents the results of the study by Wiegant et al. (2024). First, building on the literature, the study identified the alignment mechanisms; then, using interviews with sector departments, multilateral and bilateral donors, research institutions, and CSOs working on forest and landscape restoration in Ethiopia, the study illustrated how each of the alignment mechanisms are used to create synergies and negotiated trade-offs in forest and landscape restoration governance in Ethiopia.

Key Findings

For creating alignment of efforts and resources among development actors, the following are the ten mechanisms categorized into four groups:

1. Inter-departmental alignments

A) Centre of Government Efforts

Strengthening the roles of key ministries, such as the Ministry of Planning and Development (MoPD) and the Ministry of Finance is essential to ensure that sectoral policies are aligned with national development goals. These ministries should work towards the establishment of dedicated agencies such as cabinet committees from diverse sectors with the mandate to keep oversight on cross-sectoral interactions for collaborations and clarifying sectoral responsibilities. Such dedicated agencies should also have branches at lower governance levels such as regional, zonal, and district levels. Yet, the establishment of sector-specific special funds such as the Green Legacy Initiative should be used with caution as such funds lack a mechanism to explicitly balance the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainable development as they are sector-specific.

B) Inter-Departmental Collaborations

This approach works through the creation of interdepartmental committees and working groups that encourage dialogue among sectors at all governance levels. For example, a National Forest Landscape Restoration

Platform can serve as an example of cross-sectoral collaboration.

C) Policy Integration

This works by embedding cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender, climate change) into departmental policies. For instance, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority can integrate social and economic dimensions into its conservation initiatives. At the federal level, the Ministry of Planning and Development (MoPD) is responsible for integrating cross-cutting issues in federal and sectoral development plans. To this end, enhancing the skill and knowledge diversity of the Ministry's technical staff is essential to enhance the quality of policy integration.

D) Regulatory Impact Assessment

Mandatory impact assessments to evaluate the economic, social, and environmental impacts of policies and interventions before and after their implementation can also help to ensure the alignment of the initiatives with the SDGs. Broader scale enforcement of the Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority's mandates to all initiatives in all sectors and jurisdictions can help to ensure all initiatives in the country adhere to regulatory impact assessment requirements.

Benefits of Inter-Departmental Alignment:

- Enhanced synergies across sectors.
- Improved resource allocation and efficiency.
- Greater consistency in policy implementation.

2) Public-Private Alignment

A) Collaborative Governance

This works by facilitating partnerships between the public and private sectors to leverage resources and expertise. It is essential to establish regulations that promote private sector involvement in SDG-related basic services like education, health, and energy while ensuring that accessibility is not compromised. As donor-funded landscape restoration initiatives in the country are often done through partnerships between private and public actors, the practice of collaborative implementation of projects is quite common in the sector. Such

approaches could be encouraged in other sectors too.

B) Integrated Reporting

Shifting from voluntary Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting to mandatory integrated reporting for both public and private entities is essential for the country. This shift can incentivize businesses to align their operations with the SDGs.

Benefits of Public-Private Alignment:

- Increased trust and cooperation between sectors.
- Enhanced accountability and transparency
- Greater innovation and efficiency in service

3) Donor-Recipient Alignment

A) Budget Support

Donors supporting Ethiopia often give earmarked grants to meet specific goals rather than general budget support, which constrains the allocation of funds according to national priorities. Providing precise information to the donor countries on what the government wants to achieve and data on where each region and district currently stands on relevant SDGs might convince donor countries to reconsider the decision and start to provide budget support.

B) Sector-Wide Approach

Some donor countries also prefer to provide support and capacity building to their chosen sector in close collaboration with national and international actors in the sector. It could also be initiated by the Ethiopian government through the establishment of a sector-specific trust fund to which donors can contribute and each donor can finance projects in their targeted geographical area. This is a good example as it allows the donors to track the use of their aid fund. Such an approach is quite common in Integrated Landscape Management and National Forest Sector Development Program-related initiatives in the country and other sectors should follow the same step.

Benefits of Donor-Recipient Alignment:

- Reduced fragmentation of aid
- Greater alignment of donor activities with national strategies
- Improved effectiveness of development interventions

4) Inter-Donor Alignment

A) Trust Funds

This mechanism is used to pool resources from multiple donors for targeted initiatives, such as climate adaptation and landscape restoration, managed by international organizations such as the World Bank and UN agencies. However, the salary paid to consultants and staff of these projects needs due consideration.

B) Donor Working Group

This mechanism facilitates coordination among donors through regular meetings and shared objectives, allowing for the exchange of best practices and collective decision-making. Yet, the effectiveness of such donor working groups depends on whether the group has a formal communication structure and how their members regularly meet to formalize working methods and identify common priority areas.

Benefits of Inter-Donor Alignment:

- Greater effectiveness in resource mobilization.
- Streamlined donor activities and reduced duplication.
- Enhanced collaboration on shared development goals

Conclusion

The results of the empirical study forward the following suggestions to decision-makers:

- 1) **Strengthen Political Leadership:** High-level commitment is essential to foster a culture of collaboration. Political leaders should champion integrated approaches and ensure accountability across all sectors.
- 2) **Combination of Alignment Mechanisms:** Using a combination of the 10 alignment

mechanisms is the best way to foster integrated SDG implementation.

- 3) **Enhance Inclusivity:** Actively involve civil society, local communities, and private sector actors in the decision-making process to ensure diverse perspectives are considered.
- 4) **Implement Evaluation Frameworks:** Establish mechanisms to regularly assess the interactions between SDGs, identifying synergies and conflicts to inform policy adjustments. Development efforts should also be evaluated for the inclusion of relevant SDGs and how each SDG interacts with other SDGs within the development efforts.
- 5) **Capacity Building and Awareness Creation:** Invest in training and resources for government officials and stakeholders to enhance understanding of integrated approaches and alignment mechanisms.
- 6) **Regular Monitoring and Reporting:** Develop a robust system for monitoring progress on SDG implementation, utilizing data to inform policy adjustments and stakeholder engagement.
- 7) **Further work is needed** on the effectiveness of the different alignment mechanisms in different sectors such as Health, Education, and Agriculture. This helps to further strengthen the findings of the study as well as enable cross-sectoral learning.

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