

VNRs AND SDG EVALUATIONS IN ANGLOPHONE AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA

A MAPPING OF COMMON CHALLENGES
AND EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

DISCUSSION PAPER | DECEMBER 2022



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How to cite this report:

DEval, CLEAR-AA and CLEAR-LAC. 2022. *VNRs and SDG Evaluations in Anglophone Africa and Latin America: A mapping of common challenges and emerging good practices*. German Institute for Development Evaluation, Bonn.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This discussion paper, *VNRs and SDG evaluations in Anglophone Africa and Latin America: A mapping of common challenges and emerging good practices*, was produced by a cross-continental working group on evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), comprising three officials from participating organizations:

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The members of the working group are grateful to the consultants, Nils-Sjard Schulz and Claudia Aguilar Garza, for their excellent work and extraordinary findings, which form the basis for this document, as well as the heads of DEval and CLEAR-AA for their support during the course of this research.



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

The research and publication received generous financial support from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of the Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland), via DEval's Focelac+ project on capacity development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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FOREWORD



The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) and the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results-Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) formed a partnership to strengthen our respective contributions in evaluation capacity development, practice and scholarship in our countries of operation. One of our projects was the commissioning of research into the role of evaluations in assessing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Evaluation has been recognized as an important input to helping United Nations (UN) member nations to understand the extent of progress on the Goals, or lack thereof, and the factors that have contributed to such attainments or shortcomings. Using a comparative analysis of eight countries in Africa and Latin America, the study focused on the use of evaluative evidence in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), as well as the institutionalization of the evaluative function in the public policy and planning cycle in the sampled countries.

In order for governments to fully internalize the SDGs, they need to institutionalize them within public policy and planning cycles. Likewise, in order for evaluations to become a critical evidence source in VNR development processes, there needs to be a strengthening of the evaluative function across the national evaluation system (NES). The research findings show that NES stakeholders have thus far missed an opportunity to position evaluative evidence as a key tool for examining the implementation of the SDGs, and progress towards results. As institutions who specialize in evaluation and Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD), DEval and CLEAR-AA endorse the recommendation of the discussion paper which calls on ECD stakeholders and the evaluation community to design and implement innovative initiatives that will lead to greater uptake of evaluations in public policy, planning and VNR processes towards the achievement of the SDGs.

This discussion paper includes recommendations for governments, the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) which develops VNR development guidelines, UN regional economic commissions, as well as ECD stakeholders and evaluation communities. As DEval and CLEAR-AA, we hope that the rich insights and recommendations from this paper reach these intended audiences and leads to the use of evaluative evidence in strengthening future VNRs tabled at the UN High Level Political Forum. Ultimately, we hope for greater advocacy and utilization of evaluative evidence in public policies, development plans and SDG implementation strategies, towards the achievement of the Global Goals.

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On behalf of DEval

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On behalf of CLEAR-AA

ABSTRACT

One of the most distinctive features of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development lies with its detailed follow-up and review, guided by a global indicator framework and prominently reflected in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by governments. This discussion paper has been produced by a cross-continental Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) evaluation working group, constituted by three officials from DEval, CLEAR-AA and the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results-Latin America and the Caribbean (CLEAR-LAC).

The primary objective of this paper is to assess the extent of use of evaluative evidence by governments when compiling their respective Voluntary National Reviews, the latter an implementation tool used to track countries' progress and achievements vis-à-vis the SDGs. A second objective is to understand other sources of evidence that feed into the development of country VNRs. Third, the document puts forward key findings regarding evidence sources into VNRs, particularly highlighting best practices and challenges from eight sampled countries in Africa and Latin America. This paper purposively sampled four African countries in which CLEAR-AA undertakes evaluation capacity development (ECD), and four Latin American countries where CLEAR-LAC and DEval (through its Focelac+ project) undertake or support country ECD initiatives.

The discussion paper employed a research methodology consisting of an extensive desktop review of VNR, planning and public policy processes, and the state of evaluation capacities in the eight countries. The desktop review is triangulated by key informant interviews of stakeholders involved in the VNR, planning and public policy processes and national evaluation system of each country. Key findings, relative to the paper's objectives, are as follows: performance monitoring and statistics are a primary source of evidence for VNRs across the African and Latin American countries; government and non-governmental stakeholders have not internalized the value of SDG evaluation in VNR processes and its value in terms of their own internal assessment of progress toward SDGs; limited integration of SDGs and their indicators in the countries' public policy and national and sector planning cycles; slow response of national evaluation systems in responding to SDGs. Despite these challenges, the authors highlight key emerging best practices from the sampled countries of **Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Uganda, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia** and **Ecuador** that can be built upon to integrate SDG evaluation in VNR development, national and sector development planning, as well as national evaluation systems more generally. Lastly, the paper proffers key recommendations for entrenching SDGs in public policy and planning, and promoting evaluative evidence use in VNR development by stressing the value of evaluative evidence in VNR guidelines provided by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA).

ACRONYMS

| | | | |
|------------------|---|-----------------|---|
| AA | Anglophone Africa | MDP | Ministry of Development Planning, Lesotho |
| CIDE | Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Mexico | MGDS | Malawi Growth and Development Strategy |
| CLEAR-AA | Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa | MIDEPLAN | Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy, Costa Rica |
| CLEAR-LAC | Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Latin America and the Caribbean | NDP | National Development Plan |
| CODS | Center for Sustainable Development, Colombia | NSDP | National Strategic Development Plan, Lesotho |
| COEVAL | National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy, Mexico | NSI | National Standard Indicator Framework, Uganda |
| CONPES | National Council for Economic and Social Policy, Colombia | NSO | National Strategy Office, Botswana |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization | REC | Regional Economic Commission |
| DEval | German Institute for Development Evaluation | RISDP | Indicative Strategic Development Plan |
| DNP | National Planning Department, Costa Rica | SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| EAC | East African Community | SAI | Supreme Audit Institution |
| ECD | Evaluation Capacity Development | SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| FOCELAC+ | Strengthening a Culture of Evaluation and Learning in Latin America with a Global Outlook (DEval project) | SED | Performance Evaluation System, Mexico |
| GA | General Assembly | SINERGIA | National System of Management and Result Evaluation, Colombia |
| GIZ | German Agency for International Cooperation | SNP | National Planning Secretariat, Ecuador |
| HLPF | High-Level Political Forum | ToR | Terms of Reference |
| LAC | Latin America and the Caribbean | UEA | Uganda Evaluation Association |
| LNOB | Leave No One Behind | UN | United Nations |
| M&E | Monitoring & Evaluation | UNDP | United Nations Development Program |
| MDA | Ministries, Agencies and Departments | UNDESA | United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs |
| MDB | Multilateral Development Bank | UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| | | UNSDCF | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework |
| | | VNR | Voluntary National Review |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the most distinctive features of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development lies with its detailed follow-up and review, guided by a global indicator framework and prominently reflected in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by governments to the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) hosted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. In particular, the VNRs have become a success story as they enable countries – both developed and developing – to share and learn from each other’s progress made and challenges encountered in their quests to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the same time, VNRs have also come under scrutiny for the lack of quality and consistency of reporting which in most cases is almost entirely based on quantitative data with limited potential for actual learning and accountability. Although mandated by the 2030 Agenda, evaluation and other forms of qualitative evidence only play a residual, at best anecdotal role in the majority of VNRs, which also implies that these reviews merely reflect the ‘what’ without exploring the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of respective tendencies in the SDGs and their targets.

Building on previous initiatives to ensure that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda can benefit from evaluations, a Steering Committee composed by the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) and Latin America and the Caribbean (CLEAR-LAC), as well as German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)’s Strengthening a Culture of Evaluation and Learning in Latin America with a Global Outlook (FOCELAC+, for its Spanish acronym) capacity development project, is exploring the role of evaluation in informing VNR processes in four Anglophone African¹ and four Latin American² countries which are already working closely with respective regional CLEAR networks. Supported by an international team of consultants, a comprehensive mapping was conducted to highlight common and unique challenges and successes that these countries have experienced in using evaluative evidence for SDG reporting.

Based on a rapid assessment methodology (using desk reviews, interviews, and feedback loops), the mapping identified the following common challenges:

- **The lack of a learning culture in the implementation arrangements of the 2030 Agenda** which primarily focus on producing, collecting, and reporting on data for quantitative monitoring and are detached from qualitative analysis and ultimately from understanding of what works, and what does not work, to achieve the SDGs.
- **The limited extent to which SDGs can be evaluated within current national planning** due to limited integration of the SDGs and their targets in the public policy cycle, particularly at the sector level where public policies are not yet designed to contribute to the SDGs, thereby compromising future evaluations.
- **The wide-spread confusion on what SDG evaluation means**, among both governments and other stakeholders, including the evaluation community, with only few countries embracing the idea of evaluating the contributions of policies and plans to the SDGs and their targets.
- **The slow response of national evaluation systems to the SDGs** which have only timidly started to integrate the SDGs in their plans, portfolios, and operational components such as annual evaluation plans as well as evaluation standards, guidelines and tools, showing inertia and reluctance to explore flexible, adaptive and innovative approaches needed for SDG evaluations.

1 Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, and Uganda

2 Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mexico



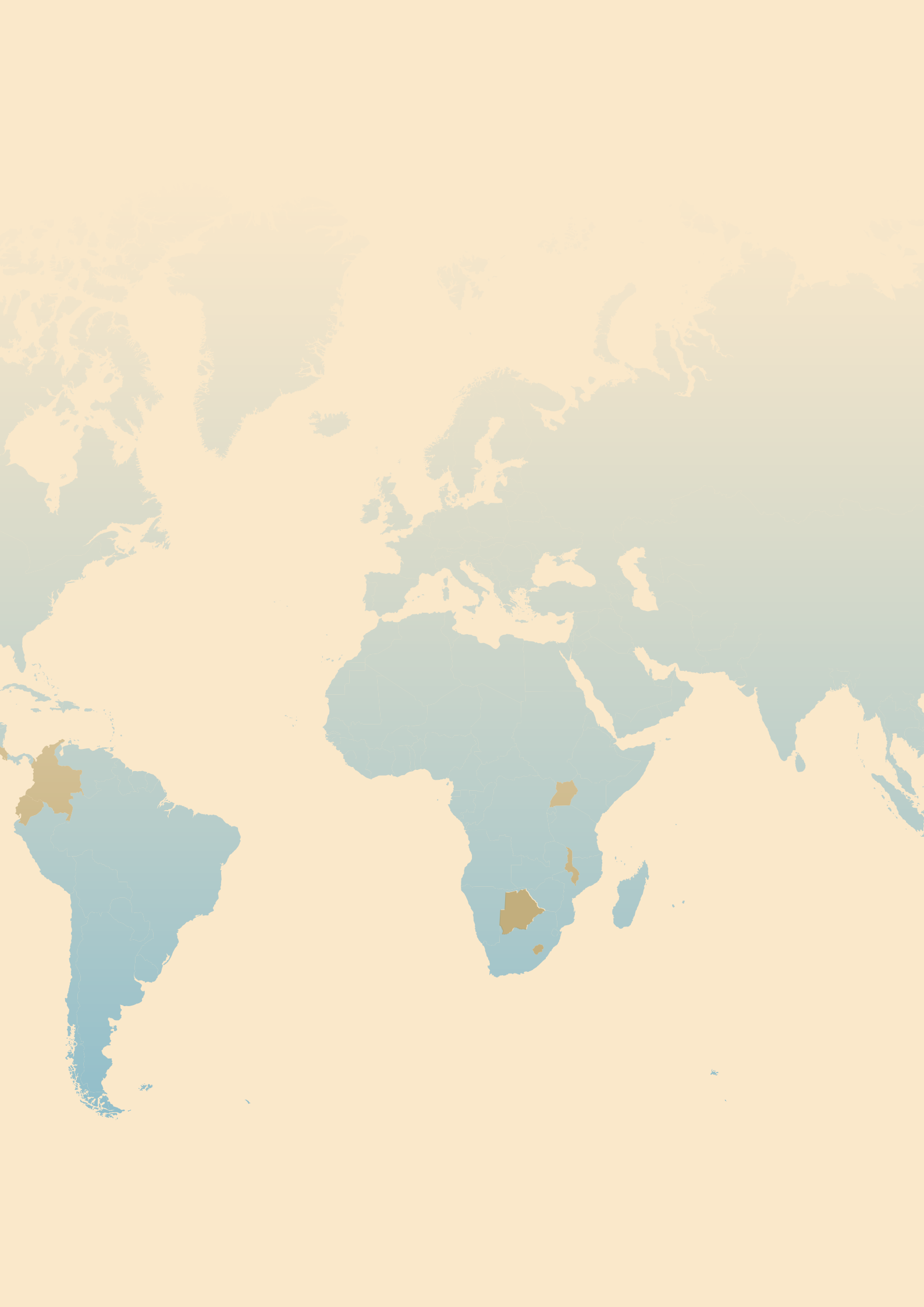
- **The sheer complexity of the institutional labyrinth (dis)connecting NDPs, 2030 implementation and SDG reporting**, where entities steering national evaluation systems – often also in charge of coordinating the VNR process – do not make any use of the wealth, and potential, of evaluation-related data and information, sending thereby a negatively charged message to evaluation players potentially interested in contributing evidence not only to the VNRs but to the 2030 Agenda implementation in general.
- **The apparent indifference of evaluation players to engage in 2030 Agenda governance and VNR processes** who, even when they have a seat at the table of 2030- and/or VNR-related arrangements, remain invisible and do not seem to contribute any significant contents.
- **The manifest reluctance of governments to use evaluations for VNRs** which is related to the preference to use the VNRs as a channel to showcase a government’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda in a global setting, rather than to contribute to mutual learning and to learn from both success and failure.
- **The mixed performance of multilateral organizations in supporting countries** who often engage in Evaluation Capacity Development and 2030 Agenda implementation, including VNRs, in parallel, without considering synergies, and make little effort to influence the better use of evaluative evidence in the context of VNRs.

Against the backdrop of these challenges, the mapping has identified a series of emerging good practices, which might provide further opportunities for mutual learning. Countries covered can share experience in the following arenas:

- **Colombia and Uganda** on how to build a learning culture for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including through the evaluation of SDG roadmaps.
- **Costa Rica** on how to incorporate the 2030 Agenda in the public policy cycle through a two-step approach, ensuring a SDG-aligned policy cycle and incorporating SDGs in the evaluation policy.
- **Colombia** on how to showcase SDG evaluability through sector policies to achieve the SDGs by requesting all public entities to design sector policies for the achievement of the SDGs.
- **Botswana** on how to adjust evaluation approaches in the context of the 2030 Agenda, particularly through rapid evaluations at the sector level.
- **Mexico** on how to evaluate SDG contributions in the context of evaluating public financial management, specifically through an annual budget for program evaluations.
- **Ecuador** on how to incorporate evaluation findings and recommendations in the VNRs as part of the SDG progress chapters
- **Lesotho** on how to partner with academia around VNRs, specifically by engaging its national public university in a think tank role for drafting evidence-based background papers.

While gaps in using evaluation for SDG reporting specifically and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are significant, there are manifold opportunities to strengthen the evidence base for better sustainable development policies, increased institutional capacities and more effective programs. Thus, the following recommendations could guide future work of different groups with distinct roles in SDG evaluations:

- Governments of developing countries should update their guidelines for policy formulation to integrate relevant SDGs and targets; invest in evaluation and other evidence generation mechanisms to inform policy design and updates in the context of national 2030 Agenda implementation; ensure qualitative analysis for the VNRs; create and deepen a learning culture for the 2030 Agenda implementation; ensure that evaluation lead entities are fully aware of the 2030 Agenda and update guidelines accordingly; as well as strengthen partnerships between key government entities with evaluation players such as universities, academia and think tanks.
- National evaluation communities should take advantage of existing spaces to proactively participate in the 2030 Agenda and VNR processes; clearly identify, articulate and disseminate the added value of the evaluation community and evaluation as key drivers of better public policies for the SDGs; conduct an in-depth analysis of the extent to which evaluation has already contributed to better public policies and more effective public services; innovate evaluation approaches and methodologies to ensure evaluative work can be conducted in timelines and deliver messages that are relevant and meaningful to national policy processes; and ensure effective participation in regional forums and events focusing on the 2030 Agenda and particularly the VNRs.
- International partners should ensure consistency and coherence of support to the 2030 Agenda implementation and engagement in Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD); innovate capacity development support around SDG evaluations; ensure that program evaluations fully cover relevant SDGs, targets and principles; take a more deliberate approach to supporting ECD and innovative evaluation methods involving national evaluation players; and facilitate knowledge sharing and provide opportunities for mutual learning among countries.
- The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) as the custodian of the VNR methodology should more consistently integrate the use of evaluative evidence in the voluntary common reporting guidelines; ensure that evaluation is conceptualized adequately; include evaluation-related conclusions in the annual synthesis reports; incentivize and support analysis of good practice of evaluation in the context of 2030 Agenda implementation; and advocate for and support the set-up of a working group on SDG evaluation.
- UN Regional Economic Commissions (REC), as hosts of regional forums, should include evaluation as a key element for regional forums; contribute to the proactive participation of evaluation players in regional forums; map and reinforce ongoing relevant ECD initiatives that are supported by regional offices of UN agencies.



CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in late 2015, almost all member states of the United Nations have submitted at least one Voluntary National Review (VNR) to report on their progress made in implementing the agreement and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets. The VNR process has become a prominent, even defining, feature of the annual High-Level Political Forums (HLPF) gathering governments to share innovative solutions and lessons learned in a highly visible manner.

To a good extent, VNRs constitute a powerful bridge between an ambitious global accord, backed by an agreed common indicator framework, on the one hand; and country implementation, on the other. The latter includes dimensions ranging from adjusting policy frameworks and budgetary processes to new institutional arrangements for development planning and upgraded statistical systems, among others. This is quite unique in the multilateral context where other agreements, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda endorsed just a few months ahead of the 2030 Agenda and supposed to be a 'sister agreement', lack mechanisms for national progress reporting. Even in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, VNRs remain a success story for multilateral action on sustainable development, as countries continue sharing their progress and challenges, for instance to build back better from the current pandemic-driven complex social and economic crises. As such, the engagement in VNR also solidifies the 2030 Agenda as a critical reference framework for emerging from crisis and converting crisis into an opportunity to steer and deepen transformations for a more sustainable future.

However, the dynamic and even euphoric engagement in VNRs cannot conceal increasingly tangible limitations in the quality of country reporting. Most reports continue focusing merely on reflecting quantitative tendencies in goals and targets based on the global indicator framework. Driven by often substantial financial and technical investments in statistical systems and 'big data', the monitoring component tends to be the primary, often even exclusive dimension covered by many VNRs. This creates a certain void in the overall implementation of the SDGs due to a persistent lack of qualitative information and analysis as to why progress has been made in some goals and targets, while others are falling behind. In other words, VNRs are often blind towards the relevance and impact of policies and institutions. This compromises not only the quality of reporting, but the actual effectiveness and sustainability of implementing a global agenda at the national and local levels.

One essential ingredient to addressing this critical void is evaluation, as a tool for understanding the 'why' and 'how' behind SDG indicator evolution, for analyzing the option for better policy and program design, and ultimately for substantive, evidence-based accountability. This approach is fully captured by the 2030 Agenda itself which states that follow-up should "identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices" and "be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data" (paragraph 74c & g).

