



# Colombia – Monitoring and Evaluation towards the SDGs: The Case of Colombia

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of Colombia's National Department of Planning (DNP) is to use technical evidence on government performance to influence public management (national and territorial). To achieve this goal, it decided to transform and institutionalize the National System of Management and Results Evaluation (SINERGIA) as a results-oriented monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system that would be timely, reliable and pertinent to decision-making. By institutionalizing M&E in Colombia, it sought to strengthen governance, improve transparency, strengthen relations for accountability, and build a performance culture within government to uphold better public management.

There were three phases to this process of transformation: 1) building SINERGIA (1994-2002), 2) strengthening M&E (2002-2014), and 3) orienting SINERGIA towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2014-2030). Since the launch of SINERGIA in 1994, the purpose was to create a culture of M&E within public entities at the national level in order to strengthen their managerial capacity. The second phase saw a process of developing, implementing and positioning M&E with the aim of helping to improve the efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness of policies and programmes and thereby to stimulate greater transparency in public management. Finally, the third phase of reforms sought to position SINERGIA as the national system for information on monitoring and evaluating the SDGs.

The three reform phases are presented in detail here. They show how SINERGIA has developed the technical and institutional capacities to operationalize a M&E process that is capable of verifying government performance in order to achieve the objectives set out in the SDGs.

## BUILDING SINERGIA (1994-2002)

The Political Constitution of 1991 redefined the functions of State and public management which involved taking new actions to strengthen good governance and to adapt national

administrative policies. The Constitution emphasized the need for instruments that would account for the expected results and achievements of public investments; all levels of government were required to formulate development plans. This reform made it possible to achieve more efficient and transparent management of public affairs. To that end, it was necessary to incorporate a system of M&E into the country's public policies under the leadership of the DNP (Art. 339 and 343).

In line with the provisions of the Constitution, and in order to institutionalize and implement M&E of the country's public policies, regulations<sup>33</sup> were issued to set up and run SINERGIA with the aim of tracking the goals set by the National Development Plan and assessing the strategic public policies adopted to achieve them.

In parallel with the establishment of SINERGIA, the Organic Law on Development Planning was adopted. It set out the procedures and mechanisms for the drafting, approval, execution, monitoring, evaluation and control of development plans. Regarding M&E of public policies, the DNP was given the task of designing and organizing management and results evaluation systems. In addition, the law required the President of the Republic to present a detailed annual report to Congress on the execution of the National Development Plan.

In 1995, the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES) published its document 2790<sup>34</sup>, which sought to strengthen results-based public management. The Council proposed that SINERGIA should be the management tool for inter- and intra-institutional coordination and evaluation of actions flowing from the National Development Plan; it regarded SINERGIA as the main instrument for creating a M&E culture as a learning process.

The first successes of the system came in 1996, when indicative planning<sup>35</sup> was introduced as a means of prioritizing public policies, and was focused more on monitoring than on evaluation. Later, in 1997, software was developed that contained such planning by entities, showing objectives, indicators, priority activities and investment projects.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, each sector drew up a sectoral plan showing the breakdown of its own plans and commitments; in 95 percent of cases, these were established on the basis of supply and determined by the sector. Each indicator in the plans that were loaded into the SINERGIA software had three possible goals: minimum, satisfactory and outstanding.

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33 Decree 2167 of 1992, CONPES 2688 of 1994 and Resolution 063 of 1994.

34 The National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES) is the highest national planning authority. It operates as an advisory body to the Government on all aspects of economic and social development. To that end, it coordinates and directs the work of organizations tasked with economic and social management within the Government, by reviewing and approving documents on the development of general policies presented at meetings.

35 There are two kinds of indicative planning: entity planning and sectoral planning. The former specifies the goals and objectives of an entity on the basis of sectoral policies defined by the relevant ministry or administrative department. Sectoral planning specifies the goals and objectives of a sector, on the basis of priorities set by the National Development Plan and information from the indicative plans of each entity (DNP, 2010).

