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Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals in national development plans

Summary

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 created an exceptional opportunity to integrate agreed international policy objectives and obligations with national and sectoral strategies and plans. Key to “leaving no one behind” and the successful implementation of SDGs into existing national plans, strategies and policies is the inclusion of marginalized groups. The 2030 Agenda calls for a *multi-stakeholder approach* for adaptation to national contexts, underlines the *interlinkages* between the social, economic and environmental development pillars and calls for an *integrated approach* to policy analysis, development, implementation and monitoring and the contextualization of issues. The promotion and establishment of joint institutional mechanisms that govern water, energy and food at the regional and national levels and the adoption of a nexus analytical framework will support Member states to pursue policy coherence among these sectors and operationalize an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to achieving the SDGs. ESCWA provides a platform for dialogue for a range of stakeholders to achieve the integrated management of natural resources by improving food, energy and water security and enhancing resilience to climate change in the Arab region.

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I. THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. The United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. In January 2016, with the conclusion of the Millennium Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda went into effect. Structured in four parts, 2030 Agenda is made up of: a declaration which includes a vision and principles for “Transforming our World” anchored in human rights and seeking to preserve and promote fundamental freedoms for all; 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets setting a guiding framework for implementing the 2030 Agenda; means of implementation underlining the importance of finance, building multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacities, developing and transferring technologies, as well as creating an enabling environment; and follow-up and review to advance implementation and ensure accountability.

2. The SDGs are universal, interconnected and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development with the aim to promote equitable economic growth and inclusive social development while at the same time safeguarding the environment and natural resources for the benefit of all, including marginalized social groups and future generations. The SDGs respect different national realities, policies and priorities, allowing for national adaptation following an integrated and collective approach. The associated targets are ambitious. They serve to guide Governments in setting national targets that take into consideration national contexts, leaving leeway to decide on how to incorporate these targets in national policies and strategies.¹

II. ADAPTATION TO NATIONAL CONTEXT: USING THE 2030 AGENDA AS A FRAMEWORK FOR PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW

3. The adoption of the SDGs by the international community represents an interesting convergence with major international agreements (Sendai Framework for Disaster Reduction, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Agreement) and with established policy objectives and obligations that are conveyed in various national and sectoral strategies and plans. Accordingly, mainstreaming SDGs into existing national plans, strategies and policies while paying special attention to the inclusion of marginalized groups is key for their successful implementation and for “leaving no one behind”.

4. As clearly stipulated in the 2030 Agenda, there is no one-size-fits-all approach for mainstreaming that would work for all countries, since each country must take into consideration its national realities and circumstances. However, engaging all stakeholders in the review and adaptation processes and following an integrated approach to policy assessment, development, implementation and monitoring are core to the mainstreaming of SDGs in national development plans (NDPs) and strategies. There are also a number of steps to mainstreaming that countries can adopt in general, including raising awareness on the 2030 Agenda; reviewing NDPs and sectoral plans and strategies and aligning them with the 2030 Agenda; financing implementation; and undertaking follow-up and review.

5. The following document focuses on approaches and steps to mainstreaming the SDGs into NDPs, applying them to the regional context where relevant.

A. APPROACHES

6. The 2030 Agenda calls for *using a multi-stakeholder approach* for adaptation to national contexts, implementation and follow-up and review through the promotion of partnerships between government entities and all development actors, including civil society organizations (CSOs), research institutes, universities and private sector institutions. A multi-stakeholder approach is essential for promoting ownership at all levels.

¹ A/RES/70/1.

7. The Agenda also underlines the *interlinkages* between the three development pillars and among SDGs and targets, calling for an *integrated approach* to policy analysis, development, implementation and monitoring and to the contextualization of issues. A water-energy -food nexus approach, as presented in box 1, spells out the linkages between the different goals and targets under the related SDGs informing national policies, programmes and projects to advance the achievement of nationally adapted SDGs. The establishment of joint institutional mechanisms for the different ministries responsible for water, agriculture and energy also enhances policy coherence among those sectors.

Water-Energy-Food Nexus in support of the implementation of the SDGs

Growing populations, rapid urbanization, dietary changes and economic growth are increasing demand for water, energy and food. Strong linkages exist between the three sectors, each of which is essential to sustainable development. Agriculture is the biggest consumer of global freshwater resources and food production and supply account for more than one quarter of the energy used worldwide. These linkages necessitate an integrated approach to the management of these sectors to support the achievement of global water, energy and food security.^a

“[The nexus] analytical framework [promoted by ESCWA] can encourage policymakers and stakeholders to consider the implications of achieving security in one sector on resource sustainability and security targets in other sectors. It does so by signaling the challenges and benefits of intersectoral institutional frameworks and the need for more integrated and informed cross-sectoral dialogue and policymaking ... [it advances a human-rights based approach to ensure] access to water, energy and food for all.”^b

The 2030 Agenda also underlines the importance of adopting an integrated approach to the implementation of “nexus-linked” SDGs such as SDG 6 (Water), SDG 7 (Energy) and SDG 2 (Food Security), promoting a better understanding of trade-offs and synergies between goals and minimizing the risk of sector-specific SDG actions weakening each another. This helps reduce inequality in access and risks in the supply of the mentioned resources.^c

^a UN-Water, *Water, Water, Food and Energy*.

