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Mechanisms to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Caribbean

Sidonia McKenzie
Abdullahi Abdulkadri



UNITED NATIONS



FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT WITH EQUALITY

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implementation of the
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in the Caribbean**

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Abstract

Almost two years have elapsed since the launch of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the pace of implementation in the Caribbean has remained slow. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has identified a lack of national institutional frameworks to support SDG implementation in most countries as a major factor in the slow pace of implementation. This study shows that Member States that have formalized an institutional arrangement for SDG implementation have recorded appreciable progress in mainstreaming the SDGs and in building national ownership of the global agenda. A template for implementing an institutional framework for SDG implementation in the remaining countries has been presented in this study. The study also highlights the critical role played by data in planning for sustainable development and calls for a renewed focus to strengthen statistical capacities in the Caribbean to support the follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda.

Introduction

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by 193 Heads of Governments at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 represented a renewed effort by world leaders to chart a global path for development that is inclusive and sustainable. The 2030 Agenda represents a holistic approach to transforming the world and is designed as a plan of action for addressing the development challenges that affect humanity and the planet. This plan of action focuses on the following areas of critical importance – ensuring human dignity, protecting the planet, achieving prosperity, fostering peace, and building partnerships. As its bedrock, the plan encompasses a comprehensive set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.¹

Drawing from the lessons learned from implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the primary responsibility for economic and social development lies with individual countries but also acknowledges the differences in national circumstances, as well as capacities and levels of development. It emphasizes national ownership and leadership as a requisite condition for successful implementation of the SDGs and tasks Governments with the primary responsibility for follow-up and review of the progress towards the attainment of the Goals and their associated targets. In this context, the important role that national policies and development priorities play cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, within the global and regional frameworks, mechanisms exist to support Member States in the SDG implementation and follow-up and review processes. These include the High Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) at the global level and the Forum for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development at the regional level. At the national level, countries are expected to set up their national and sub-national forums as part of this system of implementation and follow-up and review mechanisms.

Since the 2030 Agenda came into effect on 1 January 2016, the HLPF has held two annual meetings under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

¹ See United Nations (2015), *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* A/RES/70/1 for more information on each of the 17 goals. The SDGs build upon the progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but go well beyond poverty eradication to include a broader agenda that encompasses the social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainable development that are relevant to both the developing and developed countries.

These meetings facilitated the presentation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) by Member States on their progress in implementing the SDGs. The VNRs that have thus far been presented by countries focused mainly on the steps taken to mainstream the SDGs in the national context and the anticipated challenges with implementing the Goals. By and large, Member States identified the establishment or designation of a national mechanism for SDG implementation as a key success factor in mainstreaming the SDGs and towards achieving national ownership of the global agenda.^{2,3}

In the Caribbean subregion, SDG mainstreaming has chiefly been done by aligning the SDGs with national development plans. While progress in this area has been uneven across Member States, the region has a few examples worthy of commendation. Jamaica's national development plan – the Vision 2030 Jamaica – which was adopted in 2009 predates the SDGs. However, the country has recorded significant achievement in ensuring that Vision 2030 Jamaica is well-aligned with the SDGs. On another front, Aruba has institutionalized its Sustainable Development Goals Commission, with functional Working Groups, as the national mechanism for SDG implementation in the country. The significance of the 2030 Agenda calls for this level of national ownership which signifies to all stakeholders that the government is committed to the global agenda in synergy with national development priorities.

Taking a broader view, the mainstreaming of the SDGs in the Caribbean requires a more visible collective effort. Critical to this is strong political leadership, championing a national vision for sustainable development that is based on identified national development priorities, within the context of the economic, social, and environmental realities and needs of each country. These priorities, no matter how broadly or narrowly defined, will fit within the highlighted areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet covered by the 2030 Agenda and as identified in the United Nations General Assembly's Resolution⁴ in which the 2030 Agenda was adopted. As outlined in that Resolution, the SDGs and associated target will stimulate actions in the following areas (United Nations, 2015b, p. 2):

- **People:** to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment;
- **Planet:** to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations;
- **Prosperity:** to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature;
- **Justice:** to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development; and
- **Partnership:** to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

Within this context, the SDGs provide an important international development platform for contextualizing the sustainable development of Caribbean countries. The universal framework of the 2030 Agenda incorporates the vulnerabilities and realities of the subregion across the three dimensions of sustainable development and serves as a guiding framework for countries to transition from traditional means of development to a more sustainable development trajectory that integrates the economic, social and environmental dimensions in an indivisible manner. However, in seizing the opportunities presented by the 2030 Agenda, a coherent and institutionalized approach to long-term development planning must

² See Synthesis of Voluntary National Reviews 2016 [online]://https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/127761701030E_2016_VNR_Synthesis_Report_ver3.pdf.

³ See 2017 Voluntary National Reviews: Compilation of Main Messages [online]://https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17035Compilation_of_Main_Messages_from_2017_VNRs.pdf.

⁴ UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1.

be adopted and implemented at the national level given that the starting point in the successful implementation of the SDGs is national ownership through SDG mainstreaming.