However, this ambition has not been materialized nor operationalized in the guidance, discussion, statements, and analysis of VNRs. In particular, the current Voluntary Common Guidelines and respective Handbook for the Preparation of VNRs, both published by the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), only provide superficial indications on evaluation as a relevant source for assessing progress and gaps. In current practice, evaluation

tends to be perceived as a mere subcategory of Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) or even confused with monitoring. For the past years, evaluation networks such as EvalSDGs, jointly with numerous other platforms and organizations such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), have advocated for a more consistent inclusion of evaluation in the VNRs – as an actual or potential key driver to effective development policies – and the national processes underlying these. However, the impact of these initiatives has been limited so far, and evaluation remains widely underused, largely invisible and scarcely sourced. This is in stark contrast with the prominent role monitoring plays in the 2030 Agenda’s follow-up and review.

In this context, the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) and Latin America and the Caribbean (CLEAR-LAC), as well as German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)’s FOCELAC+ capacity development project, have decided to take a new path to understanding the role of evaluation in informing VNR processes in four Anglophone African and four Latin American countries which are already working closely with respective regional CLEAR networks.

As part of a consultancy, a comprehensive mapping of SDG evaluations within and along with VNR processes was conducted covering a total of eight Anglophone African (AA) and Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries,³ with a view to highlight common and unique challenges and successes that these countries have experienced in using evaluative evidence for SDG reporting.⁴ As a product of this consultancy, this discussion paper intends to:

- Contribute to the **ongoing discussion on the role of evaluation in SDG reporting** with a view to a more effective interaction between monitoring/data and evaluation/public policies and their governance structure as part of national, regional and global VNR processes and their respective governance
- Inform and provide inputs to **regional knowledge sharing among key stakeholders**, including the ones involved in CLEAR platforms, based on common challenges, successes and potential best practices regarding VNR reporting and the use of evaluation therein
- Provide data and analysis to inform further action to **advocate for improved reporting requirements** at the global level (Voluntary Common Guidelines), particularly to reflect the role of evaluation in the achievement of the SDGs

Rather than a theoretical exercise, this discussion paper intends to provide in-depth comparative insights and identify potential solutions and pathways for evaluation to be a stronger ingredient of successful SDG reporting, with the aim to inform the ongoing global debate and enable countries to learn from each other at political and technical levels alike.

³ **Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, and Uganda**, as well as **Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mexico**.

⁴ The related objective of the consultancy was to “perform a comprehensive mapping of SDG evaluations within and along with VNR processes of selected African and Latin American countries, with a view to highlight common and unique challenges and successes that these countries have experienced.”

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

In line with the goals outlined above, this discussion paper is informed by an in-depth mapping exercise which was conducted by an international team of consultants between December 2021 and April 2022. The research method used is mixed, exploratory, and descriptive. Documentary research techniques were applied, as well as qualitative analysis techniques, using both primary and secondary sources of information.

2.1 Mapping tools

The consultancy used a blend of methodological tools combining:

- **In-depth desk review** of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), their annexes and respective references (for instance to sources of data, analysis and evaluations related to the SDGs), in each of the eight countries to be assessed.
- **Desk review of material and documentation** related to SDG and evaluation systems, mechanisms, platforms, and players; national and sector development plans; as well as other relevant documentation related to the enabling environment for evaluation of the SDGs and public contributing to these. The final balance of secondary sources suggests that there is documentary information on the implementation processes of the 2030 Agenda in the countries, the progress of indicators in compliance with the SDGs, etc. Similarly, there are documents that allow establishing the level of maturity of the evaluation systems of the countries studied. Almost no systematized information exists on how these evaluation systems are linked to the implementation processes of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Interviews with key informants**, to complement the analysis by surveying primary sources of information. Semi-structured interviews with key informants were used to document the perceptions of various stakeholders. On average, three representatives were interviewed in each country, covering to some extent national evaluation systems and bodies, SDG coordination/governance mechanisms and government lead institutions for development planning, as well as United Nations organizations, to provide qualitative data on the role of evaluation in VNR processes (see full list of interviewees in annex 1)
- **Review by, and feedback loops with, the Steering Committee** (composed of representatives of CLEAR-AA, CLEAR-LAC and FOCELAC+) on intermediate versions, to assure quality and fine-tune the relevance of the discussion paper and allow for substantive contributions to ongoing global and regional dialogues, for instance during the 10th Conference of the African Evaluation Association in March 2022.

2.2 Analytical roster

These tools were further framed by an analytical roster establishing three key dimensions for analyzing country processes as summarized in Figure 1. The analytical roster was a key avenue to enable comparability of the findings with a view to a cross-country analysis of challenges, successes and lessons learned.

While the VNRs constituted the core of the analysis, this mapping not only looked into reviews themselves, but considered the governance and institutional arrangements of SDG reporting and their ability to enable the uptake of evaluations for VNR processes; the role and capacities of national evaluation systems; as well as other enabling factors for evaluation to contribute to sustainable development, such as the quality of public policy design or the international support to national evaluation systems and capacities.

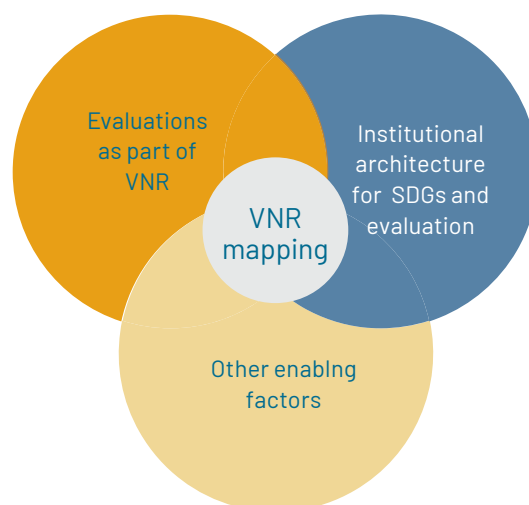


Figure 1: Key dimensions for analysis

In this line, the mapping was geared towards the following analytical elements and main sources of information, among others:

For evaluation as part of VNR processes

Main sources for desk review: VNRs, their annexes and references made therein

- Evaluation as a key ingredient for VNR process overall
- Evaluation as data source for reporting on 2030 Agenda implementation and progress in specific SDGs
- Reference to public policies and their evaluability as a means of implementation for the SDGs
- Reference to evaluation as part of COVID-19 response and building back better

For the institutional architecture for SDGs and evaluation

Main sources for desk review: VNRs, Terms of Reference (ToR) and documents of SDG and evaluation mechanisms

- Maturity, role and status of national evaluation system and its players with respect to national implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Evaluation bodies/players as part of specific VNR coordination process
- Degree to which evaluation is specifically reflected in national 2030 Agenda action plans or roadmaps
- Importance of evaluation in development planning or respective government ministry leading the 2030 Agenda implementation

For factors enabling the use of evaluation for SDG reporting

Main sources for desk review: Development plans, public policies, online information of networks, CSO, think tanks, donors/multilaterals, etc.

- Role of evaluation in the current national development plan
- Existence of National Evaluation Policies and/or programs
- Overall awareness among government entities on evaluation as a key to achieve the SDGs, i.e. evaluation as part of public policies needed to implement the 2030 Agenda
- United Nations (UN) and other multilateral institutions' engagement in evaluation agenda

2.3 Countries covered by the mapping

This mapping reviewed VNRs and experiences of eight countries, four from Anglophone Africa (AA – **Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Uganda**) and four from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC – **Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico**). The regional distribution corresponds to the groups of countries the respective regional CLEAR chapters (as members of the SC) and DEval's FOCELAC+ project support, often with deep engagement in Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) and long-standing partnerships with respective government entities. Specific countries were selected primarily based on their role as priority partner country of German development cooperation and other criteria such as the intra- and inter-regional variety of experiences, progress in evaluation systems and quality of VNRs (for further details see country profiles available in annex 3).

While the ToR established the identification of “common challenges and successes within and – if possible – between the two regions” as a key aspect for this discussion paper, it should be noted that actual comparability needs to be nuanced with an overall recognition that LAC and AA countries depart from distinct expressions of sustainable development, prioritization of development goals, public sector capacities, political engagement and leadership, available financial, institutional and human resources, among other aspects.

For instance, and specifically, most LAC countries have a long track record in public policy evaluation and related capacities, particularly in social sectors, while most AA countries have more recently started to invest in their evaluation capacities which are still at an incipient stage. However, during the process of the mapping, and despite very distinct enabling environments for SDG evaluations, it became apparent that experience and solutions have emerged in all participating countries, and that while some are more advanced, stakeholders from all countries shared and clearly expressed the need to learn from each other and in both directions between the regions, including options for LAC countries to learn from their AA peers.

Therefore, while comparability should be adjusted in the light of different conditions countries are facing, it has provided an opportunity to go beyond conventional and often overly simplistic messages around how these two regions and their countries could relate to each other.

COUNTRY CONTEXT: INTERPLAY BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND THE 2030 AGENDA

The 2030 Agenda and its SDGs suppose a critical milestone for comprehensive planning for sustainable development, complementing the previous global agenda focusing on social arenas (the Millennium Development Goals) with strong commitments to environmental and economic objectives. Due to its ambition, universality and complexity, the 2030 Agenda has opened new opportunities for countries desiring to improve their citizen's lives in almost any possible social, economic and environmental dimension. The extent to which these dimensions can be operationalized in actual development planning and ultimately policymaking, however, depends on the actual political conditions, institutional capacities and of course financial and human resources. For instance, for Latin American big middle-income countries, climate-resilient infrastructure and renewable energy might be high on the agenda, while African low-income countries might rather prioritize access to health or social protection. Also, some countries can look back on a long-standing history of evidence-based development planning and result-driven public policies, while others are still strengthening political and institutional pillars needed for effective public policy formulation and implementation. These distinctions are critical elements to take into consideration when assessing and comparing country experiences which need to be nuanced according to the degree of policy and institutional development. That said, this chapter will explore current processes of including the 2030 Agenda in overall national development and integrating the SDGs in sector policies and plans specifically.

3.1 The 2030 Agenda as part of national development planning

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, countries around the world have rallied to include the SDGs in their national development planning, particularly at the level of short-term plans. The countries covered in this mapping have all started new cycles of development planning in the past six years enabling them to consider and integrate the international agreements in national frameworks. In the African context, this includes not only the 2030 Agenda, but also the continental Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and regional accords such as the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), for **Botswana, Lesotho and Malawi**, and the East African Community (EAC) Treaty, for **Uganda**.

In AA, the emphasis is on linking national priorities to SDGs in a relatively generic manner, for instance by stating that certain SDGs (but not targets) are related to distinct key priority areas. Reviewed VNRs do not permit a deeper analysis about how these linkages were established or what they imply for policy design and implementation, indicating that these efforts have happened in a relatively superficial manner. **Uganda** is an exception: its Second National Development Plan (2015/2016-2019/2020) not only covers the SDGs but also refers to relevant targets to be addressed as part of NDPII's five Priority Development Areas. All other countries only relate to SDGs as part of their priority areas without specifying how exactly these connections are operationalized, particularly at the level of targets.

Uganda has also advanced in terms of integrating the SDG indicators in national frameworks. The reach of **Uganda's** National Standard Indicator (NSI) framework – at policy, strategic, programmatic, and operational levels – means that the country is not only measuring ex-post, but capable of orienting policy and program action towards the achievement of the SDG targets from the planning phase. In other AA countries of focus for this mapping assignment, this happens in a more superficial manner. For instance, **Malawi** broadly states that its current Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS III, 2017-2022) is “an instrument to implement the SDGs” but then monitors and reports on the SDG indicators separately from its national results framework addressing Key Priority Areas.

Similarly, according to its 2017 VNR, **Botswana** considers that its National Development Plan (NDP 11, 2017-2023) “embrace[s] and very closely relate[s] to the SDGs” but only links SDGs generally to the four NDP pillars, and reports on the 2030 Agenda through SDG reports rather than using the NDP channels. Finally, **Lesotho** also connects SDGs to the four Key Priority Areas of its National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP II, 2018/19-2022/23) but beyond VNRs, does not report on progress and tendencies in achieving the SDGs.

For their part, some LAC countries reviewed for this mapping have not only formally integrated the SDGs in their development plans but have created operational elements for implementation of these commitments, including through dedicated institutional arrangements and updated normative frameworks. **Colombia**, for instance, correlates the 13 priority areas (“pacts”) of its National Development Plan 2018-2022 to the SDGs and targets using a substantial analysis. The indicator batteries for each pact and related programs cover SDG indicators, thereby enabling programmatic work towards SDG targets. This in turn facilitates a comprehensive follow-up and monitoring of progress made in public policies and programs in line with these targets, particularly at the sector level which since recently is mandated to design plans to achieve the SDGs. While **Colombia** provides an example of forward-looking strategic and operational integration of the 2030 Agenda in national development planning, **Costa Rica** and **Ecuador** have – to different degrees – conducted more ad-hoc exercises to integrate the SDGs in existing public policies (i.e., ex-post). As such, **Costa Rica** has integrated the SDGs in 20 already ongoing policies to guide public sector interventions towards the 2030 Agenda, complementing previous, more generic efforts to integrate the SDGs and targets in the goals of its National Development Plan 2018-2022. **Ecuador**, for its part, adopted

Missed opportunities for evaluation in regional forums for sustainable development

Most developing countries use annual regional forums for sustainable development – facilitated by UN regional commissions – to share progress on respective VNR processes and prepare for the global HLPF. Evaluation, however, does not play a palpable role in these regional events. For instance, the outcome of this year’s Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)’s Regional Forum (Kigali Declaration) only states “fruitful and high-quality discussions on the monitoring and evaluation of the progress achieved” while the summary of Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Regional Forum does not refer at all to evaluation as part of the 2030 Agenda implementation processes. This mirrors the tendency of regional economic commissions to prioritize efforts on data and statistics, despite their historic engagement in better public policies for development. For the future, it remains to be seen if more attention could be given to evaluation in these regional forums as primary platforms for VNR-related knowledge sharing.

the 2030 Agenda as a public policy in 2018 (Executive Decree 622), to further interlink its then-ongoing National Development Plan 2017-2021 with the SDGs at the level of public policies and programs. Current development planning in **Ecuador** maintains a more general perspective on usually more than one SDG to which different policies are contributing without connecting these to targets or indicators. **Mexico**, for its part, has reformed its Planning Law in 2018 to incorporate long-term targets, and importantly, principles of the 2030 Agenda. This new law also mandates the Ministry of Finance to link budget programs to the SDGs and targets, as part of transitory dispositions.

3.2 SDGs as a reference for sector plans

While all countries mapped for this analysis have integrated the SDGs to varying extents in their overarching national planning, only limited progress has been made to ensure that SDGs and targets are taken as key references for sector-level planning. The only country with a systematic and formally established mechanism for a consistent translation of the SDG focus of NDPs in sector public policies is **Colombia**. Its 2030 implementation strategy – launched as a framework policy in 2018 (CONPES 3918) –, requests all line Ministries, Agencies and Departments (MDA) not only to integrate SDGs in their sector policies, but to establish costed sector policies for the achievement of the SDGs and their targets in line with the CONPES prioritization of targets and indicators. So far, **Colombia** has conducted two exercises to create and implement SDG sector policies, the last of which took place at the start of the current government administration. As opposed to conducting ex-post analysis of sector policies and programs of how they might contribute to the SDGs, this approach creates a unique opportunity to include the focus on SDGs and targets at the beginning of the policy cycle, i.e., during agenda-building, formulation, and costing.

For the remaining countries reviewed for this mapping, however, the integration of the 2030 Agenda in national development planning remains limited to the linkages between overarching national priorities and SDGs, often in generic ways lacking consistent logical and analytical substance. Further initiatives to translate these linkages at the sector level are incipient at best. For instance, **Costa Rica** provides advice for linking policies, strategies and sectoral plans to the SDGs, a process that is carried out by the Technical Secretariat of the SDGs at the request of the institutions. By 2020, more than 20 sectoral policies had been linked to the SDGs. However, the main link is in the structure of public policy and very few interventions manage to unite the Strategic actions and expected results of it. For its part, **Mexico**'s national 2030 implementation strategy, initially launched in 2018 and updated in 2019, requests line ministries and sector agencies to "adjust policies and programs where needed". The feasibility of sector-level orientation towards the SDGs remains unclear as this proposal emerged after sector policies had already been defined by the then-incumbent administration. In LAC, overall, public policies in social sectors tend to be closely articulated towards both national plans and global frameworks, but in practice, policies and programs appear to have been slow to integrate specific orientation towards SDGs and their targets. Showing a similar disconnect from the thematic dimension of development planning, AA countries face severe challenges to ensure consistency and quality of sector policies, let alone provisions for the SDGs articulated in these.

In sum, there are still significant limitations in the planning system itself, including its governance and the ways planning bodies are capable to enable and ultimately enforce the appropriate translation of national plans into sector policies expected to contribute to national priorities and goals. In addition, the lack of commitment of sector policies to the achievement of the SDGs compromises the overall public policy cycle which thus remains disconnected from these global goals and their targets. This disruption in the cycle cannot be superficially addressed by "forensic alignment" (trying to trace back non-SDG focused policies to possible SDG-relevant achievements) which is not only ineffective, but also misses the purpose of ensuring a systematic orientation of public policies to the SDGs and their targets – from formulation to implementation and, ultimately, evaluation.

NATIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH EVALUATION SYSTEMS

In the past decades, particularly LAC countries have advanced substantially in creating evaluation systems geared towards an improved management of the public policy cycle. While the related systems are not yet directly addressing the 2030 Agenda in most cases, there is ample potential to evaluate the SDGs using and adapting these institutional arrangements. In AA, evaluation remains an incipient field subsumed within evolving M&E systems which are heavily focused on monitoring and particularly data. However, evaluation as an agenda has gained traction in past years, particularly due to stronger political will, policy innovations, specialized international advocacy and support, as well as a better understanding of the institutional capacities needed.

4.1 Evaluation systems

Over the past decades, evaluation systems have evolved and consolidated particularly in LAC, and indeed some experiences in the region are well-known international references to other developing countries. There are advanced institutional arrangements with long-standing policies, dedicated plans, inter-institutional coordination, advanced tools, and institutional capacities. Two LAC countries have established compulsory evaluations of public sector activities. In **Ecuador**, evaluation is requested as a constitutional mandate which is further detailed and operationalized through the 2010 Planning and Public Finance Law. Similarly, **Mexico's** 2006 Federal Law of Budget and Fiscal Responsibility requires all government programs to be evaluated, as part of a comprehensive national evaluation system led by the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit and the National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL). Both experiences put emphasis on public sector performance which in the Mexican case is directly linked to budget programs being reviewed (around 20 annually).

In the AA context, so far, there are emerging evaluation systems, with the evaluation function finding incipient expression in M&E policies recently adopted (2013 in **Uganda**, 2017 in **Botswana**) or currently under development (**Lesotho**, **Malawi**). All countries have engaged in different types of M&E capacity assessments, particularly at the level of the MDAs. Even where they are progressing, M&E systems are almost exclusively geared towards data and monitoring. Evaluation tends to constitute a minor component lacking the scope, substance and stakeholder engagement needed to meaningfully expand its use for public policy. AA governments often face systemic sector-level barriers as M&E units in line ministries are considered weak, highly dependent on external funding and lacking adequate mechanisms for basic M&E coordination, data collection and information management. M&E lead entities in **Botswana** and **Malawi** voice concerns that basic M&E capacity development at MDAs continues draining their limited financial and human resources, preventing them from meeting their own evaluation-related responsibilities.

