21. Zimbabwe: Building the Foundations for Sustainable National Evaluation Capacities in the SDG Era

IRENE MOLLY DOROH

Director for Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation
Office of the President and Cabinet

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 is clear testimony that the world shares a common vision for the planet, that of sustainable development. The pursuit for improvement in the quality of life has remained a global priority and indeed a national priority for Member States and more evident now than before, as Member States take bold steps to focus on implementation of the SDGs and move away from commitments. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comes with a follow-up and review mechanism to ensure that the SDGs are systematically monitored and evaluated to ensure "no one is left behind". Country-led evaluations and strengthened national evaluation capacities therefore become the pillars on which the progress of the SDGs will be premised moving into the future. Mahatma Gandhi puts it well by indicating that the future depends on what you do in the present.

This therefore calls for need to increase the momentum of the global commitment that "no one is left behind" in the quest to end poverty, hunger, protect the planet as well as fulfilling the aspirations of SDG 16 of ensuring peace, justice and strong institutions for all. The role of evaluation becomes key in contributing to improving development policies, considering whether to continue or discontinue a project or programme and accounting for public expenditure and development results to stakeholders and tax payers. Hence the declaration and endorsement of the year 2015 by the United Nations as the International Year of Evaluation which advocates for stronger evaluation functions and enhanced national evaluation capacities in the post-2015 development agenda came at an opportune time.

BACKGROUND

Then United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that implementation of the post-2015 development agenda will require renewed efforts by all Governments to strengthen public institutions by enhancing their responsiveness and accountability in order to meet the growing demand for service delivery. This means that Governments should be ready to innovate and develop effective, accountable, participatory and transparent institutions at all

levels to ensure efficient and effective use of public resources for the services and benefits of all citizens.

As highlighted above, governments should therefore take a deliberate stance to put in place all-inclusive evaluation systems linked to integrated results-based management principles with clearly stated organizational design, vision for how and when evaluations will be undertaken and the stakeholders who will be involved. The intensifying public demand for greater accountability and transparency as well as production of tangible results by governments are growing in the rapidly changing global development environment. Governments, especially in Africa, find themselves responding in diverse ways to establish systems of evaluation that respond to growing demand for good governance. The need to undertake evaluations and strengthen national evaluation capacities becomes more apparent, more so in the era of the SDGs and the African Union Agenda 2063 and other regional economic obligations. Impediments such as lack of a systematic approach to creating, using and retaining capacity which encompasses individual, institutional and an enabling policy, legal and regulatory environment could derail the implementation of these agendas and other national obligations. To this end, most African countries are engaged in deep reforms, as part of their overall management process towards transformation of their economies through the domestication of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 among other commitments.

COUNTRY FRAMEWORK FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL EVALUATION CAPACITIES

In order to bring out the priorities that I find relevant in Zimbabwe in terms of developing national evaluation capacities to support the SDGs, this paper will focus on Zimbabwe's position on the SDGs in terms of the implementation modalities, institutional framework, progress to date and lessons learned and then highlight the gaps that need to be filled going forward.

The Government of Zimbabwe adopted an integrated results-based management system in 2009 with all its components including results-based monitoring and evaluation and rolled it out across the Government to guide implementation of policies, development programmes and projects. In 2013, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (2013-2018) (Zim-ASSET) came on board as the national's economic development blueprint to stabilize and accelerate economic growth. A midterm review of the medium-term plan has since been undertaken and to complete its lifespan it will further be informed by the SDGs adopted in 2015.

Furthermore, in 2015 the country developed the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, also highly anchored on integrated results-based management. The policy is an integral instrument in developing the monitoring and evaluation system in the country. It provides a clear framework to support the institutionalization of monitoring and evaluation in the Government, thus ensuring a systematic, coordinated, simplified, results-oriented, reliable and effective mechanism. This flows from the dictates of the Zimbabwe Constitution adopted in 2013 which provides for the adoption and implementation of policies and legislation that ensure efficiency, competence, accountability, transparency, personal integrity and financial probity in all institutions and agencies of Government at every level and

in every public institution. In further strengthening the monitoring and evaluation system in the country, the Government is developing National Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines which are gender-responsive, with support from UN Women. There is consensus that gender-responsive evaluations are central to the Government's policy formulation, planning, programming and resource allocation and enable achievement of national priorities and the ambitious targets of the SDGs. The need for disaggregated data is also key for targeted policies in this regard. To this end, the Government continues to provide a platform for coordination of development cooperation through implementation of the four effectiveness principles of country ownership, results, inclusiveness and transparency and accountability.