ECLAC is playing a key role towards ensuring that the Caribbean does not lag behind in the early implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. In February 2016, ECLAC organized a Caribbean Symposium on mainstreaming the SDGs in national development planning in Kingston, Jamaica to discuss challenges to the early implementation of the SDGs in the subregion. At this meeting, Member States identified the obstacles to the smooth implementation of the SDGs at the national level. These include the lack of institutional frameworks for national ownership of the global agenda, limited capacity for planning and implementing comprehensive and integrated national development plans, and limited data to inform sustainable national development. ECLAC organized a follow-up workshop to accelerate SDG implementation in the Caribbean in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, in May 2017, to highlight gaps in development planning in the subregion and the challenges these gaps could pose to the successful implementation of the SDGs. Considering the fact that most Caribbean countries do not have a current long-term national development plan to which the SDGs could be mainstreamed, the need to address the gaps in development planning, and in a timely manner too, are even more compelling.

To date, three Caribbean countries – Aruba, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago – have completed a United Nations Development Programme-led Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) exercise and more countries have initiated or are in the process of initiating a MAPS mission. This is a welcome development that would result in a SDG Roadmap for the country to implement. The implementation of this roadmap, however, hinges on the existence of a mechanism at the national level that is multisectoral, institutionalized, and empowered to deliver on a clear mandate of implementing, following-up and reviewing the different SDG processes in the country.

In contributing to ECLAC's streams of technical and analytical work aimed at providing support to countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in relation to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, this study examines the critical issues of the institutional mechanism and data systems for SDG implementation in the Caribbean with a view to highlight initial successes recorded for replication by other countries in the subregion. Along this line, the report outlines the importance of long-term national development planning in SDG mainstreaming and highlights the institutional arrangements that have been put in place in the subregion for implementing the SDGs. The issue of data for development planning is addressed by focusing on the role of data in planning, implementation and follow-up and review of the SDGs. The study includes a few recommendations on accelerating the implementation of the SDGs in Caribbean countries.

I. Mainstreaming the SDGs in national development plans

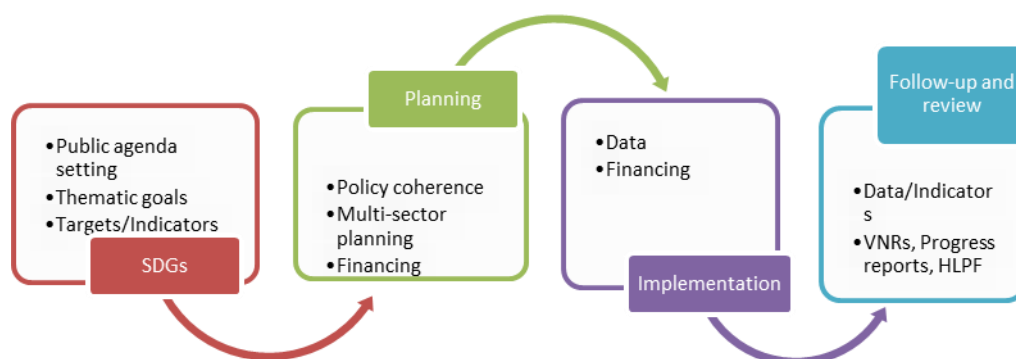
Almost two years after the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the associated Sustainable Development Goals came into effect as the new global development platform, many countries in the Caribbean are still grappling with the key issue of how to align policies and practices with the SDGs. Is there a blueprint that should be followed to implement and achieve such an ambitious agenda at the national level? The answer is probably no. The SDG framework is transformative in nature and considers the varying degrees of national capacities, challenges, and levels of development in promoting national ownership of the global agenda. Therefore, each country will need to design its own mechanism for implementing the SDGs.

The SDG implementation mechanisms have been instituted in the Caribbean involve creating a brand new organization (commission), transforming existing institutions into a new institutional arrangement, or assigning new implementation and coordination tasks to an existing agency of the government. Across these different arrangements, development planning remains a common denominator for effective localization and successful implementation of the SDGs.

Planning is a continuous process of improvement that provides a guiding light to better steer and co-ordinate national development objectives and goals around a long-term common vision. In the context of the SDG framework, it includes the processes and institutional arrangements that will channel the collective activities of stakeholders towards achieving the set goals and targets.⁵ It is, therefore, regarded as one of the fundamental stages in the SDG policy planning and implementation cycle (see Figure 1). Undoubtedly, given the unprecedented scope and significance of the 2030 Agenda, the planning and national development priority setting process is intensive and wide-ranging, but will be examined through policy coherence, multi-sectoral planning, and financing in the subsequent sub-section.

⁵ Kanuri, Revi, Espey, & Kuhle, 2016.

Figure 1
Policy Structure for the 2030 Agenda and the associated SDGs



Source: United Nations Development Group (UNDG), on *Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Interim Reference Guide to UN Country Teams, 2015.

