



Sustainable Development Goals Developing National SDG Implementation Strategies



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Table of Contents

Section 1: Background	2
Section 2: National Priority Setting for SDG Implementation	3
Section 3: Underlying Tenets of the SDGs	5
Section 4: Criteria	7
Section 5: Summary of Best Practices	8
Section 6: Canadian Context	12
Section 7: Preliminary Recommendations	13

Section 1: Background

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was a milestone in the history of the United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have the power to fundamentally change the future of this planet, but only if we implement them. The Goals distill what people around the world care about and what Canadians also want: a peaceful society that focuses on bettering people and our planet while also ensuring sustainable prosperity and leaving no one behind. The goals are not easy, but they provide a clear vision of a better Canada and a better world.



In July 2018, the Government of Canada announced the establishment of an SDG Unit, an inter-ministerial body to be led by Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. Seven additional ministers will contribute to the SDG Unit: the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie; the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs; the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development; the Minister of Indigenous Services; the Minister of Environment and Climate Change; the Minister of Status of Women; and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour.

This SDG Unit is responsible for:

- developing a national strategy;
- raising public awareness;
- fostering new partnerships and networks to advance the SDGs; and
- administering a funding program for innovative and horizontal initiatives that support the achievement of the SDGs and Canada's Voluntary National Review (VNR).

This BCCIC policy brief aims to provide the SDG unit and other Canadian stakeholders with existing best practice examples regarding the creation and implementation of a national SDG strategy. It includes a menu of steps and components that have gone into creating SDG strategies in other countries around the world.

Section 2: National Priority Setting for SDG Implementation

One of the main priorities of Canada's new SDG Unit is the creation of a national strategy for implementing the SDGs which identifies Canada's national priorities in the context of Agenda 2030. To successfully achieve goals as complex and ambitious as the SDGs, both at home and abroad, a clear plan is needed. National SDG priority setting and the development of an implementation strategy represents an international best practice for engaging with the SDGs. These plans are designed to coherently lay out the roadmap to achieving Agenda 2030 in a specific country and are important in achieving the SDGs - making them more feasible and realistic. These strategies represent a way to engage with the international agenda and support SDG implementation while setting clear expectations for domestic and international communities, laying down priorities and how an integrated agenda will be implemented in practice. They also represent a national vision- not just a government plan, but a plan for all.

This policy brief reviews existing international best practices in the creation of national SDG strategies, both in terms of the development process and the content of the strategies. It is based on interviewing 13 experts from 12 countries, including staff from national SDG units and national civil society SDG networks. The policy brief also draws on the research carried out by the 1st and 2nd editions of the "[Progressing national SDGs implementation](#)" reports which together looked at over 60 VNR reports for 2016 and 2017 HLPF- the 2017 report was published by the Canadian Council for International Cooperation but supported by a range of civil society organizations.

The brief will outline the following:

- the importance of including the SDG principles in the national strategy process,
- the criteria used to identify international best practices, and which should be considered for Canada's national SDG strategy process and content design,
- best practice processes for creating a national implementation strategy, and
- best practice examples of national strategy document content, with detailed appendices providing the menu of country examples that these best practices were drawn from.

The brief concludes with targeted recommendations for how Canada can draw on these best practice examples to create an innovative national SDG strategy that engages a diversity of Canadian stakeholders and fosters a whole-of-Canada approach to achieving the SDGs.

National Strategy: *The plan or roadmap that the government intends to follow to achieve the SDGs in a timely and effective manner.*

National Priorities: *Curated foci of a country and its National SDG Strategy. Are general, indicating in broad strokes where the country would like to advance.*

Even though high-level and thematic, national priorities are dependant on each country's specific needs/desires, and in terms of Agenda 2030, acknowledge that while it is universal, every country has different national realities, capacities and levels of development.

National priorities help generate ownership, adapt the goals to country-specific contexts, and ensure relevance of the 2030 Agenda at the local level.

Target: *a specific and measurable objective toward which actionable efforts are directed*

Indicator: *a measurement that describes the state of something, in this case, an indicator is the measuring instrument or trend that can gauge progress toward a target and goal*

Example: In the case of Japan one of their 8 **national priorities** is “empowerment of all people.” One of the **targets** under this priority could be to reduce overworking to citizens only working a maximum of 40 hours per week. An **indicator** example for this target could be the percentage of workers who work less than 40 hours per week

Section 3: Underlying Tenets of the SDGs

Full realization of the Sustainable Development Goals is impossible if the fundamental tenets driving Agenda 2030 are not reflected in Canada's national strategy. These include:

- **Universal:** applicable to everyone, in every country, including Canada
- **Integrated and Indivisible:** the achievement of any goal is linked to the achievement of others
- **Aspirational:** acknowledge the need to move beyond "business as usual" and seek transformative solutions
- **Leave No One Behind:** success depends particularly on the inclusion of, and change for, the poorest and most vulnerable, promoting their inherent dignity and human rights.
- **Planetary Boundaries:** ensuring the SDGs are achieved while protecting the planet from degradation and climate change- not exceeding the limits or boundaries that our planet can handle.
- **Intergenerational Responsibility:** Treating the earth as shared with future generations, not merely a resource for the current generation, and working between the generations to achieve goals.

The transformational nature of the SDGs is in large part driven by these tenets, which any national strategy should reflect if it is to achieve the Agenda in its entirety. Applied to the Canadian context, a SDG strategy must be:

- **Universal:** engage a wide variety of Pan-Canadian stakeholders in every step of its development and implementation. In addition, include global responsibilities as part of our own national priorities, as the SDGs are global goals that apply to all people in all places.
- **Integrated and Indivisible:** incorporate multiple policy domains, government levels and stakeholders, addressing the interjurisdictional nature of the issues that the SDGs cover
- **Aspirational:** move beyond existing processes and norms, integrating forgotten voices and including ambitious targets with bold, innovative plans to achieve them that recognize that time is of the essence
- **Leave No One Behind:** the government has committed to leaving no one behind. This means they must ensure the voices and desires of marginalized people, who could participate in, contribute to and benefit most from SDG realization, are not only prioritized, but fully integrated in development and implementation. An SDG strategy must start with areas where Canada is most behind in meeting its targets if it is to truly progress in this area. It is especially important that the implementation of the SDGs are in-line with the ongoing reconciliation process with Canada's indigenous peoples.
- **Planetary Boundaries:** ensure that planetary boundaries are not surpassed in the process of implementing the SDGs

- **Intergenerational Responsibility:** we must make decisions about the SDGs while considering the long-term impact of our decisions on future generations and we must bring all generations into the development process

To ignore the key principles of the 2030 Agenda would be to leave out an integral part of what makes the SDG's so revolutionary. Including them allows us to draw on the strengths of the SDGs, resulting in a more effective overall strategy.

Section 4: Criteria*

Criteria for determining best practices in the development of national SDG strategies can be divided into two categories: i) criteria for how to create a national SDG strategy (process criteria), and ii) criteria for what a national SDG strategy should address and contain (content criteria). By reviewing existing research literature on national adoption of Agenda 2030 and SDG implementation the following criteria were identified:

Process Criteria

1. Does the process involve widespread engagement and awareness raising about the SDGs? (Bond p.4)
2. Is there an attempt to do a baseline analysis and identify gaps? (Getting Started with The SDGs chpt. 2)
3. Are national priorities identified that can inform the strategy? (Bond, p. 6)
4. Are national priority consultations meaningful with a wide range of diverse stakeholders? (Bond, p. 4)
5. Is there special consideration for sub-national and Indigenous consultations? (Brookings p. 16 & 19)
6. Does the strategy have a plan for socializing the goals? I.e. fostering a process that generates ownership over the targets and goals (Progressing national SDGs Implementation p.4)

Content Criteria

1. Does the strategy contain national targets that are realistic but ambitious with consideration of sub-national target setting and disaggregated data? (Getting started with the SDGS, p.25)
2. Does the strategy embrace a timeline for realizing the targets that is realistic? (Getting started with the SDGs. p.9)
3. Does the strategy include a monitoring and evaluation plan which draws on strong data and indicators?
4. Does the strategy incorporate environmental, social, economic, peace, partnership as well as domestic and international policy domains? (Brookings, p. 17)
5. Is there a clear alignment between national and subnational priorities and the SDGs? (UNDG-Tailoring SDG To National, Sub-national And Local Contexts, para. 27)

*See Appendix A for a full description of criteria and rationale for selection

Section 5: Summary of Best Practices

Creating a National SDG Implementation Strategy

This brief identifies a number of countries who have demonstrated best practices around the **process** of creating an SDG Strategy. There are 7 countries identified that demonstrate best practices in one or more of these areas: inclusion of stakeholders throughout the process, using baseline data to identify gaps, widespread engagement, socializing the goals, national priority setting and special considerations for Indigenous groups and minorities. A detailed review of these best practice countries and their strategy development processes can be found in Appendix B.

Overall there were many commonalities among these seven countries and their strategy development processes. The common development process includes identifying gaps, establishing national priorities, developing a timeline and establishing indicators/targets- although this structure varied depending on the country. The consultations include holding between one to three consultations with stakeholders during at least one stage in the strategy development. These consultations included setting the national priorities prior to the strategy creation, negotiations for creating the strategy, and providing feedback on the strategy or a component of it. National priorities or themes were set by the majority of the countries early in the strategy development process. The setting of the national priorities usually included doing a gap analysis and identifying what is important to citizens. Another common action by many of the countries was localizing the goals, indicators and targets. The process of setting targets and indicators begins with the initial baseline analysis that reveals gaps, then the priorities are set, and following is the identification of targets and indicators which fulfill those priorities.

Inclusion of Stakeholders throughout the Process

Brazil used a range of different consultation methods throughout the development of their strategy such as small in-person consultations held throughout the country and online public consultations. Participants in these consultations included the National Commission of the SDGs, which is a permanent body linked to their country's SDG Unit and is made up of a range of different stakeholders including civil society organizations, faith-based groups, private sector and academia. In-person consultations were also carried out nationally with a broader range of stakeholder groups, including local governments in order to create the strategy's long-term plan. After the indicators were set, a public online engagement site was created where anyone could give feedback on the indicators. This feedback was also used in developing the strategy's long-term plan.

Development of Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles are the basis by which the entire strategy is led. Guiding principles identify the ideals that should be upheld throughout strategy development. Japan used a comprehensive method of establishing guiding principles for implementation including universality, inclusiveness,

participatory, integration, transparency and accountability. The guiding principles were established through a series of roundtables over three months with civil society organizations, academia, the private sector and international organizations. Indonesia adopted guiding principles to ensure the implementation process was inclusive, participatory and transparent.

National Priorities Set

National Priorities are general and indicate the aspirations of a country, they are thematic and dependent on the needs of that country. Based on the previously established guiding principles, Japan then developed eight national priorities, which were clustered thematically to create policy measures and ensure action. These national priorities were integral to setting targets and goals during the strategy development process. Germany included the international aspect of the SDGs by including global responsibilities as one of their national priorities. Many countries strategies have focused on an inward domestic focus but this international outward acknowledgement is important to achieving the goals.

Widespread engagement

Finland is an impressive example of creating widespread engagement and awareness raising for the SDGs during the strategy development process. As part of the process, the government created a website where anyone (organization or person) could commit to implementing a goal or goals in their own life or work. These commitments were made available publicly so participants could be held accountable to their commitments.

Special Considerations for Indigenous groups and Minorities

In Finland, the National Commission for Sustainable Development has the responsibility of implementing the SDGs and creating the strategy. Indigenous peoples, refugees and minority groups are all part of this National Commission, which is the most central and important body for SDG implementation.

Use of Baseline Data

Sweden conducted a baseline analysis exploring where they were in terms of achieving the SDGs and where there were gaps. From this analysis, the strategy was developed, indicators were set and the statistical agency was strengthened to continue reporting. This baseline analysis was done early in the strategy development process to ensure that the data could be used in developing the national priorities and roadmap.

Socializing the goals

Colombia has used a process of socializing the goals by laying out in the strategy different ways of understanding development held by indigenous communities. Columbia has committed to experimenting with different indicators and ways of collecting data to ensure sensitivity to a diversity of worldviews.

National SDG Implementation Strategy Content

This brief identifies a number of countries who have demonstrated best practices around the **content** within an SDG Strategy. There are eight countries identified that demonstrate best practices in one or more of these areas: a reasonable timeline, a monitoring and evaluation process, sub-national target setting, wide range of political domains covered and localization of the goals including sub-national and national priorities. A detailed review of these best practice countries and their strategy content can be found in Appendix B.

The main commonality between most of the strategies is the inclusion of a process for monitoring and evaluation to assess how the country is reaching the SDGs. Another very common component is the inclusion of a wide range of political domains in terms of who is responsible and accountable for achieving the SDGs. For federal governments, sub-national target setting is seen as very important. Finally, for all countries, socializing the goals has been a prominent component. All strategies touch on the timeline of 2030 but many have set out a more detailed schedule for implementation.

Monitoring and Review

Finland's strategy clearly lays out a monitoring and review mechanism to follow-up on the SDG process. The SDG implementation is reviewed yearly and government officials participate in a retreat once a year to reflect on SDG implementation. In Belgium, there is a reporting period annually in which all stakeholders participate in a review of the implementation strategy. All of the responsible bodies in Belgium report on the implementation twice per government term.

Localization of the goals

Sweden has used a method for sub-national target setting that includes localized implementation in municipalities through voluntary key indicators. This has been an effective method of sub-national target setting to ensure cohesion while not undermining other levels of government where they do not have jurisdiction. Since the indicators are "voluntary" municipalities are free to participate or not.

Germany has included a detailed account of how the 17 goals will be reached within the national context in their strategy which focuses on national priorities and identifies which ministries are responsible. This process of localizing the goals is important to ensure the goals are met within the German context. In Colombia the strategy includes the 111 SDG targets that were selected and aligned to national, regional and local governments. This process helped all Columbia governments understand which goals applied to them and how they fit into their jurisdictional context.