In LAC, national evaluation policies tend to create a relatively stable normative framework which is further operationalized through evaluation plans. Both are usually aligned to the development planning cycle and at least potentially, to the cycle of sector-level public policies. Going a step further, **Costa Rica** implements a medium-term National Evaluation Policy (2018–2030) framing all public sector evaluations even beyond current government cycles. The policy requires evaluations to directly address possible contributions to the SDGs, based on a previous prioritization of policies to be evaluated (through their already existing linkages with the SDGs). In other words, since 2018, each evaluation under the national policy should identify at least one SDG to be explored. While this is still an incipient experience and has not led to updated guidelines, it constitutes a valuable approach to address SDGs in evaluation policies. For its part, **Colombia's** CONPES is currently preparing a new evaluation policy framework geared towards more extensive use of evaluation results for policymaking, which might become a key opportunity to update evaluation guidelines accordingly. So far, however, the CONPES draft does not mention the 2030 Agenda (March 2022).

UNICEF partnering with CLEAR-AA to support five countries

Existing evaluation systems are led by national planning bodies such as MIDEPLAN in **Costa Rica**, the National Planning Department (DNP, for its Spanish acronym) in **Colombia**, and the National Planning Secretariat (SNP for its Spanish acronym) in **Ecuador**. **Mexico** is the only country mapped in this exercise where the evaluation lead is hosted at the Ministry of Finance, which exercises its role jointly with CONEVAL. **Colombia's** National System of Management and Result Evaluation (SINERGIA) and **Mexico's** Performance Evaluation System (SED) are most consistently focused on evaluating public policies, monitoring results of NDPs and assessing public management which essentially cuts across all government sectors. In the Mexican case, the SED is embedded in the results-based budgeting process as mandated by the above-mentioned 2018 Planning Law. Therefore, the national evaluation system is directly linked to the public financial management system.

That said, LAC countries also struggle with the effectiveness of their systems. For instance, **Costa Rica's** Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN) has only partial control and supervision of sector level evaluations as line MDAs are entitled to conduct their own evaluations outside the system and beyond the national annual evaluation plan (section 4.2 below). And **Ecuador** – despite constitutionally mandated evaluation of public policies – has yet to operationalize SNP's leadership effectively. Functional relations, roles and responsibilities have not been normed and clarified with sector entities. Indeed, the weak articulation with line ministries and sector agencies impairs the quality of the evaluation system. By extension, this also reduces their adaptability to evaluate the SDGs many of which are anchored at sector level, rather than linked to the overarching national levels. Finally, the Mexican system, anchored in the budget programs, faces limitations as, per definition, evaluations are conducted from an annual perspective, compromising thereby a more integral perspective on longer-term public policies.

UNICEF country offices in the Eastern and Southern Africa region have engaged with the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA), based at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, to support national evaluation capacity development in **Botswana**, **Lesotho**, Madagascar, Namibia, and Zambia. Specifically, CLEAR-AA is providing both specialized training and technical assistance to establish country M&E policies, plans, and strengthen M&E systems and individual capacities in government, parliament and civil society, among others. Findings for **Botswana** and **Lesotho** for this mapping exercise showed that the collaboration targeted strategic questions such as the design of new M&E policies and evaluation plans, institutional dimensions related to the capacities of M&E units in line ministries, as well as analytical work such as M&E readiness assessments, which all were reported as critical contributions to national ECD. So far, lessons learned with such a programmatic, cross-country ECD approach have not yet been systematized, but might be relevant for further engagement of international partners in support of national evaluation capacities in AA and beyond.

In sum, even in cases of advanced and consolidated evaluation systems, countries continue facing barriers to ensure consistency, coordination and alignment to the SDGs and targets. LAC can rely on long-standing commitment to systemic public policy evaluations but, to the extent that these are not designed towards the achievement of the SDGs and targets, it seems very difficult to adjust the existing systems to SDG evaluation. For AA, there are still paramount challenges to moving forward with incipient or even non-existent evaluation systems, due to the lack of capacities, resources, and coordination particularly at the level of sector MDA.

4.2 National evaluation plans

Operationally, national evaluation plans are used as a key tool for coordination with line ministries and sector agencies, within a relatively wide range of experiences.

In **Uganda**, evaluations are conducted in line with five-year national development plans, and an M&E Plan currently identifies the need to develop a national evaluation plan for each of the 20 NDP II programs, which in the future will be complemented with more specific sector-level evaluation at the request of the sector working groups. **Colombia** has taken a more centralized approach by scheduling, as part of its four-year plan, 15 evaluations which are defined and prioritized by the DNP. These evaluations can be led by internal, external or hybrid teams. **Costa Rica** conducts around 3-4 evaluations per year (around 15 in each plan), usually led directly by MIDEPLAN at proposal by line ministries. The plan follows a bottom-up dynamic drawing on annually defined sector priorities. In **Colombia** and **Costa Rica**, sector bodies often conduct additional evaluation using their own resources and/or relying on development partner contributions which increasingly involves multilateral development banks engaged in respective sectors. These evaluations are not required to be coordinated with the system but can be conducted separately even though they tend to be disseminated beyond sector boundaries. In addition, Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) can take a role as well. For instance, in **Costa Rica**, the Contraloría de la República occasionally requests sector-level evaluations. Inherently, due to SAI's supervision function, these evaluations also lack system-level coordination and there is no direct involvement of MIDEPLAN as the head of the national evaluation system. **Ecuador** uses annual evaluation plans which, by approval of the National Planning Council, cover around three government-funded evaluations per year. These evaluations are conducted as auto-evaluations by line ministries and sector agencies with support by the lead entity SNP. They do not involve any external, independent expertise, potentially compromising the quality of these exercises. By contrast, **Mexico**'s annual evaluation program – defined

by the Ministry of Finance and CONEVAL, covering on average 20 evaluations annually – requests that evaluations are independent and not directly linked to the public sector. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and fiscal constraints, more recent evaluations have seen a more proactive role and direct involvement of the Ministry of Finance and CONEVAL, the lead entities of the national evaluation systems.

Other countries are currently engaged in building the ground needed for evaluation plans. In **Botswana**, an inaugural National Evaluation Plan is being developed, whose objective is to build a culture of conducting government-commissioned public sector evaluations. Likewise, **Malawi** has developed a draft M&E policy that seeks to mandate, institutionalize and systemize the evaluative function across public sector institutions.

4.3 Existing evaluation capacities

In terms of evaluation capacities and players involved, countries mapped show that capacity development is required at both system and sector levels. At the system level, this refers to the capacities primarily of the entity coordinating the system (usually the national planning body, see above) to manage the architecture, engage with all players and contribute to evaluation capacity building inside the system, particularly, although not exclusively, of government's sector entities. Here, AA countries have made significant progress in positioning their lead entities as clearing houses for strengthening the evaluation system as such, but also building capacities of MDAs. While evaluation still tends to play a relatively minor role, the efforts to build and expand M&E systems in **Botswana** and **Malawi**, for instance, have reinvigorated the role of the M&E divisions of the National Strategy Office and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, respectively. M&E capacity assessments and capacity building strategies involving all relevant public sector institutions constitute major avenues for the strong leadership of these coordinating bodies. **Uganda**, for its part, the lead entity

(Office of the Prime Minister) can already look back on a decade of engagement in building the evaluation system. Essential progress has been made not only in terms of supporting MDA capacities, but also with a view to public sector financing for evaluations (through the Government Evaluation Facility).

While evaluation is still an incipient area of public sector capacities in AA, some LAC countries can rely on a long-standing engagement in evaluations. Substantial public sector resources are invested in these exercises, particularly in social sectors which often feature dedicated evaluation units. **Mexico** is a global reference as CONEVAL exclusively focuses on social policy evaluation. Overall, social sector ministries throughout the region are very advanced in building their own evaluation agendas and dedicating budget resources to this end. This is tangible in **Costa Rica's** Ministries such as Education, Health and Social Inclusion, as well as Labor and Public Works, **Colombia's** Department of Social Prosperity (which manages all social programs), the national Family Welfare Institute and the Ministry of Education, as well as **Ecuador's** Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion. Indeed in **Mexico**, all line ministries of the federal government feature highly operational evaluation units.

Beyond government structures, this mapping has only identified limited roles of other evaluation players in current national systems and capacities. Evaluation capacities in academia, think tanks and consulting firms are most advanced in **Colombia** and **Mexico** which also include – at least formally – these players in their 2030 and SDG mechanisms (see section 5.1 below). **Ecuador's** National Evaluation Platform gathers public and private players but seems to be largely dormant according to available information.

FOCELAC+ to strengthen ECD with a global perspective

The German DEval institute - in collaboration with **Costa Rica's** MIDEPLAN - supports LAC and other regions' countries in strengthening evaluation capacities with a view to the 2030 Agenda. The FOCELAC+ initiative aims to take a systematic and multi-stakeholder approach to ECD, serving as an innovation lab for new ECD formats in areas such as inclusive evaluation processes, better individual evaluators' skills and increased institutional capacities to manage evaluation processes. Apart from **Costa Rica**, key partners are **Ecuador** and **Colombia**, although collaboration with the Global Evaluation Initiative intends to reach out to additional partners around the globe.

The **Ecuadoran** Evaluation Society is more active but does not systematically engage with the government and is thus not consistently linked to public sector evaluations. Similarly, the **Uganda** Evaluation Association (UEA) struggles to find a clear role, primarily due to limited capacities and resources, rather than to a potential lack of government's commitment to engage. Overall, non-state capacities are yet to be developed in AA countries where evaluations are usually conducted (or at least led) by international firms or teams of consultants. To address this situation, **Malawi** and **Uganda** are starting to partner with national academic institutions which, on some occasions, already are offering M&E courses for post-graduate students (for instance the Makerere University in **Uganda** or the Nkhoma University in **Malawi**).

4.4 International support to evaluation capacities

The support of Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) is tangible in all countries mapped for this exercise, although with significant differences.

AA countries can rely on resources and expertise for developing their systems, policies, and tools not only from multilateral agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) but can also access support from specialized evaluation networks such as CLEAR-AA and the International Institute for Impact Evaluation (3ie). For instance, in **Botswana**, UNICEF collaborates with CLEAR-AA to support the National Strategy Office (NSO) to assess M&E capacities and build a 3-year national evaluation plan expected to be continued in successive editions. In **Lesotho**, UNDP is engaged with the Ministry of Development Planning (MDP) to conduct M&E trainings for MDA staff, while CLEAR-AA and UNICEF are co-developing a national M&E policy with MDAs.

These ECD collaborations are often medium-term in scope, providing therefore time and space to engage in systemic change and deeper operational adjustments. However, ECD efforts are often not coordinated with other lines of support, for instance in relation to 2030 secretariats and VNR processes. So far, international partners in AA seem to focus primarily on government stakeholders, with a view to engage with the wider evaluation community (non-state actors who are also part of the national evaluation ecosystem). The focus on building relations and rapport with the government is imperative in AA, given African government's historical mistrust of non-governmental entities.

South-South knowledge exchange for evaluation capacities

To strengthen their evaluation capacities, countries have started to engage in peer learning to develop evaluation capacity building on each other's experiences and solutions. These learning initiatives are often possible thanks to the support of programs such as Germany's FOCELAC+ or the European Union's EVALUA project. One outstanding experience is the ongoing exchange between **Costa Rica** and **Ecuador**, where MIDEPLAN has been supporting the Planning Secretariat of **Ecuador** by sharing its evaluation management model and the different evaluation tools that have become reference models for other countries of the region.

Given that systems are usually quite advanced and consolidated in LAC, it is not surprising that international ECD support is targeting more specific targets within existing capacities. LAC also is receiving increasing support from Multilateral Development Banks (MDB) to evaluate public policies as part of an increasingly complex portfolio of MDB loans which in some cases are directly linked to capacities and tools for public sector assessments and public policy evaluation capacities, particularly at the sector level. In addition, since its launch in 2012, the regional CLEAR LAC chapter has become a reference for ECD which has been further boosted by its recent involvement in the Global Evaluation Initiative.

4.5 Existing mechanisms for evaluation of National Development Plans

The evolution of evaluation systems is not geared towards the review of NDPs, but rather driven by the demand for sector-level evaluations and the increasing focus of evaluations on public policies, particularly in LAC.

In this vein, none of the countries mapped for this analysis has mechanisms for evaluating NDPs and indeed, apart from **Malawi** (which evaluated its medium-term development plan in 2020), no experience of comprehensive NDP evaluation could be identified. There are however planned NDP-level evaluations in **Uganda**, while **Ecuador** is in the process of preparing methodological guidelines for NDP evaluation, expected to be culminated in 2022.

Overall, LAC countries concentrate on monitoring, rather than evaluating their NDPs. Evaluations mostly focus on public policies contributing to the achievement of national development goals. **Colombia**, **Costa Rica** and **Ecuador** all evaluate sector policies as part of their evaluation planning, while **Mexico** evaluates budget programs which are largely congruent with sector policies. The **Colombian** approach constitutes a particularly interesting bridge as, since recently, sector policies and plans are expected to be geared towards SDGs and targets, thereby creating a fertile ground for future sector-level SDG evaluation.

Particularly in social sectors, there might be vast opportunities to evaluate cross-cutting agendas such as LNOB, gender equality or children's rights. **Costa Rica** has experience in cross-cutting evaluations looking into the policies and programs supporting personal autonomy of people with disabilities, for instance. Governments from both regions also work with UNICEF to evaluate policies and programs for child rights.

Overall, there seems to be a consensus that the evaluability of NDPs is low by design, as these tend to constitute an overarching narrative with indicative scenarios, i.e., they are inherently political, rather than technical frameworks. In almost all countries participating in this mapping, stakeholders consider that NDPs can and should be monitored adequately through existing arrangements and institutions, including national statistical offices. In contrast, according to key informants for this mapping, evaluation should take place primarily at the level of sector plans, policies and programs. This would hint at the essential need to ensure sufficient quality of sector planning not only in the light of NDPs, but also with a view to implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs and their targets.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA

Institutional capacities and arrangements have become critical ingredients for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In the past years, different models have appeared either specifically or as part of already existing mechanisms. For the purpose of this discussion paper, these experiences were mapped to identify the role of evaluation and evaluation players in institutional arrangements (such as committees and working groups), action plans (i.e. SDG Roadmaps) and the existing monitoring frameworks for the 2030 Agenda. This chapter provides a quick overview on the solutions developed so far by the countries covered in this exercise, in order to contextualize the use of evaluation in the overall arrangements and governance for the SDGs.

5.1 Institutional set-up for coordination around the SDGs

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, developing countries around the world have proactively launched and strengthened their institutional arrangement for implementing the SDGs. The countries reviewed for this mapping reflect a diversity of approaches to governance, coordination, and joint action for the SDGs, which can be summarized as follows:

Specific 2030 mechanisms at the high and technical levels

For the implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda, **Colombia**, **Costa Rica**, **Mexico**, and **Uganda** have all created a dedicated inter-institutional architecture which is expected to drive comprehensive changes in the public sector. Worldwide, **Colombia** was the first country to set up an SDG mechanism in 2015, through the High-Level Political Interinstitutional Commission for Sustainable Development led by the DNP and primarily involving government ministries. Only since recently, **Colombia** is preparing a multi-stakeholder platform for the 2030 Agenda which is expected to be launched in 2022. For its part, **Costa Rica** established a National Pact to achieve the SDGs and has created a comprehensive architecture through the High-Level Council for the SDGs led by MIDEPLAN. The Council is primarily government-focused, and further complemented by Technical and Consultative Committees involving academia, civil society and the private sector. However, according to available information, these committees are largely inactive. Interestingly, **Costa Rica** can also share experiences with specific SDG agendas designed by the parliament and the judiciary sector for their respective roles. Building up on previous arrangements for the Millennium Development Goals, **Mexico** launched the Specialized Technical Committee for the SDGs in 2015 and the National Council of the 2030 Agenda in 2017. Led by the President and steered by his Office as the Executive Secretariat, the Council has become a driving force not only at the federal, but increasingly also at the state and municipal, levels. Apart from all government branches (including parliament and judiciary), the National Council includes private sector, civil society organizations and academia. In all three LAC countries, the institutional arrangements have remained stable throughout electoral cycles and thereby achieved a certain degree of consolidation. **Uganda** has opted for creating a comprehensive framework at strategic (cabinet-level SDG Policy Coordination Committee), political (SDG Implementation Steering Committee) and technical-operational levels (SDG Task Force with technical working groups are also articulated with sector working groups). In **Lesotho**, there is a National Assembly SDG sub-committee, which is a key institutional oversight mechanism for the national legislature. Actors beyond the government and development partners are only engaged in the technical SDG Taskforce which, apart from reporting (particularly VNRs), can also provide policy guidance to government decision-makers.

Technical 2030 mechanisms embedded in national planning architecture

Instead of creating dedicated structures, **Ecuador** and **Malawi** have included the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the existing architecture for national development planning. In both cases, compared to countries with dedicated specific arrangements, this has led to relatively reduced traction and a more ad-hoc nature of SDG reporting, primarily focused on the VNRs. In **Ecuador**, the 2030 implementation is centralized in the Vice Presidency in coordination with SNP. This arrangement follows primarily a technical logic by focusing on the integration of the SDGs in the NDP without considering further key elements of implementing the 2030 Agenda and ultimately limiting the participation of other players, including from the sectors. **Malawi** uses the existing planning structures for implementing the SDGs and only activates SDG-specific arrangements to produce the VNRs. The planning process is centralized in the National Planning Commission in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, without activating cabinet, or otherwise high-level, committees.

Hybrid approaches

Some countries have taken hybrid approaches by using SDG mechanisms in parallel to, or overlapping with, higher-level policy planning and implementation arrangements. This can be observed in **Botswana** and **Lesotho**. For instance, **Lesotho** created a SDG sub-committee in the National Oversight and Advisory Committee for the implementation of the NSDP II. The sub-committee is further operationalized through a multi-stakeholder National Technical Steering Committee. While comprehensive in design, this structure is in practice activated for the preparation of VNRs only, although recent UNDP-supported initiatives aim to strengthen the continuity of 2030 Agenda governance in the country. On the other hand, **Botswana** has created a proper SDG architecture with a National Steering Committee, an SDG Secretariat, and an SDG Technical Task Force, but its actual building blocks are identical with the arrangements for national development planning, particularly the thematic working groups aligned to the NDP 11's four pillars.

5.2 Evaluation as part of institutional arrangements

Within the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda, countries have started to create specific committees and groups that focus on M&E and in this context, occasionally address evaluation. Exploring the role evaluation plays in these arrangements is key to understanding the depth of SDG progress made, and ensuring related processes are reviewed and analyzed.

While information on the detailed set up of the governance for the 2030 Agenda implementation is limited in the VNRs, the following main aspects have been identified in this mapping:

- In a few countries, evaluation is part of M&E commissions and working groups (**Mexico's** M&E Commission of the National 2030 Council, **Uganda's** thematic working group for Coordination, M&E, and Reporting), and there are no experiences with a dedicated coordination related to evaluation as such
- The primacy of data and monitoring as key concerns of the 2030 Agenda implementation has led to a dilution of evaluation aspects in these commissions and working groups
- Even where SDG roadmaps mandate deeper work on evaluation, this has not been reflected in the institutional arrangements
- Most countries have opted for thematic structure of the technical work, i.e. focusing on broader national priorities rather than cross-cutting aspects and/or capacities, and therefore limiting the options to look into evaluation capacities specifically (thematic working groups in **Botswana**, **Lesotho** and **Malawi**)

- Existing M&E commissions and groups are part of the technical layer and usually only communicate technical reports to the strategic levels of 2030 governance, with limited space for discussions on policies, systems and capacities needed, all of which are key requirements for evaluation systems to prosper
- While most countries (except for **Ecuador** and **Malawi**) formally include non-state actors, academia or even evaluation associations in the technical coordination mechanisms, their role seems to be relatively inactive or passive due to limited resources and capacities
- As opposed to the lead roles of statistical institutes and respective partners, this mapping could not identify any example of active involvement of evaluation players in the 2030 Agenda implementation architecture. For instance, national evaluation associations do not play a significant role in the M&E-related groups supporting 2030 implementation in AA. Similarly, **Ecuador's** National Evaluation Platform seems to be dormant in processes related to national development planning where, according to the government, 2030 Agenda implementation is embedded.

5.3 SDG Roadmaps

SDG Roadmaps are work plans to operationalize the institutional arrangements described in the previous section. These are usually highly detailed documents enabling governments and other stakeholders to address specific cross-cutting elements such as mainstreaming, financing, capacity building, advocacy, reporting, among others. Among the countries mapped for this exercise, only half have established multi-year roadmaps to achieve the SDGs.

In AA, only **Uganda** and in part **Botswana** have included SDG evaluation as part of their roadmaps. **Uganda's** roadmap can be considered an outstanding example as it includes a full section on Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation, and Reporting. The roadmap states strategic areas such as the "Integration of the SDGs into national M&E and reporting processes" (including reviewed National Evaluation Standards to include the SDGs, and summative evaluations on the SDGs) as well as "Strengthened functionality of M&E to support monitoring, evaluation and reporting on SDGs" (which includes engagements with development partners to improve evaluation of the SDG implementation framework). **Uganda** conducted an evaluation of the first edition of the roadmap (2018-2020) to inform the updated roadmap (2021-2025) which is not publicly available. Apparently, there was limited progress in evaluation-related outputs as these have remained unchanged in the new version. However, these continue to be highly relevant as the roadmap is expected to guide the overall SDG coordination framework involving planners and implementers of public policies, i.e. technical and sector working groups.

In a somewhat more superficial manner, **Botswana's** SDG Roadmap 2017-2023 (aligned to its NDP 11 cycle) follows a similar route by including "Data, Progress Tracking and Reporting" as well as "Policy Research Interventions", two out of a total of six strategic areas. For the latter, the role of academia and research institutes – which are also part of the 2030 governance structure – is to be strengthened for them to provide evidence for better policymaking, including through improved evaluation mechanisms, which are, however, not further detailed.

While not linking evaluation to specific outputs, **Mexico's** recently relaunched National 2030 Implementation Strategy also refers to evaluation as a key ingredient to ensure impact and effectiveness of the 2030 Agenda. Specifically, contributions from academia are stressed to improve capacities for impact evaluations and evidence-based policies, under the CONEVAL umbrella. **Colombia's** roadmap, by contrast, does not specify the contributions of evaluation to national 2030 Agenda implementation, but recognizes the overall role of the national evaluation system and, specifically, the need for addressing SDGs in public sector evaluation.

In sum, apart from **Uganda**, countries reviewed for this mapping do not include specific outputs for evaluation as part of their SDG roadmaps. In addition, **Uganda** is the only country which has conducted an evaluation of its SDG roadmap which has essentially become a process evaluation of 2030 Agenda implementation. However, despite the value of this approach, **Uganda** does not refer to its SDG roadmap and its evaluation in the VNR, as will be further explained in section 6.3 below.

5.4 Follow-up and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda

Given the 2030 Agenda's prominent mandate for follow-up and review, countries have invested substantial efforts in monitoring capacities over the past years. This is concentrated primarily on data-based monitoring and statistical capacities to produce data for the global SDG indicators. Much less is being done to ensure a qualitative follow-up of the implementation process, let alone to monitor how government action, including institutions and public policies, influence the tendencies in distinct SDGs and their targets.

Countries mapped for this exercise tend to produce SDG-related statistical data not only for the VNRs, but also use national SDG Progress Reports to inform on tendencies on SDG indicators, for instance in **Botswana**, **Malawi** and (planned) **Lesotho**. Although the title refers to "annual" periodicity, SDG progress reports are conducted intermittently, often in preparation of VNRs, and tend to depend on international support, primarily by UNDP and other UN agencies. However, countries which include SDG monitoring in their national development planning system update data according to the respective (usually) annual cycles. In this line, **Uganda's** National Standard Indicator (NSI) Framework monitors and reports on SDG indicators annually (as part of a larger indicator battery linked to the NDP II). Similarly, **Ecuador** and **Mexico** are monitoring SDG data through existing development planning systems. For instance, **Mexico** uses its Performance Evaluation System to collect data and report on SDG indicators in highly detailed ways. For its part, **Colombia's** SINERGIA system monitors the evolution of indicators that are subsequently included in annual Progress Reports and VNRs. **Ecuador** produces progress reports in more intermittent ways, through mid-term monitoring reports on national indicators.

So far, to assess monitoring capacities, VNRs refer to the number of SDG indicators covered by current data sources as the main proxy, and do not further explore the inherent challenges in national statistical systems, particularly those related to institutional capacities and inter-institutional coordination. AA countries achieve relatively low figures of statistical capacity for measuring SDG indicators, albeit in some cases the panorama seems to be improving. AA countries have prioritized nationally relevant indicators against which the capacities are reviewed. According to its VNR, **Malawi** is most advanced as it produces data for 168 indicators from the global framework and uses an additional 48 localized indicators as proxies to cover the remaining data gap. **Botswana** stresses 158 indicators as key to its national priorities, of which 55 can be reported on. **Uganda** can report on currently 92 of the 201 SDG indicators deemed relevant to its NDP, while **Lesotho** prioritizes 82 indicators, but is currently only able to produce data on 34 of these.

Latin American countries tend to rely on strong statistical capacity. All countries mapped for this exercise use Statistical Information Systems managed by independent Statistical Institutes. For the SDG follow-up exercise, **Mexico** measures a total of 232 indicators, of which 167 are indicators of the global framework and 67 are proxy indicators at the national level; while **Ecuador** uses 175 indicators without specifying if all are from the global framework. For its part, the CONPES strategy of **Colombia** proposes monitoring of 161 global indicators, although its last VNR only reported

105 indicators due to data availability. **Costa Rica** has committed to monitoring 136 applicable indicators, but only reports on 102 indicators in its last VNR.

Beyond data monitoring, other follow-up mechanisms have emerged in the past years, but remain largely nascent in scope and depth. Relevant examples include the following:

- Beyond SDG capacity audits (for instance in **Malawi**), Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) have started to audit and review past and ongoing public sector efforts to implement the SDGs. In **Colombia**, these reports are highly concentrated on SDG 1 and particularly targets 1.2 and 1.4 and should, therefore, not be seen as a comprehensive monitoring of the 2030 Agenda as such.
- AA countries are inserting SDG analysis in public sector assessments which are becoming more prominent, particularly as an input to deeper reform processes. For instance, **Botswana's** 2021 Annual Public Sector Performance Report features a section on SDG readiness, while **Uganda's** Annual Performance Reports include sections on SDG implementation and accountability arrangements with line ministries since 2019.
- Civil society organizations and private sector association are playing an increasing role in reviewing country progress in public policies for sustainable development through assessments, studies and more occasionally evaluation. In this regard, **Colombia** has created a platform called 'SDG for All' which involves non-state actors producing 2030-related data and information, while CSOs in **Malawi** have started to produce evaluations on priority sectors such as education. In **Mexico**, different stakeholders are engaged in the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, while social organizations and academia in **Ecuador** come together in the SDG Territory initiative to develop processes needed for national implementation.

Overall, monitoring of the 2030 Agenda remains focused almost exclusively on data and statistics with limited progress in a qualitative follow-up of processes, policies and institutions, among others. There are other streams (such as public sector performance reviews) that increasingly address the SDGs, particularly from a readiness perspective. However, this has not yet translated into a more systemic approach to institutional reviews and a better understanding of how the public sector could further adjust to the premises and objectives of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, this mapping has not identified any initiative or experience in *systematically assessing or monitoring public policies within existing institutional arrangements for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda*.

THE ROLE OF EVALUATION IN VNRs

This chapter will review whether, and to what degree, countries mapped for this discussion paper have used evaluation and evaluative evidence for preparing their VNRs. This relates to both the process of drafting the VNRs, including the underlying governance, leadership and coordination, and the inclusion of evaluative evidence in the documents themselves. Emphasis will be made on the role of evaluation players and their influence on the drafting process which tends to be very limited so far.

6.1 Overview of VNR used for this mapping

VNRs are a cornerstone of the follow-up and review process mandated by the 2030 Agenda which entails a commitment to “sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned.” Under the 2015 agreement, each UN Member State is “encourage[d] to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress”. For governments, the reviews constitute a valuable mechanism to report on progress and challenges in achieving the goals established by the SDGs, as well as an opportunity to reinvigorate national coordination and dialogue on sustainable development.

The VNRs essentially mirror the extent to which Government and other stakeholder are committed to revise and learn from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level. In line with their respective capacities and opportunities, each of the eight countries mapped for this exercise has invested significant efforts to survey and share their SDG progress, building up on the voluntary common reporting guidelines prepared by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).

Relying on greater capacities and resources, LAC have carried out this exercise already several times, all of them having submitted at least two reviews by 2021. In contrast, AA countries, except for **Uganda**, have carried out this exercise only once so far, although **Lesotho**, **Malawi** and **Botswana** have announced second editions for this year’s HLPF and are currently at different stages of drafting the reports.

| LATIN AMERICA | | | ANGLOPHONE AFRICA | | |
|---------------|--------|------------------|-------------------|--------|------------|
| Country | # VNRs | Years | Country | # VNRs | Years |
| Ecuador | 2 | 2018, 2020 | Botswana | 1 | 2017 |
| Colombia | 3 | 2016, 2018, 2021 | Lesotho | 1 | 2019 |
| Costa Rica | 2 | 2017, 2020 | Malawi | 1 | 2020 |
| Mexico | 3 | 2016, 2018, 2021 | Uganda | 2 | 2016, 2020 |

A common element of the VNRs analyzed for this study lies in the active role played by the United Nations Development System. UN agencies such as UNDP and UNICEF proactively contribute to the VNR exercises with technical expertise in LAC countries and are co-leading the preparation of the reports in AA, including through financing, technical assistance, facilitation services and secretariat hosting.

6.2 Process of drafting the VNRs

For all countries mapped, the VNR has become an opportunity and platform to foster partnerships, improve participation and dialogue with different public sector institutions and non-state stakeholders. In cases such as **Colombia**, **Mexico**, and **Uganda**, the VNR preparation has enabled more permanent interactions between the government and several other actors that have led to more systematic exchanges of information as part of the overall 2030 governance.

For instance, the VNR exercise in **Colombia** became a comprehensive process of taking stock and learning. On this basis, the 2021 VNR concluded that government and stakeholders should engage in deeper learning by conducting an evaluation of the national 2030 implementation process with a focus on policy coherence. Supported by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), this evaluation has reached adjudication phase at the time of writing this discussion paper. The experience of **Uganda's** evaluation of its first SDG Roadmap (see section 5.3 above) indicates that for **Colombia**, this might indeed become a critical milestone for further action on effective implementation.

A differentiating element of the VNRs is the extent to which they adhere to the voluntary common reporting guidelines issued by the UNDESA for VNR preparation. There are even cases in which the quality of VNR varies in the same country across years, for instance when presenting a second or third VNR. Noteworthy, not all countries include a chapter on the process of preparing the VNR, which, in the case of **Botswana** and **Ecuador**, also compromises the quality of information and analysis of the VNR process, its governance and data collection methodologies used.

6.2.1 Governance and leadership in the construction process of the Voluntary National Reports

Most countries mapped for this study have established high-level governance mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda (see section 5.1 above) which also tend to take a lead role in the VNR process. Usually, the overall governance of the 2030 Agenda contains technical committees or working groups in charge of monitoring and reporting. Occasionally these are also mandated to cover evaluation specifically, for which sub-commissions are set up. Some of these M&E bodies, for instance in **Mexico**, are open to tangible participation and co-management of representatives of civil society and the private sector, among others.

Not surprisingly, VNR preparation processes tend to rely on and be channeled through the same body tasked with overall monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

| Lead coordination entity for VNR production | |
|--|---|
| ANGLOPHONE AFRICA | |
| Botswana | National Strategy Office |
| Lesotho | Ministry of Development Planning (M&E department) through a Coordination and Technical Committee |
| Malawi | National Steering Committee and the Core Technical Committee led by Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (formerly known as the Ministry of Economic Planning, Development and Public Sector Reforms) |
| Uganda | National SDG Taskforce led by the Office of the Prime Minister |
| LATIN AMERICA | |
| Colombia | National Planning Department (DNP, for its Spanish acronym) |
| Costa Rica | Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN) |
| Ecuador | National Planning Secretary (Monitoring Department) |
| Mexico | Intersectoral Committee led by Economic Secretary |

As shown in the table above, a shared rule is that the monitoring and reporting responsibility rests with the Ministry of Planning, and occasionally Finance (**Malawi, Mexico**). An exception is **Uganda** where the Office of the Prime Minister – which is however the highest-level public sector oversight unit – leads these processes. Apart from coordinating the VNR itself, these entities are also deeply engaged in mandating, structuring and supporting the work of technical committees and working groups collecting data and generating contents for the VNR.

Particularly M&E and reporting working groups are usually led by national statistical offices which might explain why the VNR processes tend to prioritize data over evidence and analysis.

6.2.2 Role of evaluation players in VNRs

Over the past years, countries around the world have made significant strides to improve monitoring systems and strengthen national statistical capacities. Inherently, this implies a prominent role for national statistical offices and national statistical systems which are supported by a growing range of platforms and organizations, including regional organizations, specialized UN agencies and global platforms working on sustainable development data.

Compared to the dynamic evolution around data-driven monitoring, the role of evaluation players and organizations in national 2030 Agenda governance remains weak at best (see section 5.3 above). In the context of preparing VNRs, (co-)lead roles for evaluation players are virtually non-existent. This mapping has not found any example where evaluation players co-managed or at least significantly influenced the VNR drafting process.

Role of academia in SDG evidence generation

In **Colombia**, the Center for Sustainable Development (CODS) of the Universidad de los Andes has become a place for thinking about the SDGs in alliance with universities of excellence and research centers in Latin LAC. CODS facilitates a collaborative workspace for innovative solutions for sustainable development, including the development of the SDG index, a tool measuring progress in meeting the SDGs in 24 LAC countries. By grouping indicators from different sources, the index orders each of the countries on a scale of 0 to 100 depending on their level of progress and allows the construction of dashboards and trend analysis to monitor progress over time. While this experience is focused primarily on data, it showcases the added value of academia in facilitating spaces for innovation, building alliances and engaging in regional learning.

This is true even for cases where evaluation entities have been required to provide information (for example, in **Costa Rica** and **Ecuador**) or are formal members of working groups (such as **Uganda**). **Colombia** might be an exception as the lead entity for both the 2030 Agenda process and the VNR preparation process also heads the National Evaluation System, which, therefore is organically included. However, this does not translate into a more prominent perspective of the VNR on evaluation. Indeed, most players with evaluation capacities and portfolio, such as academia, are currently focused on data and indicators, rather than on SDG-related evaluations or other forms of qualitative analysis.

The large absence of evaluation players in substantial steps of the VNR processes might be traced back to different causes:

- First, evaluation entities play a minor role, if at all, in the broader institutional arrangements for the 2030 Agenda which are often geared towards quantitative data-driven VNRs for compliance, rather than reviewing and evaluation of qualitative aspects of sustainable development efforts.
- Second, in LAC countries with strong evaluation systems, evaluation players tend to focus on specific development challenges; for instance, in social sectors, and the effectiveness of government policies and programs to address these.
- Third, this also implies that evaluation entities are not used to evaluate broad development policy agendas (be it NDPs or international agreements such as the 2030 Agenda), while all involved stakeholders – including the governments themselves – might have overall concerns if this would be feasible or desirable.
- Fourth, the value of evaluations – and in general, evidence beyond data – is not fully understood and recognized in the context of the SDGs which, in most cases, are not yet perceived as outcomes to be considered for national public policies. And without inclusion of SDGs in public policy cycle, it is indeed unlikely that evaluation might gain further traction in these processes.

6.3 Considerations regarding VNR structures

The VNRs of the eight countries analyzed for this study vary widely in structure and length. **Botswana** has submitted the shortest report with 60 pages, while **Ecuador's** 2020 VNR reaches 238 pages. In general, longer reports contain detailed statistical data and public policy information in each of the SDG progress chapters. The shorter ones dedicate more space to exploring the implementation process and only refer to statistical systems in passing to then include most data in statistical annexes.

The chapter defined by the voluntary guidelines as “Methodology and process for preparation of the review” – key for this mapping exercise – tends to be very short in the VNRs analyzed, with **Mexico's** dedicating most space (5 pages) and the remaining countries only briefly mentioning the VNR process (2–3 pages). **Botswana** entirely suppressed this section from its report structure and does not provide any insights into the ways the VNR was prepared.

6.3.1 References to evaluation in VNRs

In most national reviews, the focus of monitoring and reporting is on data, without leaving space for comprehensive analysis or qualitative information for both monitoring (in the sense of ‘follow-up’) and evaluation. In this vein, references to evaluation in the VNRs are vague and confusing. This is particularly true for AA cases where evaluation is diluted in reflections around M&E. The exception is **Malawi** whose 2020 VNR dedicates a section to evaluation, primarily outlining the government’s overall commitment to future “robust, gender-responsive and equity-focused evaluations of policies and programmes [to find] the real answers for queries around achievement of SDGs.” This has not been further elaborated in other sections of the report but reflects the government’s will to pursue the evaluation agenda more specifically in the future.

In LAC reports, the distinct role of evaluation, as a process separate from monitoring, is addressed in more detailed ways. **Costa Rica** recognizes the importance of evaluation for public policy review processes, and ultimately for the effectiveness of public policies as such. In fact, the 2020 VNR dedicates a full chapter to national evaluation and accountability mechanisms which include initiatives to evaluate the 2030 Agenda. The chapter states that SDG evaluation would take place as part of the National Evaluation Agenda (ANE) in the period of 2019–2022, and public sector interventions would be selected for evaluation based on their actual relation to the achievement of the SDGs and their targets.

For its part, **Mexico**'s VNRs point out evaluation as a challenge of the implementation process, particularly to better inform progress in the SDGs. Evaluation also appears as a demand made by civil society to fully consider the 2030 Agenda in the planning, execution and evaluation, i.e. the full cycle of all national public policies. This has, however, not translated into a structured approach to include evaluations in the data collection and drafting processes of Mexican VNRs.

6.3.2 Evaluation to inform progress on SDGs

Apart from **Ecuador**, the VNRs reviewed for this mapping do not provide insights on processes and results of policy and program evaluations. For LAC, this seems to contradict the vivid and dynamic evolution of national evaluation systems, particularly in **Costa Rica**, **Mexico** and **Colombia**.

With an annual portfolio of up to 20 evaluations, **Mexico** assesses the performance of the budget programs linked to the SDGs which are planned for in one of the world's most advanced public policy evaluation plans. However, this continuous flow of high-quality evaluation is not reflected in **Mexico**'s VNRs.

Colombia's VNR is led by the entity coordinating the national evaluation system and thus also the custodian of the universe of high-quality public policy evaluations. The country's VNR, however, only refers superficially to a handful of specific evaluations; for instance, on the inclusion of environmental SDGs 13–15 in Territorial Development Plans, the framework of financial cooperation between **Colombia** and Germany, or the early impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Costa Rica, for its part, has set up a relatively less comprehensive evaluation system which is, however, well structured around the consistent leadership of MIDEPLAN (also the lead entity for coordinating the VNR drafting process). Even so, the 2020 VNR only features fragmented references to evaluation, listing evaluations mainly as a source for informing means of informing implementation of the initiative on international cooperation for biodiversity and climate change.

As an emerging good practice example, and despite its relatively weak evaluation system, **Ecuador** lists public policy evaluations for each of the SDGs reviewed in both its 2018 and 2020 VNR, briefly stating findings and recommendations related to respective policies and their contribution to the SDGs. These evaluations were carried out on interventions of a strategic nature and have provided feedback for the cycle of national public policy, in addition to providing evidence for the generation of results. While this has become a valuable SDG-related repository, the approach has not further evolved in the second VNR edition and is thus not contributing to much more than information sharing on evaluations conducted in SDG-related thematic areas.

AA VNRs remain largely silent on the potential use of evaluations although **Malawi** and **Uganda** state that the data collection process included research and evaluation reports, among other sources. This is further reflected in the mention of specific evaluations, usually for one or two SDGs, for instance, SDG 13 (**Malawi**), and on SDG 4 and 17 (**Uganda**, SDG 17 related to effective development cooperation). As AA countries lack data bases or repositories for evaluations, learning from these in the context of VNR tends thus to take place in pockets rather than in a structured manner. These pockets primarily depend on individual members of respective VNR groups preparing contents.

For the 2022 VNRs currently being prepared in all AA countries except **Uganda**, this approach seems to be continued as only specific sector evaluations, particularly those conducted by development partners who are also part of the VNR process, are expected to be included in the data collection process.

In conclusion, in the VNRs of all countries analyzed, excepting **Ecuador**, references to qualitative evaluation methods are either non-existent or highly fragmented, despite often significant quantitative data gaps which could be covered by evaluations and other analytical work. This is a surprising finding particularly for LAC countries which not only can rely on advanced evaluation systems, including those related to information management, but in some cases also handed the lead of VNR coordination to the heads of their national evaluation systems. While these would be best placed to ensure an adequate inclusion of more qualitative reviews in the process, it remains unclear why this potential has not been used so far.

6.3.3 Use of other evidence in VNRs

At this stage, and given the primacy of data-based monitoring, countries mapped for this study do not include other types of evidence in a structured manner. There are occasional references to analytical efforts which findings are however seldom explored.

Interestingly, the section related to the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) principle (suggested by the voluntary common reporting guidelines as part of the Policy and Enabling Environment chapter) might be an opportunity for including cross-cutting studies and evidence. In this vein, **Malawi's** 2020 VNR features a summary of the 2018 Multidimensional Child Poverty Analysis conducted jointly with UNICEF which, according to the report, has informed policies related to SDG 1 and 10. While this VNR section might provide opportunities to reflect particularly on cross-cutting issues, none of the reports analyzed (except for **Colombia**) engage in a deeper reflection on this principle, and some (**Botswana** and **Lesotho**) have even suppressed this section from their report structure.

To a certain extent, the use of other sources of evidence seems to be directly related to the degree of inclusion of non-state actors in the VNR processes specifically, and the 2030 governance in general. According to interviewees, in AA, civil society organizations and platforms – often supported by development partners – have produced relevant studies on SDG-related areas, particularly in the areas of climate change and the environment, or generating broad SDG reviews from the CSO perspective (such as shadow reports or statements). In LAC, it is primarily the academia generating non-evaluative evidence on sustainable development; for instance, a COVID-19 impact assessment conducted by Mexican research center Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) briefly featured in the country's 2021 VNR.

Finally, there are public sector assessments that different VNRs are referring to, often in highly aggregated ways. This includes, on the one hand, annual performance reviews for instance in **Botswana** and **Uganda** which are only briefly mentioned in the VNR and, according to interviews, are not included as core references for the drafting processes. On the other hand, VNRs also summarize results from UNDP-supported Development Finance Assessments in **Costa Rica**, **Colombia**, **Malawi**, and **Uganda**. These assessments are not necessarily linked to the SDGs and targets but constitute an input specifically to the financial means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda.

In sum, VNRs analyzed for this exercise only include non-evaluative evidence sporadically and mostly in superficial, almost anecdotal ways. Stakeholders such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and academia are among the main sources of SDG-related analytical work, but often lack participation, or quality, in the VNR processes leading to a very limited use of their knowledge.

CHAPTER 7

COMMON CHALLENGES AND EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE

The comparative analysis of LAC and AA countries' experiences in using evaluations for VNRs has showcased numerous challenges and a series of incipient solutions. For this mapping, the identification of challenges is rooted primarily in a cross-regional analysis rather than following a strictly regional logic. Within a certainly complex context of multi-level barriers to a more extensive use of evaluations for implementing the 2030 Agenda and informing the VNRs, solutions and good practice are emerging in virtually all countries, independently from the state of their respective evaluation systems and capacities.

Both dimensions – challenges and good practice – are valuable inputs for enabling evidence-based knowledge sharing among countries, which is a demand that government interviewees repeatedly voiced during the data collection process for this study. They are also relevant for deepening the dialogue across the evaluation community, including platforms such as CLEAR, on the options and pathways to strengthen evaluation as a fundamental factor for successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and ultimately the social, economic and environmental transformation the world needs ever more urgently. Finally, the challenges and solutions described in this chapter also intend to provide further food for thought for international partners looking at supporting ECD in ways that are consistent with the Decade of Action for achieving the SDGs and targets, by, among other aspects, supporting deeper-rooted change processes particularly at the institutional and operational levels.

7.1 Common challenges

This mapping has identified common challenges related to:

7.1.1 *The lack of a learning culture in the implementation arrangements of the 2030 Agenda*

- Almost half way through to the 2030 deadline, the implementation of the Agenda seems to be evolving primarily around producing, collecting and reporting on data for quantitative monitoring. Not only the VNRs but the overall national processes are detached from qualitative analysis and ultimately from understanding of what works and what does not work to achieve the SDGs.
- The fact that almost half of the countries mapped lack SDG roadmaps and that those who have created roadmaps seldom evaluate these, hints to missing opportunities to learn from ongoing efforts to achieve the SDGs. It also restricts the options to engage in deeper reviews of transformations of institutional set-ups and public policies, which would be needed to go beyond the current almost exclusive focus on (often non-existent or low-quality) data.
- The technocratic nature of how VNRs are prepared and drafted, often only formally refers to the ambitious principles for the follow-up and review process proposed by the 2030 Agenda itself, i.e. to “identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices” and “rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data” (para .74).
- The bureaucratic and overly formalized governance of the 2030 Agenda in many countries does not create a fertile ground for learning and knowledge sharing. This is apparent in many cases where relevant stakeholders (such as academia or CSO platforms conducting studies) are part of these arrangements but do not significantly influence reporting processes in ways that contribute to much-needed reflections on which policy choices enable, and which imperil, the achievement of the SDGs while meeting principles such as LNOB.

7.1.2 The limited extent to which SDGs can be evaluated within current national planning

- Several countries have not moved beyond a relatively simplistic SDG labelling of National Development Plans which in addition are not subject to evaluation. This has created a perception of in-evaluability of the SDGs among both government decisionmakers and the evaluation community.
- The SDGs and their targets are only slowly being integrated in the public policy cycle which is the place where advanced evaluation systems are playing an essential role. So far, at best, evaluations have reconstructed SDG contributions of public policies which have not been explicitly designed to achieve the SDGs, converting thus the SDGs in a mere ex-post checklist.
- With only few exceptions, at the sector level – where SDGs and their targets will be achieved or missed – public policies are not yet designed to contribute to the SDGs which compromises future evaluations. Considering timelines for policy cycles, it is urgent for governments to start designing SDG-driven sector policies which can be evaluated in the upcoming years.
- So far, little is being done to motivate, support and incentivize sector MDAs to create and operationalize sector policies and plans to achieve the SDGs and targets, and only one country has mandated MDAs to do so.
- There is even less progress in consistently pursuing the principles of the 2030 Agenda, and specifically the LNOB principle, as part of national and sector development planning, even though particularly social sectors could rely on experiences with planning and evaluating cross-cutting themes such as gender equality or the rights of indigenous people.

7.1.3 The wide-spread confusion on what SDG evaluation means

- Both governments and other stakeholders, including the evaluation community, remain unclear as to what SDG evaluation means and what it would entail in terms of means and methodologies. On some occasions, the idea of SDG evaluations seems to inherit the perception of in-evaluability of NDPs, as both are seen as broad aspirational frameworks rather than clear-cut benchmarks around which evaluations could be articulated.
- The existing conceptual void is also related to the solely retroactive approach to evaluating sector plans and policies in the light of the SDGs, as the SDGs and targets are not adequately integrated in the distinct public policy cycle phases.
- Only few countries have embraced the idea of evaluating the contributions of policies and plans to the SDGs and their targets particularly at the sector level. While international guidance is emerging, at the country level, this has not yet translated in an adjusted set of standards, guidelines and tools which could provide further clarity for all involved players on what SDG evaluation means and how it can be conducted.
- The concentration of efforts on data-driven monitoring of the SDGs – including related statistical capacity – has led to a shortage of time and resources that government-led entities are able to invest in building the necessary conceptual and methodological ground for SDG reporting.
- At country and regional levels, the evaluation community has so far been largely incapable of – even indifferent toward (see below) – contributing to a better understanding of SDG evaluation and clarifying what this would entail in institutional, methodological and operational terms.

7.1.4 *The slow response of national evaluation systems to the SDGs*

- Where existent, national evaluation systems have only timidly started to integrate the SDGs in their plans and portfolios. In LAC, countries have just recently introduced SDG considerations in public policy evaluations with still unknown progress. In AA, evaluation is subsumed within M&E systems which are almost exclusively focused on data-driven monitoring with virtually no room for qualitative analysis, let alone evaluation as such.
- The system's operational components such as annual evaluation plans as well as evaluation standards, guidelines and tools have yet to consider the SDGs and importantly, the 2030 Agenda principles. Only a few countries have identified the need for adjusted tools (for instance through respective SDG Roadmaps), and even in these cases, no actual progress can be reported.
- In LAC, while strong capacities are tangible and visible at multiple levels, national evaluation systems show a remarkable inertia to begin adjusting to the SDGs. The inherent stability of long-standing systems, relations and incentives seems to induce rigidity rather than adaptability. Where mandatory, evaluations are sometimes seen as a bureaucratic exercise needed to ensure continued budget allocations, for instance, thereby shrinking the space for the type of learning and innovation urgently needed to evaluate the SDGs, their targets and principles.
- For LAC, it is striking that sector-level capacities and experiences with evaluating cross-cutting issues have not yet been used to conduct evaluations on 2030 Agenda principles. This raises concerns particularly with a view to the lack of evaluative efforts on LNOB, a principle which governments tend to stress as part of VNRs without being able to rely on actual analyses.
- In AA, evaluation systems are at best emerging, with slow progress due the concentration of efforts, resources and time on monitoring only. AA countries face significant limitations in evaluation capacities both inside and outside the public sector. In this context, SDG evaluation is sometimes seen as an ambition far beyond current feasibilities. Indeed, evaluation systems in AA struggle already with 'conventional' evaluation approaches, concepts and methodologies which tend to exceed future national capacities even in the best scenarios.
- In addition, as opposed to LAC, most evaluations in AA are conducted by development partners as governments are lacking resources and capacities to conduct their own. This universe of evaluations provides potential for integrating the SDGs and principles from a country perspective, in addition to partner's own approaches. So far, however, coordination and co-ownership of these evaluations remains limited at best, and governments have yet to engage further in co-leading development partners' evaluative work, particularly from an SDG lens.
- Due to their inertia, national evaluation systems might not be the most productive environment to explore flexible, adaptive and innovative approaches to methods (such as rapid evaluations, or integration of evaluative aspects in other types of assessments) and processes (shorter timelines; ensuring political relevance including momenta for reform or policy design; deepening inclusiveness). Despite all differences among regions, these new approaches are needed for both LAC and AA if further progress is to be made. This has created a void of methodological progress which so far has not been covered adequately, for instance through regional platforms.

7.1.4 The sheer complexity of the institutional labyrinth (dis)connecting NDPs, 2030 implementation and SDG reporting

- The current institutional architecture of national development planning, 2030 Agenda implementation and SDG reporting reflects governments' ambiguity of broadly labelling NDP priorities with SDGs, creating 2030 governance structures which in practice seem to be moving in and out of the national development architecture, and launching ad-hoc mechanisms for SDG reporting which at times cannot be clearly localized in this complex institutional network, but are rather defined by the entity which is tasked with leading the effort of drafting the VNRs.
- Entities steering national evaluation systems are often the ones that coordinate the VNR process but do not make any use of the wealth and potential of evaluation-related data and information in VNR development. This contrast is potentially the most critical juncture of missed opportunities in terms of informing VNRs with evaluative evidence. It adds to the frictions in the institutional architecture at the crossroads between NDPs and the 2030 Agenda. Importantly, the neglect of evaluations by the institutions coordinating national evaluations sends a negatively charged message to evaluation players potentially interested in contributing evidence not only to the VNRs but to the 2030 Agenda implementation in general.
- This missed opportunity by institutions leading national evaluation systems also contrasts with the clearly shaped responsibilities of statistical players. National statistical offices tend to position and expand statistical agendas effectively in the VNR context. This is apparent even in cases where, as opposed to evaluation system leaders, they do not head the coordination effort, but are only acting as sources.
- It is therefore not surprising that, as a rule, existing technical committees and working groups in charge of M&E do not serve as an information sharing platform or as a clearing house for evaluative evidence to be considered in VNRs, but primarily focus on data-driven monitoring. Evaluation players might not feel entitled nor empowered to use the VNR process to position evaluative efforts, findings and recommendations in a context where the lead entity signals irrelevance of these.
- In addition, technical working groups in charge of M&E are often duplicated or even triplicated through the described labyrinth, with the same institutions (and individuals) being represented in separate, albeit often homonymous groups for the NDP, the 2030 Agenda and the VNRs. The effort invested in setting up, clarifying roles, and convening three M&E-related inter-institutional units, with varying degrees of non-state stakeholder inclusion, is not matched with tangible progress for evaluation to become part of 2030 Agenda implementation and SDG reporting through VNRs.

7.1.5 The apparent indifference of evaluation players to engage in 2030 Agenda governance and VNR processes

- Where evaluation players have a seat at the table of 2030- and/or VNR-related working groups, their role remains invisible and actual contributions are unclear. So far, there is no analysis as to why evaluation players do not make more extensive use of available spaces to bring forward their agenda, expertise and knowledge. Such analysis would be key to understand why evaluation players seem indifferent towards both the SDGs and the ways these are reviewed and followed up on.
- Among potential reasons for the passivity of evaluation players towards the 2030 Agenda implementation and the VNRs specifically, the following hypotheses could be further explored:
 - Especially in LAC, evaluation players (platforms, organizations, and companies, etc.) operate in a relatively stable environment, which is heavily focused on public policies and occasionally government institutional settings, guided by long-standing, sometimes rigid plans, guidelines and tools. The evaluation portfolio in advanced countries has become relatively standard. It is well-attuned to all stakeholder's programmatic cycles, capacities and incentives, but not necessarily flexible enough to react to new opportunities. Evaluation players are thus part of the overall inertia of the evaluation system and its reluctance to fast-paced, deeper changes in approaches and methodologies.
 - In AA countries, there are few evaluation players, and they tend to lack capacity and resources to engage in often bureaucratic processes underlying the production of the VNRs. Priorities for evaluation players might be found in other arenas such as resource mobilization, better working relationships with government entities and development partners, or strengthening the academia in providing learning and training opportunities on M&E.
 - So far, evaluation players seem to lack a solid understanding of, and do not feel responsible for, integrating the SDGs, targets and principles in evaluative practice. At best, evaluators have started to trace back SDGs in ex-post evaluation, often linking SDGs to findings in mechanistic ways, but without reflecting the premises and principles for follow-up and review enshrined in the 2030 Agenda.

7.1.6 The manifest reluctance of governments to use evaluations for VNRs

- Overall, governments are using VNRs primarily as a channel to communicate their efforts on the 2030 Agenda and national progress in the SDGs to the United Nations and other member states, as part of the HLPF process. While the situation might be nuanced in distinct countries, a core objective of the VNR is to showcase a government's commitment to the 2030 Agenda in a global setting, rather than to contribute to mutual learning on "achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors," as suggested by the agreement.
- The political sensitivities of VNRs might explain the need for governments to balance between sharing their efforts and being exposed to criticism in the high-profile setting of the HLPF and ultimately the General Assembly (GA). In this difficult setting, the role of evaluation might not necessarily be perceived as constructive, as a core function of evaluation is to create evidence on both success and failure, even more so in the context of policy evaluations. The experience of countries having undergone government change shows that the influence of evaluation systems and its players in VNRs is indeed subject to deliberate political decisions. In other words, the ability and willingness of governments to learn – to learn from failure, including policy and institutional failure – defines the extent to which evaluative evidence can be used, or not, in 2030 Agenda implementation and ultimately the VNRs.

- This deliberate political decision to use evaluative evidence, or not, finds ample room in the voluntary common reporting guidelines used for drafting VNRs. Due to their vague consideration of evaluations, and contradicting the premises of the 2030 Agenda, there is no incentive for governments to even consider evaluations as a part of their implementation efforts – even when, as outlined above, it is precisely the entity leading the evaluation system which is coordinating the VNR effort. An adaptation of the guidelines might not cover this gap, considering that countries tend to suppress chapters or sections for various reasons, but it would certainly create a ‘soft pressure’ to further reflect on evaluations.
- The extensive use of, and commitment to, data-driven monitoring also mirrors governments’ interest in confining SDG reporting to arenas which are relatively easy to control, supervise and, in the worst – though not exceptional – cases, manipulate, especially with a view to the international audience in a multilateral setting. Meaningful evaluations, in contrast, are inherently independent and produce qualitative data beyond direct government control. Often, evaluative findings contradict official discourse by questioning the quality and effectiveness of existing public policies, normative frameworks, or institutional arrangements of the public sector.
- While apparent in LAC countries, these are relevant structural barriers for AA countries to consider as well. On many occasions, the lack of evaluative evidence in VNRs is explained with a lack of structured information on existing evaluations. The mere set-up of “repositories” – an element several AA countries are working on and eager to learn from their LAC peers – might, however, not automatically contribute to an extended use of evaluations if governments remain reluctant to share their progress and failure in the multilateral setting of the HLPF.

7.1.7 The mixed performance of multilateral organizations in supporting countries

- Multilateral organizations such as UNICEF and UNDP are engaged in ECD of AA and LAC countries, often through multi-year programs and involving international evaluation platforms. Concurrently, both agencies are supporting governments in the production of VNRs from different angles, in AA often permeating government functions such as SDG Secretariats and stakeholder engagement facilitation. However, both streams of multilateral support seem to be conducted in strictly separate terms, thereby contributing little to enable evaluation systems’ roles in the VNR process. Indeed, there is a need to further coordinate and cross-fertilize ECD support with simultaneous collaborations around VNRs and the overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- While multilateral partners are inherently guided by government priorities, opportunities for influencing a better use of evaluations continue to be missed. For instance, through UNCTs and their operational frameworks (the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, UNSDCF), UN agencies are well placed to gather information on recent and ongoing evaluations which could be used as a reference in VNRs, especially in AA. Also, where national evaluation players – including academia – are not fully part of VNR processes, UN agencies might still find an appropriate way of engaging these through other formats such as training offerings on SDG reporting.
- Beyond the annual regional fora on sustainable development, multilateral organizations are only incipiently facilitating South-South learning on SDG evaluation and its value for the VNRs. LAC countries could benefit from a platform similar to the ongoing, albeit slowly evolving UNICEF-supported process in AA. So far, there are no experiences of cross-regional learning even though, on some occasions, it might be more useful to group countries according to the state of their systems, rather than according to regional location. Finally, country-level solutions and good practice have not yet been mapped by UN agencies, thus creating a void of mutual learning and support among countries and their stakeholders.