^b E/ESCWA/SDPD/2015/2.

^c *The Nexus Dialogue Programme*.

B. MECHANISMS

8. *Building capacity and raising the awareness* of stakeholders on the 2030 Agenda, the relevance of the SDGs and targets to national development policies, plans and strategies and the benefits of aligning them with these goals and targets are crucial to ensuring ownership of the process at the national and local levels and the successful implementation of the Agenda.

9. *Alignment* entails holding multi-stakeholder consultations to review national sectoral strategies and development plans against the 2030 Agenda and global SDGs and targets, identifying gaps, providing recommendations on the required amendments to address these gaps and bringing policies, strategies and plans in line with the 2030 Agenda. Mapping the interconnections between the SDGs is of special importance as it supports the identification of trade-offs and synergies that guide priority setting and the refinement of strategies and plans. Adaptation also entails the setting of ambitious but attainable targets that are relevant to the national

context and, lastly but not least, the incorporation of recommendations into strategies and plans, and the matching of commitments with resources and capacities.²

10. *Mobilizing domestic resources and official development assistance and addressing international cooperation* issues pertaining to technology, science and innovation and trade and capacity-building are emphasized in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) adopted in July 2015. The AAAA looks into possible sources of financing to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, outlining “a series of bold measures to overhaul global finance practices and generate investments for tackling a range of economic, social and environmental challenges”.³ *Financing the implementation* of aligned NDPs to advance the 2030 Agenda at the national level involves the examination of the financing sources laid out in the AAAA and the different available traditional and non-traditional financing instruments; and the use of tools such as results-based budgeting and gender and environment mainstreaming, and measures including subsidy reforms, the taxation of “public bads” and disaster risk financing to enhance resilience.

11. *Follow-up and review* are principal elements of the 2030 Agenda. They support tracking and reporting on progress in implementation and promote accountability. Undertaking follow-up and review requires building human capacities; the identification of indicator and data gaps by assessing the global set of SDG indicators proposed by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators against existing national statistics; the establishment of data systems and data collection methodologies; and setting up mechanisms such as Voluntary National Reviews, among others, to track progress in the achievement of nationally-adapted SDGs. All stakeholders should engage in the follow-up and review process.⁴

III. REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR MAINSTREAMING SDGS INTO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

12. ESCWA as a regional commission seeks to achieve the integrated management of natural resources by improving food, energy and water security and enhancing resilience to climate change in the Arab region.

13. ESCWA is providing a platform for dialogue for a range of stakeholders. As stipulated and requested in the 2030 Agenda,⁵ the regional commission organizes inclusive regional preparatory meetings on water, food and energy that draw upon national-level reviews, engage countries in discussions on shared targets and contribute to policy discussions held at the ESCWA organized Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD). The agreed upon key messages from the region and its countries are then conveyed to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

14. Recognizing the importance of building capacity and raising awareness, ESCWA engages in activities that support its member countries in tracking and monitoring the water-energy-food related targets and goals and in mainstreaming SDGs into their national strategies. Collaborative work with the National Statistical Offices, continued engagement by CSOs, research and centres of excellence and the private sector ensures the accounting for the concerns and priorities of marginalized groups. It also enhances the understanding of the drivers of transformative change for innovation and technological advancement and enables exchange of lessons and experiences to further progress towards achieving national, regional and global set goals for 2030.

² United Nations Development Group (2017). *Mainstreaming The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Reference Guide to UN Country Teams*.

³ Third International Conference, *Financing for Development*, Countries reach historic agreement to generate financing for new sustainable development goals.

⁴ United Nations Development Group (2017). *Mainstreaming The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Reference Guide to UN Country Teams*.

⁵ A/RES/70/1.

15. Pursuing policy coherence across various sectors has entailed the promotion and establishment of regional institutional mechanisms for water, energy, food security at the regional and national levels. This has included holding joint meetings of the ESCWA Committees on water resources and energy resources and the first Joint Meeting of Arab Ministers of Agriculture and Water. Institutionalizing a sustainable regional mechanism for consultation, coordination and planning between the various sectors is very important to raise the level of coordination, enable the formulation of integrated policies and strategies and implement joint programmes on water, energy and agriculture that take the various environmental, economic, social and political changes in the Arab region into consideration.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Member countries are invited to review this document and advise on means for enhancing water-energy-food interlinkages, policy coherence and institutional coordination. They are also invited to look more in depth at the water-energy-food nexus as one of the robust avenues to operationalize this integrated and multidisciplinary nature of the SDGs.
