



Georgia – Measuring Progress towards SDGs through National Policy Monitoring and Evaluation System

TAMARA RAZMADZE

Head of Donor Coordination Unit,
Administration of the Government of Georgia

In September 2015, world leaders came together to commit to a new universal set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the betterment of lives worldwide. Built on the Millennium Development Goals, the 17 SDGs and 169 targets are more expansive and based on the largest consultative process ever. The Georgian people were part of that worldwide process and contributed to the formulation of the new development priorities. Through UN country office support, the voices of diverse groups were recorded. They included women, teachers, poor, elderly, youth, unemployed, internally displaced persons, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, ex-prisoners, persons with disabilities, urbanites, and rural and mountain dwellers. The discussions revealed Georgians' desire to live in a secure environment where an honest and responsive Government fostered healthcare and education, standard of living, job opportunities and social security. Peace and the restoration of the country's territorial integrity were most often mentioned as the key priorities.

Governments and other stakeholders have debated whether the number of SDGs and targets need to be reduced and the framework simplified to make them manageable, applicable and effective. The consensus in Georgia is that it is better to have more goals targeting, for example, women's empowerment, good governance or peace and security, rather than fewer goals that do not address those. However, national capacities to implement all the SDGs should be taken into consideration. For Georgia, the imperative of rigorous monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of national policies as well as SDGs puts additional pressure on the country's limited capacities. The country still faces challenges such as a lack of holistic approach towards monitoring and evaluation, data availability gaps, a weak National Statistics Office, lack of resources, limited capacity of government institutions. Georgia has improved the coverage and quality of official statistics in recent years, but there are still problems in terms of frequency, reliability and periodicity based on internationally recognized standards. Efforts should continue to upgrade the Georgian statistics system, which will allow closer SDG monitoring and a more refined reporting system.

It is much more difficult to achieve significant progress in the absence of a direct link between global goals and national ones. Georgia's experience with tracking progress towards MDGs unveiled challenges such as data collection gaps, weak interagency coordination and inadequate donor coordination. Having learned those lessons, the country has made efforts to introduce innovative systems that ensure adequate monitoring of the SDGs.

The Government has realized the centrality of a sound system to measure the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of Georgia's progress towards the SDGs. Such a system needs to be easily applicable or compatible with national policies and objectives. As Georgia has little experience in monitoring and evaluation, it lacks a harmonized and uniform practice across government institutions. Monitoring and evaluation is carried out mainly with support by development partners such as the European Union or is performed in a very simple fashion. From the perspective of SDG implementation and monitoring, this can be an advantage, as it could pave the way for a holistic and uniform approach.

Such an approach requires instruments that would ensure the alignment of the national agenda with the global one and is consistent, balanced and realistic. Therefore, integration of the SDGs into national planning is crucial. Georgia has an ambitious national agenda and a list of reforms either planned or under implementation. The Government has engaged in an extensive cross-ministerial consultative process for the nationalization of the SDGs, which will serve as the baseline for national development. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Government has taken responsibility for coordinating national policies, ensuring linkages between the SDGs and national priorities, coordinating domestic and international actors around the goals, and building an innovative SDG M&E system. In 2015 the consultative process culminated in a round table that brought together all ministries and UN agencies. A comprehensive matrix was developed containing the SDG goals and 132 targets based on Georgia's reality, along with corresponding government policies and responsible institutions. In this hierarchy of national and global commitments, each policy is linked with the respective SDG target. This will allow the country to track progress towards the national agenda as well as the SDGs.

A module is being developed for a well-functioning M&E framework that will ensure linking of national policies with each target of SDGs, further enabling measurement of progress through national and international indicators. Integration of the SDG M&E framework into that of national policies is the first step towards achieving better efficiency in measuring progress. A hierarchy of indicators shall be introduced where the set of national markers contribute to the global ones. These indicators in the hierarchy will vary in measuring different kind of progress but would contribute to the ultimate goal – achieving each of SDGs. For example, SDG goal 1, target 1.2. states: "By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions". At a national level, a corresponding policy objective is to change and refine the methodology for the evaluation of the families' socio-economic status to provide targeted social assistance (TSA) more efficiently. Although the effectiveness and efficiency of the new methodology will be measured separately – i.e. the indicator can be a number of vulnerable people covered by the TSA – the relevant indicators should contribute to the global measurement tools.

TABLE 1. EXAMPLE OF MATRIX DEVELOPED FOR THE ANALYSIS OF GEORGIA'S POLICIES VERSUS SDGS

GOAL 2. END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE			
TARGET	ONGOING ACTIVITY (GOVERNMENT WORK PLAN, 2015-2016)	PLANNED ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBLE LINE MINISTRIES
2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round	13.4.2.3 Reduction of malnutrition through greater access to fortified food products; greater awareness of the public on staple food fortification and the necessary supplementation of micronutrients to children aged 6-24 months in particular		Human Rights Secretariat (Administration of the Government of Georgia)
		Increasing laboratory testing facilities	Ministry of Agriculture
	Food safety, plant protection and epizootic reliability		Ministry of Agriculture
2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons	13.4.2.3 Reduction of malnutrition through greater access to fortified food products		
2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment		Concessional agro credit project	Ministry of Agriculture
	4.2.1 Support to small enterprises to get better access to the leasing and finances 4.2.2 Implement the micro and small-scale business support programme 4.2.3 Policy reform on small and medium enterprises 4.2.4 Project for the support of smallholder farmers in the spring works		Ministry of Agriculture
		Modernization of amelioration systems	Ministry of Agriculture
		Plant the future (the initiative for maximum support of the intended use of agricultural lands through setting up perennial gardens and nurseries in all municipalities of Georgia)	Ministry of Agriculture
		Study land resources in Georgia for improving soil fertility	Soil research and mapping in Georgia for improving soil fertility

Bearing in mind the cost and administrative burden, the approach is to simplify the M&E process without compromising quality and ensuring greater efficiency in developing and implementing national policies having a clear link with the SDGs. This process has begun with close collaboration with all respective government institutions. The Administration of the Government of Georgia will initiate extensive dialogue with all stakeholders to elaborate practices that are demand-based, realistic and valuable for making informed decisions. Once the global and regional indicators are adopted, the Georgian Government will analyse those against national ones and fill in the gaps, avoid duplications and save resources. The special module will enable the Government to introduce a holistic approach towards national and global objectives without investing too many resources. The role of Geostat – the national statistics office – will be key in measuring the progress of SDGs. Geostat, which has established itself as an effective independent institution with strong leadership, is finalizing a three-year strategy to improve the quality and reliability of data. However, it faces two main constraints: limited resources of the organization and lack of systemic approach towards statistical information from different bodies of the Government. The latter is very much linked to a well-functioning public administration, as well as the capacity of policymakers to use quality data for informed decision-making. The ongoing public administration reform, a holistic approach to policy development and implementation, as well as the above-mentioned policy module will significantly improve the situation. While limited resources remain a key challenge for Geostat, improvement of administrative and other sources of statistics, such as availability of ‘big data’ or registers, will significantly improve data quality and reliability.

A good M&E system can serve as an excellent tool for attaining national and global objectives better. However, given Georgia’s extensive development agenda, a key challenge is to introduce a system that is efficient and avoids duplication of resources. With this clear vision, Georgia has embarked on the path towards creating such a system. Once in place, it will pay off with better policies targeted at sustainable development.