36 By the end of the 1990s, a total of 18 ministries and 176 entities had installed the SINERGIA software and were using it to provide data to the DNP.

A significant change occurred in the year 2000 with respect to the battery of indicators. These were no longer defined in terms of available institutional supply but on the basis of public demand. Known as first-generation indicators, they were drawn up by the DNP, taking into account international trends, the main national policies, the guidelines defined by the Presidency of the Republic, the temporal context, and the CONPES reports for each sector.

By 2001, first-generation indicators were classified by goals and commitments. The former might be either sectoral or multisectoral indicators; they relied on both the public and private sector, which made them harder to handle and to monitor. The commitments, however, were exclusively the task of the public sector, and in the first instance of the entity or organization concerned.

In short, the first phase of reform was marked by the normative definition of SINERGIA and its initial progress in defining strategic plans and indicators for monitoring. This progress was hampered, however, by the lack of clarity in defining both the competency of the entities and the responsibilities they should assume.

#### STRENGTHENING MONITORING AND EVALUATION (2002-2014)

By 2002, it had been acknowledged that there was a need to adopt new monitoring-and-evaluation-based management practices that would make it possible to define strategic areas in public management as well as to optimize the use of resources and attain efficient results. This need was spelt out in the framework of the Programme of Public Administration Renewal (PRAP) and in Presidential Directive N° 010. SINERGIA was thus engaged in a process of technical improvement with six major objectives: 1) generating standardized methodological guidelines; 2) creating decision-making management tools; 3) acquiring its own IT platform; 4) influencing national planning (with a territorial perspective) and sectoral planning; 5) strengthening the M&E process; 6) institutionalizing the M&E process.

**Standardized methodological guidelines:** In order to consolidate results-oriented public management, SINERGIA has used the model of public value generation to strengthen M&E functions in public policies. This conceptual framework used the value chain as a fundamental structure for defining the sequential and logical relationship between inputs, activities, products and results, to which value is added throughout the transformation process. There are two major benefits to the way in which SINERGIA uses the value chain: 1) it makes it possible to articulate the public policy cycle and to provide feedback for each of its phases to give more coherence to design and analysis; and 2) it enables to obtain government performance analysis.

The first benefit depends on the extent to which the value chain provides the common conceptual and methodological foundations to ensure the mutual coherence of planning, earmarking, implementation and M&E. The second benefit depends on the possibility of verifying the efficacy, effectiveness and quality of public interventions through the use of indicators, data and analysis provided by the value chain. This is done by: using monitoring to check whether objectives and targets have been met in products and results (efficacy);

using evaluation to measure causality, or the impact of public interventions on results (effectiveness); and using surveys to measure citizens' perceptions (quality).<sup>37</sup>

Taking this conceptual framework into account, SINERGIA separately developed standardized methodologies for the M&E system in such a way that all actors in the system would have a unified idea of its design and implementation.

**Decision-making management tools:** SINERGIA has designed a toolkit for decision-making based on the standardized methodologies, which can be divided into four groups:

- Control panels which provide the national Government with early warnings about the progress being made towards accomplishing its targets and which enable it to take the measures required to improve the performance of public policies in the country. In particular, the methodology was consolidated and the indicators were grouped into three kinds of control panel: presidential<sup>38</sup>, cross-disciplinary<sup>39</sup> and sectoral<sup>40</sup>.
- Monitoring reports, which can be classified into three types: 1) Presidential reports to the National Congress, 2) results review, and 3) periodic reports. The first of these document sets out a general review of the national Government's achievements in the framework of the National Development Plan. The document is intended principally for the National Congress, in accordance with article 30 of Law 152 of 1994. The second report is the annual results review, which contains the ministries' and administrative departments' most important achievements for each calendar year, from January to December, in light of the NDP. This document must be submitted to the Council for Economic and Social Policy in April (Article 29 of Law 152 of 1994). In the third category are the quarterly reports which are submitted to the Presidency of the Republic and the High Government in general and which set out the average progress of indicators associated with the NDP and of government sectors.
- Strategic evaluation summaries, which contain plans for transfer and implementation of recommendations. These summaries seek to present to the executive entities whose interventions have been evaluated, and to the NDP, the recommendations from this analysis and the factors to be taken into account in order to make use of them in decision-making.
- Citizens' perceptions survey reports. These seek to complement M&E analysis through the subjective verification of welfare, derived from the level of satisfaction

