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Initial challenges of SDG implementation: Regional trends and country experiences

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Introduction

Global South countries embraced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with great enthusiasm and engagement in its implementation earnestly. Operationalising a universal and holistic development agenda within countries' contextual realities was an extremely challenging endeavour. The initial experience of these countries in adapting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is instructive, providing useful guidance for mid-course corrections, and for enacting the United Nations' (UN) announced Decade of Action (2020–2030).

This chapter begins by reviewing regional trends across three continents, namely Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This review establishes common features of regional trends as well as their unique manifestations. The chapter then builds on six country case studies to observe lessons emanating from their first three to four years of SDG delivery. The countries covered are Bolivia, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Peru, and Sri Lanka. The analytical framework assessing the country experience (and regional trends) is defined by five 2030 Agenda implementation challenges: aligning the global Agenda with national priorities, setting up a dedicated intuitional structure, resource mobilisation, data mapping, and developing multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The SDGs epitomise a rights-based approach to a transformative, integrated, and inclusive development paradigm— built on economic, social, and environmental pillars.

The framework of analysis

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, launched in 2015, is a multidimensional and multilayered development programme. Its 17 Goals and 169 Targets are profoundly interconnected as an indivisible whole. The SDGs epitomise a rights-based approach to a transformative, integrated, and inclusive development paradigm—built on economic, social, and environmental pillars. The means of implementation mentioned in the 2030 Agenda give some guidance to countries, regions, and the global community towards action plans. The overarching aspiration of the Agenda is captured by its powerful commitment to 'leave no one behind'. While national ownership of the Agenda has been underscored, it is expected to be delivered through a multi-stakeholder partnership, supported by an effective global compact.

Understandably, developing countries face wide-ranging challenges while implementing this ambitious global Agenda. National manifestations of these challenges are quite often circumstantial, predicated on economic development, social cohesion, administrative capacity, and political governance. Quite often, ramifications of the implementation process have remained unclear and the way forward uncertain. Thus, one observes varied trends in the regions—South/ Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and LatinAmerica—during the initial years of SDG implementation. To address these many factors, a more granular approach—based on country-level analyses—is appropriate to explore the implementation challenges of the SDGs. Indeed, at the end of negotiations, it was nation-states which were the signatories to the 2030 Agenda.

Regional approach. The regional surveys cover SSA (48 countries), South and Southeast Asia (10 countries), and Latin (20 countries). These surveys capture regional developments in initiating the SDGs through multi-method research designs. Extensive reviews of secondary literature, focussing on country-level studies, regional reports, and scrutiny of relevant data and information, were conducted. Relevant trends were also examined through a carefully chosen set of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

Country-level analysis. The country case studies constitute the core component of the Southern Voice on the State of SDGs (SVSS) initiative. They reflect regional variations and the range of development diversity. The countries examined are Bolivia, Ghana, Nigeria, Peru, India, and Sri Lanka. These countries from three continents are either low-income countries (LICs) or low middle-income countries (LMICs). Country experiences have been examined through the prism of the following five dimensions:

- Aligning the SDGs with national planning processes;
- Coordination, management, and leadership of the implementation process;
- Adequacy of financing and other means of implementation;
- Data-related issues and capacities of national statistical agencies; and
- Partnership and stakeholder participation in SDG implementation.

Based on a substantive review of global literature, national policy documents, and findings of studies conducted by Global South think tanks, Bhattacharya, Khan, Rezbana and Mostaque (2016) have identified five key SDG implementation challenges. The scope of these five challenges is presented in Table 2.1. They may be collectively understood as 'first-generation challenges', faced by developing countries as they commenced SDG implementation.

Table 2.1. The framework of country-level analysis of SDG implementation

Challenge	Description
Aligning the SDGs with national planning processes	There is a need to mainstream SDGs into national plans. Also, SDGs must be integrated into local and sectoral development plans. Countries should also prioritise Targets most relevant to their specific contexts, needs, and national development goals.
Coordination, management, and leadership of the SDG implementation process	Delivering a comprehensive and integrated programme needs coordination among government agencies (e.g. ministries and departments) nationally. It requires strong leadership from an agency with the authority to coordinate within the government system.
Adequacy of financing and other means of implementation	Means of implementation are key pre-requisites for delivering the SDGs. They can be financial (including official development assistance (ODA), domestic resource mobilisation (DRM), foreign direct investment (FDI), and public-private partnerships (PPPs), as well as non-financial (such as systemic issues).
Data-related issues and capacity of national statistical agencies	For effective planning, transparency, and accountability for spending and tracking progress in implementation, the availability and accessibility of real-time disaggregated data is critical.
Partnership and stakeholder participation in SDG implementation	Attainment of the SDGs by 2030 requires an effective institutional mechanism that involves all national and international stakeholders, including government, public representatives, civil society organisations, the private sector, academia, international NGOs, international development partners, and common citizens.

Source: Bhattacharya et al. (2016).

Acknowledging the complexity of the SDGs and tracking their delivery, the SVSS studies have adopted a three-dimensional analytical lens. Besides the regional and country-level analyses, this includes an enquiry into three cross-cutting issues, namely: leave no one behind (LNOB), synergies and trade-offs, and global systemic concerns (GSC), underpinning the implementation challenges of the SDGs. While the first two approaches are deployed in this chapter, the third approach informs the discussion presented in the following chapter (Chapter 3).[1]

Regional trends

Notably, the regional dimensions of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were understated, if not missing, issues. Thus, it is of policy and practical interest to explore how regional considerations affect the 2030 Agenda. While one may examine the role of regional cooperation arrangements in implementing the SDGs, it is no less interesting to examine how preparation for their delivery varied within and across regions.

To track the (sub) regional continental trends, three sets of regional surveys were undertaken by the SVSS—covering South and South East Asia (10 countries), SSA (48 countries), and Latin America (20 countries). These surveys were executed through a review of the literature and secondary analysis of relevant global databases (e.g. the World Bank and UNESCO) as well as regional UN databases (e.g. United Nations Economic and Social Comission for Asia and the Pacific and United Nations Economic Comission for Europe). Outputs of other entities, such as the Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa, and the Regional Observatory on Planning for Development of the ECLAC, were also studied. The VNRs and country-level studies were analysed to identify measures taken to integrate the SDGs, particularly regarding quality education (SDG 4), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8).

Tracking the initial experiences of these countries indicates the shared resolve of the Global Southto realise the SDGs. This message comes through notwithstanding their unique developmental contexts, national priorities, resource endowments, and institutional structures. Accordingly, the regional reports establish that this common approach of Southern countries reflects the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda. However, the regional surveys also prominently reveal that 'one size does not fit all'.

Africa

In terms of regional policy alignment, substantial convergence was observed between the SDGs and Agenda 2063, adopted by African leaders in 2013 (Kasirye, Ntale & Venugopal, 2020). However, some divergences remain between the two programs in specific targets, indicators and timelines. Our research suggests that at least 65% of the SDGs are strongly matched to the goals of Agenda 2063; the proportion of targets and indicators that are equally matched is only 37% and 40%, respectively (Kasirye, Ntale & Venugopal, 2020). Prior to adopting the SDGs and Agenda 2063, African countries also signed up to the Istanbul

1 A list of the six country studies and three regional surveys is provided in additional publications of the State of the SDGs

Programme of Action (IPoA) for least developed countries (LDCs) in 2011. The IPoA envisioned that at least half of the countries from the group will graduate from LDC status by 2020. This implies that at least 17 African LDCs should leave the group by 2020. However, the concerned countries did not demonstrate that level of ambition, indicating the risk of that target not being met.

The 'domestication of the SDGs' process in Africa was characterised by common activities involving awareness building and the sensitisation of stakeholders, including political leaders, public representatives, government officials, business leaders, and civil society activists. Country progress on developing institutional structures for SDG delivery varied due to differing levels of administrative capacities and financial resources. Progress in this area was partially dependent on strong national and local ownership, embedded in a coordinated system of governance. For example, localising and mainstreaming the SDGs through planning and capacity building nationally and locally is being attempted in Lesotho.

Some countries in the three regions did undertake assessments of financial resource requirements, revealing huge resource gaps (Kasirye, Ntale & Venugopal, 2020). Due to low domestic tax bases, these countries have programmed for a substantial flow of ODA to implement the SDGs. Recently, foreign loans have grown faster than grants. In view of their infrastructure deficits, African countries have planned substantial investments in the energy sector. Most of SSA has turned to China to close the financing gap. The expansion of mobile banking has led to financial inclusion and opened up new government revenue avenues (Kasirye, Ntale & Venugopal, 2020). In Kenya, funds collected from an excise tax on mobile finance are earmarked to fund universal healthcare.

Regarding data availability, the majority of African countries rate poorly (i.e. with rates below 40%). Only 38% of the 232 SDG Indicators can be tracked in these countries. Prioritising funding for data—important for tracking and monitoring but also for setting realistic domestic targets—remains a critical challenge.

Finally, weak civil societies, underdeveloped private sectors, and limited civic spaces are salient challenges in the region for building partnerships (Kasirye, Ntale & Venugopal, 2020). South-South cooperation, mostly driven by Chinese finance, is an important form of partnership in SSA, aiding capacity building and promoting development. Kenya is a rare country that has managed to significantly involve other partners, such as the private sector, in implementing the SDGs.

Asia

All countries of South and South East Asia have attempted to align their strategies, policies, and planning documents with the SDGs. Several have undertaken initiatives to involve local government institutions in the SDG mainstreaming process (Rahman, Khan & Sadique, 2020). Many have also engaged multi-stakeholder groups in the consultation process. However, the SVSS studies reveal that, at current rates of progress, the Asia and Pacific region may not achieve most of the SDGs.

South Asian countries have completed mapping exercises at various levels by aligning the SDG Targets and Indicators with national plans, and a few have prioritised them nationally (Rahman, Khan & Sadique, 2020). However, an in-depth assessment of interlinkages between the Goals and evaluation of policy interventions remains to be undertaken, with the help of further research, to ensure delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

Countries are gearing up initiatives to establish SDG-related institutions to ensure proper implementation processes. Better coordination is being attempted among different core ministries of central governments—such as Prime Minister's Offices, Ministries of Finance, and Ministries of Planning—for smooth implementation. Only some South Asian countries (e.g. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan) have started mainstreaming the SDGs into an existing or new frameworks. Indonesia and Thailand (from South East Asia) have also completed the mainstreaming process. Bhutan is the only country from South Asia which has a plan for an SDG implementation roadmap.

Most Asian countries have estimated their resource requirements and identified possible sources of funding for implementing the SDGs (Rahman, Khan & Sadique, 2020). The humanitarian aid sector has garnered the highest attention, followed by economic infrastructure—against a backdrop of declining ODA to the social infrastructure and service sectors. The Asia Pacific has a very low level of inter-country cooperation. Financing gaps in the region require significant improvements to mobilise domestic resources and leverage international development cooperation. Attention to the fairness, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of tax systems are important to broaden the tax base and efficiently collect tax (Rahman, Khan & Sadique, 2020). Southern providers, such as India and China, have emerged as new funders of development projects in Asia, with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Nepal being key destinations.

There is a lack of good-quality data at the regional level for Goals related to the social and economic dimensions of the SDGs. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2019), only 50 of the 169 SDG Targets are currently ready for progress assessment (one-third of the total indicators). Improving disaggregated data remains a key concern. Reviews reveal that sex-disaggregated data are better available compared to other disaggregated data, but only for a limited number of Indicators. In most Asian countries, data transparency and quality are critical concerns. Many Southeast and South Asian countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Malaysia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Vietnam) have undertaken exercises to identify data gaps. These gap analyses suggest that tracking SDGs 12 and 14 will be highly challenging. Many Asian countries are creating separate committees to collect data and coordinate, monitor, and report on the SDG implementation process (Rahman, Khan & Sadique, 2020).

Lastly, countries are making plans to involve other stakeholders in SDG implementation. Interregional collaborations to share best practices are present only in a few cases. For example, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) has emerged as a leading platform for sharing experiences and developing a regional roadmap for SDG achievement. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in its meeting of ministers on poverty alleviation, held in 2015, decided to revise the SAARC development goals to align with the SDGs.

Latin America

While most Latin American countries tried to align their national plans with the SDGs, SVSS studies indicate that some did not move in that direction. For example, the Bolivian government adopted its 2025 Patriotic Agenda and the Economic and Social Development Plan (2016–2020) without referencing the global Agenda (Andersen, Medinaceli, Maldonado & Hernani-Limarino, 2020). It has been recognised in most of the Latin American countries that national and regional governance coherence is particularly important to address the SDGs. Otherwise, implementation of new policies and goals may get undermined.

While most countries in Asia and Africa have developed five-year development plans aligned to the SDGs, Latin American countries opted for ad hoc implementation plans.

Most countries conducted mapping exercises in their VNRs to determine the alignment of their plans with the SDGs (Beneke de Sanfeliú, Milan, Rodríguez & De Trigueros, 2020). Only six countries developed long-term development plans longer than the incumbent president's tenure. 15 of 17 countries in the regional study will have new presidents by the end of 2020. Achieving the SDGs by 2030 requires sustained efforts for more than one presidential period. All countries include at least one Goal from each dimension of development—social, economic, and environmental. Most have prioritised SDG 1 (no poverty) and 3 (good health and well-being), which are continuations of the MDGs.

