



Global Report on the State of the Sustainable Development Goals

BRIEFING NOTE

Introduction

As the first four-year cycle of the 2030 Agenda comes to a close, the issues related to its effective delivery are generating renewed attention. While the world overall is moving in the right direction regarding the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), progress remains discernibly uneven across Goals and regions. In fact, at this pace, a large number of countries will not be able to reach the targets.

Southern Voice's flagship initiative on the State of the Sustainable Development Goals generates country-level evidence-based analysis to enrich the global dialogue on the 2030 Agenda. Our Initiative is a response to the lack of participation and knowledge asymmetry limiting the inclusion of researchers from the Global South in international debates. The initiative is neither a typical data-driven analysis of progress nor a traditional monitoring exercise. Instead, we seek to identify the "second-generation" challenges along with the policy responses to address them.

Our cross-country and regional analysis show that SDG progress in the Global South has been mixed. On the one hand, national governments have made critical progress in designing policy frameworks aligned with the Agenda and garnering widespread acknowledgement of the importance of not leaving the most vulnerable behind. On the other hand, weak coordination among relevant stakeholders and horizontal coherence remain as challenges to achieving the Goals. Siloed approaches also continue to undermine national governments' ability to address systemic problems and create the necessary conditions to end poverty for all.

With these challenges in mind, the State of the SDGs Report explores barriers and solutions to fulfilling the 'leaving no one behind' promise that is central to the Goals. We have identified three layers of critical action and analysis. First, we explore who are excluded from achieving the goals. Second, we delve into the links between Goals, for a better understanding of these interconnections is a basic condition to build integral policies that leave no one behind. Finally, we assert that in the context of a global agenda, policies cannot be thought of only within national borders. As such, the third layer of analysis explores these global systemic issues and their impact on national policies.

Framework of analysis



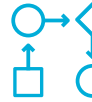
Understand synergies and trade-offs

How do the Goals interact with each other in practice?
How does this shape exclusion?



Identify those left behind

Who is being left behind in different contexts?



Internalise global systemic concerns

How do global policy problems impact national efforts to ensure no one is left behind?

Three cross-cutting issues to keep in mind

Identifying those left behind

A core principle of the 2030 Agenda is to end poverty and ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind. The first step for national governments in achieving this principle is to identify excluded individuals and groups. For this to happen, a high level of statistical capacity is crucial to generate reliable and disaggregated data that supports national governments and their efforts to end poverty. However, many countries in the Global South still struggle with weak strategies and limited funding for statistical capacity development. Data and financing gaps remain as challenges. It is also increasingly clear that efforts by national governments should include clear strategies to involve non-state actors.

Exclusion, as a global phenomenon, is more complex than ever. Individuals and groups experience overlapping forms of discrimination which deeply constrain their capabilities and opportunities to lead decent and fulfilling lives. A better understanding of what it means to be excluded in the Global South is crucial. Exclusion is highly context-specific. While well-known markers of exclusion such as gender and ethnicity remain powerful, they look different in each context and have specific implications and explanations.

The multiple dimensions of exclusion add to the challenge of governments identifying the left behind. Since it is becoming increasingly evident that progress in one area will not automatically translate into progress in another, strategies to end poverty need structural changes. Fulfilling the principle of leaving no one behind requires research and analysis that incorporate different lenses. This is only possible by looking at synergies and trade-offs that result from policy actions and the global dynamics that shape or constrain the achievement of this overarching goal.

Breaking silos: understanding synergies and trade-offs

Policies oriented towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda need to identify who is left behind, but also need to reflect an understanding of horizontal coherence and the types and levels of interactions among SDGs and targets. Therefore, the study of these interconnections has gained increased relevance in sustainable development debates.