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37 Other performance dimensions, such as productivity and efficiency (resource optimization), are measured through other information sources, for example the Unified System for Investments and Public Finances, but they must always be consistent along the value chain.

38 They display indicators prioritized by the President of the Republic to conduct bilateral dialogues with the ministers.

39 They display sectoral indicators set out in the NDP.

40 They display progress achieved by different sectors aiming at the development of policies of common interest.

of citizens after receiving public goods and services as a result of distinct government interventions.

**Dedicated IT platform:** M&E was carried out through UNDP's regional SIGOB platform, but this was not sufficient to meet the challenges faced by the national Government, so it decided to have a dedicated platform of its own. This made it possible to customize and exploit to the full the collection, analysis and use of data.

**National planning (with territorial perspective) and sectoral planning:** To give strategic force to M&E in public policies, SINERGIA became involved in the process of elaborating the 2010-2014 and 2014-2018 National Development Plans in such a way that the structure and design of this planning instrument converged with the orientation of measurable results at the national and local levels.

In this respect, SINERGIA has played a fundamental role in the structuring and the measuring of the 2010-2014 and 2014-2018 NDPs. These incorporated indicators and production and results targets as well as a separate chapter on M&E demonstrating the methods used to check progress on the NDP (at the national and territorial level) and identifying the evaluations that would be strategic for the national Government.

**Strengthen the M&E process:** SINERGIA set out to direct the measuring component of government targets towards strategic indicators (products and results) that would demonstrate whether the objectives of the NDP were being reached. For the periods 2010-2014 and 2014-2018, it gave greater priority to products and results than to activities indicators; this was an important difference with the indicators that were incorporated into the technological platform in the plan's previous phases (2002-2006-2010). The new indicators have been used as the basis for defining the control panels; in addition, they are the principal source for the National Government's Results Review and the President's Report to Congress.

As far as the strategic evaluation component was concerned, SINERGIA began to work with a group of evaluations enabling it to generate evidence for designing or reformulating public policies. In this way, as from 2007, annual evaluation agendas were drawn up and 103 evaluations were carried out with results and recommendations that made it possible to improve the direction of public policies.

Meanwhile, in 2013, databases resulting from evaluations that had already been carried out were incorporated into the evaluation process to facilitate their publication, availability and use. This took place within the framework of the open data strategy implemented by the national Government<sup>41</sup> and the Accelerated Data Programme (ADP)<sup>42</sup> launched by the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In addition,

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41 The Open Data Strategy started in 2011 and is part of the Online Government Programme aimed at contributing to the creation of a more efficient, transparent and participative State; it is also intended to provide better services to citizens and businesses by exploiting communication and information technologies (Decree 1151 of 2008).

42 The objectives of the ADP are: to encourage and improve the documentation process for existing data according to international norms and best practices, to develop effective micro data anonymization processes and to implement transparent and more open dissemination policies.

protocols were developed for the handling and anonymization of evaluation databases so as ensure the transparency and protection of information. Databases corresponding to 17 evaluations were able to be published and documented under international quality standards in the government's online ANDA catalogue.

Likewise, SINERGIA decided to generate new tools to complement M&E in order to acquire better analytical criteria for decision-making. In this regard, between 2011 and 2014, eight public opinion surveys were conducted which made it possible to understand the manner in which citizens receive public goods and services resulting from distinct governmental interventions. Moreover, the first exercise of the delivery system was carried out (the land restitution policy), and produced evidence to optimize the delivery of goods and services processes and thus to attain the proposed objectives.

**Institutionalize the M&E process:** Finally, and continuing the process of consolidating the system, the national Government issued Decree 1290 in 2014 to regulate the organization, configuration and operations of SINERGIA as the National System for Management and Results Evaluation. This defined and clarified the scope, the actors and the procedures required to advance the work of monitoring government targets (Monitoring Sinergia) and the evaluation of public policies at the national level (Evaluation Sinergia); it also strengthened technical support to municipalities and departments for the design, implementation and set up of monitoring systems of their development plans (Territorial Sinergia).

## ORIENTING SINERGIA TOWARDS THE SDGS (2014-2030)

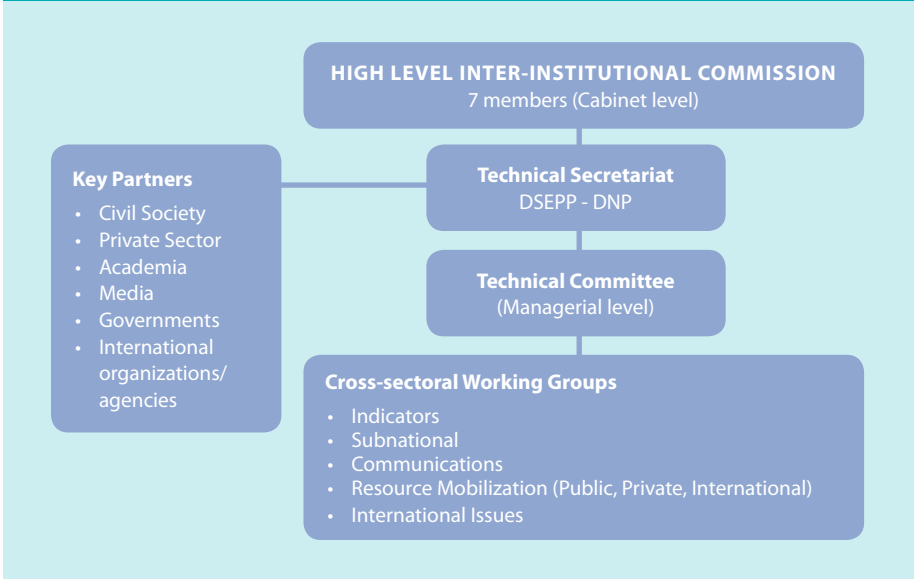
Since 2014 Colombia has played an active part in putting together Agenda 2030; it has a reliable and efficient statistics and institutional system and this has made it an international leader in various fields of measuring sustainable development.<sup>43</sup> The country is currently taking concrete actions as part of the strategy to enlist support and effectively implement Agenda 2030. In particular, Colombia played a pioneering role in the creation of the High Level Inter-Institutional Commission for the Sustainable Development Goals by Decree 280 in 2015. The commission is a formal monitoring and decision-making body organized around the implementation of the SDGs through public policies, plans, actions and programmes.

Membership of the Commission comprises seven national government entities, with the National Planning Department holding the chairmanship and technical secretariat (see Figure 1). The Commission's task is to direct and coordinate the process of enlisting support for, appropriating and implementing the Agenda 2030 Objectives, in association with stakeholders including territorial entities, civil society, the private sector, the academic world and the international community. The Commission has a technical committee and is defining the working groups that will tackle the 17 SDGs in a cross-disciplinary and inter-connected

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43 A clear example is Colombia, pioneer and global leader for measuring multidimensional poverty (IPM, OPHI). During the process for setting the 2030 Agenda, Colombia participated in Rio+20; the Open Working Group on the SDGs; it represents the Latin American region at the Inter-Agency Experts Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and is a member of the Champions Group to promote the launch of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.