Six of 17 countries built institutional mechanisms for SDG implementation based on existing structures, with highest-level ministries and secretariats having political and technical responsibilities, dependent on the presidency. Nine countries created commissions, councils, or high-level ad hoc entities, some accompanied by a technical committee (Beneke de Sanfeliú, Milan, Rodríguez & De Trigueros, 2020). Five countries have coordination mechanisms with the participation of at least one ministry in charge of the social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

Coordination mechanisms differ among different levels of government. In most cases, two levels of coordination were set up. Firstly, there is a policy entity to prepare roadmaps to achieve the SDGs and to coordinate and monitor progress. Secondly, there is and a statistical coordination mechanism for data availability and disaggregation. According to their VNRs, four countries have created ad hoc technical committees; others have set up cross-sectoral bodies to coordinate statistical activities. The formal inclusion of non-governmental organisations is not a general practice in Latin America. While most countries in Asia and Africa have developed five-year development plans aligned to the SDGs, Latin American countries opted for ad hoc implementation plans. Chile and Paraguay chose to create separate commissions to coordinate each pillar of the 2030 Agenda, i.e. social, economic, and environmental.

Most efforts to finance the SDGs are aimed at increasing tax revenues and combating tax evasion and avoidance. Increasing debt levels have been observed in the region since 2011. In the past ten years, financial flows to Latin America have been mostly limited to a few

LMICs (Beneke de Sanfeliú, Milan, Rodríguez & De Trigueros, 2020). Concessional financing for middle-income countries is limited, even when facing significant development challenges, such as in Nicaragua and Bolivia. An underutilised source in Latin America is blended finance for development, the targeted use of concessional funding to complement private capital. Inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) to Latin America remain well below their peak in 2011. Only nine countries mention triangular, South-South, and bilateral cooperation, or technology and knowledge exchange agreements, as sources of good practices and lessons learned.

Most countries assessed their ability to produce the Indicators required for tracking SDGs. Diverse groups and networks encompassing government, the private sector, and civil society organisations are working to generate data with the necessary level of disaggregation. Innovation in data collection and collaboration across complex data systems is being attempted (Beneke de Sanfeliú, Milan, Rodríguez & De Trigueros, 2020). There is almost no mention of accountability mechanisms in VNRs; this is an area where challenges remain for Latin America. Political will from policymakers at all levels is still needed to make monitoring and evaluating standard practices. Only Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay mentioned evaluating their ability to disaggregate the Indicators. Some countries have considered the Sustainable Asset Valuation (SAVi) mechanism, developed by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), to help decision-makers assess how environmental, social, and economic externalities affect the financial performance of infrastructure assets and projects.

From the foregoing analysis, the common characteristics of SDG integration and implementation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are quite evident. However, one should not miss some of the distinguishing features of the respective regions. These critical features are underwritten by their diverse economic endowments, states of social cohesion, institutional capacities, and environmental circumstances—as well as by the nature of incumbent political regimes. Africa remains preoccupied with the issues of poverty, conflict, and foreign aid. Alternatively, trade expansion and environmental sustainability figure prominently across Asian countries. In Latin American nations, the issues of inequality and foreign investment figure more often. Altogether, the challenges of domestic governance and international development cooperation—defining the success of the SDGs—have been underscored by countries across the three regions. These dimensions become clearer once we examine the country-level evidence.

Country experiences

The six-country case studies undertaken as part of the SVSS initiative provide unique perspectives regarding the efforts made, and problems encountered, as countries in the Global Southimplement the SDGs. Table 2.2 presents the basic socio-economic characteristics of sample countries. The focus is on LICs and LMICs across three continents, with varied levels of per capita income, poverty, and human development. Attention was paid to economic differences by noting the role of manufacturing, exports, remittances, and FDIs.

Dependence of these economies on ODA and other official flows (OOF) has been taken into account when deciding on sample countries. In sum, the choice of sample countries reflects enough diversity to derive general conclusions regarding the experience of the Global South in institutionalising the 2030 Agenda.

Table 2.2. Profile of the sample countries

Indicator	Bolivia	Ghana	India	Nigeria	Peru	Sri Lanka
Population in million (2019)	11.51	30.42	1366.42	200.96	32.51	21.80
Per capita income in USD (2018)	2731.21	1461.78	1739.90	1583.18	5520.05	3690.47
Share of population with income <USD 1.90-a-day (%) (2018)	4.00	15.00	3.00	46.00	2.00	<3.00
Share of manufacturing (% of GDP) (2018)	10.34	10.46	14.58	9.65	12.94	15.82
Human Development Index (HDI) 2018	0.703, High	0.596, Medium	0.647, Medium	0.534, Low	0.759, High	0.780, High
Merchandise export (% of GDP) (2018)	22.25	22.80	11.69	14.35	22.08	13.37
Remittances (% of GDP) (2018)	3.14	5.78	2.86	5.77	1.46	8.43
FDI (% of GDP)—2018	0.62	4.55	1.54	0.47	2.78	1.82
Total ODA+OOF from DAC countries (% of GDP) 2018	**0.82**	**0.76**	**0.06**	**0.33**	**-0.06**	**0.08**

Source: UNDP (2018-2019).
Elaborated by the authors.

Methodological approach and data sources

It was decided a priori that the six-country case studies (and the three cross-cutting studies) would focus on SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). The common narrative for the analysis was provided by the aspirational tag line of 2030 Agenda: 'leave no one behind.' From that perspective, special attention was accorded to the development outcomes of left-behind people (particularly women) in the country contexts.

Country case studies deployed both quantitative (e.g. regression analysis and simulations) and qualitative methods (e.g. life-history and citizen's report card analyses). Some studies opted for mixed methods (e.g. mixing non-linear logistics models with the community-based participatory methods). The country-level empirical analysis was built on individual-, household-, and regional-level data. The studies have extensively used available official data, and also generated purposive primary information. The most common official sources had been the national-level household/living standard censuses and surveys, as well as sectoral datasets (e.g. education, demographics, and health). These reviews of official data were complemented by interviews of key actors and other stakeholders. The case studies were prepared following robust methodologies, meaning the conclusions derived from these exercises are on firm ground.

In the rest of this chapter, we highlight select findings of the six-country case studies under the five dimensions of our analytical framework described earlier.

Aligning SDGs with national planning policy framework

Policy alignment can support governments and other entities to keep their actions and approaches coordinated, consistent, and integrated to achieve shared goals. A policy alignment 'mindset' helps countries understand the impacts of their policy actions regionally and globally, and tailor their approaches to achieve the Goals of the 2030 Agenda. However, policy alignment has been approached in the literature from various perspectives. It is often studied in connection with the relationships between donors and partner governments, and in relation to the impacts of policies from developed countries on developing countries. Most recently, the alignment of development policies has been widely analysed in the framework of policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD). Discourse centring on the alignment of national priorities and policies with the 2030 Agenda, as a requirement for successful implementation of the SDGs, is more recent.

The global Agenda of the SDGs is to be implemented in countries through a nationally-owned process, under the leadership of national governments. Accordingly, one of the initial tasks of Global South governments has been to 'align' planning and policy documents with the global Agenda.[2] An overwhelming number of countries surveyed could accommodate key elements of their national mid-term plans within the broad ambit of the SDGs. The exercise also allowed countries to highlight their strategic priorities. However, given its integrated nature, it was understood that such alignment will be a continuous (dynamic) process.

To some countries, however, this was a process to secure the confidence of international development partners. They assessed that the comfort level of development partners in channelling their resources to recipient countries would be enhanced if the latter brought their development objectives in line with the agreed international agenda. On the other hand, most countries in the Global South are members of one or more regional cooperation arrangements. These regional blocs also had well-articulated development plans. Countries had to take account of their regional commitments while revising or drafting their planning documents in line with the 2030 Agenda. For example, prior to the adoption of the Agenda 2030, African countries signed up to Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want in 2013, and the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for LDCs in 2011. However, the 2030 Agenda does mention that it is aligned with all existing international understandings.

The present body of research shows that developing countries—notwithstanding their unique contexts, policies and

2 This process has been called different things in different countries, such as adaptation, integration, mainstreaming and localisation.

priorities—largely rearranged their national policies in line with the Agenda 2030. However, this process was quite varied across countries. To some degree, this process contributed to establishing upward vertical coherence between global and national development agendas. Yet, there was the outstanding issue of establishing downward vertical coherence and horizontal coherence among different parts of national governments. All of these government bodies have their specific mandates, policy commitments, and programmatic documents. In this case, horizontal coherence implies coherence among various national government line ministries, whereas vertical coherence relates to synergies among sub-national and local tiers of public administration, as well as with the international commitments of the country.

SVSS country case studies indicate that varying approaches are being followed to align the SDGs with national policies and programmes. The Indian government has introduced several new policy interventions, while strengthening existing policies to address development issues such as malnutrition and hunger, sanitation, basic amenities, education, and women's empowerment. In India, the SDG Targets have been linked to existing flagship government programmes such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (Banking for All), Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission), Skill India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and several others. The NITI Aayog, the Indian government's supreme policy outfit, developed a matrix of in-progress and planned policy schemes at the national level to achieve each SDGs.

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The Sri Lankan approach has been both ambitious and ambiguous. The Government of Sri Lanka, to align the global Agenda with national priorities, sought to narrow down the 169 Targets to 30 Targets as a first step (Fernando, Arambepola, Niles & Ranawana, 2020). A 17-member expert group was tasked to prioritise some Targets for this purpose using the Stockholm Environmental Institute's interaction model, a scoring method of SDGs. But a final output on policy coherence remains elusive. The National Planning Department (NPD) of Sri Lanka has consulted the agriculture sector to develop a template to identify linkages between their current programmes, projects, and actions and the SDG Goals and Targets. The NPD had been trying to reflect the SDGs in the public investment plan. Thus, developing a broader vision or objectives for delivering on the SDGs continues in the country.

The SVSS country case studies show that several countries included SDGs into their current development plans. For example, Ghana enacted the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA II) (Crentsil, Fenny, Ackah, Asuman & Otieku, 2020). The GSGDA II framework was reviewed and amended in sync with the global SDGs. In line with the 'leave no one behind' agenda, the Ghanaian development policy, enshrined in its Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies (CPESDP), has set out four mutually inclusive goals to reflect the development aspirations of the 'Ghana We Want'. This calls for building a prosperous and resilient society, creating opportunities for all Ghanaians, and safeguarding the natural environment.

Nigeria also deliberately integrated the SDGs into its current development agenda, namely into the Economic Recovery and Growth

Plan (ERGP) for 2017–2020 (Adeniran, Onyekwena, Onubedo, Ishaku & Ekeruche, 2020). All VNRs originating from SSA (about 28 countries) have reported progress in integrating the 2030 Agenda into their national development plans. Further, some African countries have developed five-year development plans aligned to the SDGs (Kasirye et al., 2020).

SVSS country case studies further reveal that certain Latin American countries have adopted national policies instead of explicitly referring them to Agenda 2030. For example, the Bolivian government has focused on achieving national objectives through its frameworks: the 2025 Patriotic Agenda and the Economic and Social Development Plan (ESDP) for 2016–2020 (Andersen et al., 2020). Simultaneously, in 2019 it had been working on two parallel processes to integrate and align the 2030 Agenda with national development plans. The first process is a comprehensive assessment of data available for monitoring SDG implementation. The second process, through an UN-supported project, seeks to identify policy combinations and accelerators that can be included in the next five-year ESDP.

The country case studies and SVSS regional surveys bring to the fore explicit intellectual recognition and political initiatives in the Global South to align the 2030 Agenda with national development documents and frameworks. While in most cases countries have tweaked existing documents to bring them in line with the SDGs, some have integrated them in new plans. It is rare, but not absent that countries declare their existing plans to be fit for purpose for the global Agenda. Countries have also strengthened their existing development plans and programmes as well as introduced new ones. These alignment exercises have been implemented through the regular development planning machinery of respective countries, in some cases, with the help of external expert groups.

While there has been substantial convergence between the SDGs and national plans, policies and programmes, some unsettled areas remain concerning targets, indicators, and timelines. Also, in many cases, the SDGs are yet to be mainstreamed into national sectoral and sub-sectoral development plans. Moreover, a spatial reflection of the SDGs through localisation and integration in regional (sub-national) plans remains an unfinished agenda.

Leadership, coordination and management of the implementation process

Effective delivery of the 2030 Agenda requires that governments provide leadership in connecting multilayered, multidimensional and multi-stakeholder elements of the holistic programme through an integrated approach. Such an approach should be able to work across policy domains and promote coherence among them. Further, this approach needs to offer adequate clarity regarding roles and responsibilities—within the government and beyond. SVSS studies reveal that while most countries did construct dedicated mechanisms to oversee national SDG implementation processes, their structure and scope varied widely.

Country experiences suggest that required institutional arrangements are usually built into existing governance structures, rather than created anew. To endow nodal agencies with adequate political authority, they have typically been located close to the chief executive of the government, i.e. the president or prime minister. In India, it is the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog—a policy think tank, under the chairmanship of the country's Prime Minister—in charge of steering the implementation of the SDGs (Nair, Shah & Sivaraman, 2020). Sri Lanka's President spearheads the delivery of the 'Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision—Strategic Path'. In Nigeria, the Office of the Senior Special Adviser to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDGs) leads the implementation of the SDGs as well as the integration of the global Agenda into national development. In Bangladesh, an Office of the Coordinator of the SDGs has been created under the Prime Minister's Office to lead the implementation process. At the apex of the institutional framework in Ghana is the Office of the President of the Republic of Ghana, where there is an SDGs Advisory Unit and a High-Level Ministerial Committee, whose primary mandate is to provide strategic direction for the attainment of the objectives at both national and sectoral levels.

There are a number of variations in Southern countries' attempts to develop institutional mechanisms for providing guidance on the SDG actualisation process. For example, the Minister of Development Planning in Bolivia is presiding over an inter-institutional committee, charged with monitoring the implementation of both the National Development Plan and the 2030 Agenda (Andersen et al., 2020). The Peruvian SDG implementation strategy is managed by three main governmental entities, namely the National Centre for Strategic Planning (CEPLAN), the National Institute for Statistics and Computing (INEI) and the National Working Group for the Fight Against Poverty (MCLCP) (Alcázar, Bullard & Balarin, 2020).

The experience of Latin America is quite instructive in this regard. Six of 17 countries built institutional mechanisms from existing bodies at the highest levels of ministries and secretariats within the presidency of the republic, assigning them political and technical responsibilities. Nine countries created commissions, councils, or high-level ad hoc entities, some of them accompanied by a technical committee. Five countries have coordination instances with the participation of at least one ministry in charge of aspects related to each of the social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

Importantly, countries in the Global Southhave moved forward from the initial phase of understanding and disseminating the 2030 Agenda, to an implementation phase characterised by translating the SDGs into public policies (discussed earlier) and institutions. However, the challenges of realising an integrated programme—cutting across national and local governments, and involving multiple ministries, departments, and institutions—often manifest in administrative turf wars. In order to overcome this challenge, most countries have chosen to vest coordinating responsibility in a supra body (located at a high political office). Often, this outfit did not have the necessary intellectual capacity to perform its duties. In these cases, the outfit has to depend on another entity with the necessary capacity—usually the planning ministry on department. For example, in Bangladesh, while lead responsibility lies with the SDG Coordinator's Office under the Prime Minister, knowledge support is extended by the Planning Commission.

In India, due to the variety of nodal departments involved in the design and implementation of SDG-enabling policies, programmes, and projects, institutional coordination is emerging as a major challenge (Nair et al., 2020). Similarly, there appears to be weak coordination between OSSAP-SDGs and relevant agencies in Nigeria. The challenges of coordination in these two countries also epitomise the special challenge of a federal state with a constitutionally strong role for state (or regional) governments.

> **A major responsibility for the actual implementation of the 20230 Agenda lies with local authorities.**

To promote cross-sectoral collaboration, innovative planning instruments that use frameworks and incentives to coordinate cross-ministerial activity are being devised by Southern countries. To this end, in Bangladesh and other countries, mapping of government institutions has been done in the context of specific SDGs to identify lead and associate ministries. However, as this is being done at the Goal level, a complication arose regarding the identification of the appropriate public agency at the Target level. Some countries have created new inter-ministerial commissions to break down silos across sectors as the 2030 Agenda demands strong collaboration. The institutional landscape of Ghana, especially the energy sector, is in tandem with the overall institutional architecture for achieving the SDGs.

Coordination mechanisms among different levels of government in Latin America comprise a two-pronged approach. In most cases, two levels of coordination were set up. Firstly, a policy entity to prepare roadmaps to achieve the SDGs and to coordinate and monitor progress. Secondly, a statistical coordination mechanism for data availability and disaggregation. According to their VNRs, four countries in the region have created ad hoc technical committees, and others have set up cross-sectoral bodies to coordinate statistical activities. However, the SVSS studies indicate that an effective monitoring mechanism to track impacts and progress is yet to gain traction in many countries.

Southern countries have adapted ways to design coordination mechanisms to oversee SDG-based planning and implementation. Country-level evidence suggests that leadership in the SDG implementation process largely lies with the government's administrative apparatus. While most public representatives are quite aware of the dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, they hardly enforce an accountability process in this regard. However, in Sri Lanka, to cover the range of SDGs, four clusters were set up under a parliamentary oversight committee; each is meant to work with the relevant government entities (Fernando et al., 2020). Parliamentary standing committees in the Global South have an uncharted track in this case.

A major responsibility for the actual implementation of the 2030 Agenda lies with local authorities. Regional institutional arrangements have also been established to support the implementation of the SDGs. In

Peru, elected officials in national, regional and local governments signed the Governance Agreement for Comprehensive Human Development 2016–2021 to uphold the Goals and Targets (Alcázar et al., 2020). In Bolivia, the Municipal Government of La Paz published a document that describes in detail how the city is equipped to implement the SDGs (Andersen et al., 2020). However, the institutionalisation of the relationship between the central government and local bodies—political and administrative—is gradually gathering momentum as the efforts for 'localisation of SDGs' are gathering increased recognition.

Another level of cross-sectoral cooperation requires national governments to create a joint mechanism with the private sector to ensure their participation in delivering the SDGs. The formal inclusion of non-governmental organisations in governments' institutional structure is not a generalised practise in the Global South. We return to this issue later in this section.

To conclude, evidence from country experiences shows that no single institutional model is intrinsically more appropriate to ensure the coherent and efficient adoption of the SDGs at the national level. The preferred institutional arrangements for sustainable development in each country ultimately depend on the national context defined by a host of factors, including the governance structure and the level of ownership of the global Agenda. This process should be looked upon also as an enterprise in evolution.

Adequacy of financing and other means of implementation

It is no secret that achieving the SDGs would necessitate mobilising a huge amount of resources and efficiently managing and investing them. Global sources (e.g. OECD and UNCTAD) have initially estimated that there is a yearly financing gap in developing countries of USD 2.5–3.0 trillion. The annual funding requirement for implementation of the SDGs in LICs and LMICs is about USD 1.4 trillion. To fund urgent action to combat impacts of climate change, an estimated USD 100 billion will be necessary every year. The global financial system is far from meeting these figures. In fact, the promises of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015) remain largely unfulfilled in this respect.

Such gaps exist not because of lack of financial resources, but because of misaligned incentives and regulations, and difficulties in identifying, measuring, and reporting on sustainable investments. The situation is aggravated because of rising inequality and debt levels, and the devastating impacts of conflict and climate change, especially for the most vulnerable developing countries and communities. Uneven economic growth in developing countries and their limited capacity to expand fiscal space, combined with lack of reforms in the financial sector and capital markets, have intensified the situation further.

SVSS studies remind us that the investments required to finance the 2030 Agenda are complex and vary depending on the Goal area. For example, financial schemes for social sectors (health, education) are quite unlike from investments required for infrastructure development (energy, communication). Financing of the SDGs also requires a complex mix of public and private actors at national and global levels. Given the fragmented international financial architecture and underdeveloped national financial systems, available funds are often inconsistently deployed, leading to missed cross-sector synergies. There is often a severe dearth of institutional and human resource capacities in weak economies in the Global South, lacking essential competence to deal with such complex financial engineering. A changing development assistance landscape—characterised by changing priorities of traditional providers, the appearance of new actors, and emergent use of new financial instruments—has made the task of resource mobilisation more challenging for these countries.

Some countries tried to estimate their financial needs to implement the SDGs. For example, Bangladesh, in 2017, estimated the additional 'synchronised' cost of implementing the SDGs until 2030 would be approximately USD 928.5 billion, which is about 20% of the accumulated GDP of the country. The need for these resources is expected to increase during the period sequentially. The highest cost was supposed to be incurred for acting on SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). The financing requirement assessment exercise estimated that the mentioned total amount will be sourced in the following proportions: the public sector (34%), domestic private entities (42%), public-private partnerships (PPP) (6%), non-government organisations (4%) and combined external sources (15%). Regrettably, the results of this ambitious exercise were not reflected in reality.

Sri Lanka has attempted to have agencies set aside regular budget allocations for the SDGs, but the process has not yet been operationalised (Fernando et al., 2020). Templates are still being developed for annual budgets. Support for this exercise, as in many other countries, is coming as technical support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). For Nigeria, financing requirement to meet SDG 4 only has been estimated at USD 34 billion.

In its VNR for 2017, India admitted that the country "is unlikely to gather sufficient revenues for achieving the SDGs". However, the country's NITI Aayog's SDG-Policy mapping does delegate ministries with the responsibility for deploying SDG-related initiatives and schemes to secure funding (Nair et al., 2020).

The Peruvian government, like most developing countries, does not have a separate budget for SDG implementation (Alcázar et al., 2020). Instead, funds are allocated to national programmes tackling development objectives. This follows a results-based scheme and is understood to cater to the SDGs. This approach is administered by the Ministry of Economics and Finance. Some social programming in Peru is externally funded, for instance, UNDP collaborates with the government on several programmes for social protection and basic service provision (Alcázar et al., 2020). However, most of the financing tackling SDG-related objectives is internally mobilised from Peru's national budget.

Almost all countries covered by the SVSS indicated that the demand for resources is highest for the social sector (including emergency relief), closely followed by economic infrastructure. The countries are increasingly recognising that addressing their SDG-related financing gaps would require significant improvements in the mobilisation of domestic resources, accessing innovative private finance, and leveraging international development cooperation.

> **Domestic resource mobilisation for SDG financing remains a vital strategy for countries in the Global South.**

In this regard, it may be recalled that the UN has put integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs) in place to address the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and to support the SDGs. Adopting INFFs is a challenging endeavour, as in many countries, capacities are limited, policy reform is costly, and existing financing policies are misaligned due to underlying political constraints. However, there was no guarantee that an INFF would lead to enhanced flow of external resources. As a result, very few countries in the Global South felt inclined to undertake this exercise, with only Bangladesh and Solomon Islands showing interest in this regard.

ODA is one of the most important sources for financing, especially for the world's poorest countries. Amounts flowing into developing countries through ODA had been fluctuating since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Country-level data reveals that multilateral sources, including international and regional development institutions, are accounting for a greater share of public development assistance flows. The flows from traditional bilateral providers from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries are either stagnating and/or being multilateralised. Further, a significant portion of their resources is being prioritised for dealing with the influx of migrants in their respective countries. However, the country case studies find that external public finance coming to the Global South could not be assessed against an agreed framework of development effectiveness linked to the delivery of SDGs, with focus on 'leaving no one behind.' Indeed, recipient countries in their VNRs reiterated the urgency of financial assistance from developed countries for climate change mitigation and control of pandemics. They also noted the need for setting clear eligibility standards and ensuring greater transparency concerning ODA regimes. At the same time, as some Southern LICs graduate to LMICs (e.g. Bangladesh and Nigeria) they are facing less concessionary financing terms from multilateral institutions like the World Bank.

Domestic resource mobilisation for SDG financing remains a vital strategy for countries in the Global South. Some countries have shown some progress in this respect. India reported on direct tax reforms as well as the goods and services tax (GST), a uniform and simplified form of indirect taxation. Bangladesh has instituted a modernised version of the value-added tax (VAT) system, whereas Nigeria has launched the Voluntary Assets and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS) which offers amnesty to tax defaulters willing to meet their tax obligations. Taxes on mobile transfers in certain Southern countries have been introduced to expand the tax bracket by capturing the informal sector. In Kenya, funds collected from the excise tax on mobile finance are earmarked to fund universal healthcare. The increase in the Bolivian government's tax revenue allowed investment in education to increase (Andersen et al., 2020). In the Southern countries covered by the SVSS study, one notices policy declarations aimed at increasing the tax base, as well as combating tax evasion and avoidance.

In India, financial funding seems to be the biggest challenge for the achievement of the SDGs. The VNR 2017 has admitted that "India is unlikely to gather sufficient revenues for achieving the SDGs".

Adequate funding for the SDGs is an immediate priority with solutions outlined, including improving India's tax–GDP ratio and improving accountability for official development assistance.

The SVSS studies indicate that the fundamental importance of private sector investments in meeting SDGs is recognised in almost all Southern countries. However, concerned policymakers point out that this form of finance cannot replace the role played by public finance in meeting demands for education and health in rural areas. In this connection, it was observed that foreign remittances are frequently used to finance education in countries of origin (e.g. Bolivia). Indeed, remittances play a critical role in many countries in improving the consumption level of migrant families, facilitating their graduation from the poverty level (SDG 1). Stable and predictable flows of remittances have been considered a major source for financing the 2030 Agenda.

Countries are also gearing up to attract FDI because of its well-known benefits. Arguably, for attracting FDI, an investment-enabling ecosystem and long-term policy framework are needed. An inability to do so has punished countries like Bolivia, where the flow of FDI fell, whereas it grew in many countries in Latin America. However, in some countries, FDI flow remains concentrated in the extractive sector (e.g. Nigeria), which does not necessarily facilitate growth and diversification of the manufacturing sector.

Alternatively, blended finance is touted as one of the promising forms of innovative finance, but is yet to find a foothold in the LICs and LMICs in the SVSS studies. There is a reticence of developing countries towards using external concessional finance to leverage private investment for uncertain benefits in areas of the SDGs. Records show that blended finance is not trending in the weaker economies in the South due to market distortions, risk perceptions, and a lack of institutional and regulatory mechanisms.

PPPs (a most recognisable form of blended finance) may provide a partial solution to resource mobilisation challenges of developing countries. However, our studies show that the ambitious programmes of governments in this area are yet to deliver cognisable results.

Southern financial flows (particularly from China and India) are emerging as the most ubiquitous form of long-term support for infrastructure development in LICs and LMICs. Southern providers have emerged as new and prominent funders of development projects in Asia and Africa, and to a lesser extent in Latin America. New Southern financial institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are making their mark in the region. Recipient countries often express their preference for these sources as against borrowing from the market, in view of their unmet demand for long-term financing for infrastructure development. However, because of these borrowings, most of the concerned African and Asian countries are accumulating an unsustainable debt burden.

Curiously, awareness regarding the impact of global governance on domestic resource mobilisation in the developing South was not captured by the SVSS country case studies. For generating resources for the SDGs, these countries are yet to vigorously deal with such corrupt practices as transfer pricing and illicit financial flows (an upshot of the current international taxation system). The value of regional (essentially South-South) cooperation is often not adequately emphasised by these countries as a resource for attaining the SDGs.

The major message from the SVSS studies is that resourcing seems to be the biggest challenge in the Global South for achieving the SDGs. While these countries are making efforts to improve mobilisation of various forms of finance, they are gradually coming to the reckoning that the most dependable source of finance is domestic revenue. On the other hand, this group of countries have aligned their national policy frameworks with the 2030 Agenda, but any change in their fiscal priorities is yet to become visible.

Data related issues and capacity of national statistical agencies

To ensure policy alignment, monitor implementation, and assess the progress of the SDGs, the readiness of relevant data is critical. This enhanced demand for data involves availability, accessibility, and usability of real-time, quality evidence concerning the SDGs. The aspiration of 'leaving no one behind' has brought to the fore the need to have disaggregated data of various dimensions. On the supply-side, the weak and under-resourced statistical infrastructure of developing countries is not able to meet this heightened demand. A noticeable political reticence in generating and disclosing data and information has often hindered capacity building progress of statistical institutions in the Global South. However, the introduction of the SDGs in national policy frameworks have given a much-needed impetus for engaging governments in this area, which may ultimately usher in a 'data revolution'.

SVSS studies show that data are relatively more available on indicators inherited from the MDG period—certain indicators concerning SDG 4 on education or reproductive health under SDG 3—than ones newly incorporated into the 2030 Agenda. However, SDG 17, notwithstanding being featured in the MDGs, also suffers from the absence of an empirical descriptor. Country case studies suggest that there is a significant absence of empirical assessment of SDG 16, relating to peace, justice and strong institutions. The same applies to SDG 10 on reducing inequalities. Information on apparently obvious indicators, such as in the areas of SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) or SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) is also often missing.

Reviews of the availability of disaggregated data reveal that location-related (urban and rural), sex-denominated (male and female), and income-group-specific data are more available compared to other forms of disaggregation data. Even that is limited to a number of indicators. As the countries in the Global South move to identify the region and communities who are being left behind, awareness regarding missing data grows. Yet, in most of these countries, data quality and transparency remain critical concerns.

The SVSS studies point out that the availability of data for the SDGs varies across regions and countries. Many South East and South Asian countries have undertaken exercises to identify data gaps. The gap analysis suggests it will be highly challenging to track

SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 14 (life below water) for Asia. Many Asian countries are creating separate committees to collect data, and coordinate, monitor, and report on the SDG implementation process.

Countries around the world have developed indicator frameworks to review progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. For example, the Department of Census and Statistics in Sri Lanka has set up a baseline report to collect data on the SDGs. Again, the Department could collect data for only 46 indicators (19%) of the 2030 Agenda. The Sri Lankan agency has identified level of data disaggregation, frequency of data collection, and costs of training equipment as their major challenges (Fernando et al., 2020).

Bangladesh, Malaysia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Vietnam have conducted data gap identification exercises (Rahman et al., 2020). In Bangladesh, data for 29% of SDG indicators are readily available, 45% are partially available, and 26% are not available. Bangladesh has designed an 'SDG tracker' to follow up, review, and monitor their SDG implementation progress.

Scarce funding is a critical bottleneck for the development of national data systems in the Global South.

In India, development of an accurate tracker of SDG progress is handicapped due to lack of recent data on governance outcomes, with the latest census being eight years old. It was found that for SDGs 12, 13, and 14, no available data sufficed in accounting for the respective Indicators. The country's Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has developed an SDG India Index considering 13 out of 17 SDGs (except for SDGs 12, 13, 14, and 17), which is based on 62 national Indicators, termed as priority Indicators for India.

It transpires from the SVSS studies on Africa that 56% of SSA countries have been rated 'poorly,' i.e. have data availability at less than 40%. Only 38% of 232 SDG Indicators can be tracked properly in this group of countries. However, there has been an improvement in data availability in African countries following increased execution of censuses and household surveys, and the use of technology in these processes.

For example, Ghana has been made progress in data collection, with the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) as the national statistics agency (Crentsil et al., 2020). The National Development Planning Commission, in collaboration with GSS, has produced Ghana's SDGs Indicator Baseline Report in 2018, which highlights 70% of the SDG Targets. Similarly, in Nigeria, moderate progress has been made in data collection for sectors such as health, gender equality, and poverty, which are key components of the SDGs. Yet due to infrequent data collection and the lack of robust and disaggregated data, ensuring policy coherence and measuring SDG outcomes continue to be an issue in many African countries.

In many Latin American countries, groups and networks of diverse actors, including governments, the private sector, and civil society organisations are working to generate data with the necessary disaggregation. However, the VNRs of only Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay mentioned their ability to disaggregate the critical indicators. Despite Peru's reliable data provisions, issues remain concerning the estimation methodology of certain indicators (Alcázar et al., 2020).

The current SDG Indicators do not have a single synthetic (meta) Indicator that defines 'decent work'; this issue has been addressed in the SVSS country report on Peru. The National Statistical Office in Bolivia launched a process of formulating a National Strategy of Statistical Development to respond to the needs of monitoring the implementation of the SDGs in Bolivia (Andersen et al., 2020).

Scarce funding is a critical bottleneck for the development of national data systems in the Global South. International support for statistics marked a 5% increase after the launch of the SDGs, and this total amounted to USD 623 million (OECD & UNDP, 2019). This amount accounted for 0.33% of the annual ODA flow. Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Vietnam figured among the top recipients of external support for their national strategies for the development of statistics. With the entry of the Gates Foundation in this area, funding for data on sexual and reproductive health got a boost.

Finally, the need to process administrative data to meet information demands for the SDG Indicators is yet to be fully appreciated in most countries. Similarly, the use of 'big data' (e.g. cell phone and credit card records), originating from the private sector is also yet to gain traction. Moreover, the possibility of blending official statistics with findings of rigorous sample surveys implemented by research organisations, or representative perception surveys of citizens conducted by various NGOs, is not yet recognised officially in the countries of Global South.

Partnership and stakeholder participation

The 2030 Agenda is a multilayered and multidimensional holistic programme, which presupposes its implementation through multi-stakeholder partnerships. This envisaged arrangement encompasses actors located both vertically (from local to global via national) and horizontally (across entities at the same level of governance). The aspirational statement to 'leave no one behind' has further consolidated the need for such an inclusive approach towards implementation of the SDGs. Goal 17 specifically calls for stronger means of implementation and encourages effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on their respective experience and resourcing from tangible and non-tangible assets. Such an approach will enhance the transparency and accountability process as well as bolster the efficiency of the SDG delivery process.

A strong pursuit of this proposition entails operationalisation of a substantive global partnership, as well as partnerships among national actors—ranging from the central government to local government agencies, to the whole collection of non-state actors, including the private sector and civil society. The SVSS studies suggest that this core aspect of SDG implementation has been addressed varyingly in countries of the Global South. Some have tried to meaningfully address the issue of partnership and participation in implementing the SDGs. For instance, India prioritised building partnerships and participation involving subnational governments and non-state actors. A variety of international organisations, as well as the private sector and local civil society groups, are engaged in articulating policies and methods of SDG implementation. Nepal has formed SDG implementation committees at provincial, district, and municipality levels. Several Asian countries, including Malaysia and Indonesia, have initiated the 'whole of society approach'.

In the face of Latin America's territorial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, consultation with these actors has been of high interest (Beneke de Sanfeliú et al., 2020). In an attempt to engage a variety of civil society representatives, post-2015 consultations in Peru had a strong focus to 'leave no one behind'. Thus, outreach consultations included leaders of indigenous groups from the Andes and Amazon, women of Afro-Peruvian descent, members of the LGBTQ community, representatives of grassroots organisations, children, people with disabilities, housekeepers, the young, and people with HIV/AIDS. Indeed, such a process was most visible and intense during a phase when governments were seeking alignment of national development policy frameworks with the global Agenda.

Civil society in most countries is yet to enforce a process of social accountability, thereby taking its partnership with the government to a new level.

All international development partners in Bolivia have aligned their interventions with both the 2025 Patriotic Agenda and the 2030 Agenda, and are coordinating their interventions through monthly meetings of Group of Development Partners (GruS). Additionally, the United Nations and Confederación de Empresarios Privados de Bolivia (CEPB) signed an agreement to implement the UN's Global Compact Initiative in Bolivia (Andersen et al., 2020). However, due to insufficient information and lack of systematic public-private sector collaboration, very few businesses have been able to incorporate the SDGs into their business model.

In Africa, partnerships are crucial mechanisms to ensure joint implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063 (Kasirye et al., 2020). For example, in Ghana, several in-country consultations were held to foster citizens' engagements in the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level (Crentsil et al., 2020). In Nigeria, there had been adequate in-country consultation between state actors, NGOs, CSOs, and international development partners in the agenda-setting of the SDGs (Adeniran et al., 2020). Kenya also has managed to significantly involve other partners, e.g. the private sector, in implementing the SDGs (Kasirye et al., 2020). Furthermore, to foster stronger collaboration and partnerships for the SDG implementation, new coordination and leadership structures have been set up in Nigeria.

The Peoples' Forum for Sustainable Development, attached to the regional commissions of the United Nations, provides a unique platform for non-state actors to meet and exchange experience and do peer learning on SDG delivery across borders.

The second stage of consultation regarding SDG implementation with non-state actors in different countries took place, with varying degree of inclusivity, as these countries prepare their VNRs. Often the concerned governments have pursued this type of consultation on a proforma basis, instead of seriously responding to the observations of participants. Many countries have acknowledged in their VNR reports the role of NGOs in ensuring that no one is left behind, yet civil society reports have highlighted different problems concerning existing partnerships with governments.

However, very few countries have institutionalised this consultation process to make it effective and systematic. In Ghana, to foster stronger collaboration and partnership for SDG implementation, new coordination and leadership structures have been set up with the participation of the non-state actors. These new structures are: the SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee, the Technical Committee, and the CSOs Platform for SDGs.

SVSS studies indicate that the quality of public-private dialogue has often been constrained by limited civic space available in certain countries. Global actors have not always emphasised the role of local non-state actors in international dialogues either. The lack of required capacity of non-state actors has, on occasion, inhibited their effective participation in dialogue with governments.

To recapitulate, one observes a tradition in the countries of the Global South where the incumbent government feels it is necessary to go through the notion of consulting non-state actors without committing to act on their inputs. On the other hand, civil society in most countries is yet to enforce a process of social accountability, thereby taking its partnership with the government to a new level. At the same time, understanding the role of the private sector in delivering the 2030 Agenda, beyond SDG 8, turned out to be problematic in most countries. In many, this role is still perceived through the prism of corporate social responsibility. The record of public-private dialogue and joint actions in the Global South seems to fall short of the commitments expressed by governments to the 2030 Agenda.

Summing up

The foregoing reviews of regional trends and country analyses illustrate both common and unique experiences during the initial years of the SDGs in the Global South. One common trait of this process is the interest and initiative demonstrated by regions and countries in embracing the 2030 Agenda.

A focus on eradicating human deprivations and structural changes while introducing the SDGs is evident in all three continents, yet some variations can be noted. While one region emphasised poverty and conflict (Africa), others have highlighted environmental concerns (Asia); and governance- and inequality-related issues (Latin America). Another aspect that stands out in all cases is the absence of any effective regional cooperation mechanisms as yet—supporting delivery of the SDGs. However, there has been one continental programme (in Africa) drawn up in line with the 2030 Agenda.

Countries in the Global South have energetically integrated the SDGs within their respective country contexts. In the process, they have encountered 'first-generation challenges' and resolved them with varying degrees of success. Most countries have satisfactorily adopted the 2030 Agenda within their existing national plans, programmes, and policies. However, the refashioning of policy frameworks is yet to become visible through changes in governments' allocative priorities. On the other hand, countries have, in general, put in place mechanisms dedicated to implementing the SDGs, but the silo approach within public administrations largely continues.

The most serious challenge afflicting countries' SDG implementation plans emanates from their financial resource gaps. The situation is further aggravated by a lack of predictability regarding the flow of international development assistance. The second-most pressing dimension of country-level SDG implementation plans is the data deficit undermining efforts to identify the 'left behind' people, consequently frustrating the possibility of assessing progress at a disaggregate level.

The success of coalescing multi-stakeholder partnerships to achieve the SDGs has been a function of the space allowed for non-state actors in their respective countries. The search for an effective modality for engaging the private sector in promoting the SDGs (beyond its traditional role in enhancing investment, employment, and income—assessed through the prism of corporate social responsibility) is yet to meet with reasonable success.

As Global South countries continue to address the initial challenges of SDG actualisation within their respective realities, they are also gradually taking note of 'second generation challenges' underpinning the continuum of the process. These novel challenges are discussed in the following chapter.

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