



COUNTRY-LEVEL NEEDS FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York (25-27 September 2015) opened a new development chapter, which built on unprecedented consultations with people around the world, including the national consultations undertaken in countries of Europe and Central Asia (ECA) during 2013-2014. In 2016, the world will start a new development countdown until 2030, by when the new sustainable development goals and targets should be achieved.

In view of its interconnectedness, the new agenda will require holistic approaches and coherent action by global, regional and country level actors. In order to ensure interlinkages between the regional and country levels, the ECA Regional UNDG Team undertook a consultation with ECA UN Resident Coordinators (RCs) and Country Teams (UNCT) through a survey to identify needs and requirements at country level with regard to SDG implementation.

The Survey was organized around the following key elements of SDG implementation:

Table 1. Key Elements of SDG Implementation

KEY ELEMENTS
<u>Prioritization:</u> identifying SDGs that are key and primary priority for your particular country context; reviewing/ mapping their linkages/ correlation with the overall national goals and targets (please refer to your country UNDAF)
<u>Integration of SDGs and targets into national development plans and policies:</u> integrating goals and targets into national development plans/ strategies, as well as sectoral plans; reflecting SDGs in policy interventions, programming and budgeting, and developing resource mobilization strategies
<u>Localization:</u> translating nationalized sustainable development goals and targets into local objectives, targets, indicators, programming and implementing policies, etc.
<u>Advocacy/ awareness/ mobilization of partners:</u> raising awareness and improving understanding on SDGs of relevant stakeholders; mapping and engaging with multiple stakeholders, including parliaments, local authorities, civil society, academia, and private sector; analyzing possible synergies and linkages, etc.
<u>Monitoring/data:</u> establishment of SDG monitoring systems at the national and local levels; carrying out analysis of data availability for SDGs; defining modalities of review, monitoring and follow up; areas for strengthening national statistical capacities; use of open data; mobilizing people for transparent monitoring etc.
<u>Reporting:</u> identifying modalities for reporting and review, including the timeline and contributions from various stakeholders and citizens.
<u>Other/additional:</u>

The following sections describe:

1. Findings of the survey: It should be noted that information provided by RCs/UNCTs reflects different stages, at which respective countries are in terms of SDG prioritisation, integration, and localization, as well as different stages of UNDAF preparation, implementation, or evaluation.
2. Conclusions drawn upon the key findings of the Survey.

KEY FINDINGS

SDG Prioritization

➤ UNCT plans to support the government

1. New UNDAFs that will commence in 2016 demonstrate correlation between SDGs, UNDAF outcomes and national development plans and strategies.
2. Countries that are in the penultimate year of UNDAF implementation and are designing new UNDAFs for 2017-2021, including through Results Groups are formulating UNDAF outcomes in line with national priorities and in connection to SDGs.
3. A few countries indicated that they have established relevant inter-agency working groups to support governments in developing a course of action for SDG nationalization.
4. At the government level, national coordinating mechanisms for SDG implementation are being established.
5. Mapping exercises to identify linkages between national development strategies/priorities and SDGs have been initiated in several countries.
6. Transitioning from MDGs to SDGs is used as one of strategies to ensure sensitization and initial steps on SDG integration.

➤ Identified gaps and needs for support

1. A number of UNCTs were approached by their host governments with a request to help with SDG prioritization and integration.
2. UNCT is seen as a facilitator of consultations on national goals and targets within the SDG framework.
3. A few UNCTs have requested guidance on prioritization ("how to avoid cherry picking"), adaptation and mainstreaming, review of targets and indicators, budgeting, data and monitoring systems, as well as resource mobilization.
4. PSG and PAG support is required in establishing stronger linkages between UNDAFs and SDGs.
5. Most of UNCTs also indicated a need for additional financial windows to support their governments with this process.
6. UNCTs have outlined a need for a clear agreement on roles/lead agencies in each priority area/SDG to ensure synergies and complementarities of efforts and avoid competition. Special reference was made to the SDG 16.

Integration of SDGs and targets into national development plans and policies

➤ *UNCT plans to support the government*

1. Some UNCTs have prepared SDG Roadmaps or Concept Notes for integration of SDGs.
2. Within the context of no national development strategy, establishment of SDG-specific roadmap, action plan and resource mobilization plan is planned. These will identify relevant national strategies and policies, which will need to observe and account for SDG alignment and budgeting.
3. UNCTs are also providing or are preparing to provide support in the revision of national medium-term and sectoral development strategies using this as an opportunity to assess the extent to which SDGs are already reflected in national strategies.
4. Support with costing SDGs-focused development programmes is planned to be provided.