FIGURE 1. HIGH LEVEL COMMISSION FOR THE SDGS ORGANIGRAM



Source: Author

manner so as to deal with common themes such as data and indicators, communications strategy and the regional implementation of the SDGs.

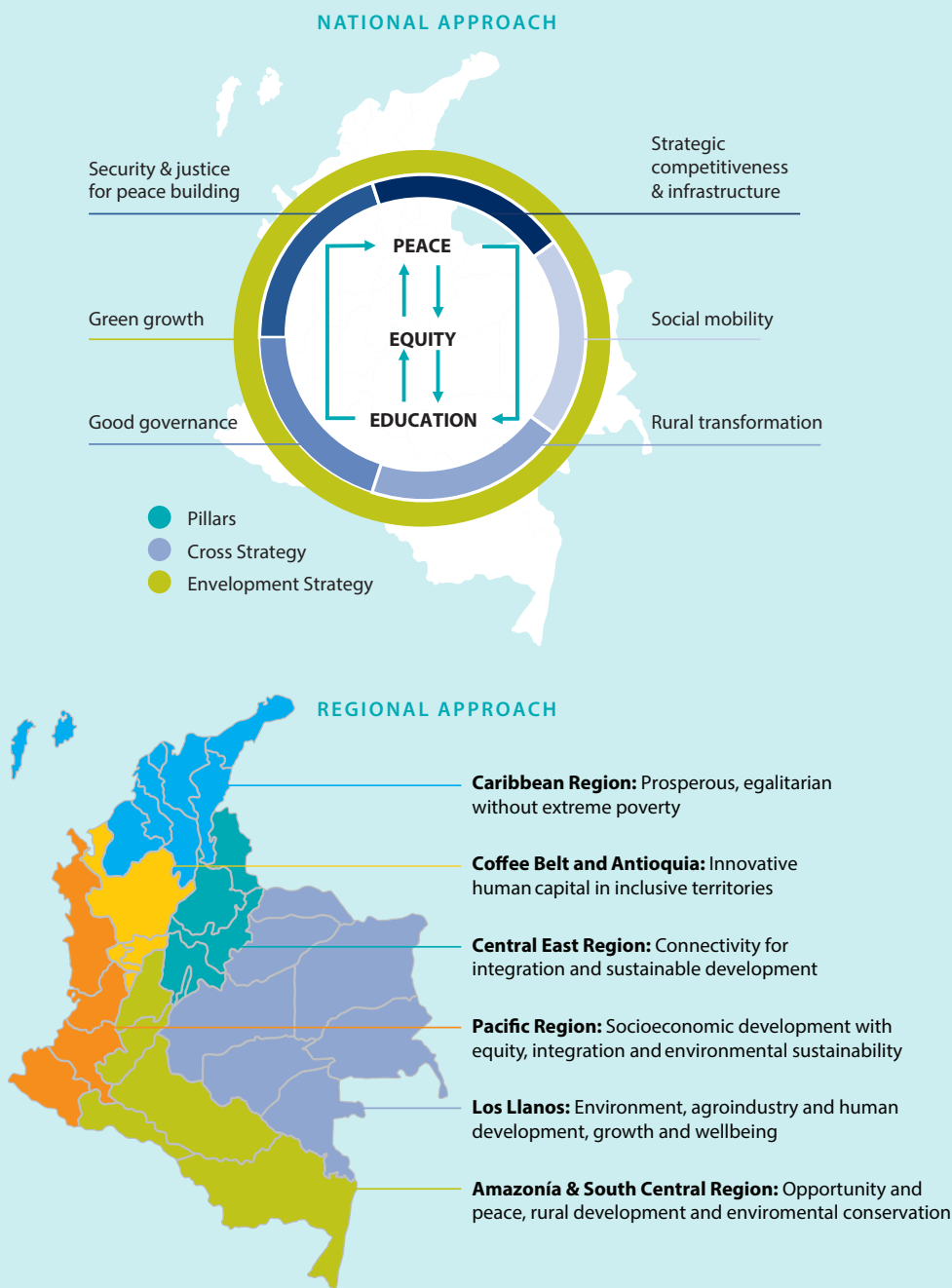
Starting from this institutionalization and national strategy, the third phase of SINERGIA's reforms seeks to channel the M&E capacity and experience into checking compliance with the SDGs.

It is worth pointing out that Colombia is a pioneer country in having a SDG approach in its 2014-2018 National Development Plan and that this constitutes a formal instrument for outlining the Government's objectives. The plan was drawn up on the basis of three pillars, articulated around five cross-disciplinary strategies and a developing strategy of green growth (see Figure 2), with the aim of attaining the national targets for 2018 and making progress towards the global goals of Agenda 2030. The three pillars of peace, equality and education are in line with "the areas of critical importance for mankind and the planet": people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership which underpin the SDGs.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, the 2014-2018 NDP for the first time explicitly acknowledged territorial differences and the need to develop them so as to reach a virtuous growth path through six regional chapters, each with its own indicators and targets. The NDP was drawn up in a participative process including regional authorities, representatives of civil society and the private sector. More than 7,000 people took part in 33 regional meetings and 27 sectoral consultations.

44 See case study, *Colombia and the Sustainable Developing Goals "Learning by Doing"*.

FIGURE 2. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE 2014-2018 NDP

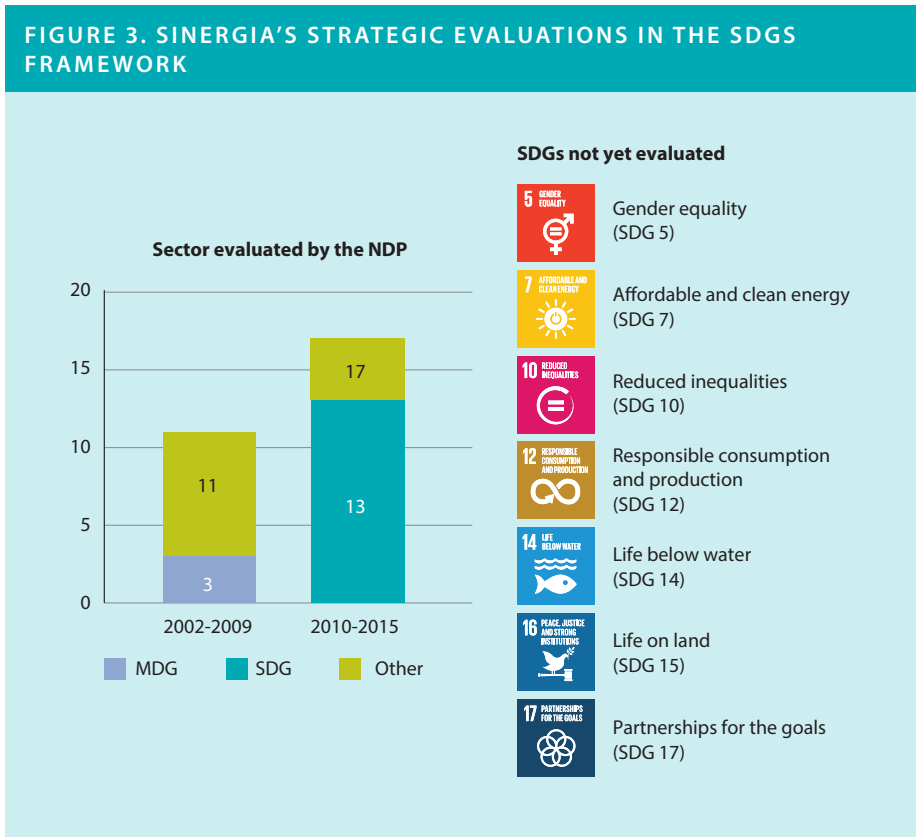


Source: 2014-2018 NDP



Once the 2030 Development Agenda had permeated government planning for 2018, indicators and targets to which the country could commit itself and ensure their monitoring were defined. Thus, the 2014-2018 NDP has taken 92 of the 169 objectives in the SDGs – each with at least one indicator – and they are currently part of SINERGIA’s control panels and monitoring system. As for the remaining SDG objectives: i) 17 had already been incorporated into Colombian law or into CONPES documents; ii) 24 others encountered difficulties with the country’s measuring or verification systems, and iii) another 34 were not exclusive to the country.

With regard to evaluation, among the 11 sectors that were evaluated between 2002 and 2009 as part of SINERGIA’s strategic evaluation process described above, three are thematically connected to the Millennium Development Goals. Between 2010 and 2015, the number of evaluated sectors rose to 17, among which 13 coincide thematically with the SDGs. SINERGIA is currently working to identify evaluations which would contribute to the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, notably to check whether public sector actions are meeting agreed targets. Figure 3 shows examples of SDGs that have not been evaluated by SINERGIA yet, though it is hoped to start work in the medium term.



Source: Author

## CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGES

For more than 20 years Colombia has made determined progress towards consolidating a M&E system which enables it to take informed decisions to change the direction of public management and thus to achieve better results. In recent years, the country has made considerable strides in implementing the SDGs and this has enabled it to play a leading role in the sustainable development agenda, as shown by its influence and its active participation in the global definition of the SDGs. It is acknowledged, however, that major efforts are still required on the path towards sustainable development by 2030.