7.2 Emerging good practice

While this mapping has detected challenges at numerous levels, countries are also working on solutions and good practice to overcome the existing barriers. Considering the high demand from virtually all interviewees to share their experience and learn from other country's innovations, this section intends to give early insights on emerging good practice identified during the mapping process. These solutions might need to be further explored and validated in separate analytical work but already shed a light on feasible ways forward with SDG evaluations.

Based on the mapping conducted, the following good practice examples can be highlighted:

7.2.1 *How to build a learning culture for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda*

Countries: **Colombia and Uganda**

Why is this relevant?

The process of implementing the 2030 Agenda is subject to abrupt challenges (for which the COVID-19 pandemic and the war on Ukraine are just the most recent examples) and evolving opportunities, for instance through new partnerships, public sector reforms, and others. Existing roadmaps should not constitute rigid frameworks, but rather be used as an opportunity to learn and adjust through a continuous review of progress, failure and lessons learned.

What is the solution?

Uganda conducted an evaluation of the first edition of its SDG roadmap (2018-2020) and the SDG coordination framework. The evaluation spotted challenges and opportunities in terms of coordination capacities, linkages between strategic and technical implementation, weak reporting mechanisms, among other aspects. It informed the current edition of the SDG roadmap which features technical and operational improvements in the 2030 governance and the day-to-day work of its different layers. **Colombia**, for its part, is currently engaging in a similar process of evaluating its SDG coordination framework, the need for which has emerged during the preparation of the country's 2021 VNR. This effort will be conducted as a rapid evaluation and emphasize policy coherence for the environmental SDGs. This would be the first-ever evaluation of this kind in LAC and might thus become an essential reference regionally and globally.

7.2.2 How to incorporate the 2030 Agenda in the public policy cycle

Country: **Costa Rica**

Why is this relevant?

So far, SDG evaluations tend to focus on a 'forensic analysis' of how public policies that are not designed properly to implement the 2030 Agenda have contributed to the SDGs and targets. There are only a few examples where SDG targets and principles have been included in all phases of the policy cycle which compromises not only SDG-related evaluability of public policies today, but for many years to come.

What is the solution?

Through its 2017 Executive Decree to incorporate the SDGs in national strategies and policies, **Costa Rica** has been piloting the full inclusion of SDGs and targets in the public policy cycle, including in design, planning and budgeting. This process has benefitted from the incorporation of the SDGs and principles in the national evaluation policy which enables the government and other stakeholders to evaluate the contributions of public policies to SDG attainment. This two-step approach (ensuring an SDG-aligned policy cycle and incorporating SDGs in the evaluation policy) provides a unique reference for the deep transformations needed particularly for sector policies.

7.2.3 How to showcase SDG evaluability through sector policies to achieve the SDGs

Country: **Colombia**

Why is this relevant?

Both public sector and evaluation players have concerns regarding the evaluability of the SDGs and tend to overlook the fact that evaluations are conducted on public interventions, not on the goals themselves. Overall, there is an urgent need to showcase in practical terms how SDG contributions can be evaluated, which ultimately depends on the quality of policy design and its orientation towards not only the SDGs, but also its principles and targets. In other words, the more rooted the sector and territorial policies in this framework, the more feasible becomes evaluability of their contributions to its goals, targets, and principles.

What is the solution?

As part of its 2030 policy framework, **Colombia** has requested all public entities to design sector policies for the achievement of the SDGs which are expected to go far beyond the relatively superficial linkages of the NDP with the SDGs. **Colombia** has conducted two rounds of policy design in this regard under the lead coordination of the National Planning Department, with dynamic and proactive responses from the sector MDAs. In future years, evaluations of these policies will easily identify contributions to the SDGs and might also become key references for further methodological development of SDG evaluations.

7.2.4 How to adjust evaluation approaches in the context of the 2030 Agenda

Country: **Botswana**

Why is this relevant?

In the context of AA, countries often lack the capacities and resources needed to engage in full-fledged evaluations which are usually conducted by international partners with only, at best, limited engagement of national expertise. The methodological complexity and long timelines of evaluations can be disconnected from national realities and opportunities, generating deliverables that lack political relevance and reader-friendliness. By itself, this tends to solidify, rather than solve the limited interest of government decision-makers in evaluations, while also sending a discouraging message to evaluation players which see this kind of evaluations as an aspiration beyond their capacities.

What is the solution?

Botswana is among the AA countries which conducted innovative types of evaluations as part of its M&E capacity building agenda and as an avenue to deepen the dialogue among evaluation lead entities and sector MDA still showing resistance to investing in evaluations. As such, in 2019, the government with support from the World Bank conducted three rapid evaluations at the sector level (tourism, medical supply chain, early childhood) with the purpose to test the demand, understand interests and map capacities, i.e. 'check the temperature' for MDA-level evaluations. The exercise was primarily successful in the tourism sector which used the contents for designing a new policy, while in the other cases, conversations on evaluation were continued with the ministers showing more tangible interest in evaluations and openness for improving evaluability of their policies. For SDG evaluation, this is an example of a pragmatic approach to evaluation which is sensitive to the available capacities and incentives to co-lead and absorb finding and recommendations in meaningful ways.

7.2.5 How to evaluate SDG contributions in the context of evaluating public financial management

Country: **Mexico**

Why is this relevant?

The alignment of public finances (including budgetary systems) to the SDGs and their targets is a key element of an effective orientation of public sector action toward the 2030 Agenda. It ensures overall SDG planning and strong accountability while also creating allocation-driven incentives for achieving the SDGs. While a few countries have started to indirectly link public budgets to sustainable development outputs and outcomes, much more needs to be done to ensure that financial systems are consistent with the national commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda goals, targets and principles.

What is the solution?

Parting from a Planning Law reform in 2018, **Mexico** not only integrated the 2030 Agenda in the NDPs, but also strengthened the Performance Evaluation System which addresses the SDGs and targets as benchmarks for results-based budgeting. In consequence, the Ministry of Finance has updated the guidelines for budget programs which now are linked to SDG targets while including the 2030 indicators in the more than 400 national indicators used for budgetary planning and execution. Based on these premises, **Mexico** evaluates SDG contributions of budget programs, conducting around 20 of such evaluations per year, and is therefore able to assess the effectiveness and relevance of public expenditure against the extent to which they contribute to the targets and indicators.

7.2.6 How to incorporate evaluation findings and recommendations in the VNRs

Country: **Ecuador**

Why is this relevant?

So far, SDG reporting is almost exclusively focused on data-driven monitoring of the global indicator framework. Moreover, countries tend to analyze only the development of their statistical capacities, rather than reflecting on their ability to critically and substantially review progress made. In this line, qualitative analysis is a largely missing piece in the VNRs, and very few countries make a systematic use of evaluations as a relevant source for data collection.

What is the solution?

In both its VNRs (2018, 2020), the government of **Ecuador** has included recent public policy evaluations as evidence for each of the sections of the SDG progress chapters, complementing the set of quantitative data. The VNRs state both the findings and recommendations in a summarized way allowing readers to understand the key issues in discussion in different SDG-relevant public policies. As an essential first step, this solution can build further ground for assessing policy and/or institutional changes informed by these evaluations, as part of future VNRs. Indeed, **Ecuador** is the only country among those mapped for this exercise which uses a structured approach to integrating evaluations in SDG reporting.

7.2.7 How to partner with academia around VNRs

Country: **Lesotho**

Why is this relevant?

Academic institutions play an essential role in both emerging and advanced evaluation systems as (a) providers of academic and practical training of evaluators, (b) hosts or core members of evaluation associations, (c) developers of new and innovative approaches, and (d) contractors of evaluations, among others. However, in practice, they play a minimal role in 2030 governance and by extension, have limited engagement in VNR processes. This missing link contributes to deepening the gap between the SDGs and evaluation, which is particularly worrisome in the case of public universities which could benefit from a closer interaction with the government on national development policy and evaluation systems.

What is the solution?

While other mapped countries are collaborating on occasional matters with national universities and seek to include M&E in respective academic curricula, **Lesotho** has engaged its public National University (NUL) in a think tank role for its 2019 VNR and, according to current plans at the time of writing, the 2022 VNR as well. Commissioned by Ministry of Development Planning and UNDP, a NUL team drafted evidence-based background papers in 2019 which were framed by consultations and validated with multiple stakeholders. This experience has also led to capacity development of the university in the area of SDG reporting, while creating an important reference point for other countries, especially those already building formal partnerships with academia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the challenges identified in this mapping, continuous efforts will be required by all stakeholders, from governments and international partners to the evaluation community, UNDESA as the VNR custodian and Regional Economic Commissions of the United Nations as hosts of regional forums. While weak areas and gaps in using evaluation for SDG reporting specifically and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as such are significant, there are also manifold opportunities to strengthen the evidence base for better sustainable development policies, increased institutional capacities and more effective programs. Taking advantage of these opportunities is critical as the 2030 deadline comes closer with global, regional and global conditions requiring decisive – and informed – action for countries to achieve the SDGs.

In this line, distinct groups might consider the following recommendations:

8.1 Governments of developing countries

Based on updated guidelines for policy formulation, new and updated public policies should integrate relevant SDGs and targets, as well as principles⁵ such as Leaving No One Behind, in respective theories of change and results frameworks. This should also translate into sector level planning and programming consistent with the SDGs and targets.

Further invest in evaluation and other forms of evidence generation to inform policy design and updates in the context of national 2030 Agenda implementation, thereby committing more consistently to evidence-based policymaking for sustainable development.

Ensure sufficient qualitative analysis for the Voluntary National Reviews, particularly through the use of policy reviews and evaluations as key ingredients in the analysis of national performance in different SDGs and targets.

Create and deepen a learning culture for the 2030 Agenda implementation processes, among others, by ensuring evidence-based approaches to roadmaps and institutional arrangements (including through evaluations).

Ensure that evaluation lead entities and players of the respective national systems are fully aware and knowledgeable of the 2030 Agenda and update approaches and guidelines accordingly, with a strong focus on operational capacities to evaluate contributions of public policies to the SDGs and targets.

Strengthen partnerships between key government entities (particularly for planning and budgeting) with evaluation players such as universities, academia and think tanks, with a view to longer-term development of evaluation capacities (for instance through inclusion of evaluation in curricula).

⁵ The principles of the 2030 Agenda include: Universality (the Agenda applies to all countries), Leaving No One Behind (all people are to be considered according to their degree of vulnerability), Interconnectedness and invisibility (the SDGs depend on each other for success), Inclusiveness (all players are to be involved), as well as Multi-stakeholder partnerships. Leaving No One Behind has become the most critical in strategic and operational terms in light of the growing complex vulnerabilities around the globe.

8.2 Evaluation community

Take advantage of existing spaces to proactively participate in the 2030 Agenda governance (such as committees or working groups) and processes of VNR drafting, contributing evaluative evidence, building capacities, identifying opportunities for deeper partnerships, and ensuring continuous collaboration and dialogue with government entities and their leadership.

Clearly identify, articulate and disseminate the added value of the evaluation community as (individual and collective) key players of national sustainable development, and of evaluation as a key driver of better public policies for achieving the SDGs and targets.

In each country context, conduct an in-depth analysis of how evaluation has already contributed, and in the future might contribute, to better public policies and more effective public services in critical development sectors.

Innovate evaluation approaches and methodologies to ensure evaluative work can be conducted in timelines and deliver messages that are relevant and meaningful to processes and key players of national policy processes.

Ensure effective participation of evaluation players in regional forums and events focusing on the 2030 Agenda and particularly the VNRs, for instance through side events and publications.

8.4 International partners

Ensure consistency and coherence of support to the 2030 Agenda implementation (including VNR preparation), on the one hand, and engagement in Evaluation Capacity Development, on the other; for instance, by effectively linking respective projects, initiatives and implementing agencies around a shared understanding that evaluation is a critical ingredient for designing effective public policies for sustainable development.

Innovate capacity development support around SDG evaluations; for instance, through innovation labs (focusing on approaches and methodologies), seed funding for home-grown design and piloting of rapid evaluation tools, and flexible engagement with the national evaluation community.

Where possible, ensure that program evaluations fully cover relevant SDGs, targets and principles such as LNOB, and thereby create evaluative evidence which can easily be used to inform national 2030 Agenda processes, and particularly future VNRs.

Engage in, and deepen, partnerships with regional evaluation platforms such as respective CLEAR chapters and other regional evaluation umbrellas, and consistently support their work on the crossroads of evaluation and the 2030 Agenda.

Take a more deliberate approach to supporting ECD and evaluation innovations at national universities, academia, think tanks and evaluators' organizations, focusing on medium-term processes needed to build respective capacities.

Facilitate knowledge sharing and provide opportunities for mutual learning among countries, structured around key challenges and emerging good practices, for which this discussion paper might provide a first inspiration to be further deepened in a more detailed mapping, validation and packaging of available solutions.

8.5 UNDESA

Based on the mandate of the 2030 Agenda itself, more consistently integrate the use of evaluative evidence in the voluntary common reporting guidelines for the VNRs (at least current chapters 4 to 6).

Also in the guidelines, ensure that evaluation is conceptualized and addressed in ways that are clearly separated from monitoring and the use of quantitative data.

As part of the annual VNR synthesis reports, include conclusions and reflections related to the role of public policies and the evaluation of these in successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Incentivize and support analysis of good practice of evaluation in the context of 2030 Agenda implementation and help disseminate the findings of emerging analysis in this arena.

Advocate for, and support, the set-up of a working group on SDG evaluation geared towards capturing and discussing good practices; as well as building the ground for further multilateral and inter-governmental commitment to evaluation as a driver for achieving the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

8.6 UN Regional Economic Commissions (as hosts of regional forums)

Include evaluation as a key element for regional forums preparing the annual HLPF and ensure that evaluation is consistently addressed in knowledge exchange on VNRs among countries of respective regions.

Where possible, contribute to the proactive participation of evaluation players in regional forums and provide spaces for these to share practices and lessons learned, for instance through dedicated sessions and/or side events.

At the regional level, map ongoing relevant ECD initiatives that are supported by regional offices of UN agencies and their respective partners, to assess their possible contribution to the regional forums.

ANNEXURES



Annex 1 – Interviewees

| Country | Institution | Person | Position |
|------------|--|--|--|
| Botswana | Office of the President | Modiegi Ngakane | Chief Monitoring and Evaluation Office National Strategy Office (NSO) |
| | UNICEF | Gape Machao | Monitoring and Evaluation Officer |
| Colombia | Olga Lucia Romero Londoño | Monitoring and Evaluation Public Policies Department DSEPP/DNP | Evaluation Director |
| | Adriana Cozma | Technical Secretary ODS, DNP | Responsible for ODS |
| | Alejandro Pacheco and Jaime Urrego | United Nation Development Program (UNDP) | Deputy representative/ Chief of human development program |
| | Angela Maria Penagos and Carla Medrano | Centro de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (CODS) | Director/project manager |
| Costa Rica | Eddy Garcia | MIDEPLAN | Chief of Evaluation Unit |
| | Adrian Moreira Muñoz | MIDEPLAN | Responsible for ODS |
| | Randall Brenes | Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo | Chief of human development and governability program |
| Ecuador | Gianna Micaela Aguirre Sánchez | National Planning Secretary | Secretary of Evaluation |
| | Viviana Lascano | Ecuadorian Evaluation Society Seeval | Coordinator |
| | Nelly Patricia Carrera Burneo | Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador PUCE | Vice Chancellor |
| | Sofía Suarez | Grupo Faro | Coordinator of Sustainable Development and Cities |
| Lesotho | Sentle Monaheng | Ministry of Development Planning | Senior Economic Planner |
| | Marisa Foraci | UNICEF | Social Policy Chief |
| | Lerato Moeketsi | Prime Minister's Office | M&E Manager. Public Service Effectiveness Unit |
| Malawi | Kajomba Gringoster | Ministry of Economic Planning, Development and Public Sector Reforms | Chief Economist |
| | Austin Chingwengwe | National Planning Commission | Manager, Monitoring and Evaluation |
| | Sophie Kang'oma | Ministry of Economic Planning, Development and Public Sector Reforms | Director for Monitoring and Evaluation |
| México | Rosa Isabel Islas | Former Leader of the Committee for Monitoring and Evaluation of the 2030 Agenda / Former Director of the Performance Evaluation Unit | Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público |
| | Alfredo González | Secretaría de Economía | Manager of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development |
| Uganda | Office of the Prime Minister | Florence Mbabazi | Economist |

Annex 2 – Literature

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- United Nations: Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (2021)
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National SDG Roadmaps

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Mexico Estrategia Nacional para la Implementación de la Agenda 2030 (2019)

Uganda Roadmap for Creating an Enabling Environment for Delivering on SDGs (2017/2018 - 2019/2020)

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National evaluation policies, plans and tools

Colombia

Borrador de documento CONPES 0322 sobre Evaluación

Guía Metodológica para el Seguimiento y la Evaluación a políticas públicas

Costa Rica

Política Nacional de Evaluación de Costa Rica

Agenda Nacional de Evaluación

Manual de Evaluación para intervenciones públicas

Ecuador

Guía de evaluación de políticas Públicas

Norma técnica de Seguimiento y evaluación ODS

Mexico

Lineamientos generales para la evaluación de los Programas Federales de la Administración Pública Federal

Programa Anual de Evaluación 2021

Uganda

National Evaluation Plan (forthcoming, 5-year rolling)

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Botswana

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Reporte Nacional Voluntario – Acelerar la Implementación para una Recuperación Sostenible, 2021

Reporte Nacional Voluntario, 2018

Presentación Nacional Voluntaria de Colombia – Los ODS como Instrumento para Consolidar la Paz, 2016

Costa Rica

Segundo Informe Nacional Voluntario sobre los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible – Desarrollo sostenible en acción: la ruta hacia la sostenibilidad, 2020

Reporte Nacional Voluntario de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible – Construyendo una visión compartida del desarrollo sostenible, 2017

Ecuador

Examen Nacional Voluntario, 2020

Examen Nacional Voluntario, 2018

Lesotho

Voluntary National Review of the Implementation of the Agenda 2030, 2019

Malawi

Voluntary National Review Report for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2020

Mexico

Informe Nacional Voluntario, Agenda 2030 en México, 2021

Informe Nacional Voluntario para el Foro Político de Alto Nivel sobre Desarrollo Sostenible – Bases y fundamentos en México para una visión del desarrollo sostenible a largo plazo, 2018

Reporte Nacional para la Revisión Voluntaria de México en el Marco del Foro Político de Alto Nivel sobre Desarrollo Sostenible, 2016

Uganda

Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2020

Review Report on Uganda's Readiness for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (VNR), 2016



BOTSWANA

Basic development data

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Population, total | 2.3 million (2019) |
| GNI per capita | 7,510 USD (2019) |
| WB country classification | Upper Middle-Income (2021) |
| Statistical capacity score | 51.111 (2019) |

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/BW>

VNRs published so far (May 2022): 1 (2017)

Key results from mapping

| | |
|---|-----|
| Existence of a National Evaluation Plan | NO |
| National Evaluation System has adopted the SDGs | NO |
| Existence of SDG Roadmap | YES |
| Evaluation included in SDG Roadmap | YES |

Source: Based on mapping findings

1. Governance of the 2030 Agenda

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda is led by a National Steering Committee (NSC) which includes Government, development partners, Youth Groups Assembly, House of Chiefs, CSO, Trade Unions, and other non-state actors. The NSC is supported by an SDG Secretariat hosted at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MFED). An SDG Technical Task Force is providing technical-level support. Content work takes place through four thematic working groups which are congruent with the four pillars of the National Development Plan NDP 11 (2017-2023), i.e. Economy and Employment; Social Upliftment; Sustainable Environment; and Governance, Safety and Security. As such, the 2030 governance structure is largely identical with the architecture for the National Development Plan (NDP). Aligned to the NDP 11 cycle (2017-2023), Botswana launched an SDG Roadmap which covers six strategic areas, among which “Data, Progress Tracking and Reporting” and “Policy Research

Interventions” are most relevant for this mapping. Based on these premises, strategic partnerships with think tanks, academic and research institutions are being pursued, and at least formally, these players are included in the institutional set-up of the 2030 Agenda and the TWGs specifically.

