



CASE STUDY

Institution Building in Pakistan:

Establishment of the SDGs Monitoring and Coordination Unit

Background Information

During the years of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Pakistan kept those efforts separate from their development work. The MDGs were viewed as a UN-driven program that would only be complied with via quadrennial progress reports. Those reports were prepared without a mechanism in place to deliver on the MDGs, and it took six years just to get localization efforts initiated after the MDGs were officially recognized in 2004, so progress was limited. In preparing for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the country's leaders decided to integrate the new goals into their national plans. Doing so would keep the SDGs in focus, centering opportunities and challenges for decision makers.

In the wake of the MDGs, the Pakistani government held discussions with a broad group of stakeholders with the goal of improving coordination and strengthening efforts at the national and local levels in seeking to achieve the country's SDG targets. The process they undertook considered improving the country's data collection capabilities, as well as developing appropriate monitoring mechanisms.

Quote

"We believe the SDGs agenda for development isn't an international agenda; it is our own agenda. It reflects our ambition and desire to give our people better quality of life. Therefore, we must take ownership of SDGs with complete devotion and passion."

-Ahsan Iqbal; Minister of Planning, Development and Reform

Approach, Delivery, & Challenges

In preparing for the SDGs, Pakistan's leaders spent three years working with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to develop the country's Post 2015 Development Agenda. The goal of that work was to learn from the challenges experienced in working with the MDGs, and to use the insights gained through that analysis to guide their entry into the SDGs. That process led Pakistan's leaders to embed the SDGs in the 7 Pillars



of Pakistan's Vision 2025, which included: (1) putting people first, (2) achieving sustained, indigenous, and inclusive growth, (3) democratic governance, institutional reform, and modernization of the public sector, (4) energy, water, and food security, (5) growing the economy via the private sector and entrepreneurship, (6) developing a competitive knowledge economy, and (7) modernizing their transportation infrastructure. The 7 Pillars are viewed as a comprehensive, long-term strategy for inclusive growth and sustainable development. To help deliver on these plans, the SDGs Monitoring and Coordination Unit was created to serve as Pakistan's national coordinating entity, with local units working directly with the individual provinces. Pakistan was the first country to adopt the 2030 Agenda. Its leaders view the SDGs as a path to help achieve the goal of joining the ranks of upper middle-class countries by 2030. After committing to the SDGs, in October 2015 Pakistan launched a 5-year national initiative on the SDGs and in February 2016, Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan's Minister of Planning, Development and Reform, was nominated to be UNDP's champion to promote the SDGs.

Pakistan's leaders view empowering local government units to lead SDG efforts as crucial to achieving the country's goals. Provinces are planning and executing their local work, and they were asked to keep a focus around the goals that are related to social factors. This disaggregation of the whole is believed to be the optimal path towards achieving the targets in sum. For this to work, Pakistan's leaders believe they need to grant greater autonomy to these local units, while also making them responsible for the outcomes.

To aid the disaggregated approach, the SDGs Monitoring and Coordination Unit is establishing special SDG Support Units that will help federal and provincial leaders mainstream and accelerate progress on the SDGs. The federal group will also assist with data collection, resource allocation, analysis, and policy guidance. And three distinct groups have been initiated at the federal to aid coordination. These groups are embedded in the Planning Commission, the Prime Minister's Office, and Parliament. The group within the Planning Commission will oversee implementation in general, while the other units will work on specific issues and ensure that the executive and legislative branches are kept informed and engaged.

At the federal and provincial levels, these units will work with local government groups to plan and implement SDG efforts, while optimizing resource utilization. This effort will focus on four areas: aligning plans and policies to Agenda 2030, strengthening monitoring, reporting and evaluation capacities, directing spending towards SDG necessities, and accelerating progress towards the goals. These groups will also ensure consistent policy consistency and an institutional framework that will provide the necessary collaboration for successful implementation of the SDGs.

At the local level, where SDG implementation efforts will be focused, district level representatives were engaged through a national conference where they had the opportunity to express the priorities of their communities. Education, health, unemployment, and water were the most commonly cited issues. (Pakistan is making significant funding available for the SDGs, with Rs30 billion allocated prime minister's SDG programme and Rs12.5bn each for programs on clean drinking water, as well as electricity for all.) And a lack of restrooms was found to be impacting educational opportunities and outcomes for females.

Data collection and analysis capabilities were recognized as one of Pakistan's biggest challenges around the goals. Of the 230 SDG indicators, Pakistan was not collecting any data for 14 of them. And data for 45% of the indicators was being collected, but not being analyzed. To bridge this gap, Sartaj Aziz, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, has ordered that all the SDG indicators be replicated as national development goals as part of the 2018-2023 five-year plan. Efforts to improve data collection and analysis will be prioritized in the following order: (1) education, (2) health, (3) economic wellbeing, (4) water, (5) peace and security, and (6) affordable energy.

District governments were recognized as lacking the administrative and financial wherewithal necessary to deliver on the goals. And creating awareness of the importance of the SDGs was believed to be crucial. To help with this, Planning Commission authorities are working with local governments to develop projects that align with the SDGs.



Benefits & Lessons Learned

The challenges Pakistan's leaders experienced while working with the MDGs helped them see the critical role local governments need to fill for the country to achieve its SDG targets. In March 2027, the Planning Commission held an event with local government leaders to discuss and plan for the goals. The 75 leaders of local governments in attendance all signed a Declaration calling for the administrative and financial empowerment to enable these leaders to pursue the goals. As their Declaration states, "We, the local leaders, are convinced that by giving specific attention to the localization of all goals, the new agenda will trigger an important transformation in our joint act."

Leaders of provincial Planning and Development departments shared this assessment. One such leader noted that local governments have a critical role to play in the SDGs, stating "they are closer to the people, are aware of the local needs and issues, and easier to hold accountable for failing to meet their targets."

The SDGs demand a significant upgrade in the level and kind of data that's necessary for proper reporting, as well as for countries to validate their own progress. Data needs to be recorded in a way that allows disaggregation around important factors like sex, age, and other relevant socio-economic characteristics, including age, class, disability status, ethnicity, income/wealth and location. In looking to answer this need, the SDGs Monitoring and Coordination Unit is developing a scorecard to track spending at the federal and provincial levels against the respective outcomes. This will help identify wasteful spending, while also highlighting promising efforts. This data-driven approach will help the Pakistani government monitor progress across provinces as they work towards the goals.

Opportunities & Next Steps

Financing the goals will be a significant undertaking for Pakistan. To this end, the country is improving its tax collection capabilities. In doing so, the country has doubled the total intake over the past four years. This will help enable Pakistan to fund projects directly, but also to secure the external funding that it needs.

Pakistan has prioritized the SDGs, with the goal of using them to help lift the country into the global upper middle class by 2030. To get there, it is working to strengthen the capabilities of the Planning Commission's SDGs Monitoring and Coordination Unit as that group works to improve coordination between the private sector, civil society organizations, and other development partners. Given the alignment between the SDGs and Pakistan's development plans, the closer it comes to achieving its SDG targets, the better the outcomes will be for the people of Pakistan.

Sources & Verification

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Case study author:

Chris Oestereich

Director of Publications, School of Global Studies; Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand