



Progress on the 2030 Agenda: Insights from country experiences

12 July 2019, 9:00-15:30

Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice

Background

Southern Voice, together with the United Nations Foundation and Club de Madrid, organized a side event during the High-Level Political Forum in July 2019 in New York. The aim was to discuss progress on the 2030 Agenda, as explored in **Southern Voice's State of the SDGs research initiative (SVSS)**.

This policy-focused research initiative unpacks some of the critical relationships underpinning the 2030 Agenda to identify those who are “left behind” within diverse contextual realities in the Global South. Against this background, the initiative has conducted an innovative review of the SDGs. It shows the importance of prioritization and sequencing of policies across sectors.

The event took place at the Ford Foundation and gathered more than 60 participants. Government officials, representatives of international organizations and civil society organizations discussed the findings from this research initiative designed and led by researchers from the Global South.

Based on the newest findings from six country case studies conducted in Ghana, Nigeria, India, Sri Lanka, Peru and Bolivia, the round table aimed at answering two recurring questions that are intrinsic to the success of the 2030 Agenda:

1) How do global systemic issues impact the Agenda's implementation at the national level?

The creation of partnerships has been constantly emphasized in global debates, as coordinated policies at the global level are essential to achieve the Agenda. In addition, gaining an

understanding of interactions at the global scale helps countries to factor in the effects of these global trends on the implementation process of the Agenda on the national scale.

2) *How do synergies and trade-offs of the different goals and targets play out in practice?*

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda requires that countries understand the nature of interlinkages between SDGs. This way they can reap the benefits from maximizing existing synergies and minimizing trade-offs. However, interlinkages between goals and targets cannot be taken for granted. They are shaped by each country context, and to champion the implementation of the agenda, countries need to gain a deeper understanding of these interconnections.

The event conclusions below are valuable inputs for the State of the SDGs Global Report, to be released this September at the SDGs Summit in New York.

Key takeaways

- The implementation of the SDGs demands a more rigorous, sophisticated and complex thinking. This entails looking into the global trends that affect the implementation of the SDGs, which include: i) the global economy ii) governance and conflict, iii) environmental transformations and iv) social changes, among others.

At the national level, the Agenda must be understood integrally, keeping in mind the various interactions between goals. However, both of these approaches require more and better data, evidence and research as well as better policy integration between the global, national and local levels.

- There is a need of better understanding the local context where the SDGs are being implemented and of identifying the transformations needed according to each context. Thus, looking at historical trends and factors that have led to contextual manifestation of developments is something valuable to keep in mind at the moment of designing new programs and policies.
- Participation is crucial. Those whose lives are affected should be involved in the process.
- The implementation of the Agenda is not a linear process. It is dynamic and multidimensional. So always keep in mind how interconnections work and affect the achievement of the Agenda.

- Research agendas need to be constantly adapted in order to understand how different pathways have emerged and to explore how possible pathways are going forward.
- Data availability and accessibility are key to guarantee evidence-based policy-making, although bear in mind that sometimes data can be manipulated or misinterpreted to support other agendas.

Event summary

Opening remarks by Dr. [Debapriya Bhattacharya, Chair of Southern Voice](#)

"The SVSS initiative does not intend to conduct a conventional SDG review," said Dr. [Debapriya Bhattacharya](#) during the opening remarks. It is also not intended to track SDG progress in specific countries or to assess means of implementation. Instead, this initiative employs a southern perspective. It looks into the interlinkages between goals and the global systemic issues that equally affect the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while getting a close-up view of the groups left behind. As opposed to the MDG approach, which focused on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the SVSS looks into four middle-income countries and two upper-middle-income countries. The main output of the SVSS is an innovative global report designed and produced by researchers from the Global South.

Key findings from our case studies show that prioritization and sequence in policy is key to the achievement of the SDGs. Case studies' results emphasize the need for common, but differentiated, approaches, adapted to each country context. Lastly, the successful implementation of the Agenda also calls for stronger global partnerships. Adequate mechanisms and data to monitor achievements cannot be forgotten, especially desegregated data of all kinds.