Wide range of political domains

Both Germany and Finland are examples of how a wide range of political domains are included in implementation and strategies. Germany has laid out the many different policy agencies that will be responsible for implementing the goals related to the national strategy. The inclusion of a wide

range of political domains ensures coherence and accountability. Finland's strategy defines all actors that will be responsible for implementation. This includes the wide range of political actors and domains involved, allowing for coordination and effective management. For example, the Finnish government has been very diligent to include the Ministry of Finance as having a key role in implementation.

Timeline

Nigeria uses a method of incorporating their SDG strategy into both their medium and long-term national plans to ensure a timely implementation of the SDGs. The medium-term plan runs from 2017-2020 and the long-term plan runs 2020-2030.

Section 6: Canadian Context

There is considerable work being done at the governmental level to move Canada towards SDG achievement. This work should be highlighted in Canada's SDG strategy, as well as linking together all of the policy frameworks and strategies that are progressing on the SDGs. In highlighting areas of advancement, Canada's strategy should also identify gaps and where further acceleration and work needs to be done. Not only is this process important for developing a national vision but it also creates ownership across the country.

Specifically, in regards to the development of a Canadian SDG strategy, progress includes:

- Working with Canada's statistical agency to track progress on reaching the goals (Canada's VNR).
- Departments have also been tasked with seeing where their policies and actions align with the 2030 Agenda.

Although there have been efforts to begin the strategy development there is still much to be done including:

- Public consultations
- Priority setting
- Target setting
- Outlining the role of stakeholder
- Partnerships with Indigenous communities
- Monitoring and evaluation guidelines
- Sub-national inclusion

In regards to public consultations, some previous strategy and policy development in Canada has made use of citizen and organization consultation. These mechanisms are important to take into consideration because existing consultation methods exist and can be drawn on in the development of a national strategy. See *Appendix C* for a more detailed look at Canada's past strategy consultation methods.

Section 7: Recommendations

- **The SDG Implementation Strategy development process should be extensive and inclusive.** From the beginning, the process should include both online and offline elements and should be undertaken in partnership across the federal government as well as with an SDG Advisory Council made up of civil society coalitions, subnational governments, the private sector, and academia.
- **The government should adopt a set of guiding principles - a proven best practice - to guide all priority setting, consultation and engagement.** The guiding principles should be established through a series of consultations with diverse stakeholders and will help guide the development of national priorities while also ensuring that the national implementation strategy is a cohesive strategy that ties Canada's existing policy frameworks together.
- **The Government of Canada should conduct a baseline gap analysis early in the strategy development process to determine Canada's status on the goals.** Based on the baseline analysis and gaps identified, Canada will then be able to develop national priorities intended to accelerate action around gaps. This baseline analysis should be done early in the strategy development process to ensure that the data could be used in developing the national priorities and roadmap.
- **The government should develop national priorities in consultation with key stakeholder networks and across levels of government.** The development of national priorities should take into account existing federal and provincial policies that have already begun to identify priorities and set targets. Examples include the Feminist International Assistance Policy, Federal Sustainable Development Strategy, the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy, and several provincial poverty reduction strategies.
 - **It is critical to coordinate with subnational governments when developing the implementation strategy due to jurisdictional responsibilities around several of the targets/indicators.** The alignment of provincial, and even municipal, sustainability policies, subnational targets and strategies must be incorporated into a national implementation strategy in order to ensure a smooth multi-directional implementation process. A forthcoming brief in this series will further discuss localizing the goals.
- **The government should establish an SDG Advisory Council comprised of a range of different stakeholders - either individuals or subject matter networks.** The Advisory Council should include civil society networks, Indigenous groups, refugee and minority groups, youth, the private sector, and academia. This SDG Advisory Council should be consulted with in-person and online in all steps of the SDG Implementation strategy. A future brief will further describe Stakeholder Engagement best practices.

- It is important to note early in the strategy development engagement process that, based on Canada’s colonial history, and in the spirit of reconciliation, **Indigenous Peoples should be standing members of the SDG Advisory Council and should be consulted independently on all development issues.** Special consideration should also be given to Indigenous approaches/definitions of sustainability and these approaches should be incorporated into all planning stages.
- **The National Implementation Strategy should include mechanisms to support widespread engagement and awareness raising.** A future brief in this series will describe best practices for awareness raising, but it is important to note here that all planning around the topic should consider diverse perspectives and backgrounds.
- **The Implementation Strategy should include methods of monitoring and review that go beyond traditional statistics gathering to incorporate stakeholder expectations determined through consultation.** A future brief in this series on Monitoring and Evaluation will describe possible Canada's best practices.

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