Causal relationships among SDGs are complex from a conceptual and empirical perspective; however, lack of integration of these cross-sectoral interactions into the policy-making process has prevented countries from maximising synergies and minimising trade-offs. As a result, it has also delayed progress on the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Embracing the complex nature of interconnections between SDGs and targets implies moving away from siloed thinking to more holistic approaches. Most importantly, resulting policies need to integrate findings of how each country and local context shape interactions especially among SDGs. Lessons from our country studies in Asia and Latin America show that well-known synergies such as the positive effects of increased access to education on productivity and reduction of inequality are not necessarily being fulfilled. In particular, findings show that an increase in schooling has not always fostered increased labour-related earnings, nor has it contributed to reducing poverty. The inability to anticipate unexpected policy outcomes often disproportionately affects those who already experience exclusion.

Our study emphasizes the many challenges facing policymakers working to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Not only do policymakers have to integrate different levels and types of exclusion in their analysis, but also they need to create policies that maximize positive impacts and minimize trade-offs which are often overlooked.

Internalising global systemic concerns

Even a well-integrated and coherent national policy is not enough to achieve the 2030 Agenda; a global perspective is also required. The Global Report looks at links between three key factors: global governance (how decisions are made at a global level), global systemic concerns (policy problems that require global action), and their implications at the national level. Some of the global systemic concerns identified include regulation of global technological goods and services, trade regimes, climate change agreements, and global security policies and strategies. Each has distinct governance arrangements.

These global systemic concerns directly impact the pace with which countries implement the SDGs. Some systemic concerns have a direct impact on national policy areas: For example, changes in trade regimes will affect the industrialization of a country. However, there are also less obvious impacts: For instance, global security may also impact social sectors such as education and health.

Global systemic concerns may have positive or negative impacts at the country level. For example, while technological transformation can create significant economic benefits,

it can also fundamentally change the way work is conducted. Some jobs become obsolete, and new ones emerge. As industrial sectors grow and successfully adopt new technologies, the loss of employment may happen mostly among unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Thus, new technologies impact the various segments of society differently; governments need to respond to these global issues, primarily to ensure that they do not exacerbate inequalities and exclusion. Furthermore, the global community must take into consideration the various ways in which they impact countries and implement the best governance arrangements to deal with them.

Conclusions

The follow-up and review process of the Agenda 2030 can benefit from reflecting on the three layers of analysis of the report which are deeply intertwined: the people left behind are usually affected by the negative impacts of policy choices made nationally and of the negative effects of global policy. Thus, the SDG monitoring exercise has to give, first, a more disaggregate account of progress by the different groups of people in a country. Second, it should report beyond the silo approaches often used to assess progress and design policies. And finally, it should integrate the effects of the global systemic issues.

Successful implementation of the SDGs requires that countries move beyond monitoring towards acting in contextualised and integrated policy solutions.

Nationally, governments should strengthen their capacities to identify who is left behind and to adopt horizontal coherence approaches when creating policies that tackle different dimensions of exclusion. These policies must take into account the global issues affecting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the country level and develop strategies to overcome these challenges.

Given that global policies may act as both enablers or disablers for implementing the 2030 Agenda, more attention is required in global policy debates. One approach would be the provisioning of global public goods, based on an effective global partnership to address market imperfections and institutional failures exposed in the process of SDG delivery. This will also require establishing governance arrangements that allow countries to secure access to global public goods. Regional integration can also contribute to strengthen the standing of Southern countries in the global arena. It is imperative to recognise these second-generation challenges regarding SDG implementation.

Southern Voice is an open platform for think tanks that contributes to the global dialogue on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It does this by disseminating evidence-based policy analysis by researchers from the Global South.

This briefing note summarizes the findings from the Global Report on the State of the SDGs. The report is based on research conducted by three Southern Voice members: CIPPEC (Argentina), IPAR (Senegal), and SDPI (Pakistan). The report has extensively used regional analysis and country case studies also developed as part of the SVSS initiative and authored by nine Southern Voice member organizations. The briefing note was prepared by the Chair and Secretariat of Southern Voice.



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