A. Policy coherence

Policy coherence is one of the underlying principles in the mainstreaming of the SDGs in national development plans and has been identified as an important systemic issue under SDG 17 on means of implementation (Target 17.14: Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines policy coherence as “the systemic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives”.⁶ Accordingly, policy coherence may be viewed as a direct planning tool to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development as well as governance at all stages of national policy making. It involves managing potential conflicts and identifying tradeoffs to ensure that progress in achieving one target does not hinder the progress for other targets.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Caribbean to be pursued in tandem with other international agreements, notably the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway,⁷ the Addis Ababa Action Agenda,⁸ The Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Within the Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) framework of the OECD, the complementary and mutually reinforcing aspects of these international commitments are coordinated to ensure that policies and plans are “fit for purpose” and that implementation of the SDGs does not occur at the expense of these other international agreements. The framework has eight building blocks (see Box 1).

These building block are well-accomodated within MAPS which is increasingly being used as a tool for SDG mainstreaming in the Caribbean. As Figure 1 shows, the process of mainstreaming the SDGs involves aligning the Goals and associated targets with the national planning mechanisms that include policy coherence, implementing the aligned plan through evidence (data) and financing, and

⁶ OECD, 2016.

⁷ This is a key inter-governmental agreement aimed to address the sustainable development challenges that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) continue to face. Member countries include: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. Curaçao is listed as an associate member country. See [online] <http://www.sids2014.org/index.php?menu=1537>.

⁸ The Addis Ababa Action Agenda provides a foundation for implementing the 2030 Agenda by addressing all sources of financing and covers co-operation on a range of issues including technology, science, innovation, trade, and capacity building (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015).

following-up of the implementation of the plan and reviewing the attainment of the Goals, again through evidence, information-sharing and peer-learning.

Box 1

The eight building blocks of policy coherence for mainstreaming SDG implementation

Political commitment and leadership- to guide 'whole-of-government' action and translate commitment on SDG into concrete and coherent measures at the local, national, and international levels.

Integrated approaches to implementation- to consider systematically inter-linkages between economic, social, and environmental policy areas as well as ensure consistency with international engagement before making decisions.

Inter-generational timeframe- to make informed choices about sustainable development considering the long-term impact of policy decisions on the well-being of future generations.

Analyses and assessments of potential policy effects- to provide evidence on the potential negative or positive impacts on the well-being of people at the domestic level and in other countries to inform decision-making.

Policy and institutional co-ordination- to resolve conflicts of interest or inconsistencies between priorities and policies.

Local and regional involvement- to deliver the economic, social, and environmental transformation needed for achieving the SDGs and to ensure that no one is left behind.

Stakeholder participation- to make sure that SDGs are owned by people, diverse actions are aligned, and resources and knowledge for sustainable development are mobilized.

Monitoring and reporting- to better understand where there has been progress or lack of it and why, and where further action is needed.

Source: (OECD, 2017).

B. Multi-sectoral planning

Although the institutional mechanism adopted in every country will involve the designation of a coordinating body, mainstreaming the SDGs at the national level goes well beyond the responsibility of one single ministry. Multi-sectoral planning involves a wide range of stakeholders, which allows for an inclusive approach to policy planning. In addition, it addresses the multi-dimensional and crosscutting issues in the 2030 Agenda, such as climate change and environmental vulnerability, which require harmonization across a number of different sectors to be achieved. This is embodied in SDG target 16.7, which calls for “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels”. Including and incorporating a wide range of government agencies and non-state actors⁹ facilitate an inclusive and participatory approach to sustainable development. Moreover, localizing the 2030 Agenda is essential to raising public awareness and creating national ownership of the SDGs.

Across the region, early efforts of countries that have begun localizing the SDGs have focused on establishing a multi-stakeholder coordination framework to ensure long-term engagement and commitment to the SDGs. In Cuba for example, the institutional framework for mainstreaming the SDGs is a national working group that is led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and includes all ministries and

⁹ Non-state actors are non-sovereign entities that exercise significant economic, political, and social roles in development at national, and in some cases international levels without any direct obligatory directions from a state (see <https://nonstateactorsafrica.wikispaces.com/Operational+Definitions> and (Bhamra, Nagrath, & Niazi, 2015). They may include multinational corporations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and super-empowered individuals.

departments of State, but also involves several actors from academia and civil society.¹⁰ In Jamaica, the National 2030 Agenda Oversight Committee represents the national governance framework for SDG implementation and consists of the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the Statistical Institute of Jamaica, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade as the National SDGs Core-Group. The arrangement also includes Vision 2030 Jamaica Thematic Working Groups with participation of ministries, departments and agencies of the Government of Jamaica, as well as representatives of civil society, academia and the private sector.¹¹ In Aruba, the SDG National Commission, established by ministerial decree in February 2017, is responsible for SDG coordination and implementation in the country. The Commission is comprised of two national working Groups, the Indicator Working Group and the SDG Awareness and Communication Working Group. Through the coordinating role of the SDG Commission, Aruba has completed its MAPS exercise and is taking steps to implement its SDG Roadmap.

Belize is the first Caribbean country to present its Voluntary National Review to the HLPF in July 2017. The country reported progress in its implementation of an institutional framework for the the SDGs through the creation of the Sustainable Development Unit under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development, and the activation of technical committees and working tables to advance SDG implementation in the country. Notably, the government has adopted programme budgeting to ensure that line ministries make budgetary provisions for the implementation of the Goals. Despite these notable achievements, Belize reported that collaboration and coordination on SDG implementation among stakeholders was still ineffective with remaining challenges in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda being among the political directorate and persisting inadequacy of data for SDG monitoring and evaluation.¹²

The Bahamas, along with Jamaica, are due to present their VNRs to the HLPF in 2018. The Bahamas is also concluding the drafting of a new long-term national development plan – the Vision 2040. The Economic Development and Planning Unit (EDPU) under the Office of the Prime Minister has the dual mandate of preparing the Vision 2040 and coordinating the implementation of the SDG in the Bahamas. This provides for a unique opportunity to integrate the SDGs with national development priorities from the onset and EDPU has implemented a grassroots stakeholder engagement process that is participatory and data-driven to arrive at an integrated draft of the long-term development plan that is expected to be adopted in 2018.

Several other countries are finalizing, drafting, or initiating the process to develop a new long-term national development that incorporates the SDGs. Among these countries are Grenada, Guyana, Sint Maarten, and Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is finalizing the preparation of a new long-term national development plan – the Vision 2030 – and the country has benefitted from the MAPS exercise to ensure a high level of alignment between the plan and the SDGs. Guyana is in the early stages of developing its Green State Development Strategies while Grenada and Sint Maarten are still discussing the arrangement for initiating the development of a new plan. Other countries, perhaps due to their relatively small size, have sought to coordinate the efforts of multiple stakeholders towards the implementation of specific SDG(s). Curacao and Antigua and Barbuda are interesting examples. While Curacao has prioritized four of the 17 SDGs (SDGs 4, 7, 8 and 14) in its National Development Plan 2015-2030, Antigua and Barbuda has focused on SDG 14. At the United Nations Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 held in June 2017, the Antigua and Barbuda government pledged to strengthen legislative frameworks to achieve better control and management of ocean and marine resources. More specifically, the Barbuda Local Government, with the assistance of the Waitt Institute, adopted an ocean and coastal management project entitled ‘Blue Halo Barbuda’. This was implemented at the community level and involved developing and implementing sustainable ocean policies focused on marine spatial planning, sanctuary zones, and fisheries regulations.¹³ However,

¹⁰ ECLAC, 2017.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Belize’s Voluntary National Review for the Sustainable Development Goals 2017. See [online]: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16389Belize.pdf>.

¹³ See [online] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24496Antigua_Barbuda_E.pdf

Barbuda was severely impacted by Hurricane Irma in September 2017. This had dire consequences for sustained livelihood on the island, emphasizing the need, not only to rebuild, but to rebuild in a sustainable manner given the island's vulnerability to extreme weather events.

C. Financing

Financing for development, and in particular financing of the SDGs, cannot be viewed in isolation from other aspects of mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda. In fact, the 2030 Agenda affirms that, “cohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated national financing frameworks, will be at the heart of our efforts”.¹⁴ Therefore, financing is the cornerstone for transforming the SDGs into reality. Allocating resources to implement the 2030 Agenda requires coherence across all planning frameworks so that the SDGs are included in the budgeting process, as has been done in Belize. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda emphasized the need for innovative sources of financing beyond tax collection. The Caribbean subregion will therefore need to be creative in its approach to financing which will allow it to tap into various streams of funding. In addition to improving fiscal management and strengthening domestic resource mobilization, the subregion should recognize the potential of new investment vehicles such as risk mitigation instruments and blended finance instruments, potentially through public private partnerships (PPPs).¹⁵ In particular, blended finance, which combines concessional public finance and expertise from the public and private sector, could be a more viable option for the Caribbean. This type of financing tends to reduce investment-specific risks and incentivize additional private sector funding for sustainable development.

Financing could also be used as a tool to leverage and incentivize additional means of implementation in the context of the region's other international commitments. For example, as evident by the recent devastation of some Caribbean countries by hurricanes Irma and Maria, the effects of the vulnerabilities of Caribbean SIDS to extreme weather events and the impacts of climate change are enormous for these countries to warrant access to thematic financing, such as the Green Climate Fund, which has annual allocations of approximately US\$100 billion for financing climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives.¹⁶ In the light of the region's huge debt burden and fiscal constraints, it is imperative that means of financing the SDGs be non-debt creating.

D. Institutional arrangement for SDG implementation: a template

There are more countries in the Caribbean without a formalized institutional arrangement for implementing the SDGs than are those with a functioning mechanism. This is in part a reflection of the level of development planning in the country and an indication of the challenge that these countries are likely to encounter in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The success stories of SDG implementation so far have involved countries with a designated framework for SDG coordination and implementation. Although these coordinating bodies exist in various forms and complexity, they include certain elements that make them function effectively. A generic template that could be adapted to individual country's circumstances is presented in Figure 2 for consideration by Caribbean countries that are yet to create an institutional framework for SDG implementation.

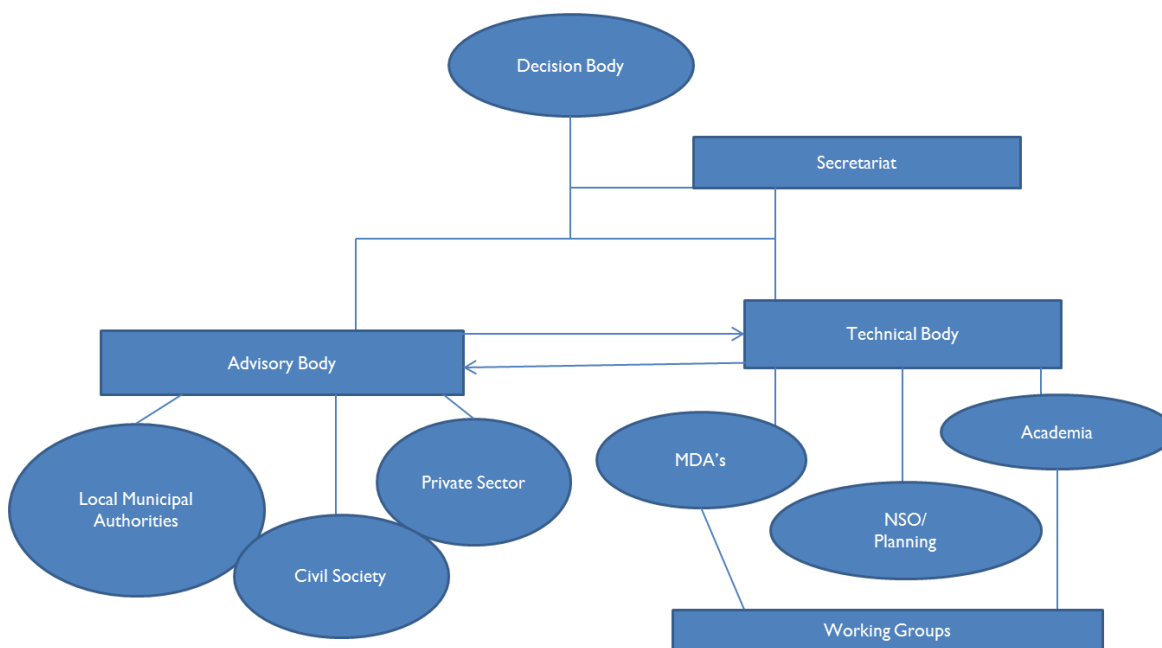
Central to this arrangement is a decision body that is empowered to make decisions on behalf of the government on matters relating to the SDGs and which is set up at the highest political level, where possible. This could be under the Presidency, the Office of the Prime Minister, or the Cabinet. This body should have a secretariat which could be housed in the Ministry, Department or Agency with the mandate for national development planning. Where such mandate resides in the Office of the Prime Minister, then the secretariat should ideally be situated in that office.

¹⁴ See paragraph 63 of United Nations, 2015.

¹⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015

¹⁶ ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, 2015

Figure 2
Template for National SDG Institutional Arrangement



Source: Abdulkadri, Abudullahi, *Formalizing institutional arrangements to mainstream the SDGs and other relevant development platforms in national development processes*, Workshop to accelerate SDG Implementation in the Caribbean, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago: ECLAC Subregional Headquarters, 2017

In this framework, the central decision body will be supported by an advisory body and a technical body. In addition to key public sector representatives, the advisory body will have representation from different stakeholder groups including local or municipal authorities, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations, including civil society organizations, community-based organizations, religious groups and youth organizations. The advisory body will serve as the “sounding board” for activities that will be undertaken or prioritized and will play a key role in raising awareness about and advocating for the SDGs in their different constituencies, contributing to SDG financing, and most of all, ensuring that no one is left behind in the implementation of the SDGs. On the other hand, the technical body will consist of thematic experts from government ministries, departments, and agencies, and at the minimum must include the agency with responsibility for planning and the country’s National Statistical Office. Representatives from the academic community should also be part of the technical body. The technical group will have the task of articulating policies, programmes, and projects that are most likely to result in the attainment of the SDGs and the mechanism of implementation using the best available evidence. In executing this task, the technical body may create sub-committees or working groups along thematic lines or task-based. In whatever form the advisory and technical bodies are established, there should be cross fertilization of ideas by providing for a limited number of individuals or agencies to be represented on both organs.

E. Conclusion

The pace of implementation in the Caribbean has remained slow due to the lack of a national institutional framework for SDG implementation in many countries. It is, therefore, critical that a clear institutional arrangement for SDG implementation be defined at the national level to ensure national ownership of the 2030 Agenda and to promote a coordinated approach to the implementation of the SDGs. Among the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries, Aruba, the Bahamas, Belize, and Jamaica have made significant strides in their national mainstreaming of the SDGs. What is common to these countries is the existence of a functioning national institutional framework for SDG implementation. Other countries of the Caribbean could benefit from their mechanisms.

At a more general level, a generic template of institutional arrangement for SDG implementation has been presented in this section for consideration for adoption and modification by Caribbean countries that are yet to establish an institutional framework. Implementing the framework or its variant will assist in accelerating the pace of implementation of the SDGs in the subregion.

II. The role of data in planning, implementation and follow-up and review of the SDGs

The MDGs were, in their own right, ground-breaking in improving the availability and quality of data for monitoring development progress in developing countries (Chen and others, 2013). However, with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the demands for data will even be greater. Additional to the wide scope of coverage of the, economic, social, and environmental dimensions, the 2030 Agenda promises to ‘leave no one behind’. This implies monitoring the progress of all socio-economic groups, particularly the most vulnerable in the society, in a disaggregated and stratified way to ensure that the well-being of all people is measured. Along this line, “quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind”. This will require a significant increase in the quality, type, and speed of data available, which is the idea behind the phrase ‘data revolution’, coined by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons in 2013.¹⁷ The data revolution presents new opportunities to enhance the capacity to generate, use and share data. Advances in digital technologies and the proliferation of ‘big data’, including geo-spatial data, present new opportunities for countries to develop robust data systems to enhance national capacities for data-driven decision making.

A. The role of data

Monitoring and reporting on the comprehensive suite of SDG targets and indicators will require a vast amount of statistics and data at the local, national, regional, and global levels. The processing of these data must be done in a timely manner to inform policy decisions. As noted in Chapter I, effective planning is a crucial step in the mainstreaming of the SDGs and planning is intrinsically linked to the availability of high-quality and timely data. Evidence-based planning allows governments and stakeholders to utilize the latest available data to establish a baseline or to take stock of where the country stands, the potential priority areas, where institutional capacity may be insufficient, and the well-being of different socio-economic groups in the society in as close to real time as possible (Sustainable

¹⁷ High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda , 2013.

Development Solutions Network, 2015). It is true that in order to address the needs of ‘those left behind’, we first must be able to quantify them. For this reason, a data-driven SDG planning process is necessary to help countries discern how to catalyze policy actions and resources to facilitate rapid progress.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that each country has its own national circumstances and priorities, which will shape how the SDGs are incorporated into national development strategies and policies. However, for many countries, mainstreaming and tracking progress on the SDGs will require substantial improvements in national statistical capacities. In other words, National Statistical Systems (NSS), including National Statistical Offices (NSOs), need to be strengthened to integrate new data sources, such as geospatial data and statistics, with existing data sources for collecting high-frequency and high-quality data. This need for strengthening capacity building and data collection in Member States was emphasized in the 2030 Agenda¹⁸ and further elaborated in the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. This global plan seeks to provide a framework for discussion on planning and implementation of statistical capacity building necessary to achieve the scope and intent of the 2030 Agenda and beyond (HLG-PCCB, 2017).

Once national and subnational governments have established priority goals and targets, data become the necessary input for preparing national indicators and setting baselines. These indicators should build upon existing monitoring systems and should fall within global SDG indicator framework. The process of preparing national indicators and setting baselines form the backbone of monitoring progress towards the SDGs at the local, national, regional, and global levels. This was also emphasized in the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, which mentioned that national indicators and the supporting data serve as a starting point needed for the global indicator framework. Moreover, it was noted that in the absence of reliable country specific data/indicators, the international organization or regional entity that is providing technical assistance should engage in full consultation and coordination with the national statistical office to produce valid estimates. Targets 17.16¹⁹ and 17.17²⁰ directly refer to this kind of capacity-building linked to data development through the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. This further drives home the need to develop and strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships, not only at the local level, but also at the global and regional levels.

The follow-up and review process is a management tool and an accountability exercise. The 2030 Agenda explicitly delineates the importance of a follow-up and review framework for the achievement of the SDGs (UN ESCAP, 2016). Follow-up and review is operationalized using a three-tier structure at the national, regional, and global levels. Notably, at the national level, member countries are encouraged to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven”.²¹ At the global level, countries present their VNRs at the HLPF. At the heart of the follow-up and review framework is a data-driven process of three closely intertwined, yet different activities: monitoring, review, and follow-up (UN ESCAP, 2016). Monitoring consists of streamlining institutional systems for data collection and analysis from various sources and producing information in an understandable format for policy makers and other stakeholders. The data harnessed at this stage provides inputs to the review process. The review process synthesizes the information from the monitoring phase and focuses on emerging issues and their implications. It therefore acts as a ‘self-reflection’ or ‘self-assessment’ mechanism through which government and stakeholders’ actions can be stimulated to make any necessary adjustments to the implementation strategies. Follow-up is the engaging aspect of the framework that ensures that the findings and recommendations coming out of the monitoring and review stages are addressed. This may involve defining new indicators or changing implementation, resource allocation or financing strategies at the national, regional, and/or international levels.

¹⁸ See paragraph 57 of United Nations, 2015.

¹⁹ Target 17.16: Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries.

