

In Search of Innovative Approaches for Follow-up and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals: Is There a Role for Southern Think Tanks?

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Despite their success, the Millennium Development Goals lacked a rigorous monitoring and accountability mechanism. This arguably affected delivery, undermined stakeholder participation, eroded legitimacy, and limited opportunities to enforce upstream and downstream “mutual accountability”.

Similarly, the follow-up and review framework for the new 2030 Agenda lacks clarity. In the final agreement, reporting modalities, governance structures, and the interface between global, regional and national reporting remain relatively obscure. While this is probably a reflection of the fine political balance achieved in the negotiations, many important questions must still be answered.

Unless we take innovative approaches to the follow-up and review process, it will be difficult to realize the potential of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). New initiatives, working in parallel with formal intergovernmental mechanisms, can help to plug some of the obvious gaps. In particular, think tanks located in the Global South are uniquely positioned to provide independent and credible evidence-based policy feedbacks (coupled with stakeholder participation) on SDG delivery. However, in designing such an initiative, it will be important to think critically about the opportunities, risks and challenges.

Key questions include:

- How can think tanks in the Global South add value to the follow-up and review process for the SDGs?
- What should be the scale and scope of their engagement?
- What would be the most appropriate modalities? What should be the frequency of deliverable outcomes?
- How can these local initiatives be pulled up to the global level in a meaningful way?
- What are the risks? Are there areas or aspects of follow-up and review where think tanks in the Global South shouldn't engage?