➤ *Identified gaps and needs for support*

1. Regional and/or country-based technical workshops targeting national stakeholders are required to support the process of SDGs integration.
2. There is a need for technical and methodological guidance on integration of SDGs in a systemic manner, especially taking into account country-specific priorities, strategies, plans and programmes at different levels. Costing of and budgeting for SDGs, as well as strengthening institutional/human capacities to ensure that integration continues to take place beyond initial efforts of 2016 in a sustained manner are also identified as requiring support from regional level.
3. Integration of SDGs within a country context, where there is no overarching national strategy, will require regional support.
4. Specific guidance on integration of gender equality and women empowerment into national development policies and budgeting processes is required.
5. Clarity on availability of additional funding and technical support to cover these efforts was also highlighted by countries.

Localization

➤ UNCT plans to support the government

1. A number of UNCTs indicated that localization cannot start before nationalization and are expecting first outcomes of the SDG nationalization/integration process, such as, for example, a discussion with the National Council on Sustainable Development; development of a Roadmap; adoption of the new National Strategy on Sustainable Development, etc.
2. A few UNCTs report that this process is already underway upon the official request by respective governments.
3. The UN is engaging with development partners and governments to define expected contributions of the UN to the overall sector programme approaches.
4. With specific reference to Human Rights, integration of SDG 16 indicators into human rights action plans, and their monitoring and evaluation frameworks is planned at country level.

➤ Identified gaps and needs for support

1. There is a gap between the level of SDG awareness at the national level and among local communities/local authorities. UNCTs will need support in ensuring reach out beyond central government level.
2. There is a need for technical and methodological guidance on translating national-level SDGs into local-level plans and actions. This is particularly relevant with regard to targets, indicators, budgeting, and resource mobilization strategies.
3. Capacity building support will be required to ensure that monitoring of SDG implementation can be brought down to the local level: for instance, provision of technical experts for a period of 2-3 months.
4. Additional financial support will be required.
5. Some UNCTs are not able to identify existing gaps until integration phase has not been finalized.
6. UNCTs expressed request for sharing best practices with regard to the localization processes.

Advocacy/ awareness/ mobilization of partners

➤ *UNCT plans to support the government*

1. UNCTs already initiated or are planning a series of awareness raising activities among relevant partners and public at large, with a specific emphasis on innovative approaches to advocacy and mobilization.
2. UNCTs are reviewing practices outlined in the MAPS reference guide, which is seen to contain well elaborated approaches to advocacy and awareness on SDGs.
3. In some countries, UNCTs are planning to support governments in developing a national media campaign on SDGs.
4. Some UNCTs indicate that awareness levels on SDGs are already higher than it was on MDGs, but UNCTs plan to support governments further on this element.

➤ *Identified gaps and needs for support*

1. There is a need for sharing available advocacy tools and good practices in the area, especially with regard to the engagement of the private sector and exploration of public-private partnerships for SDG achievement.
2. Additional funding will be needed to build comprehensive awareness building/advocacy campaigns.
3. Some UNCTs report that this aspect is well covered and no additional support may be needed.
4. Interest was expressed in using the services of a HQ expert, who was part of SDGs global consultations, to support national stakeholders' sensitization about the SDGs, process behind, and key principles from the global perspective.
5. A mapping of innovative approaches in this area will be welcomed, as well as regionally facilitated exchange of experiences, learning from each other and ensuring access to international debates, regional consultations, webinars.

Monitoring/data

➤ UNCT plans to support the government

1. UNCTs recognize that, currently, the biggest hindering factor is the lack of clarity on SDG indicators, hence ambiguity in terms of required data collection processes and analyses.
2. UNCTs plan/consider to provide support to strengthen national statistical capacities as part of current and future UNDAFs.
3. UNCTs plan to support governments in establishing data and monitoring systems at national and local levels, carrying out research, collecting, analysing and disseminating data, as well as promoting the use of open data.
4. UNCTs will provide technical assistance to countries in formulation of country specific indicators and data collection for baseline assessment, as well as in improving national databases.
5. UNCTs will review SDG indicators to be adopted by governments and explore opportunities for their integration in UNDAF implementation and monitoring.

➤ Identified gaps and needs for support

1. To ensure proper monitoring and data collection, a well-developed dynamic monitoring system is needed, contrary to the practice of reporting on MDGs once in 5 years only.
2. There is a gap with regard to the collection of disaggregated data and its use for policy development and action, including with respect to thematic areas, for instance, support on gender-responsive SDGs monitoring system.
3. UNCTs requested methodological guidance to reassess and review national practices of monitoring and data collection, budgeting, including both national and sub-national systems.
4. Specialized statistical expertise from relevant UN entities will be required in this area.
5. Extensive capacity development efforts will be required, including on training national counterparts in data development, collection and policy use for SDG achievement.
6. Additional funding may be required.
7. Sharing best practices would also be welcome by UNCTs.