²⁰ Target 17.17: Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

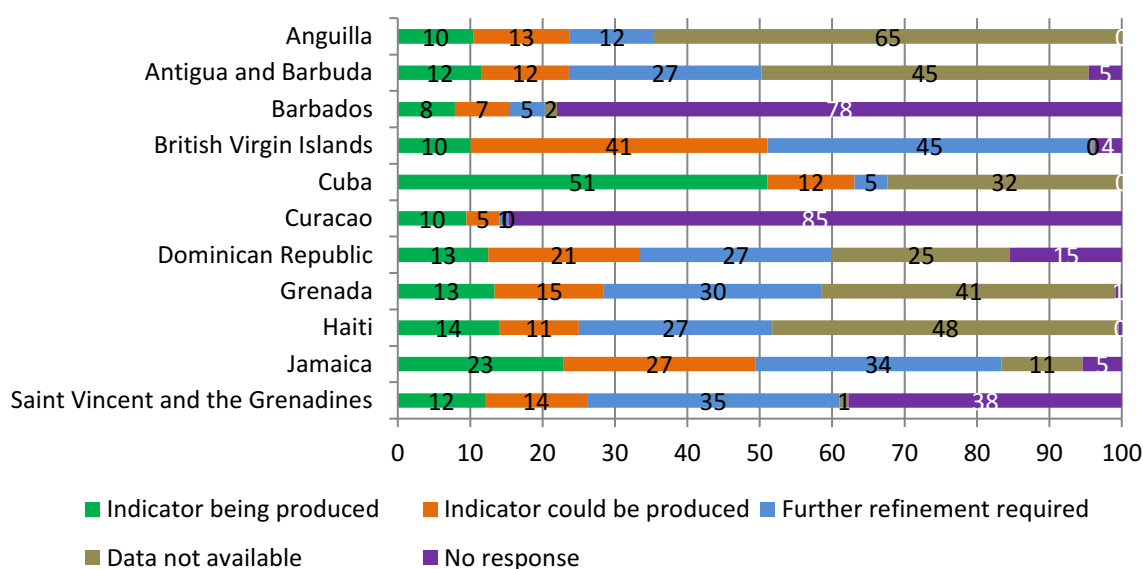
²¹ See paragraph 79 of United Nations, 2015.

B. Data challenges in the Caribbean

There is no question that the SDGs, with 169 targets and more than 230 indicators, will require many different types of data (environmental, demographic, economic, and social) and even data that have never been collected before (the so called Tier III indicators of the global SDG indicator framework). An ECLAC survey of NSOs in the Latin America and Caribbean region carried out in 2016 to determine the national statistical capacities for the production of SDG indicators revealed that no country is currently producing information on 15 of the 169 targets.²² On average, countries of the LAC region signalled that about 50 per cent of the SDG indicators can be retrieved from administrative records while household surveys could provide 28 per cent of the indicators. Summary statistics was identified as another vital source of data, which could calculate eight per cent of the indicators.

A country-by-country analysis of the results of the ECLAC's survey on National Statistical Capacities Questionnaire for the Production of the SDG indicators revealed that among Caribbean countries, the British Virgin Islands, Cuba, and Jamaica are the only country well-placed to produce 50 per cent or more of the SDG indicators from existing data (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Capacity of Caribbean countries to produce data for the SDG indicators
(Percentages)



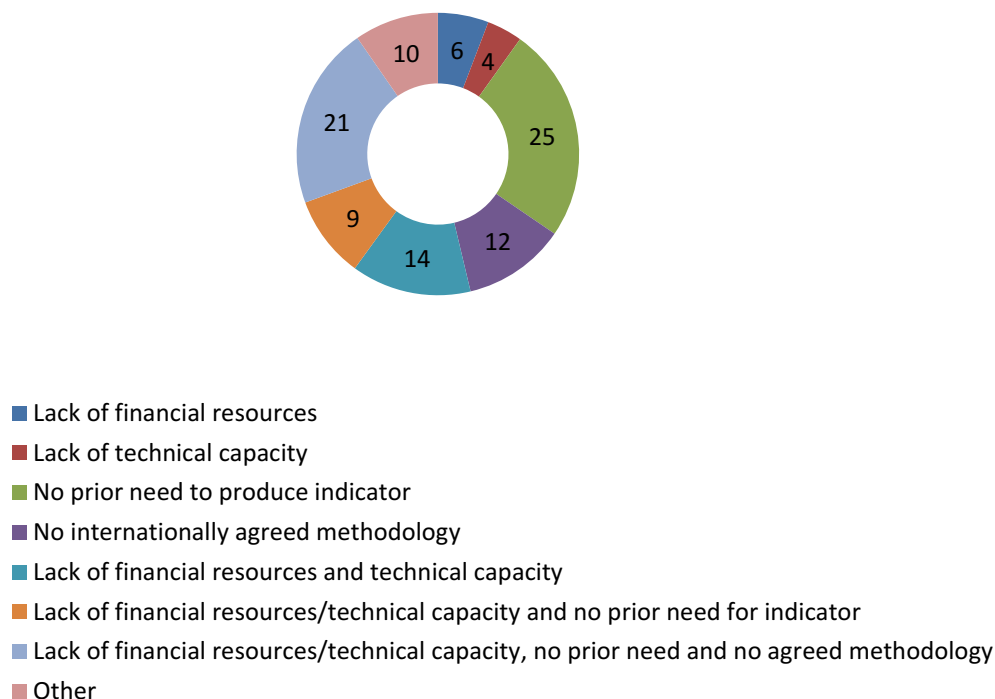
Source: ECLAC database of National Statistical Capacities for the production of the SDG indicators from the global monitoring framework survey, 2017.