The opening session was followed by a Keynote by H.E. **Ms Laura Chinchilla, former president of Costa Rica**, on the importance of voices from the South in global development debates. You can read the full keynote [here](#).

Session 1 – Understanding global systemic issues to strengthen the global partnership

Session 1 addressed the question of how global systemic issues impact the 2030 Agenda's implementation at the national level, based on findings from Sri Lanka, Ghana and Nigeria.

Learn more about the case studies discussed in this session

- [*The opportunities and risks for achieving sustainable labour in a global value chain: A case study from Sri Lanka's apparel sector. Presented by Karin Fernando, CEPA.*](#)
- [*Ensuring access to affordable, sustainable and clean household energy for all in Ghana. Presented by Aba Obrumah Crentsil, ISSER.*](#)
- [*Is Nigeria on track to achieving quality education for all? Drivers and implications. Presented by Chukwuka Onyekwena, CSEA.*](#)

Discussions highlighted that **the use of linear solutions has become obsolete when dealing with the complexities of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.** In the current context, solutions need to keep up with the unprecedented global pace of change. Countries need to secure and spread adequate resource mobilization and continuous innovation, while making sure that the implementation processes of the 2030 Agenda remains dynamic. The latter is not an easy task. A dynamic process has to be constantly fed with new and accurate information. It also needs to go through periodic performance assessments to make sure it is adapting to continuous transformations.

New ideas and non-traditional approaches are needed. **A policy agenda with a bottom-up approach is key to making the transformations possible.** Research experts that know their national context are best positioned to inform policies.

Promoting real change demands stakeholders to support strategic design and political leadership. This will allow to diagnose problems effectively, connect with unconventional areas that are often forgotten, and prioritize them based on real needs. A glance at data availability attests how lack of strategic planning has become a real issue. It affects the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. While some areas have a great amount of data available, others lack even basic information. On the other hand, political leadership is also a driver of change. It is a fact that change does not necessarily happen because of the amount of data available to back it up, but due to political will. Leaders aligned with 2030 Agenda principles and who decide to trust and make use of reliable data are a cornerstone for the transformations needed to achieve the SDGs.

After four years of the Agenda's adoption, we are experiencing a proliferation of tools, in particular to assess progress on SDGs implementation. Independent analysis, like the one produced by think tanks, that contrast or corroborates this information, is a valuable asset. It contributes positively

to current debates. The impact of these findings is exponential when presented to and discussed with government representatives. Therefore, as independent research providers, **think tanks should move beyond producing relevant studies also focus on transmitting these findings to decision-makers**, so they can prompt positive change. Moreover, think tanks can use research findings to follow up on global discussions, raise more questions and promote more research.

Unveiling **synergies and trade-offs** is necessary to foster policy coherence. But understanding these interlinkages also reveals deep-rooted problems inherent to each country. For example, in northeast Nigeria, children are affected by internal displacement. Violence and arms proliferation have had a negative effect on their access to education. Going beyond exploring the interlinkages in this case means exploring the reasons behind violence, the root of displacement. The ultimate objective is to provide policy makers with the information required to understand the causes of the problem and so they can act accordingly.

Session 1 left us with three final remarks:

- **Integration.** When it comes to SDG implementation, we are still struggling to break a silo approach. How to deal with the integrative approach is still a challenge for policy makers and think tanks alike.
- **Interlinkages.** The research has explored the interlinkages with a horizontal perspective, meaning across sectors. Now the challenge is to move from understanding horizontal coherence to vertical coherence. The goal is to bring the evidence from the ground into national, regional and global policy debates.
- **Dynamic approaches.** We live in an era of disruptive development. There is less predictability, so we need to find alternatives and adapt to a changing environment.

Session 2 – The elusive links between SDGs: How to avoid trade-offs where synergies are expected?

Session 2 focused on the crucial question of how synergies and trade-offs among goals and targets play out in practice, based on findings from Peru, Bolivia and India. It was emphasized that well-known synergies, for example between education and access to decent jobs, cannot be taken for granted. Findings show the importance of adequate policy prioritization based on each country context.

Learn more about the case studies discussed in this session,

- [Poor education and precarious jobs in Peru: Understanding who is left behind and why. Presented by Lorena Alcazar, GRADE.](#)
- [A country at risk of being left behind: Bolivia's quest for quality education. Presented by Werner Hernani-Limarino, ARU.](#)
- [Will women be a part of India's future workforce? The quest for inclusive and sustainable growth in India. Presented by Meena Nair, PAC.](#)

The SDGs are very ambitious. **Successful implementation of the goals demands that stakeholders go beyond the use of traditional tools and ways of analysing data.** In particular, national averages obscure realities that only desegregated data can unveil. This is especially important to keep in mind if policies are to reach traditionally excluded groups.

To understand relevant dynamics at the national and local levels, policy makers need access to locally rooted data and analysis. Thus, **the added value of alternative studies like the State of the SDGs lies in the development of evidence-based research and analyses from the Global South that inform national, regional and global debates** on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. There is no need for a blueprint for countries on how to and what to implement. The next steps should be developed independently and according to each country context and needs. This task can be simplified with a coalition to build and support sustainable development plans at national and local levels.

The importance of accessing data and participation was raised prominently. For example, what a policy maker needs to know, in order to make sure that women with children under five years are not left behind in Peru? What can data tell us and what can we do with this? **Access to data in developing countries should not be taken for granted.** In developing countries data from the poorest 5% are predominantly based on household surveys, and that not all countries have the resources to continuously update these data sources. Data produced by international organizations is sometimes not accessible to researchers from developing countries. **Even if there is more data available, the follow up question is: who is going to make choices based on the data?** The answer is complex.

Prevailing lack of a long-term political vision for the implementation of the SDGs, often gives precedence to whatever is supported by the public's opinion, instead of implementing evidence-based policy decisions. This is why in addition to access of data and evidence-based research, people's approval and support is key to guarantee that the implementation of the Agenda is on track.

To access the individual presentations, please follow this [link](#).

Agenda

- 08:45 - 9:15 *Check-in and registration (breakfast and coffee)*
- 9:15 - 10:00 **Opening. Setting the Scene**
Keynote: H.E. Ms. Laura Chinchilla Miranda, President of Costa Rica (2010-2014), Vice President of the WLA-Club de Madrid
Panelists:
- Minh-Thu Pham, Executive Director for Global Policy, UN Foundation
 - Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow at CPD; Chair, Southern Voice and Team Leader, SVSS Research Team
- 10:00 - 12:00 **Session 1. Understanding global systemic issues to strengthen the global partnership.**
Chair: Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue
Presenters:
- Karin Fernando, CEPA - Sri Lanka
 - Aba Obrumah, ISSER - Ghana
 - Chukwuka Onyekwena, CSEA - Nigeria
- Discussant:
- Laurel Patterson, Team Leader, AI and SDG Integration, UNDP
 - Member State (TBC)
- 12:00 - 12:30 *Lunch served*
- 12:30 - 14:30 **Session 2. The elusive links between SDGs: How to avoid trade-offs where synergies are expected?**
Chair: Andrea Ordonez, Director, Southern Voice
Presenters:
- Lorena Alcázar, GRADE - Peru
 - Werner Hernani-Limarino, ARU - Bolivia
 - Meena Nair, PAC - India
- Discussants:
- Michael Green, Chief Executive Officer, Social Progress Imperative



SOUTHERN VOICE



- Ms. Christine Brautigam, Director, Intergovernmental Support Division, UN Women

14:30 - 15:30 **Conclusion.** *What is next for the 2030 Agenda?*

Panelists:

- Peter Taylor, Director of Strategic Development, International Development Research Centre
- Minh-Thu Pham, Executive Director for Global Policy, UN Foundation
- Andrea Ordóñez, Director, Southern Voice