The SDGs are being implemented within the context of an economic recovery following the El Niño-induced drought of 2015/2016 which left over 4 million people food-insecure, 51 percent of whom are women. The rate of growth of the gross domestic product declined from 1.1 percent in 2015 to an estimated 0.6 percent in 2016. The projections have since been revised upwards to 3.8 percent in 2017 due to the good performance registered in the 2016/2017 agricultural season, and improvements in the mining, construction, manufacturing and financial sectors.

The post-2015 development plan is therefore being implemented within our development plan, Zim-ASSET, and its architecture of four core clusters, namely food security and nutrition, social services and poverty eradication, infrastructure and utilities, and value addition and beneficiation, plus three enabling clusters that include the fiscal and monetary reform measures, aid coordination and public administration, and governance and performance management. All SDGs have been integrated into these clusters for ease of implementation and ensuring synergies between the SDGs and the country's development plan as depicted in Table 1 below.

For reporting and ease of data collection and consistency in reporting, 2015 was adopted as the base year in the implementation of the SDGs. Given the breadth of the 2030 Agenda which now incorporates the three pillars of sustainable development, that is economic, social and environmental, and given the magnitude of the resources both human and financial that are required to implement the programmes, a multi-stakeholder approach

TABLE 1. ALLOCATION OF THE SDGs INTO EXISTING CLUSTERS

CLUSTERS	RELEVANT SDGs
Food security and nutrition	1,2,3,6,12,13,14 and 15
Infrastructure and utilities	3,7 and 9
Value addition and beneficiation	9 and 10
Social services and poverty eradication	3,4,5 and 6
Public administration, governance and performance management	8,19,11 and 16
Fiscal and monetary reform measures/aid coordination	8,10 and 17

has been adopted to augment government efforts. As stated in the post-2015 development agenda, governments alone especially in the developing world will not be able to implement the 2030 Agenda on their own. Therefore, key partners will also be involved in the financing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs. These stakeholders include the Government (national and subnational structures); parliamentarians, chiefs, parastatal organizations, the private sector (both domestic and foreign); civil society organizations; development partners; youth organizations; women's organizations; local authorities; faith-based organizations; and organizations representing persons living with disabilities, the elderly, academia and the general citizenry.

The Government of Zimbabwe has put in place a clear and robust institutional framework to guide the implementation of the SDGs consisting of a Steering Committee, Technical Committee and SDG Clusters as illustrated in Figure 1.

- At the apex is the Cabinet, which is the supreme policymaking body in the country responsible for considering policy issues pertaining to the SDGs in the country as well as reports from the Steering Committee including the SDG annual country report before its submission to the United Nations.

- Below the Cabinet is a Steering Committee which comprises Permanent Secretaries, cluster chairs and co-chairs, heads of United Nations task force agencies, the private sector, parastatal organizations and donors and is chaired by the Chief Secretary to the President and Cabinet or his designate. This committee meets twice per year to consider reports from the Technical Committee and give policy guidance in the implementation of the SDGs in the country. It is also responsible for preparing reports to Cabinet.

- The Technical Committee is made up of the cluster chairs and co-chairs, SDG focal persons and representatives of all key stakeholders in the cluster; it is chaired by the