The single most cited reason by Caribbean countries for not producing the indicators was that there was no need to collect these data prior to the SDGs (See Figure 4). Therefore, the SDGs present an opportunity to strengthen national statistical capacity to cultivate innovations, collaborations, and synergies across new and existing data ecosystems to improve data availability. Cuba represents a good example in the subregion of how scaling up efforts to improve national statistical capacity can place a country on a path of rapid progression regarding SDG implementation. In terms of actual production of indicators, Cuba currently measures over 50 per cent of the indicators and targets in the global framework. In addition, they can provide technical assistance on capacity building in five areas of the SDGs, namely food security, child mortality, natural disasters, early childhood, and health (ECLAC,

²² See ECLAC, 2017a.

2017a). Especially noteworthy is Cuba's position as the only country, from the Caribbean, that can provide technical cooperation on developing statistics for food security.²³

Figure 4
Reasons for non-production of data for the SDG indicators in the Caribbean
(Percentages)



Source: ECLAC database of National Statistical Capacities for the production of the SDG indicators from the global monitoring framework survey, 2017.

The magnitude of the data gap in the Caribbean is a clear limitation to any analysis of the progress in meeting the SDGs in the subregion. Addressing this challenge is pertinent to not only expediting progress in implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda but also for leveraging international financial resources and mobilizing national budgetary allocations towards sustainable development.

Since the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, global efforts to improve the means of financing the SDGs have increased. Undoubtedly, the key to achieving the intended results of the SDGs in the next 13 years is identifying and then generating the magnitude and type of financing required, particularly at the national and regional levels.

Globally, several estimates for the cost of the SDGs are available but is typically estimated to be between US\$5 – US\$7 trillion annually, a range that is equivalent to more than thirty times the total annual global ODA.²⁴ Of this amount, it is estimated that roughly US\$254 billion is needed to support the proposed 169 targets (Jerven, 2014) and an estimated US\$2 billion to US\$2.25 billion is needed to improve national statistical systems in developing countries, with US\$1 billion sourced from domestic resources. While there are no publicly agreed estimates of the financing gap in the Caribbean region, it is

²³ See ECLAC, 2017a.

²⁴ See <http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/meetTheSDGs/Executive-Summary-achieving-the-sustainable-development-goals.pdf>.

clear that there is a deficit between current expenditures and future requirements.²⁵ Therefore, solely relying on global financing agendas is not sufficient to plug the financing gap. Instead, a bottom-up, holistic, and targeted solution is needed to mobilize domestic resources which also depends on reliable estimates of the cost of implementing the SDGs in the Caribbean.

C. Conclusion

The NSS of Caribbean countries often vary considerably in human capacity, financial resources, and level of autonomy. As a result, they face unique constraints in producing official statistics regularly and timely. The Follow-up and review processes of the 2030 Agenda will place greater demands on these systems, therefore, specific programmes of statistical capacity strengthening will be needed for the subregion to not be left behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

²⁵ Notably, UNCTAD World Investment Report, 2014, estimated an annual funding gap of US\$2.5 trillion in developing countries.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

SDG mainstreaming in national development plans has proven to be a facilitator of early successes in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Caribbean. Improving on the status of SDG implementation across the subregion will therefore require that more Member States implement SDG mainstreaming in national development processes. A starting point would be the establishment of a national institutional framework to coordinate SDG-related activities in each country. To date only a handful of countries have established such a framework. To assist in accelerating the pace of implementation, a generic template of an institutional framework has been proposed in this study. The template could be customized to an individual country's circumstances but the main structure that consists of a decision-making body at the highest level of political authority, an advisory body of different stakeholders, and a technical body of experts should be maintained.

To ensure that the 2030 Agenda's promise to leave no one behind is realised, a concerted focused should be directed at improving the capacities of the National Statistical Offices in the Caribbean to produce adequately disaggregated data that are of high quality, regularly and in a timely fashion. With only three countries currently signaling their ability to produce at least 50 per cent of the global SDG indicators from available data, Caribbean countries have a formidable task ahead in their follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In light of the foregoing, we recommend that Caribbean countries implement the following, if they have not already done so, towards accelerating the implementation of the SDGs in the subregion:

- Establish an institutional framework for SDG implementation;
- Develop and implement a long-term national development plan;
- Mainstream the SDGs in existing national development plan or integrate the SDG in any new development plan being developed; and
- Devote resources to strengthening statistical capacities for long-term sustainable development planning.

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