Reporting

➤ UNCT plans to support the government

1. Some UNCTs have prepared comprehensive reports on achieving the MDGs and plan to build on this experience in the future.
2. UNCTs aim to support governments in defining national reporting modalities, including timeline and contributions from stakeholders, with UNCTs planning to look into this area in 2016.
3. Creation of a simple reporting space and promotion of a regional SDG reporting venue is on the agenda.
4. Some UNCTs are not clear with what support will be required by countries, as the government has not made decisions on the reporting modalities.

➤ Identified gaps and needs for support

1. UNDG/R-UNDG guidance/ recommendation/ orientation workshops are required to be provided on reporting modalities, timeline/frequency of reporting and formats that will ensure comparability with other countries.
2. Technical assistance on how to draft reports/reviews in view of the new agenda to build capacities.
3. Additional financial support will be required, for example similar to UNDP allocations for production of 5-year MDG reports.
4. Interest was expressed in utilizing regional networks and activities to disseminate any learning coming out from earlier implementation of the SDGs with overall promotion of regional approaches.
5. Creation of a single reporting space was also seen as needed.

Other/additional

1. One of the prominent concerns expressed is financial resources earmarked for SDGs in 2016 – there is a need for regional system-wide information about the availability of SDG-earmarked resources.
2. Universality of the 2030 agenda will require better cooperation across ministries, departments, national and local authorities, donors/UN agencies in country. Guidance on building this inter-ministerial, inter-sectoral and issue-based cooperation inside the government and UNCTs will be welcome.
3. Specialized technical support may be needed with a number of SDGs, which were not a significant part of the UN agenda in a country, for example sustainable consumption and production or sustainable cities and towns.
4. Lack of political commitment and internal political challenges experienced by countries may hinder UNCTs ability to effectively work on SDG throughout 2016. Regional advice and guidance in this regard will be welcome.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account country level efforts – mainly in sensitization and awareness raising for SDGs, but also strategic positioning via UNDAF design and roll out processes, also analysed through the present needs assessments survey, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Most of countries in the ECA region are actively involving in dialogues with governments on SDG prioritization and integration. However, joint messaging by the ECA R-UNDG Team is required to further encourage more proactive UNCT engagement in promotion of and discussion on SDG integration with their national counterparts.
2. Most UNCTs ensured linkages between SDGs and UNDAF outcomes (especially those that rolled out their UNDAF development in 2014 and 2015). The same integration should be ensured with the rest of UNCTs, namely UNDAFs developed before 2014 and the ones starting in 2016.
3. UNCTs are also engaging in sensitization and awareness raising activities. UNCTs have used a few general occasions (such as UN Day, youth forums, etc.) to raise the profile of the SDGs in countries and position the UN development system as a convenor and facilitator for future initiatives with governments. To avoid ad-hoc nature of such activities, however, countries should be encouraged to make regular use of the UNDG reference guide, which provides good examples for advocacy and awareness raising approaches. In addition, tailoring of the available guidance to regional specificities may be required.
4. With regard to the key elements of SDG implementation (see Table 1), “the easiest” element is seen to be Advocacy/Awareness/Mobilization of Partners, while “the most difficult” and requiring the most intensive regional support seem to be (a) Monitoring/Data, (b) Integration and (c) Localization.
5. In terms of the identified gaps and requests for support, most UNCTs highlighted:
 - a. Technical and methodological guidance on all key elements of SDG implementation (only one UNCT commented on the MAPS Interim Reference Guide, which makes it difficult to conclude whether this available guide is found insufficient or irrelevant);
 - b. Sharing good practices (especially at the regional level) via peer-to-peer learning, mapping of innovative approaches in the region and beyond, additional exchange of experience or provision of examples of successfully working initiatives/ approaches/ methodologies from other regions.
 - c. Need for a joint UN voice and coherent approaches, which will be possible to achieve with a strong support and One UN voice from the regional UN system.
 - d. Need for specialized expertise, capacity building and financial support. Most of UNCTs recognize that SDG implementation will require mobilization of capacities within the Teams, as well as additional capacities for national partners. However, there is no wide recognition that the support for SDG implementation, including for all its elements, should be integrated into UNDAFs. In 2016, nonetheless, there will be a need for organization of a series of regional workshops/ gatherings targeting RCs/UNCTs and their national counterparts, and either focusing on SDG advocacy/ understanding/ awareness raising (of a more generic nature) or having more specialized thematic focus.