2. Relation between SDGs and the NDP

In its 2017 VNR, the government of Botswana states that the current National Development Plan NDP 11 (2017-2023) as well as the long-term Vision 2036 (2017-2036) “embrace [...] and very closely relate” to the SDGs but does not offer any specific insights are SDGs and their targets are integrated

in development planning. There is a rough indication on which of the six SDGs selected for the 2017 edition of VNRs are related to each of the four NDP pillars. The SDG Roadmap states that domestication of the SDGs “has been done in Botswana to some extent.”

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda

According to government interviewees, monitoring is conducted through SDG reports which however are not reflected in the VNR. Statistics Botswana published in 2018 an Indicators Baseline which states a total of 158 indicators, of which 55 (35%) can be reported on at least partially, while the rest lacks sufficient data. The SDG Roadmap poses almost exclusive emphasis on the need for more and better data, without looking into other areas of monitoring.

So far, there is no evaluation on the 2030 specifically, and proposals included in the SDG Roadmap to conduct evidence-based reviews of public policies and programs have not yet translated into specific action. The M&E Directorate conducted three rapid evaluations in 2019 on (a) tourism, (b) medical supply chain,



COLOMBIA

and (c) early childhood development to test demand, interests and capacities needed for public policy evaluation – supported by WB. In general, interviewees state that NDP and public policies lack evaluability (no Theory of Change, nor process indicators, etc.). For now, only DPs are conducting evaluations, and the government has not yet funded any evaluations directly.

4. VNR

Botswana submitted its first VNR in 2017 and is currently preparing a second edition. Beyond the indication that an RCO-hosted SDG Project Office (one person) will lead the process through its Steering Committee, details were not clear at the time of this mapping (February 2022). The 2017 VNR does not include the section related to “methodology and process for preparation of the review”.

5. National evaluation system

Botswana is currently preparing the ground for improving the national M&E system initially created in 2013/2014 and updated through the M&E Policy in 2017. The M&E system and policy are heavily focused on monitoring, with evaluation being “very silent” according to interviews. The government (National Strategy Office) is now implementing an M&E capacity building strategy which might gain further traction as part of the next DNP cycle (DNP 12) starting in 2023/2024.

In terms of evaluation, a national evaluation plan is under preparation. The duration of the plan would be multi-year, probably from 2022-2024, to then be aligned with the new NDP 12 cycle.

6. Evaluation and 2030 Agenda

There has not been any evaluation on the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs specifically, yet. ■

Basic development data

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Population, total | 50.3 million (2019) |
| GNI per capita | 6,570 USD (2019) |
| WB country classification | Upper Middle-Income (2021) |
| Statistical capacity score | 81.111 (2019) |

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/colombia>

VNRs published so far (May 2022):
3 (2016, 2018, 2021)

Key results from mapping

| | |
|---|-----|
| Existence of a National Evaluation Plan | YES |
| National Evaluation System has adopted the SDGs | NO |
| Existence of SDG Roadmap | YES |
| Evaluation included in SDG Roadmap | NO |

Source: Based on mapping findings

1. Governance of the 2030 Agenda

The Governance of the 2030 Agenda is led by the High-Level Political Inter-institutional Commission for Sustainable Development, chaired by the National Planning Department (DNP, for its Spanish acronym), which also acts as the Technical Secretariat. The DNP is also in charge of formulating, monitoring and evaluating medium and short-term development policies in the country (competence defined in article 343 of the Political Constitution). Thus the government evaluation players participate in the coordination mechanism of the 2030 Agenda. To ensure inclusiveness of this governance mechanism, the government is about to launch a multi-stakeholder platform that will allow the systematic participation of civil society, the private sector and academia in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

2. Relation between SDGs and the NDP

According to the national government, the National Development Plan (PND, for its Spanish acronym, running until 2022) is articulated with the 2030 Agenda, as its lines and strategies are related, directly and indirectly, to the SDGs. PND indicators are 98% aligned with the SDGs. The PND monitoring processes help identify the level of progress of the policies and programs consigned in relation to their goals and with the SDGs. Monitoring that is carried out through the National Management and Results Evaluation System (SINERGIA, for its Spanish acronym).

Beyond the alignment with the PND, a specific SDG Strategy is reflected in the document 3918 adopted in the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (known as CONPES 3918). This highest-level policy document defines the roadmap for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Colombia, establishing goals, strategies, indicators, responsible entities and financial resources required. However, evaluation is not mentioned in said document.

Following the guidelines of CONPES 3918, the prioritization of SDG goals has been included in the PND and in multiple territorial development plans. However, this inclusion is made indicatively and a posteriori with respect to the design of the public policies. One relevant element is that as part of said strategy, sectoral entities are mandated to present SDG sectoral plans. To date, two exercises of these sectoral plans have been conducted.

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda

CONPES 3918 establishes the monitoring, reporting and accountability scheme, as well as the statistical strengthening plan. The monitoring scheme allows reporting progress in the implementation of the SDGs in Colombia, based on a set of national indicators that have a baseline and their respective goal to 2030, including the regionalization of tracer goals.

For the statistical monitoring of SDG indicators, the National Statistical System was created in 2016 and the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, for its Spanish acronym) was designated as the governing body, becoming thus coordinator and regulator of the system. However, monitoring compliance with the SDGs as a whole is the responsibility of the DNP, specifically its Directorate for Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies. This institutional enclave for monitoring the SDGs allows a very high level of interaction with the PND monitoring mechanism and with the national evaluation system.

According to the latest VNR, another relevant element of monitoring, and in particular in terms of data for development, is the existence of partnerships between the government and non-governmental actors: "One of the pioneering projects that is important to mention is the "SDG for Everyone" led by organizations such as the National Association of Industrialists, the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, the Global Compact Network in Colombia, the Bolívar Davivienda Foundation, the Corona Foundation, and CEPEI think tank.

4. VNR

Colombia has submitted three VNRs to date. The 2021 VNR was coordinated by the DNP, and in particular, the Technical Secretariat of the High-Level Inter-institutional Commission for the implementation of the SDGs in Colombia. This latest review includes statistical information to evidence the performance of the monitoring indicators as well as a general balance on the progress in the implementation of the SDGs. Likewise, it features the contributions of non-governmental actors that report on actions being implemented in Colombia, advances in the territorialization strategy of the SDGs in Colombia, as well as actions to mobilize resources and players for the SDGs.

The VNR include the follow-up exercises to indicators. However, the evaluation has not had a relevant place in them, despite the fact that the government evaluation body participates in its preparation. The only relevant reference to evaluation in the 2021 VNR is found in the final section which addresses the effects on Colombia's development goals due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Colombia carried out rapid evaluations of the main effects produced by the pandemic and that would cause adjustments in the development strategies included in the PND.

5. National evaluation system

The leadership of the national evaluation is exercised by the DNP, which has a Directorate for Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies (which also monitors the SDGs) and directs, plans, evaluates and coordinates SINERGIA. Through the latter, the policy evaluation process is carried out through a module of the National Evaluation System (SISDEVAL, for its Spanish acronym).

Colombia's evaluation capabilities have been greatly strengthened in recent decades. It currently has a National Evaluation Agenda made up of some 15 annual interventions, which are defined and prioritized by the DNP, although sectoral entities also have autonomy to commission and conduct their own evaluations. In fact, there is a strong evaluation tradition of the social sector entities such as the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, the Department of Social Prosperity and the Ministry of Education, among others.

Evaluation modalities are varied and can be internal, external or hybrid. The type of evaluations is also diverse, depending on what is considered in each case. Evaluations can thus be of design, management, or results. There is an annual evaluation repository that allows verifying the richness of the exercises carried out and that are available in SISDEVAL.

Despite Colombia having an institutional framework (regulations and policies) that has facilitated the conduct of evaluations, its use for decision-making remains limited, as stated in a 2020 OECD report. As a reaction, the DNP is promoting the approval of a CONPES document that mandates national institutions to make use of evaluations for decision-making.

6. Evaluation and 2030 Agenda

Although CONPES 3918 establishes the framework for monitoring the SDGs as part of SINERGIA, it does not give a specific role to evaluation. There are currently multiple mechanisms for evaluating public policies which are carried out based on the objectives of the policies and government priorities, but do not consider the SDGs.

However, since 2020 evaluation practice have started to reflect on the SDGs, in the sense that the evaluations inform which SDGs are being contributed to. This is an exercise that is usually done a posteriori. Currently, there is no explicit relationship between evaluation results and the fulfillment of certain SDG targets.

On the other hand, the content of the 2030 Agenda is not included in the official evaluation guidelines. Colombia has an Evaluation Guide dating from 2014 that has not been updated in light of the SDGs. However, this tool is currently under review which could be an opportunity for further integration.

A currently ongoing evaluation exercise of the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda, supported by the German government, constitutes another opportunity for further work on SDG evaluations. This evaluation will emphasize on policy coherence around the SDGs in environmental matters, which might become a unique precedent for other Latin American countries which despite multiple capacities in evaluation of public policies, have not advanced in SDG evaluation as such. ■



COSTA RICA

Basic development data

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Population, total | 5.1 million (2019) |
| GNI per capita | 12,090 USD (2019) |
| WB country classification | Upper Middle-Income (2021) |
| Statistical capacity score | 91.111 (2019) |

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/costa-rica>

VNRs published so far (May 2022): 2 (2017, 2020)

Key results from mapping

| | |
|---|-----|
| Existence of a National Evaluation Plan | YES |
| National Evaluation System has adopted the SDGs | YES |
| Existence of SDG Roadmap | NO |
| Evaluation included in SDG Roadmap | NO |

Source: Based on mapping findings

1. Governance of the 2030 Agenda

Costa Rica was the first LAC country to launch a National Pact for the Achievement of the SDGs. Executive Decree 40203-PLAN-RE-MINAE created in 2016 a High-Level Council of the SDGs as the highest coordination body for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Its functions include the definition of the national policy for the SDGs as well as SDG financing. This body gathers the Presidency of the Republic, the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Worship, National Planning and Economic Policy, and Environment and Energy, as well as Human Development and Social Inclusion.

The Council relies on a Technical Secretariat, hosted at the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN, for its Spanish acronym), in addition to a Consultative Committee where institutions signatories of the Pact come together. Despite these broad institutional arrangements, the implementation process in Costa Rica remains highly centralized in MIDEPLAN and the national statistics institute, according to those consulted. The Advisory Council has not functioned regularly in recent years and hardly exercises its core functions.

2. Relation between SDGs and the NDP

The SDGs were considered in the design of the 2018-2022 National Development Plan (PND), so that the goals and indicators are directly or indirectly linked to the PND Goals, although the indicators do not always coincide.

Costa Rica did not establish its own SDG Agenda, nor does it have sectoral plans for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as such. That said, the SDG Technical Secretariat (MIDEPLAN) has provided advice on more than 20 public policies to align these to the SDGs.

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda

Monitoring of SDG indicators is led by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC, for its Spanish acronym), which is currently able to measure 60% of the global indicator framework. For Costa Rica, improving statistical capacities is a key priority, however, there are no alliances between the government and non-governmental actors in terms of data.

The broadest monitoring of the 2030 Agenda process is carried out by MIDEPLAN, a function that is executed centrally from the office of said Ministry, but with the active participation of the Development Analysis and Planning Departments. MIDEPLAN's evaluation directorate does not directly participate in the functions of the SDG Technical Secretariat but provides inputs and receives guidelines from them.

4. VNR

Costa Rica has submitted two Voluntary National Reviews VNRs in 2017 and 2020 which in both cases were coordinated by MIDEPLAN with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations System. As part of the VNR preparation process, inputs from non-state actors, other government bodies and local governments were also collected.

To date, the results of existing policy evaluations have not been systematically reflected in the Voluntary National Reports. The subject of evaluation is mentioned in the 2020 report, where a recount is made of the national efforts to improve public policy

evaluation capacities and some examples are mentioned of how the evaluations that are being carried out are linked and may be relevant to certain SDGs.

5. National evaluation system

Costa Rica hosts a strong institutional evaluation structure, organized in a pyramidal scheme with a centralized entity that exercises stewardship (MIDEPLAN), an intermediate level of sectoral stewardships and at the base the executing institutions.

Progress of the strategic actions of each government institution or sector is monitored through the National Evaluation System (SINE, for its Spanish acronym), which was designed to achieve evaluation, monitoring and accountability objectives. Specifically for evaluation purposes, Costa Rica has a multi-year National Evaluation Agenda, which coincides with government periods and is made up of some 15 evaluations for the whole period. The evaluation agenda is defined from bottom up, that is, starting from the request of the executing agencies to the sector leads, and from these to MIDEPLAN. Evaluations are not compulsory but are based on sector-level demand. MIDEPLAN prioritizes evaluations in line with government priorities and available resources.

Sector institutions can carry out their own evaluations, without needing to coordinate with MIDEPLAN. In fact, several institutions can rely on a long tradition of evaluation, with their own structures for this purpose. Most of these are linked to the social sector: Ministries of Education; Health; and Social Inclusion, as well as the Costa Rican Social Security Fund. The Ministry of Labor and Public Works has also begun to systematically evaluate its interventions. These sectoral evaluations can be carried out with the sector's own resources or through external resources. Sometimes these evaluations are also linked to resources from loans or large technical assistance packages from multilateral banks, which incorporate external evaluations.

Evaluations can also be conducted at request of the Office of the Comptroller of

the Republic, which, in addition to its audit processes, plays the role of requesting evaluations when it deems it pertinent. These evaluations are carried out without the participation of MIDEPLAN.

The PND itself is not evaluated in the strict sense of the word. The government focuses on follow-up and monitoring, as well as compliance reports. That said, transversal or sectoral interventions contained in the PND are subject to evaluation which can be done with a view to process, design and increasingly results. These evaluations are mostly carried out by MIDEPLAN, and less by other state agencies. Regardless of who executes them, the evaluations in Costa Rica are aligned with the premises of the National Evaluation Policy 2018-2030.

6. Evaluation and 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda was taken into consideration when preparing the National Evaluation Policy which mandates its users to establish a direct relationship between the evaluations and the SDGs. However, this important step still does not contain the content of the 2030 Agenda as specific criteria in the evaluation guidelines. While evaluation practices and procedures are still to be modified, a good practice in this regard is that the evaluations should make visible the goals and SDGs that are linked to the policies or programs evaluated.

Evaluation could be indirectly affecting better compliance with the SDGs, to the extent that the evaluations improve the policies linked to the SDGs. To a certain extent, this is already happening as government instances in Costa Rica are obliged to use evaluation results and recommendations to implement an action or improvement plan.

The government of Costa Rica stresses the overall value of policy evaluations, but with a view to the SDGs, considers that rapid reviews illustrating levels of progress and thus accelerate evidence-based decision-making might be more useful. In this line, carrying out evaluations around the SDGs would require the ability to be methodologically flexible and generate quick results for decision makers, in contrast to often rather lengthy evaluations of public policies. ■



ECUADOR

Basic development data

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Population, total | 17.4 million (2019) |
| GNI per capita | 6,090 USD (2019) |
| WB country classification | Upper Middle-Income (2021) |
| Statistical capacity score | 66.667 (2019) |

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/ecuador>

VNRs published so far (May 2022): 2 (2018, 2020)

Key results from mapping

| | |
|---|-----|
| Existence of a National Evaluation Plan | YES |
| National Evaluation System has adopted the SDGs | NO |
| Existence of SDG Roadmap | NO |
| Evaluation included in SDG Roadmap | NO |

Source: Based on mapping findings

1. Governance of the 2030 Agenda

Governance of the 2030 Agenda is included in Executive Decree No. 622 of 2018, whereby the Vice President of the Republic is in charge of coordinating and articulating with the Planning Secretariat for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, by linking the Objectives of Sustainable Development (ODS) with the objectives of the National Development Plan (PND). Ecuador has decided not to create a new structure to implement the 2030 Agenda but uses its existing planning governance and mechanisms.

2. Relation between SDGs and the NDP

The lead entity for national planning is the National Planning Secretariat which coordinates the different levels of government and their planning instruments, with a view to guaranteeing compliance with the National Development Plan (PND) which run in four-year periods. Ecuador adopted the 2030 Agenda as a public policy as part of the PND, linking national development programs and policies to the 17 SDGs. The planning body has created three plans aligned with the SDGs (2017-2021; 2021-2025 and 2025-2029), each of which establishes programmatic goals consistent with the 2030 Agenda. It has also made efforts to link the Agenda with planning local. However, Ecuador still lacks an implementation strategy and SDGs have not yet been fully integrated in sector plans.

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda

The follow-up to the 2030 Agenda is led by the Vice Presidency and the Planning Secretary. For its part, the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC) is in charge of monitoring indicators and measuring their progress. In November 2018, Executive Order 046 was issued, which constitutes the technical standard for monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs as well as the preparation of the VNRs. The regulation establishes in its article 6 that “the methodology for the follow-up and evaluation of the SDGs will be the same applied for the follow-up and evaluation of the PND”. However, the methodology for the evaluation of the PND has not been developed until 2022, and no evaluation exercise has been carried out so far.

4. VNR

Ecuador has submitted two Voluntary National Reports in 2018 and 2020, while a third one is underway for the 2022 HLPF. These reports have been prepared by the Vice Presidency and the Planning Secretariat and approved by the National Planning Council. Ecuador does not follow the voluntary common guidelines, although the drafting process has become more participative since 2020. Interestingly, Ecuador's VNRs look into the public policies or initiatives to be carried out to achieve the different SDGs while also relating the evaluations that are linked to these policies.

5. National evaluation system

The national evaluation system is rooted in the new constitution of 2008, which, among other aspects, reformed public management. The leadership of the system is exercised by the National Planning Secretary. Within the Planning Secretariat there is a public policy monitoring and evaluation subsystem. To promote its development and make the role of evaluation visible, an Evaluation Directorate was created within the institutional structure in 2014, which was later raised to the rank of Vice-ministry. From then to date, the latter instance has been strengthening its stewardship.

In Ecuador, evaluation is mandatory as stipulated in the Constitution and in the Organic Code of Planning and Public Finance and its regulations. However, the regulatory framework that governs evaluation in Ecuador has gaps in terms of the role that each institution must play in the evaluation process. In addition, it lacks normative force since it does not have policies or strategies in evaluation itself. The Public Policy Evaluation Guide was published only in 2022 and does not sufficiently consider specific aspects regarding the use, quality, and independence of evaluations.

Evaluations are carried out based on an annual evaluation plan that must be approved by the National Planning Council, with about three annual evaluations conducted as self-assessment exercises developed by the sectoral entities and directed by the Undersecretary for Evaluation. There are concerns that this type of evaluation might not meet the independence standards.

Sectoral institutions also carry out their own evaluation exercises, in most cases these exercises are hand in hand with requirements from cooperation partners. The participation of other actors in the evaluation system is limited. The national evaluation platform has a rather irregular and unsystematic operation. There is also the Ecuadorian evaluation society, but its role or contribution to evaluation practice in the country is not very clear. Overall, Ecuador still faces the challenge of institutionalizing evaluation within its policy cycle and generating an evaluation culture in the public sector and society as a whole.