FIGURE 1. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK
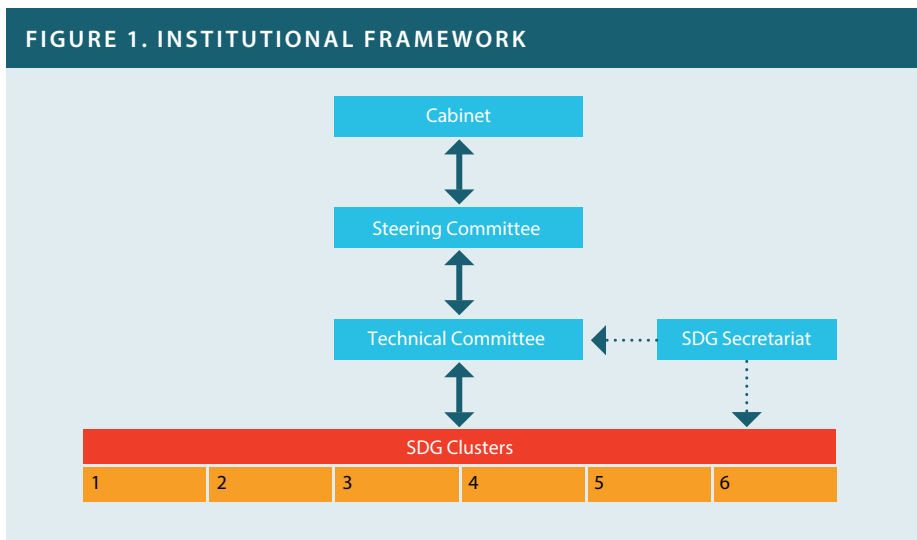
Secretary for Macro-Economic Planning and Investment Promotion. This commit-tee is seized with receiving the quarterly reports of the clusters and in turn prepare reports for submission to the next committee in the hierarchy. This committee also directs and works closely with the Secretariat to ensure that the events and activities necessary for the smooth implementation of the 2030 Agenda are undertaken.

● The SDG Clusters are working groups consisting of all institutions responsible for the implementation of policies, projects and programmes key in the attainment of the SDGs, targets and indicators. Included in the SDG Clusters are SDG minis-try focal persons. The clusters are made up of the representatives of all above-mentioned stakeholders who have interest in the topical issue/s dealt with by that group or cluster.

● The Secretariat, constituting the Office of the President and Cabinet, Ministry of Macro- Economic Planning and Investment Promotion, United Nations Development Programme and Zimbabwe Statistical Agency, is responsible for organizing and coordinating key SDG activities and production of the necessary documentation.

The main sources of financing the sustainable development agenda include inter alia domestic resource mobilization, domestic and international private business, official devel-opment assistance, debt and debt sustainability and global partnerships.

The Government of Zimbabwe decided that it would implement all 17 SDGs as they are deemed important to the country. However, in terms of emphasis and guided by the coun-try's vision, the need to concentrate on enabling Goals, resource availability and the unfin-ished business of the Millennium Development Goals, the Government decided that its focus would be on the following 10 Goals: SDG 8, SDG 7, SDG 2, SDG 9, SDG 6, SDG 13, SDG 17, SDG 3, SDG 4 and SDG 5. The rationale for the focus SDGs is given in Table 2.

TABLE 2. PRIORITIZATION OF THE SDGs

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL	RATIONALE
Goal 8: Economic growth	Sustained and inclusive economic growth is necessary if we are to create wealth which can be channeled to the social sectors, create economic oppor-tunities for citizens to go into business or to become gainfully employed.
Goal 7: Energy	Energy is critical for all sectors of the economy to be fully functional and productive.
Goal 2: Agriculture, food security and nutrition	Sustainable agriculture is the bedrock of our economy [agro-based economy] and the bulk of our population derive their livelihood from this sector. Also critical are the attendant food security and nutrition aspects. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy as espoused in Zim-ASSET.
Goal 9: Infrastructure	Resilient infrastructure, industrialization and innovation are key in promoting sustainable economic growth. Zim-ASSET and the Ten Point Plan emphasize the importance of infrastructure.

(Continued)

TABLE 2. PRIORITIZATION OF THE SDGs

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL	RATIONALE
Goal 6: Water and sanitation	The availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation are key in supporting all sectors of the economy. These are key enablers in Zim-ASSET and the Ten Point Plan.
Goal 17: Partnerships	Means of implementation and revitalized partnerships are key in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda since there is outright acknowledgement that domestically mobilized resources will not be enough to finance the Agenda. Financing will require much more players than Government alone. The country needs both foreign and domestic investment for it to grow. Private sector participation is critical in the Ten Point Plan.
Goal 3: Health	For the economy to grow it will require healthy people. The relationship between a healthy nation and economic growth is pivotal. Health is key in improving labour productivity and hence economic growth.
Goal 4: Education	Quality education is key in imparting the necessary skills required in all sectors of the economy and enhancing labour productivity.
Goal 13: Combating climate change	The economy, including the anchor sector of agriculture. depends on the environment. There is therefore an urgent need to combat climate change and its negative impact on the environment.
Goal 5: Gender and women's empowerment	The achievement of full human potential and sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues is to be denied its full potential of sustainable development. Economic empowerment of women and girls is therefore imperative for them to participate in all sectors of the economy.

Focus on the above-mentioned Goals will trigger activity in the remaining seven, leading to the ultimate goal of eliminating poverty in all its forms everywhere. The implementation of policies, projects and programmes on all SDGs continues in collaboration with development partners and the private sector. Progress to date in terms of implementation of the SDGs includes continued government participation in several local, regional and international seminars on the SDGs; the indicator framework has been finalized; the Government produced a report on the voluntary national review which was presented at the high-level political forum held at the United Nations in New York in July 2017; SDG focal persons in all line ministries are coordinating issues at the ministerial level; and engagement with the Parliament is ongoing.

LESSONS LEARNED

As the country increases momentum in the implementation of the SDGs, there have been key lessons as follows:

- Prioritization is key as it enables achievement of greater development outcomes;

- Integration and alignment are essential to effective implementation of the SDGs hence mainstreaming of the SDGs into development plans and budgets ensures implementation;

- Parliament has a pivotal role to play in terms of domestication and ownership of the SDGs;

- Strong partnerships are essential to progress on the SDGs;

- Targeted interventions can pay huge dividends; for instance, the Government's special maize production for import substitution programme has strengthened resilience to economic and climate-induced shocks.

Building on the lessons learned and following the lessons drawn from the experiences of other countries in terms of SDG implementation shared in the 2017 voluntary national reviews, the country will focus on embracing the SDGs in the national budgeting formulation process; enhancing private sector involvement to bridge the huge financing gap that exists; strengthen multi-stakeholder participation in all processes at all levels, urgently addressing structural barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to enhance their participation in the economic development process; and recognition of children, adolescents and the youth as important agents of change, underlining the necessity of investing in them with a view to addressing multidimensional deprivations, reducing poverty, harnessing the demographic dividend and empowering them to build a more prosperous future.

The defining parameter for the successful of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, African Union Agenda 2063 and all other development programmes is capacity development, both individual and institutional. Priority areas for national evaluation capacities could entail the following:

- Statistical capacity: capacitation of the National Statistical Agency to effectively address the data requirements of the 2030 Agenda. Because data gaps are evident in the system to monitor progress of the SDGs, developing capacities to collect, analyse and disseminate high-quality and reliable timely data, disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, disability, region and other relevant variables is needed, together with the development of SMART indicators;

- Evidence-based policymaking;

- Peer review support;

- New technologies to deal with emerging data;

- Integrated systems tools.

Evaluation has the capacity to go beyond compliance into engagement in performance assessment, learning, strengthening of accountability mechanisms as well as feeding into policymaking and decision-making. Therefore, to ensure that evaluation enhances progress towards the SDGs and responds to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development the following are important:

- Document and share information on good practices relating to the evaluation of the SDGs across countries;

- Strengthen the knowledge base on what works and assist in disseminating good practices and lessons from evaluations;

- Embrace new technologies such as remote sensing and satellite data systems;

- Integrate new methodologies, practices and sources of data into evaluations relating to the SDGs;

- Promote effective evaluation practices as an important way to improve evidence-based or participatory processes;

- Encourage governments to further strengthen national evaluation systems and policies in support of SDG implementation and review;

- Work with partners on data generation and evaluation methods relevant to the SDGs.

CONCLUSION

The next steps for governments to take in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is to optimize the value of contributions by development partners to national capacity development through enhanced common results management and reporting frameworks as well as coordinated support to the overall development mantra. There is also need to continue joint efforts with partners and such investments and efforts should have a long-lasting impact on eradicating poverty and reducing inequality, on sustainable development, on promoting inclusive growth and on enhancing national capacities, aligned with national priorities and policies.

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