In particular, there is a recognized need to strengthen international sources of funding so as to better concentrate existing information systems in the country towards enlisting support for and effectively implementing the SDGs. At the regional level, support is needed for South-South cooperation to facilitate the harmonization of countries' processes and trajectories, as well as the joint construction of regional indicators. Lastly, at the national level, the challenge is to support overarching policy initiatives that extend beyond the mandate of a particular government; in this way, a sustainable development policy document could be produced containing all the targets, programmes and commitments to be achieved for 2030.

As this report has shown, SINERGIA provides Colombia with considerable institutional and operating capacity for credible M&E; the national M&E system is currently being actively used to promote SDG follow-up. The particular challenges to measuring and implementation in the country can be summarized as follows:

- Revision of the technical and operative viability of target measurement, starting with the construction of national indicators and making them consistent with regional and global indicators. This includes seeking and developing innovative and technological solutions to overcome the obstacles presented by traditional data-collecting methods. For example, to develop an Open Data and Big Data strategy for Colombia. The associated challenges:
  - The definition of a regulatory framework for the use of information.
  - Lack of capacity of entities producing national statistics.
  - Lack of data dissemination and appropriate data use by decision-making bodies.
  - Inadequate design and management of statistical processes.
  - The high cost of developing analytical tools.
- Creation of strategies for strengthening the territorial links and the participation of local authorities from the early stages of the process; this will ensure that the Colombian project will be the result of feasible and longstanding regional commitments and it will contribute to standardizing the quality of information gathered at subnational level.
- Coordination and participation of public sector, private sector and civil society actors, not only to take ownership of the SDGs, but also in their actions and contribution

to the M&E of the goals. To this effect, work must be done to generate spaces for coordination between actors to develop technological platforms for data gathering and analysis.

- Developing communication strategies for the SDGs which help raise awareness about them and which encourage various stakeholders to take ownership of the goals and to change their behaviour for the effective implementation of Agenda 2030.

In this manner, the normative, institutional and technical framework of SINERGIA, in coordination with a working process to overcome the mentioned obstacles, will make it possible to set up a M&E system focused on checking the attainment of the SDGs and thus to transform the life of citizens.

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