6. Evaluation and 2030 Agenda

As mandated by the 2018 executive order 046, following up and evaluating the SDGs should follow the methodology of the PND. However, until 2021 the PND was mainly subject to monitoring, not to evaluation itself. The PND evaluation guide is about to be published by the new administration which is also considering creating a specific methodology for evaluating the SDGs. In the perspective of the new government, evaluation of the SDGs is relevant, and its realization requires that the SDGs are integrated in public policies at all levels.

While there is an important movement of civil society that follows up on progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the national evaluation platform does not play an active role in these initiatives, and the networks of evaluation are not aware of the content or dynamics of the 2030 Agenda and its implementation process in Ecuador. ■



LESOTHO

Basic development data

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Population, total | 2.1 million (2019) |
| GNI per capita | 1,290 USD (2019) |
| WB country classification | Lower Middle-Income (2021) |
| Statistical capacity score | 67.778 (2019) |

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/LS>

VNRs published so far (May 2022): 1 (2019)

Key results from mapping

| | |
|---|----|
| Existence of a National Evaluation Plan | NO |
| National Evaluation System has adopted the SDGs | NO |
| Existence of SDG Roadmap | NO |
| Evaluation included in SDG Roadmap | NO |

Source: Based on mapping findings

1. Governance of the 2030 Agenda

At the strategic and political level, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is led by a cabinet-level Sub-Committee on the SDGs which is mandated to ensure effective coordination, advocacy, implementation and monitoring of sustainable development agenda. The sub-committee is part of the National Oversight and Advisory Committee – led by the Prime Minister – for the implementation of the NSDP II.

At the technical level, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is coordinated by the National Technical Steering Committee, chaired by the Principal Secretary for Ministry of Development Planning. Within a high-level political logic, there is no specific role for academia, think tanks or evaluation groups. As per available information, Lesotho does not use a roadmap for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

2. Relation between SDGs and the NDP

While the Government of Lesotho states that regional and international commitments, including the 2030 Agenda/SDGs, AU Agenda 2063 and the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Plan, are mainstreamed into national priorities, defined through the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP II) 2018/19–2022/23, it remains at the generic level of SDGs connected to the four NSDP Key Priority Areas. There are no linkages to more specific targets. It is unclear to which extent sector policies might be more specifically related to SDGs and targets. In general, line ministries do not involve or engage sufficiently with the MDP to develop their sector development plans and programs.

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda is only monitored through the VNR and UN-led analyses, and there are no provisions for or experiences in evaluating the 2030 Agenda or specific SDGs. For monitoring, the country can rely on the 2016 Sustainable Development Goals Indicator Baseline Summary Report which covers 82 indicators on which Lesotho can report. However, 34 of these are either proxies or simplified indicators (“customized”) and would not meet the standards of the international SDG indicator framework. The overall institutional set-up for monitoring is not entirely consolidated as M&E is not addressed by a specific structure for the governance of the 2030 Agenda (see above). The M&E Department of the MDP and the M&E unit of the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) share responsibilities for monitoring the NSDP II (MDP in the overall lead, but PMO in charge of ensuring quality of sector policies). Where happening, M&E is exclusively focused on monitoring (and primarily on expenditures), with no reference to evaluation of public policies. As such, Lesotho does not evaluate the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs, lacking approaches, systems and institutional arrangements for evaluation in general.

4. VNR

Lesotho conducted its first VNR in 2019 with a relatively heavy focus on data, and less on analysis, for instance in relation to institutional arrangements and capacities. The VNRs are led by the MDP (M&E department) through a Coordination and Technical Committee chaired by the MDP Principal Secretary. For the 2019 edition, MDP and UNDP commissioned the National University of Lesotho, to produce six evidence-based background papers (SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17).

5. National evaluation system

Lesotho lacks dedicated policies, systems, and arrangements for evaluation. In practice, the existing M&E system is exclusively focused on monitoring. This involves a loose M&E system (M&E officials in MDAs) which is currently being updated through a new national M&E policy (supported by CLEAR-AA). The new policy is also expected to clarify functional relationships between MDP and the PMO, among others.

6. Evaluation and 2030 Agenda

So far, there is no evaluation on the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs. Development partners conduct evaluations on their programs some of which are closely related to the NSDP II and (potentially) to the SDGs. However, these evaluations are not focused on public policies as such and are usually not owned by the government. ■



MALAWI

Basic development data

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Population, total | 18.6 million (2019) |
| GNI per capita | 550 USD (2019) |
| WB country classification | Low Income (2021) |
| Statistical capacity score | 73.333 (2019) |

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/malawi>

VNRs published so far (May 2022): 1 (2020)

Key results from mapping

| | |
|---|----|
| Existence of a National Evaluation Plan | NO |
| National Evaluation System has adopted the SDGs | NO |
| Existence of SDG Roadmap | NO |
| Evaluation included in SDG Roadmap | NO |

Source: Based on mapping findings

1. Governance of the 2030 Agenda

Malawi uses the existing development planning structures and only activates SDG-specific coordination elements to produce VNRs (see below). In this line, the National Planning Commission (NPC) in close collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs coordinates national implementation of the 2030 Agenda through integration of the SDGs into the plans of ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). Sector Working Groups (SWGs) – primarily an aid coordination mechanism – are among key drivers of sustainable development policies based on the SDGs, which produce quarterly reports relying on Technical Working Groups (TWGs) which are specialized groups of experts in which CSOs and academia are occasionally key partners. There is also a cross-cutting Technical Working Group on M&E which consists of public sector institutions exclusively and advises SWGs primarily on monitoring. The

role of evaluation players or related actors (such as academia) is however not yet formally established in this context, although CSOs have contributed studies and jointly with academia might become more formal partners in the SWGs in the future.

2. Relation between SDGs and the NDP

According to the VNR, the SDGs are fully integrated in the third Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS III) along with goals and targets from other international frameworks such as the Agenda 2063. The MGDS III “is being used as an instrument to implement the SDGs”, however, it is unclear how exactly this is happening beyond the monitoring aspects mentioned below.

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda

Based on existing documentation, SDGs and their targets are monitored and reported on in separate ways, rather than as part of the MGDS reporting system. For SDGs, in contrast, the government has used an SDG baseline report (2016) followed by a first SDGs progress report in 2018 (validated in 2019). According to the latter, Malawi can produce data for 168 indicators from the global framework (72% of total), in addition to 48 localized indicators (proxies to cover the remaining data gap).

So far, there is no evaluation on the 2030 Agenda or SDGs specifically. The evaluability of the MGDS III is considered very low, and there have not been any evaluations yet.

4. VNR

For the 2020 VNR, the government of Malawi set up two coordination and governance structures to oversee VNR preparations, namely the National Steering Committee (NSC) and the Core Technical Committee (CTC). The NSC included government MDAs; the UN; development partners, international financial institutions; and civil society organizations. The CTC was in charge of the technical process (“secretariat, operational and logistical support”) of data collection, drafting and consultations, and gathered

directors of planning from all key MDAs, as well as representatives of academia, CSOs, UN, and experts from other development partners. The contents of the VNR were supported and contributed by existing MGDS structures, including the SWGs.

While the VNR does not include references to the participation and contributions of evaluation players, academia or research institutes, it features a few studies including evaluations in the area of SDG 13 (climate action). It also states public policies and programs for some of the SDGs reviewed, however, without further analyzing how these policies impact the achievement of the SDGs and their targets.

5. National evaluation system

Malawi does not have a national evaluation system, and evaluation as such is still an incipient field, with only DPs and occasionally CSOs conducting evaluations. There is an ongoing process to set up a national M&E system which started at the end of 2021 and is expected to be concluded in 18 months. There are some capacities in CSOs and their networks contributing evaluations, and several individual consultants who are involved as national experts or teams in DP. Academia is starting to offer training, but so far only the Nkhoma University with structured M&E courses (private Christian university). Government (M&E Division) is currently in discussions with the Chancellor College of the public University of Malawi to create a curriculum on M&E.

6. Evaluation and 2030 Agenda

There has not been any evaluation on the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs specifically, yet.



MEXICO

Basic development data

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Population, total | 127.6 million (2019) |
| GNI per capita | 9,470 USD (2019) |
| WB country classification | Upper Middle-Income (2021) |
| Statistical capacity score | 93.333 (2019) |

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/mexico>

VNRs published so far (May 2022):
3 (2016, 2018, 2021)

Key results from mapping

| | |
|---|-----|
| Existence of a National Evaluation Plan | YES |
| National Evaluation System has adopted the SDGs | NO |
| Existence of SDG Roadmap | YES |
| Evaluation included in SDG Roadmap | YES |

Source: Based on mapping findings

1. Governance of the 2030 Agenda

Mexico has built a broad governance for the 2030 Agenda. In 2017, it formed the National Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also has a Specialized Technical Committee for the SDGs (CTEODS, for its Spanish acronym), a Working Group for the Legislative Follow-up of the SDGs in the Senate of the Republic, as well as Monitoring and Instrumentation Bodies (OSI) at the state and municipal levels for compliance with the SDGs.

The Council, headed by the President of the Republic, is the highest body and gathers the Powers of the Union, local governments, the private sector, civil society and academia. It has an executive secretary and coordinates the design, execution, monitoring and evaluation of actions for the SDGs, including through Multisectoral Work Committees; the National Strategy Committee; and a Monitoring and Evaluation Committee.

This institutional framework has remained unchanged despite changes in government.

Although the institutional arrangements are clear, the functioning of the different commissions and technical entities in terms of contributions to the implementation process remains vague. Likewise, governance is portrayed as broad and inclusive, but the margin of non-governmental actors to influence these spaces is not fully mapped. For its part, the Monitoring and Evaluation Commission within the Council has purely monitoring functions and evaluation is largely invisible so far.

Mexico's SDG roadmap has undergone changes as a result of government changes. The 2018 Strategy for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Mexico has been replaced by the 2019 National Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

2. Relation between SDGs and the NDP

In 2018, the government reformed the National Planning Law (LPN, for its Spanish acronym) and incorporated the three dimensions of sustainable development, as well as the principles of the 2030 Agenda. The reform established that the National Development Plan (PND, for its Spanish acronym) must contain considerations and projections for 20 years. This regulatory adjustment strengthens the planning instruments and budget allocation based on results towards more far-reaching actions. The PND 2019-2024 thus points to sustainable development as an essential factor. The current government prioritizes the PND over the 2030 Agenda, the latter being relevant as long as it contributes to the PND priorities.

To evaluate and monitor the PND, the LPN stipulates that the federal governments will establish a Performance Evaluation and Compensation System (SED, for its Spanish acronym) to measure the progress of the centralized federal administration in achieving the objectives and goals of the Plan and the annual sector programs. However, the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, the governing body of planning, points out that in practice the PND is monitored, not evaluated as such.

Importantly, however, the 2018 LPN reform requires that the annual budget programs are linked to the SDGs and indicate to which objective they contribute directly or indirectly. As these budget programs are evaluated, there is a certain critical mass of (at least, potentially) SDG-related evaluations. However, there is no rule or guideline that mandates the incorporation of the SDGs in sectoral plans or in specific public policies. However, there are guidelines for municipal authorities to incorporate the SDGs in their respective local development plans.

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda

The follow-up to the 2030 Agenda is exercised by the Technical Secretariat of the Council, which currently falls to the Ministry of Economy which is supported by the Council's work committees. The LPN establishes a specific follow-up to PND goals, through the SED, which contributes to the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and its indicators are contained in the PND. Thus, the Technical Secretary takes up the information from the SED in addition to that generated in the CTEODS for the follow-up of SDG indicators. Thanks to its statistical and data production capacity, Mexico is one of the most advanced countries in the measurement of SDG indicators.

Regarding evaluation, chapter V of the National Strategy for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Mexico (titled Monitoring, Validity and Accountability) refers to the "evaluation of the process to accelerate progress", as well as to "adjusting policies and programs where the need exists, celebrate and scale up successful approaches, and introduce innovations and experiences from other countries." For this task, a central role is given to the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy (CONEVAL) and to the State control mechanisms. Despite this, CONEVAL does not play a relevant role in the governance of the 2030 Agenda or in the mechanisms for its implementation.

4. VNR

Mexico has submitted three VNRs in 2016, 2018 and 2021 which were developed within the framework of the CTEODS while also collecting contributions of all the organs of the Union, as well as (more limited) from civil society, the private sector and academia. Multi-stakeholder approaches are more visible in the 2021 VNR featuring sector level consultations and in some cases independent studies from non-state actors. Even though the CTEODS has the representation of various instances of the executive, the governing bodies of the evaluation did not participate in this process. Evaluation has not played a predominant role in the three VNRs submitted so far. Although Mexico is an international reference for public policy evaluations, the government does not include evaluation results in the analysis of the progress of the SDGs. References to evaluation are very general (necessary to advance in evaluations, or to have a more robust evaluation system, etc.). The 2021 review does refer to the results of an independent evaluation exercise on the effects of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the achievement of the SDGs.

5. National evaluation system

With the set-up of the SED in 2016, all government programs are subject to evaluation, establishing mandatory evaluation. There is also a Federal Evaluation Policy, which is made up of instruments such as the SED, the Results-Based Budget (PbR) and the evaluation of the Social Development Policy. The main actors of the System are the Performance Evaluation Unit of the Ministry of Finance and CONEVAL. The 2016 General Guidelines for the Evaluation of Federal Programs are shared by both institutions have not been updated yet, although CONEVAL has a specific evaluation policy for social programs.

There is an annual evaluation program defined by the Ministry of Finance and CONEVAL in consultation with the sector entities. As a rule, the evaluation must be carried out by entities external to the public administration. However, since 2020, due

to resource limitations derived from the pandemic and other conjunctural factors, internal evaluations have been carried out by the governing bodies with the sectors, with case-dependent, i.e. uneven focus on the SDGs.

A strength of the Mexican evaluation system is that the line ministries and sector agencies have evaluation units which, despite some technical weaknesses, are able to carry out evaluations with approval of the Ministry of Finance and CONEVAL.

In the case of the SED, its objective is to link government planning, design and implementation of public programs with the budget process. One of the weaknesses of this approach is that since its evaluation unit is the budget program, these evaluations are carried out on the principle of annuality, and on specific programs, which fragments a comprehensive view of public policies. As it is also based on the logic of managing for results, there is no analysis of the processes, inhibiting inputs to better program management.

6. Evaluation and 2030 Agenda

Evaluation is contemplated in both the strategic framework and the governance mechanism for national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, in practice, evaluation does not fulfill a more than allegorical role. The National 2030 Strategy does not refer to the national evaluation system which remains outside the current 2030 Agenda set-up and processes. Evaluation could be reinforced through a more active role of the Monitoring and Evaluation Commission within the Council, which until now has played a relevant role exclusively in the determination and measurement of SDG indicators, thus failing to position evaluation in this context. ■



UGANDA

Basic development data

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Population, total | 44.3 million (2019) |
| GNI per capita | 790 USD (2019) |
| WB country classification | Low Income (2021) |
| Statistical capacity score | 67.778 (2019) |

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/uganda>

VNRs published so far (May 2022): 2 (2016, 2020)

Key results from mapping

| | |
|---|---------|
| Existence of a National Evaluation Plan | Partial |
| National Evaluation System has adopted the SDGs | YES |
| Existence of SDG Roadmap | YES |
| Evaluation included in SDG Roadmap | YES |

Source: Based on mapping findings

1. Governance of the 2030 Agenda

Uganda implements the 2030 Agenda as part of its National Development Plan which integrates SDGs and targets linking them to a total of 201 indicators of the global framework. There is a cabinet level SDG Policy Coordination Committee (SDG-PCC) chaired by the Prime Minister. The SDG Implementation Steering Committee (SDG-ISC) is responsible for reviewing progress and recommending policy proposals to the PCC. At the technical level, the National SDG Taskforce is led by the Office of the Prime Ministers (OPM). The practical work is done by five Technical Working Groups (TWG), including the Coordination, M&E and Reporting TWG (led by OPM) and the Data TWG (led by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics -UBOS-). The Coordination, M&E and Reporting TWG includes academia and the Uganda Evaluation Association, and work on evaluation specifically is coordinated through a sub-committee.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda is framed by a costed roadmap which is being implemented under the lead coordination of the OPM. The initial roadmap (2018-2020) was evaluated jointly with the SDG coordination. The recent update of the roadmap for the period SDGs 2020/21 – 2024/25 (i.e. aligned to the new NDPIII), includes detailed planning for the Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation, and Reporting TWG.

2. Relation between SDGs and the NDP

Uganda has opted for creating a National Standard Indicator (NSI) Framework which operationalizes the indicators of the Third National Development Plan (NDPIII, 2020/2021-2024/2025) and uses additional indicators from global and regional agreements. For the 2030 Agenda, the government states 201 relevant indicators that should be reported on as part of the NSI. The NSI indicators are integrated in sector development plans and used by MDAs and local governments. They also guide Programme Based Budgeting (PBB) in the sense that resources are allocated to Key Performance Indicators (KPI) which have been selected from the NSI framework.

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda

In terms of monitoring, through the NSI, Uganda has set up a comprehensive framework to monitor progress in the SDGs and report on SDG indicators, along with other national and regional indicators. In the past years, national ability to report on indicators has improved substantially, moving from 45 to 92 out of the 201 SDG indicators deemed relevant for the NDP. The new NDP III aligns to 95% of the prioritized SDG targets, compared to only 69% in the case of the NDP II. On the NSI indicators, the National Statistical System (NSS) produces regular data, and much attention is paid to increased availability and quality of data for SDG reporting.

Evaluation of the SDGs is an evolving field in Uganda. The NSI enables not only data-driven monitoring but through its linkages to institutions, budgets, policies and programs generates numerous opportunities to evaluate the SDGs and their targets. So far, evaluations are being conducted for the 20 NDP programs.

4. VNR

Uganda has contributed two VNRs in 2016 and 2020 whose drafting process was led by the existing SDG Coordination Framework, specifically the National SDG Taskforce with support by the SDG Secretariat. The 2020 VNR remains shallow with regard to the structured use of evaluations and other evidence. Beyond few exceptions (SDGs 4 SDG 17), the review does not rely on evaluative evidence. Furthermore, the VNR has not been used as a potential channel to share lessons learned with the roadmap which includes detailed provisions on SDG evaluation.

5. National evaluation system

Uganda has developed a relatively strong M&E environment in which evaluation is gaining relevance and traction at the strategic, institutional and operational level. The existing M&E policy (from 2011) institutes the practice of both monitoring and evaluation across government entities. The OPM is expected to support evaluations of national programmes set out in the NDPIII, commissioned and financed by the Government Evaluation Facility (GEF). The National Evaluation System (NES) and the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES), both created in 2013, are governed and implemented by the National M&E Working Group (NM&E-WG) whose secretariat is hosted at the OPM. In addition, also in 2013, Uganda launched a National Policy on Public Sector M&E which request MDAs to design and implement a five-year rolling Evaluation Plan, in collaboration with their respective SWGs.

The institutional structures are quite advanced as every MDA has an M&E department responsible for the collection of data on NSI indicators and to report these on a quarterly basis to the OPM. The Government Evaluation Facility (GEF) is a key driver for designing and implementing government-led evaluations directly linked to the NDP and ultimately the SDGs.

6. Evaluation and 2030 Agenda

So far, and despite the outputs included in the national SDG roadmap, there is no evaluation on the 2030 Agenda and/or the SDGs specifically. The NDP program evaluations provide however ample opportunities to include the SDGs and their targets, as well as 2030 principles such as Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) in government evaluations. Due to the public policy focus of GEF-funded evaluations and their linkages to the NSI (including SDG indicators), it might be relatively easy to generate SDG-related evidence. ■



Financial support from: