

Policy coherence for COVID-19 response and recovery: What can we learn from sound policy making in Africa?

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31 December 2021

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Main messages

- No single country in Africa has fully recovered from the pandemic but on the bright side, recovery scenarios from COVID-19 will draw further attention to health, well-being, and sustainability. At the same time, **participatory policy making, planning, and monitoring for the SDGs and Agenda 2063 have become further challenging with restrictive measures taken in 2020 to curb the pandemic.** Moreover, COVID-19 has amplified existing **issues of institutional fragilities and vulnerabilities, as well as revealed additional ones.**
- **African countries need to use more sophisticated tools and approaches for policymaking** and these approaches should be accompanied by collaboration with different stakeholder groups, especially in the context of leaving no one behind.
- An early review of “success” cases for COVID-19 responses from around the world highlighted **how important digital integrated platforms are in terms of ensuring coordination and real time sharing of critical information between agencies, which allows more agile responses.** This message has implications for technology development as it requires governments to invest in the necessary hardware and software infrastructure, applications, analytics tools, and human capital while ensuring that data governance policies and procedures are in place.
- In terms of COVID-19 recovery, **long term development plans or multimillion recovery packages are only partially effective. At times, enabling conditions to implement these plans become more important** (i.e., capacity for monitoring, for the design of concrete indicators and timelines and to ensure transparency in financial management).
- Aside from ensuring the necessary enabling conditions, **a focus on specific catalytic issues or accelerator SDGs seems to be crucial** when designing effective recovery plans for Africa. Priorities should be identified based on both COVID-19 recovery plans and pre-existing development objectives. For instance, the current state of African agri-food systems can be underscored as the root of the disruptions to food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. **However, any focus on priority areas needs to be analysed from the perspective of systems thinking, to avoid unwanted trade-offs.**
- **Examples of systems thinking, and analysis of policy synergies and trade-offs are not the norm but rather the exemption.** The few analyses that exist focus exclusively on the national level, which is not enough as empirical evidence suggests that subnational assessments of SDG interactions are vital for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

- **High level commitment is crucial** for cutting through the barriers to coherence, which requires strong incentives, but practical implementation of coherence requires the mobilization of more technical parts of government.
- **There is still some way to go for the meaningful engagement of stakeholders in Africa** as it can be observed that governments perhaps feel it is necessary to go through the process of consulting non-state actors, but not committing to act on their inputs. It is urgent for African countries to align political will for sustainable development with the inclusive participation of stakeholders.
- **National budgets are mostly not aligned with the planning process for the implementation of international agendas,** such as the SDGs or Agenda 2063. Some countries completely lack a strategic framework to finance the implementation of the SDGs. A strategic and well-defined funding and fundraising plan is important, as the sources of funding for the implementation of sustainable development agendas are limited.
- Regarding the way forward, it is key that response and recovery efforts begin to consider long term impacts and to include green investments. More specifically, **African countries need to reorient their strategic priorities and invest in sustainable, environmentally friendly development, and accelerate their energy transition.**

1. Re-defining coherence in the times of COVID-19

The world is facing an unprecedented multidimensional crisis that demands coherent policy responses. COVID-19 response and recovery are issues of policy coherence. The decisions made, and the strategies put in place, can lead to short term recovery or to building back in a more sustainable and equal manner.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) make a strong call for integrated decision making and coherence. Case in point, the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) reported to the High-level Political Forum, increasingly pay attention to the issues of integration and policy coherence.¹ Additionally, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has developed a composite indicator framework methodology on policy coherence (SDG target 17.14, indicator 17.14.1). The Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government at UN DESA/DPIDG has also developed a self-assessment tool, which includes key building blocks developed in support of the Toolkit on institutional arrangements for policy coherence (UNPAN - United Nations Public Administration Network, n.d.). The SDGs prominently feature institutions, yet public sector reforms needed to build strong institutions to deliver public goods and services remain a challenge for many countries. At the adoption of the SDGs, Africa's starting point was lower than all the other regions. For instance, slightly over 50% of the countries were classified as low-income countries, with Africa's share of global GDP being less than 3%. Additionally, 37 African countries were classified as low in human development indicators with a Human Development Index (HDI) of less than 0.55 (SDGs Center for Africa, 2020).

In the African context, the SDGs and Agenda 2063 are even more relevant today than ever before as they aim to transform the systems that undermine well-being and perpetuate vulnerabilities. The human, social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may reverse by decades the progress made in achieving the SDGs in all countries. As the situation unfolds and given the immediate priority to ensure a rapid recovery, there is a risk that plans for a "decade of action" advancing the SDGs are side-tracked. If the SDGs and Agenda 2063 take a back seat to COVID-19 recovery in terms of priority setting and policy design, then it will be crucial to carefully "re-define" policy coherence in the times of COVID-19. A refined approach to coherence will be necessary in order to promote policy integration and the minimization of potential trade-offs between objectives as much as possible.

Although they have a long history, policy integration and policy coherence have received increased attention since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the Agenda itself mentions that the sustainable development goals are indivisible and interdependent

¹ Compilation of main messages from VNRs ([2021](#) | [2020](#) | [2019](#) | [2018](#) | [2017](#) | [2016](#))

and need to be addressed together (UNDESA, 2021c). Policy coherence can be defined as the process of policymaking that *“systematically considers the pursuit of multiple policy goals in a coordinated way, minimizing trade-offs and contradictions, and maximizing synergies”* (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2021). Addressing interactions between economic, social, and environmental goals in a balanced manner, while avoiding negative effects on the wellbeing of people here and now, elsewhere and later, has been recognised by many countries as one of the most difficult challenges to implementing coherence and the SDGs (OECD, 2019).

It is now widely recognized that whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are essential to promoting policy coherence and integrated policymaking among national and subnational levels and across sectors (APRM, 2021a). Since the why policy coherence is important is generally accepted, the how becomes the key question, and this is the issue that has occupied much of the global literature with different proposals and approaches.

The Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) has developed a set of principles of effective governance for sustainable development (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2019), which were endorsed by ECOSOC in 2018 (E/2018/44-E/C.16/2018/8, para. 31). It frames the long-term global goals of sustainability along with eleven principles that address three key contexts. The first is the context of effectiveness, and this is described and developed under three areas of competence, sound policymaking, and collaboration. The second is about accountability, covering integrity, transparency, and independent oversight. Finally, the third context is of inclusiveness, which comprises leaving no one behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity, and integrational equity. The essential purpose of these voluntary principles is to provide practical, expert guidance to interested countries in a broad range of governance challenges associated with implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) took on the task to conduct a broad review of selected countries on the status of implementation of the eleven CEPA principles of effective governance for sustainable development, including sound policy making (APRM, 2021a). The study has particular significance for Africa as it primarily focuses on the state of preparedness of African governments in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ability of public institutions to adopt a “whole-of-society” approach addressing the pandemic. The baseline study provides recommendations to AU Member States on best practices concerning inclusive and accountable public institutions. In terms of sound policymaking, the baseline highlights the need to develop and use more sophisticated tools and approaches for policymaking (APRM, 2021a, p85) and how such approaches should be accompanied by enhanced mobilization of and collaboration with different stakeholder groups, especially in the context of leaving no one behind (APRM, 2021a, p51).

One of the strategies under the principle of sound policymaking that is most relevant for African governments and other partners seeking to design and implement a recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, is policy coherence. In 2021, CEPA has further developed a strategy guidance note outlining different methods and mechanisms that can be employed to achieve more coherent policy making (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2021). The need for policy coherence has also been reiterated during the HLPF 2021² for its potential to contribute to strengthening the effectiveness of institutions.

This paper takes a closer look at the issue of policy coherence in the context of COVID-19 recovery. It is developed in the context of UN DESA' and APRM's engagement in policy coherence work in the African context. In February of 2021, UN DESA held a Virtual Workshop on Sound Policymaking for Sustainable Development³ for government officials and RCOs, which expanded on the 11 Principles of Effective Governance for the implementation of the SDGs elaborated by CEPA⁴.

The aim of this study is to conduct a non-exhaustive review of the African context⁵, to determine if whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are present in the reviewed countries, particularly in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also identify two case studies of good policy coherence practices. Finally, the paper presents existing capacity development needs in the analysed countries, to make recommendations regarding gaps that could be improved for more coherent policy making and implementation.

This background paper will inform a regional webinar, to explore the nexus between policy coherence and strategy implementation after COVID-19, scheduled to take place in January 2022. The paper will be presented at the meeting to stimulate a dialogue among policymakers on practical implementation methods, strategies, and approaches at the national level.

2. Framework for this paper

This study focuses on two questions: 1) what are examples of policy coherence strategies that have been implemented by countries for the achievement of Agenda 2063, the SDGs, and for COVID-19 response and recovery? and, 2) what has worked well, what has presented challenges and what are some reasons for this? To answer these questions, the study focuses on the experiences of seven African countries. The country experiences are selected and analysed through the lens of the building blocks for policy coherence in the UNDESA-DPIDG Readiness Assessment, and the implementation methods in the CEPA Strategic Note on Coherent Policy Making.

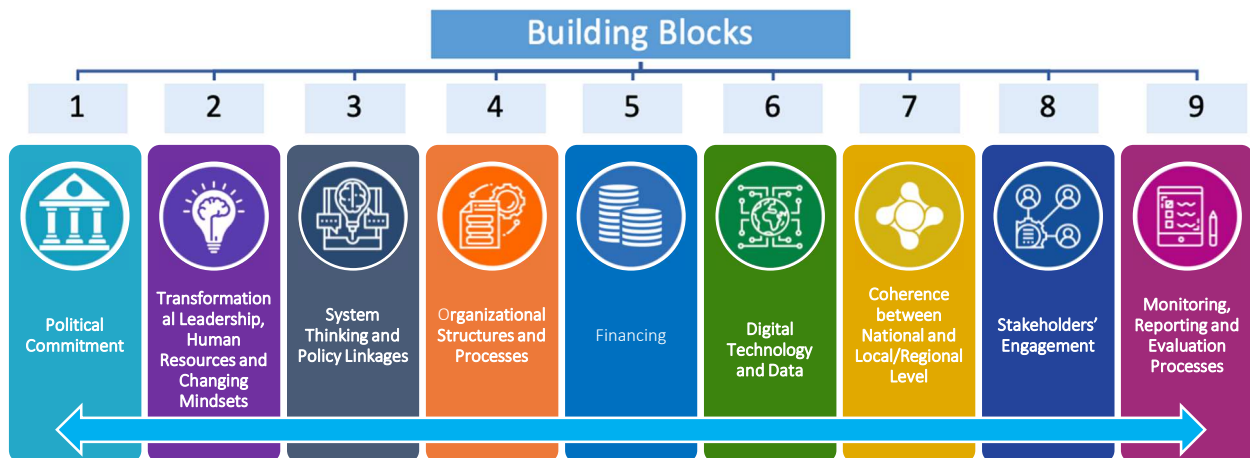
² See the [Ministerial Declaration for the 2021 HLPF](#)

³ [Virtual Workshop on Sound Policymaking for Sustainable Development](#)

⁴ [ECOSOC Committee of Experts on Public Administration \(CEPA\)](#)

⁵ This paper looks at Ghana, Madagascar, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Uganda, and Cote d'Ivoire. The last two represent good practice case studies.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) – Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) – developed a Readiness Assessment on Institutional arrangements for Policy Coherence (UNPAN - United Nations Public Administration Network, n.d.). The assessment is based on UN DESA’s analytical work and the UN Environment Programme’s methodology for Tier II Indicator 17.14.1. It is composed of nine building blocks, which together give an indication of whether and to what extent a country has mechanisms in place that effectively enhance institutional arrangements for policy coherence.⁶



Source: UNDESA Readiness Assessment on Institutional Arrangements for Policy Coherence to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The building blocks will be used in this review as lens to organize the different strategies for policy coherence implemented in the countries. They will help define what types of actions are expected to be in place for each of the themes to narrow the scope of the research. For instance, building block 1: asks if **political commitment** for policy coherence is in place. It goes on to define that the commitment of a country can be demonstrated if it has been institutionalized through legal and normative frameworks in support of the implementation of the national development agenda. This would imply evidence that the country has included commitments to policy coherence at the highest level through a vision, legal and normative frameworks. In order for the research to become even more specific, another layer is needed to outline specific strategies that are to be found for each of the blocks, for instance, how the mainstreaming of the SDGs in national policy bills and development plans can be considered a strategy for political commitment. For this, the CEPA Strategy Note on Coherent Policymaking was used as it outlines eight processes, instruments, methods, or measures as suggested to be used as qualitative indicators to measure progress for more coherent policymaking, as they have led to good results and impact on policy coherence in many contexts around the world (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2021).

⁶ More information under: <https://unpan.un.org/node/705>

Table 1- Eight strategies that indicate a policy coherence friendly approach

1	Establishing a high-level interagency committee , hosted by a high-ranking ministry, or the centre of government. Cutting through the barriers to coherence requires strong incentives to do so, such as if governments demonstrate political commitment at the highest level.
2	Establishing a coordinated institutional mechanism building formal or semiformal partnerships and processes for sharing and learning across ministries. It is important that investments are made to involve the implementing ministries in the design process.
3	Conducting simulation and mapping exercises of integrated policy analysis such as SDG synergies mapping, or integrated modelling.
4	Arranging multi-stakeholder consultation forums including with local levels of governance.
5	Ensuring SDGs are visible and mainstreamed in national policy bills, development planning, finances, and strategies.
6	Requiring strategic impact assessments of draft policy bills to ensure that SDGs are considered in policy and planning.
7	Imposing mandates and reporting requirements of SDGs across ministries and agencies (so called sector-responsibility).
8	Engaging in international cooperation and peer learning around integrated action and policy coherence.

Source: adapted from the CEPA Strategy Note.

From the building blocks and implementation strategies listed above, particular attention will be paid to the ones especially allowing diving beyond structural issues, to consider the state of play for policy coherence. Namely: high level commitment, transformational leadership and changing mindsets, national-regional coherence, systems thinking, stakeholder engagement and financing. Financing is arguably a more structural issue but accessing sufficient resources and their transparent management is such a key question for the African context that it was considered relevant to include it. The question here becomes: does a country have strategies or mechanisms in place that fall under this theme (e.g., political commitment)? If so, are there indications of how well they have worked in practice and why this is so?

Instead of an extensive review of all mechanisms or strategies that are in place in the countries, the review here focuses on selected strategies related to the implementation of Agenda 2063, the SDGs and COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

At the core of the report, a sample seven African countries were selected for in-depth research. Ghana, Madagascar, Kenya, South Africa, and Zambia are reviewed. In addition, Uganda and Cote d'Ivoire were selected as good practice case studies and are presented separately in text boxes.

Information on the country experiences was collected through desk research, and where possible, by approaching countries that have provided evidence of good practices in the African region. The

literature reviewed included Voluntary National Reviews (VNR), Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR), the Voluntary National Review Synthesis Report, national sustainable development strategies and national development plans, legal and policy documents coming from different levels of government and oversight institutions, UN Common Country Assessments, academic articles and studies.

It is important to highlight that **policy coherence as an objective does not normally specify any absolute level of achievement**. Therefore, this paper does not seek to determine whether policy coherence has been “achieved” in the reviewed countries, but rather explore promising practices and identify remaining capacity development needs. This considers that some policy conflicts cannot be fully resolved, and that policymaking **requires prioritization based on political agendas and government interests**.

Such an approach responds to the need for *“moving the debate beyond mainstream calls for more coherence as a silver bullet in an increasingly complex world, to a more cautious and nuanced view on the limits of coherence, and what level of coherence is good enough”* (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2019).

3. Examining policy (in)coherence in Africa

This section aims to review some examples of COVID-19 response and recovery strategies, and of policy coherence in general, in order to explore the nexus between implementing the strategies in a way that ensures sustainable recovery and resilience after the pandemic.

3.1. COVID-19 response and recovery plans

No single country in Africa has fully recovered from the pandemic but on the bright side, recovery scenarios from COVID-19 will draw **further attention to health, well-being, and sustainability**. At the same time, participatory policy making, planning, and monitoring for the SDGs and Agenda 2063 have become further challenging with restrictive measures taken in 2020 to curb the pandemic. Moreover, COVID-19 has amplified existing **issues of institutional fragilities and vulnerabilities, as well as revealed additional ones**.

Many African countries lack the sufficient resources to implement recovery measures. In the spirit of leaving no one behind, **there is growing concerns of more inequality as the risk of disproportionate impacts for poor people and socially marginalised and excluded groups has increased**. For instance, civil society in Zambia reported during the pandemic that support measures were not reaching thousands of people and households that were left jobless and with no source of income from losses to the tourism and entertainment industry (CSOs Platform Zambia, 2020). They reported that school children from poor sectors were being left out of an education due to the inability to cover internet costs for

remote learning. There were also alleged violations to human rights from the excessive use of force to impose mask wearing, while government representatives were not adhering to this guideline. These concerns are shared by major international organizations warning of the lack of social protection for the vulnerable, especially those active in the informal economy (International Monetary Fund, 2021; World Bank, 2021a). Informal employment is estimated to account for 89.2 percent of all employment, although there is heterogeneity across the region⁷, as shown in Figure 1 (World Bank, 2021a, p.3).

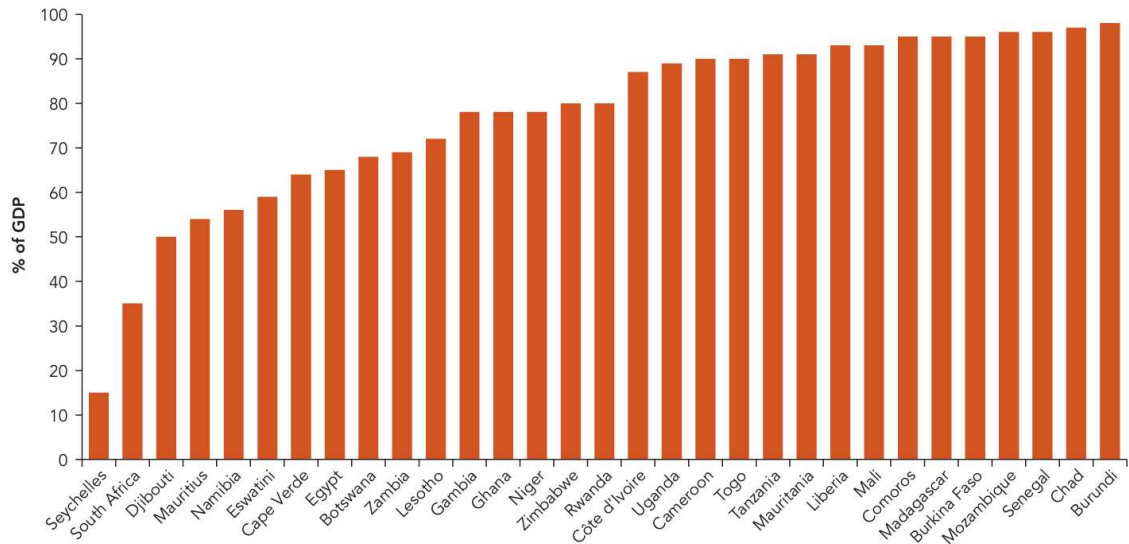


Figure 1 - Informal sector employment rate for Africa, 2014–19. Source: Adapted from World Bank, 2021, original 2018 data of ILOSTAT (dashboard), International Labour Organization, Geneva, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>

The experience of African countries navigating the crisis highlighted the importance of trade relationships to maintain and diversify income, necessary to ensure public services and support the economy. Countries were hit hard by weakened trade channels and lower foreign direct investment by China (and subsequently also Europe and the US) (OECD, 2020b). Unlike South Africa or Ghana, least developed countries such as Zambia, do not have alternatives to China as a buyer, nor do they have viable alternatives to their commodities for sources of growth. Further issues may arise with increasing national debt levels, as anticipated by IMF data (IMF, 2020).

Even if mobilizing resources is critical, the ability to deploy those resources optimally will determine how countries emerge from this crisis. Improved governance and quality

⁷ For instance, the rate of informal economy employment ranges from 15 percent to 80 percent in the Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia, and Ghana to over 90 percent in Madagascar, Senegal, Tanzania, and Togo.

of public expenditure becomes crucial and an aspect where policy coherence strategies can help secure improvements.

Much can be learned already from the different ways countries are choosing to respond to the current crisis. An early review of “success” cases⁸ for COVID-19 responses from around the world aimed at drawing lessons from those countries that could be applied in Africa. One main conclusion was how important integrated platforms are in terms of ensuring coordination and **real time sharing of critical information between agencies, which allows more agile responses** (Grier & Dumbacher, 2020). The example of Taiwan is highlighted for its integrated databases which “*enabled better coordination between different government agencies and swifter responses in time critical scenarios*” (Grier & Dumbacher, 2020), p15). This example has **strong implications for technology development** as it requires governments to invest in the necessary hardware and software infrastructure, applications, analytics tools, and human capital while ensuring that data governance policies and procedures are in place.

Enabling conditions tend to become more important than plans and strategies when it comes to implementation:

The example of **South Africa** demonstrates the **need to think beyond plans and policies to ensure the enabling conditions for sound policy making exist**. The country has been hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa and has had the most forceful response (APRM, 2021a). At the time of writing, a new variant with multiple mutations, and potentially resistant to vaccines, was quickly spreading through the country⁹. The pandemic affected both the demand and supply side of the economy, threatening to collapse the value chains, and turning the health crisis into an economic crisis. The president announced a multimillion fund to keep the economy from collapse. Recently, the government has published the Economic Recovery Plan, which is under discussion and focuses on infrastructure building, reindustrialisation and building local value chains¹⁰. However, the plan cannot yet be considered a success story in terms of sound policy making and policy coherence, as it lacks widespread support. It continues to be contested as not ambitious enough, and for its lack of indicators and set timelines for implementation (APRM, 2021a). In addition, the Auditor-General has published reports on the financial management of the government’s COVID-19 initiatives, warning of inadequate financial management controls and lack of accountability, among other issues, in the government sectors tasked with implementing the emergency response (Auditor

⁸ Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Norway, New Zealand, Rwanda, and Senegal. For more information see: (Grier & Dumbacher, 2020)

⁹ See <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-03552-w>

¹⁰ See https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202010/south-african-economic-reconstruction-and-recovery-plan.pdf

general South Africa, n.d.). In contrast, the government has had positive results with an online resource portal developed to enhance transparency by providing a single-entry point to information and resources on COVID-19¹¹.

Coordination mechanisms have proven quite effective, for instance, the Kenyan government set up a National Coordination Committee to assess the risks and offer adequate measures to prepare, prevent and respond to the impacts of the pandemic (Executive Order No. 2 of 2020: National Emergency Response Committee on Coronavirus, 2020).

There is a need to focus on high priority issues, but potential trade-offs should be analysed:

Aside from ensuring the necessary enabling conditions, a focus on specific catalytic issues seems to be crucial when designing effective recovery plans for Africa. For instance, Mr. Kwaku Onwona-Hwesofofour Asante, Executive Director of the Agency for Health and Food Security (AHEFS) in **Ghana**, highlighted at the 2021 Africa Food Systems Dialogue that food security is a prime example for the need for more policy coherence, as the continent is facing a looming food crisis, in addition to the health and economic crisis¹². The current state of African agri-food systems can be underscored as the root of the disruptions to food security during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving farmers, traders, consumers, and their governments highly vulnerable to disruptions (FAO, 2020; IMF, 2020; Mohamed et al., 2021; World Bank, 2021b). Some of the main issues experienced in the agri-food sector can be linked to ongoing climatic events leading to low rainfall in some areas and floods in others, locust infestations since mid-2019, historically low prices for staple export crops (cocoa and coffee), as well as unrest in some countries pushing parts of the region into a food security crisis (McKinsey, 2020). Logistics and trade for instance were put under pressure during the pandemic as costs were being driven up by travel restrictions, border checks, curfews, delays caused by staff shortages, and a general reduction in volume. For example, wine exports from **South Africa** were banned in the initial lockdown as part of the overall ban on the sale of alcohol products. According to Mr. Asante, governments must introduce a policy framework that prioritizes policy coherence, harmonization, and coordination to ensuring functional food systems as part of their pandemic recovery efforts. However, **any focus on priority areas needs to be analysed from the perspective of systems thinking, as argued in the corresponding section 3.5 below.**

The APRM (2021) found that responses to the pandemic have shown that bold actions and transformative changes are possible on a scale and at a speed not seen before. They recommend that Governments should not aim to return to pre-existing procedures and institutional cultures but should rather **reimagine the role of institutions and policy**

¹¹ See <https://sacoronavirus.co.za>

¹² See <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1054759/policy-coherence-and-harmonization-are-critical.html>

making, promote new governance norms and shift from past practices to transformative pathways that strengthen resilience and accelerate action to achieve the SDGs.

Regarding the way forward, it is **key that response and recovery efforts begin to consider long term impacts and to include green investments.** More specifically, African countries need to reorient their strategic priorities and invest in sustainable, environmentally friendly development, and accelerate their energy transition.

3.2. High level commitment for policy coherence

According to the African Peer Review Mechanism's latest baseline, political will towards the SDGs is "heterogeneous and arguably lacking" (APRM, 2021a). In practice, how high in government is the location of lead coordinating units for SDGs implementation is often used as an indication of the influence of the unit and of political will (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2019). It is also seen **as indication of the level of appreciation and understanding of the broad and cross-cutting nature of sustainable development issues,** and of the need to establish an appropriate coordinating mechanism to address them in a holistic and integrated manner (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2021; OECD, 2018b; UNDESA, 2019).

There is variation in Africa from one country to the other when it comes to selecting the lead coordinating unit for SDGs implementation in the central or federal government. The most common are: a unit under the Ministry of Planning/National Planning Agency, a unit under the Centre of government (Government office/Prime Minister Office/President's office/Cabinet office), followed by the Ministries of finance or environment (SDGs Center for Africa, 2020).

To make policy coherence operational, it is key to combine high-level commitment with the mobilization of more technical parts of government:

Countries with units located under the office of the president/prime minister have noted that the high-level positioning has ensured effective coordination. However, the author of this paper notes from empirical experience, that these bodies are usually too high to follow up on the practicalities of an effective implementation of policy coherence, such as: ensuring potential trade-offs are properly discussed and analysed, or that reporting considers sufficient stakeholder engagement. High level commitment is crucial for cutting through the barriers to coherence, which requires strong incentives, but practical implementation of coherence requires the mobilization of more technical parts of government. Locating that unit within a ministry does not give it the necessary political clout to effectively coordinate sustainable development in a coherent manner. A single ministry might not have enough convening power to mobilize other key parts of government.

All seems to indicate that complementary mechanisms offer better opportunities when it comes to creating a whole-of-government approach, such as **establishing a high-level interagency committee, hosted by a high-ranking ministry, or the centre of government which will be complemented or accompanied by a coordinated institutional mechanism building formal or semiformal partnerships and processes for sharing and learning across ministries** (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2021). Such is the case in one of our good practice cases. In **Uganda**, an SDG Implementation Steering Committee and SDGs National Task Force function right under the Office of the Prime Minister and deal with issues of coordination and implementation respectively.

Another example can be found in **Ghana**, where the apex of the institutional framework is the Office of the President, which hosts an SDGs Advisory Unit and a High-Level Ministerial Committee, whose primary mandate is to provide strategic direction for the coordinated attainment of the goals at both national and sectoral levels (Government of Ghana, 2019). Those high-level structures are complemented by more technical bodies in charge of coordinating more practical aspects of implementation, engagement, and monitoring (see figure 1). Even with this multi-level and multi-sectorial approach, there is still the need to finetune functioning of these bodies. The 2019 Civil Society shadow report for Ghana concluded the SDGs Technical Steering Committee should be divided into sub-groups to make it more manageable, focused, and effective. With over 80 members, **the number is considered too large to allow for effective functioning and management of the committee** (Civil Society Platform Ghana, 2019).

The importance of ensuring the agility of institutions and bodies arises as a key learning from the COVID-19 pandemic:

As the previous example shows, **the issue of making institutions and bodies more agile is an important one**, and it comes to the fore when a global pandemic requires quick and well-designed responses. The pandemic has exposed the benefits of a stronger, flexible, and more responsive government which can incorporate risk management and has access to contingencies in an emergency. The OECD suggests that a key action for African countries in the medium-to-long term will be to **invest in the transformation agenda**, particularly through regional integration and digitalisation (OECD, 2020b). Along these lines, the World Bank has reviewed emerging lessons from the immediate response to the pandemic and suggests that governments need to **adapt models of operations, service delivery, and interactions with citizens**, which include technology options for the modernization of services to citizens and businesses (World Bank, n.d.). **Further options relate to funds and their availability for action**. They range from making cash available to pay for public services, to processing and disbursing payments with minimum bureaucratic layers, to reporting in a timely and accurate manner to ensure transparency. Of course, agility in resource management must be supported by the appropriate appointment of staff and accompanied by anti-corruption measures to ensure its

effectiveness. All these options will ultimately support countries build capable, efficient, open, inclusive, and accountable institutions, which are critical for sustainable growth after COVID-19.

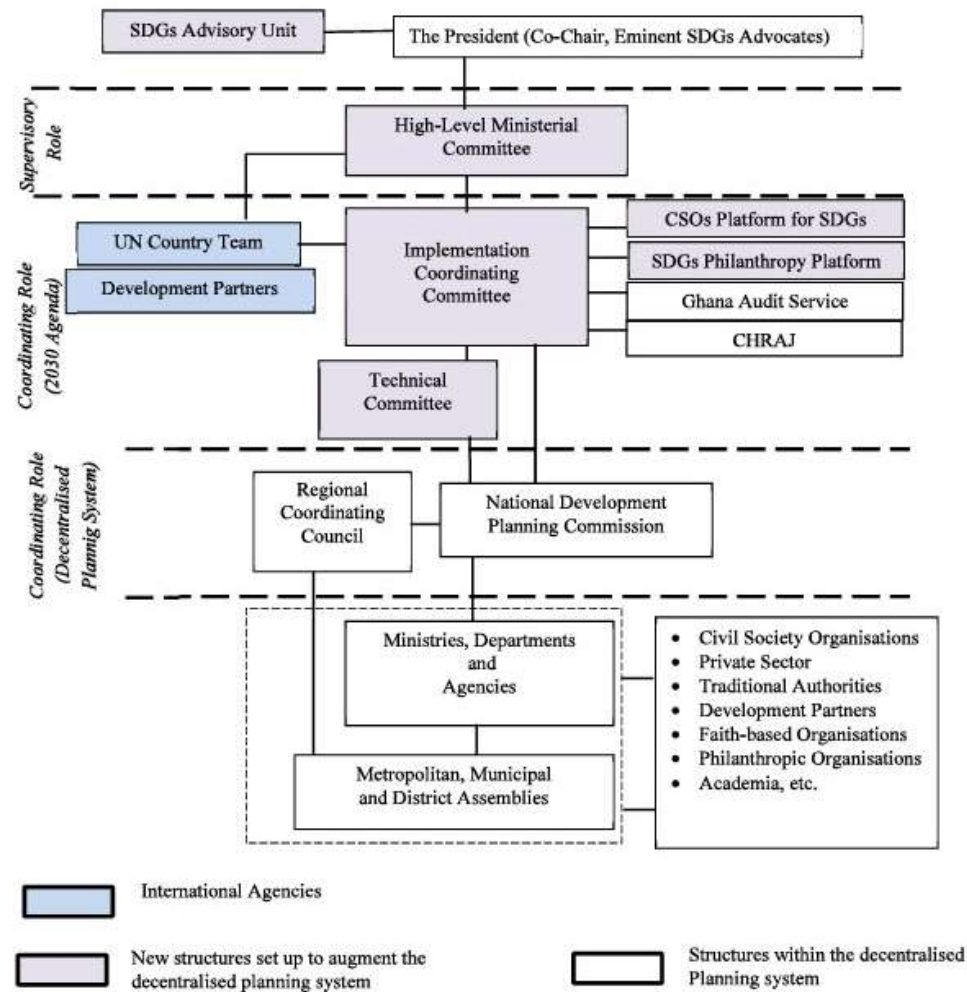


Figure 2 - Institutional Arrangements for the SDGs in Ghana. Source: Government of Ghana, 2019.

Countries continue to make significant progress in integrating the SDGs into national development plans and sectoral strategies:

In terms of policy coordination, it is positive that many countries have aligned their development strategies and/or national development plans with the SDGs. **Kenya** has gone as far as mapping the SDGs to initially existing long-term plans, i.e., Vision 2030 (Government of Kenya, 2020). In **Madagascar**, the implementation of the SDGs coincides with the updating

of development policies and strategies: alignment of the National Development Plan (2015-2019) and integration of the SDGs into the 13 commitments of the General State Policy, the foundation of the Emergence Madagascar Plan (2019-2023) (Government of Madagascar, 2021). The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of 2021 show that countries continue to make significant progress in integrating the SDGs into national development plans and sectoral strategies, as well as the elaboration of indicators¹³. As for regional policy alignment, substantial convergence is observed between the SDGs and Agenda 2063, adopted by African leaders in 2013 (Kasirye et al., 2020). However, enough divergence exists between these two agendas to **create reporting fatigue and a disconnect that jeopardizes policy coherence**. Hence, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Union Commission (AUC), and the **African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) are being urged by African countries to work closely together to develop integrated monitoring and evaluation tools to track Agenda 2063 and the SDGs** (APRM, 2021b).

3.3. Transformational leadership and changing mindsets

Beyond implementing formal changes to rules and structures, policy coherence requires new mindsets, capacities, and competencies to ensure that broader sustainable development values guide public servants' behaviours and actions in delivering services and spearheading plans to recover from COVID-19. A mindset can be understood as the set of beliefs and attitudes that a person has assimilated throughout a lifetime about themselves and the world around them (worldview), which affect the way we think, see (frame reality) and act (UNDESA, 2021a). These mindsets have been undoubtedly affected by COVID-19. The pandemic has forced multiple levels and areas of government to work together, with subnational authorities playing an essential role (UNDESA, 2021c). **Coordination has been critical in order to ensure coherence in response measures, support local health systems that are at the front line, and ensure the delivery of assistance packages to local communities**. These forms of coordination have required in many instances for government officials to put aside their own perceptions of other individuals or government bodies and reach out to ensure critical services in times of emergency.

Leadership and mindsets are usually analysed by looking at strategies at the individual, organizational and institutional levels to promote a change. In many cases this implies actions for capacity building on methods for effective policy making, as well as to strengthen awareness of sustainable development principles. Several empirical studies show the importance of these measures, though not many are available for Africa. For instance, Rasul et al (2018) find that moving from the 25th to 75th percentile of bureaucratic quality in **Ghana** increases project completion rates by almost 20 percentage points (Rasul et al., 2018). In

¹³ Compilation of main messages from VNRs ([2021](#))

general, the effectiveness of actions to improve leadership and mindsets is not always easy to identify and acts as a proxy for the mindset held by a government official.

A recent review by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government at UNDESA found that activities to increase the capacity of civil servants to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs have increased since the agenda was adopted (UNDESA, 2021b). At the same time, the review highlights how information available does not easily provide a consolidated overview of how ongoing efforts address gaps at the level of individual countries. This issue has also been identified in the research conducted for this paper, for this reason, this section refers mostly to lessons learned from training, and multi-actor and regional cooperation.

Training and capacity building for sustainable development has been mostly linked to the SDGs:

The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development in **Sierra Leone** (Audit Service Sierra Leone, 2019) and the State Department for Planning of **Kenya** (Government of Kenya, 2020) have conducted trainings on the SDGs respectively to build the capacity of key ministries, departments, and agencies on implementing the Goals and serve as trainers to build capacity in their organizations. In **South Africa**, the Department of Science and Innovation has implemented an SDG Hub¹⁴. The Hub is an online platform aimed at connecting South African policymakers with research and innovations needed to implement the 2030 Agenda. The SDG Hub is housed at the University of Pretoria and provides open access to SDG-relevant research published through universities' institutional repositories. The Hub also organizes public lectures and seminars on SDG related topics and posts SDG briefing notes developed by 26 public universities in South Africa.

In order to complement SDG related training and capacity building, more efforts would be necessary to also increase capacities around related key agendas, such as Agenda 2063.

There are positive examples of multiple actors collaborating and working together in new ways to respond to the pandemic:

Integrated response and recovery plans involving several sectors of government have had a positive effect on containing the negative ramifications of COVID-19. **Madagascar** developed a multi-sector emergency plan to combat COVID-19 and mitigate its socio-economic consequences (Government of Madagascar, 2021). The plan calls for the allocation of resources for money transfers, safety nets and actions for vulnerable populations. However, **the efforts to establish coordination mechanisms and elaborating response plans have on**

¹⁴ South Africa SDGs Hub: <http://sasdghub.up.ac.za/en/>

all accounts undermined efforts to implement related sustainable development agendas, such as the SDGs.

When it comes to effective leadership, corruption is a key issue to change in civil servant's mindsets:

Africa has suffered from weak leadership in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, related to **corruption and the misappropriation of public resources**. For instance, looting of public funds was evident in **South Africa** at the height of COVID-19 and has been carried out with an impressive level of impunity (APRM 2021). One of our “good practice” policy coherence cases has also suffered from inappropriate use of public funds. In **Uganda**, the high Court ruled that legislators must pay back money received in their personal accounts as part of a package of 2.4 million euros approved to fight the coronavirus in their constituencies¹⁵. Corruption is known to undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of governments, compromising their ability to support sustainable development in a coherent manner.

Africa enjoys a general mindset of collaboration due to past challenges:

Regional coherence in responses to the pandemic have proven key in terms of containing uncontrolled spreading of the virus, as well as for timely information sharing and cooperation for the devising of concerted economic recovery strategies. COVID-19 presents a classic example of why regional coordination, cooperation, and integration are key to Africa's future. **Countries in the region understand quite well the importance of coordination, also in terms of health emergencies, as there is vast experience from dealing with the Ebola outbreak in West and Central Africa, as well as with TB and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa.** The African Union (AU), under the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, recognised the importance of collaboration between countries within in Africa, given that global cooperation had not delivered the support that would be required (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2020). An emergency meeting of African health ministers held on 22 February of 2020 led to adoption of the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19¹⁶. **The AU also played a crucial role for instance in engaging with international financial institutions and the private sector.** In March of 2020, the AU brought together African finance ministers to write a joint letter to the IMF, World Bank and European Commercial Bank expressing their need for immediate additional resourcing of \$100 billion to support the continental effort to tackle Covid-19 (p.5).

¹⁵ See <http://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200429-covid-19-in-africa-ugandan-mps-forced-to-repay-coronavirus-cash-malawi-gives-money-to-poor>; <http://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200421-public-outcry-in-uganda-as-mps-offered-coronavirus-cash>

¹⁶ See <https://africacdc.org/download/africa-joint-continental-strategy-for-covid-19-outbreak/>

Section 3.7 below touches upon the issue of financing crisis recovery to highlight that mobilizing resources is a crucial part of the equation, but not the main one. **Improved capacity for resource management will determine the success of responses.** A request by African governments for this amount of funding needs to be backed by serious improvements to governance, policy coherence, resource management, transparency and by anti-corruption measures.

Overall, it is very difficult to paint a realistic picture of the state of leadership and mindsets in Africa. Reporting on capacity-building activities has not been a high priority for governments. Because of this, the needs related to capacity building are hard to determine. **More government-wide capacity-building gap assessments are needed** (UNDESA, 2021b). Only with better baselines will the changes in learning outcomes due to COVID-19 become clearer. Learning about this is crucial as these changes can have long-term impacts on the capacity of the civil service.

3.4. National-regional coherence

The growing role of local governments has emerged in the context of increasing global demands for policy coherence at the local level, in the form of **effective decentralization of national, regional, and global agendas, but also supporting more direct forms of democratic practices, such as stakeholder engagement in policymaking, planning and budgeting.** The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the key role of local actors in maintaining public services and for the achievement of a coherent policy approach to respond in times of crisis. Above and beyond, they are responding rapidly to fast-changing realities and emergencies all while ensuring the safety and protection of local public officials who deliver services that assist people, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Local governments have experienced an expansion of their roles as a result of the pandemic, but they often lack the capacities to properly perform these roles:

As a result of their expanding responsibilities, local governments will in many cases be directly responsible for delivering a large part of the national governments' commitments to the SDGs. They will also play **an important leadership role in bringing stakeholders of the local development ecosystem together to achieve the SDGs.** But do they have the required autonomy, competencies, resources, and capacity to effectively monitor and achieve the SDGs? Two studies by UNDP on the state of local governments in West and Central Africa found that in many cases, local government capacity to enable sustainable local development is constrained by a **“lack of clarity in mandates, lack of appropriate resources to implement transferred responsibilities, lack of transparency and predictability in funding flows, limited technical capacity, and limited initiatives to build multi-sector and multi-level partnerships”** (UNDP, 2018).

Coordination between national and local governments has been a cornerstone of COVID-19 responses and one of the most challenging building blocks to implement. Lack of vertical integration can cause disruptions in many key areas, especially when responsibilities are left unclear. This is particularly the case where local governments do not have administrative autonomy or the financial means to implement functions or services that they are supposed to provide. H. E. Hon. Martin Wambora, Governor of Embu County and Chairman of the Council of Governors of **Kenya** has highlighted the role of local governments to combat the pandemic¹⁷. Sub-national governments in Kenya have developed County COVID-19 Social Economic Recovery and Re-engineering strategies to mitigate the socio-economic implications of the pandemic and manage the situation in case of an occurrence of subsequent wave(s). The recovery strategies are built on five pillars: boosting private sectors activity; strengthening ICT capacity; human capital development; policy, legislative, and institutional reforms; strengthening county governments preparedness and response to pandemic and disasters. The success of these plans will, in high degree, depend on the capacity to coordinate and engage with the national government.

Local government engagement and local level policy coherence is at times recognized on paper as important and structurally outlined in policies but not fully implemented in practice. **Ghana** mainstreamed SDG localisation by setting up a three-tier coordination mechanism composed of: (i) a High-Level Ministerial Committee (HLMC), (ii) a technical SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC), and (iii) a CSOs Platform on SDGs—composed of 300 local and international CSOs clustered into 17 sub-platforms aligned to each of the 17 goals (Government of Ghana, 2019). The country is considered to have strong national level institutional arrangements, but weak local level coordination (Annan-Aggrey et al., 2021; Civil Society Platform Ghana, 2019). At the district level, there are three types of assemblies: Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). These are responsible for development planning, revenue collection, service delivery and internal security. The structures that operate at the national level do not seem to have translated to the sub-national level, namely the MMDAs. Although the MMDAs have integrated the SDGs into their local development plans, they have not done much to promote local ownership or awareness or to actively engage other stakeholders on the implementation of the SDGs (Civil Society Platform Ghana, 2019). Structurally, MMDAs face **challenges related to revenue collection** (especially in the poorest areas), which is problematic as service delivery depends on the actual, timely disbursements of **funds** from the central level and is **allegedly distributed according to political clientelism and alliances** (UN, 2016). In this case, **the whole is the sum of its parts, as coherence at the national level needs to be accompanied by coherent regional and local level approaches.**

¹⁷ See <http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/en/media-files/opinion-articles/605-sub-national-governments-in-kenya-emerging-from-the-impacts-of-covid-19>

Monitoring and reporting offer a strategic opportunity for more vertical coherence, starting by building links between Local and National Voluntary Reviews:

A special opportunity to increase engagement between national and local levels of government comes with the **need to report disaggregated and context specific progress on the SDGs**. The HLPF is increasingly paying attention to the local, by highlighting **Local Voluntary Reports (VLRs) and increasing the participation by local government representatives**. More specifically, through a Local and Regional Governments' Day during the main programme and a standalone two-day Local and Regional Governments' Forum¹⁸. Out of the countries reviewed for this paper, only two had regional governments preparing Local Voluntary Reviews: **Cape Town in South Africa; and Busia, Swale, Marsabit and Taita Taveta for Kenya, all in 2019**¹⁹. These VLRs are focused on the local context without explicit recognition of relations with the national level. The VNR for South Africa mentions local governments in relation to specific programmes but no inclusion of local level achievement of the SDGs is to be found (Government of South Africa, 2019). VNRs and VLRs provide an opportunity to identify and focus on what might key development issues to unlock achievements across all SDGs, directly combat COVID-19, and put the region on track towards the Goals. But **they need to speak to each other in order to ensure a coherent approach. African regional VLR guidelines are to be finalized by UNECA and are eagerly anticipated by localities and member States to facilitate continued localization of the SDGs and Agenda 2063**.

Other countries also highlight the importance of vertical coherence in their VNRs. **Zambia'** and **Ghana's** VNRs recognize **enhancing vertical policy coherence and deepening the practice of appropriately incorporating all the dimensions of sustainability in development plans, policies, and programmes as key areas for capacity development** (Government of Ghana, 2019; Government of Zambia, 2020).

3.5. Systems thinking

In view of the challenges and restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, countries are being encouraged to focus on the so-called "**accelerator Sustainable Development Goals**", and to identify strategic targets (Africa 2021 Regional Sustainable Development Forum). **The prioritization of themes or SDGs should be embedded in a systems approach, in order to avoid undesirable impacts on adjacent policy areas**. Systems thinking offers a more-integrated perspective and a number of proven concepts, tools and methods to improve our understanding of the complex systemic issues which threaten the future.

¹⁸ See <https://sdgs.un.org/events/local-and-regional-governments-forum-32572> and watch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hoy_JkBmNPc

¹⁹ See <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews>

Systems thinking is not mainstreamed in African countries but necessary to avoid unwanted trade-offs:

In some selected countries of Africa, a significant amount of work has been done by national governments (especially planning ministries) to analyse synergies and trade-offs in the national context, conduct analyses of policy coherence, and seek increased policy integration (UNDESA, 2021c). The National Planning Authority (NPA) of **Uganda** commissioned a study using a system dynamics simulation model to help understand and estimate Uganda's SDG achievement into 2030 under different policy and intervention implementation scenarios for the National Development Plan (National Planning Authority of Uganda, 2020). **Ghana's** latest VNR included an analysis of synergies and trade-offs for some flagship government programmes (Government of Ghana, 2019). The UN Resident Coordinator Office in **Tanzania** has produced a Common Country Assessment (CCA) that identifies SDG accelerators²⁰. **These examples are not the rule, but rather the exemption. These analyses also focus exclusively on the national level, which is not enough as empirical evidence suggests that subnational assessments of SDG interactions are vital for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda** (Hernández-Orozco et al., 2021). To tackle this gap, the use of soft systems thinking methodologies is proposed as a way forward. Such methodologies are not limited by the availability of official data at any scale.

As mentioned above, systems thinking is not mainstreamed in African countries. For instance, systems thinking does not appear to be part of the equation in Kenya, as Kobia, M. points out in her report titled Status of Implementation of the CEPA Principles of Effective Governance in Kenya: *"The absence of a systematic approach to the government policy cycle, in the face of a devolved structure of government, has led to policy incoherence within and across levels of government"* (APRM, 2021a). The report further notes that **local levels, while being the ones where policy issues converge, are often the least equipped to handle integration**. A further challenge to implement systems thinking, according to the report, is transparency as there seems to be a culture of political pushback when transparency is demanded in policy realms. Systems thinking requires a high degree of transparency as it depends on government officials being straightforward with the trade-offs being caused by their Ministry or sector, on others.

It is especially **difficult to properly assess synergies from a true holistic perspective if some key issues drop from the policy landscape or are not a theme actively considered by the government**. For instance, gender is an issue that is usually significantly impacted and influenced by other policy areas, however, it is at times disregarded for cultural or other reasons. For instance, in **Madagascar**, there is a lack of continuity in national gender equality planning (the last policy on the on the subject was issued in 2015) and there is a seriously

²⁰ The CCA is currently in a draft state.

limited scope of resources dedicated to the promotion of gender equality in the country (Government of Madagascar, 2021).

3.6. Stakeholder engagement

There is still some way to go for the meaningful engagement of stakeholders in Africa:

Stakeholder engagement is at the core of policy coherence approaches (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2019; OECD, 2018b; UNDESA, 2019). There is still some way to go for the meaningful engagement of stakeholders in Africa as it can be observed that governments perhaps feel it is necessary to go through the process of consulting non-state actors, **but not committing to act on their inputs**. This has been for instance the case for civil society actors in **Madagascar** (National CSO Platform Madagascar, 2021). The government of Madagascar did include in the country's 2021 VNR the input from the Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations, who succeeded in ensuring the protection of children was highlighted as one of the major challenges to the implementation of the SDGs (Government of Madagascar, 2021), which suggests a selective approach when it comes to inputs. It is not enough to demand inclusiveness and to involve many parties in debates. Rather, **responsibilities must be spelled out clearly and apply to different partners in different ways** (Begashaw, 2017). Enabling effective stakeholder engagement implies that **all "stakeholders should have fair and equitable access to the decision-making process in order to balance policy debates and avoid the capture of public policies by narrow interest groups"** (CEPA - Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2021). **Civil society in most African countries is yet to enforce a process of social accountability**, which could take its partnership with the government to a new level. A further challenge for the region is how to ensure genuine and active civil society participation with a weak civil society and narrowing civic space. For example, some **South African** civil society organisations had raised concerns that *"government no longer trust CSOs in the country as CSOs are accused of pushing for regime change"* (Africa Monitor, 2017 p.6.).

There is a clear need to implement stakeholder engagement mechanisms and strategies that aim at reaching numerous civil society representatives. Meetings with interest groups, expert panels and focus groups seem to be the preferred methods (SDGs Center for Africa, 2020), but methods reaching a larger number of stakeholders are much less popular, such as focus groups, citizen panels and online consultations.

African governments should better utilize the process to develop their VNRs to engage stakeholders:

The processes to prepare VNRs present a special opportunity to engage varied stakeholders in a coordinated approach to review and reflect on the implementation of sustainable development goals, especially if the report includes a revision of coherence in the implementation of the agenda in the country. **Thus far, countries are generally choosing what to report, which defeats the purpose of using reporting as an engagement and learning opportunity** (SDGs Center for Africa, 2019). **Those who have come forward prefer to report on low-hanging fruits, which hinders learning from their effort and performance and has an impact in the potential to make comparisons and ensure accountability.** It is in this regard that **CSO shadow reports** become an important instrument for stakeholders to find the space to **air grievances or complement what is reported by governments**²¹.

Positive examples are available to draw lessons for other countries in the region:

Positive examples to highlight relate to stakeholder engagement in **Ghana and Kenya**. To foster stronger collaboration and partnerships for SDG implementation, the government of **Ghana** has created new coordination and leadership structures with the participation of non-state actors. These new structures are the SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee, the Technical Committee, and the CSOs Platform for SDGs (Government of Ghana, 2019). Very few countries have gone as far as Ghana to include non-governmental actors in official SDG implementation mechanisms. The Ghana CSOs Platform on the SDGs was established in 2015 to bring together CSOs working on the SDGs under one umbrella. The CSOs Platform is made up of 18 Sub-Platforms, seventeen (17) of these are linked to the SDGs, with a Sub-Platform on youth issues (Civil Society Platform Ghana, 2019). **Kenya** has also managed to significantly involve other partners, e.g., the private sector, in implementing the SDGs (Kasirye et al., 2020). The Ministry of Devolution and Planning lead by the SDGs Unit invited all 44 state departments to submit progress report on SDGs implementation. Development partners, including the different arms of the UN, actively participated. Civil Society members were invited to participate and follow the process, and after negotiations, CSOs were given the go ahead to have their input integrated directly into the Kenyan VNR (SDG Kenya Forum, 2017). Kenya is also making use of ICTs as social media communication platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp, which are being used to disseminate the 2030 Agenda Goals.

3.7. Financing policy coherence

Policy coherence requires sufficient funding for the correct functioning of coordination mechanisms, monitoring and reporting, and for stakeholder engagement. According to Ms. Bineswaree Bolaky, Economic Affairs Officer, UNECA, Sub-regional Office, Africa needs about US\$600 – US\$614 Billion annual incremental expenditure for the implementation of SDGs²².

²¹ For a compilation, see <https://action4sd.org/resources-toolkits/>

²² See presentation at the launch of the Africa Sub-regional SDGs Center on 7 August 2019 <https://sdgcafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Report-Launch-of-SDGCA-Sub-Regional-Center.pdf>

This is in general terms, however, there is lack of national estimation of the cost of implementing effective policy coherence strategies. Each country could come up with an **estimate of the costs of ensuring policy coherence**, which could be linked to the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063. **Such an exercise would inform the formulation of a resource mobilization strategy.** This plan would need to include a breakdown of financing needs into annual, short-term, and long-term, and include actions to ensure that finances are used effectively and transparently. The latter is crucial as transparent funding use and resource use monitoring are required to ensure sustained and adequate funding. The countries reviewed for this study had varying results in the 2019 Open Budget Survey by the International Budget Partnership, which includes country-specific findings and recommendations on budget transparency, public participation, and oversight (International Budget Partnership, 2019). Overall scores in order of more to less transparency are: **South Africa (87), Ghana (54), Kenya (50), Madagascar (40), and Zambia (30)**. Our good practice cases **Uganda**, and **Côte d'Ivoire**, scored 58 and 34 respectively.

The limited sources of funding available to implement sustainable development agendas make it imperative to have a well-designed fundraising and spending plan:

A strategic and well-defined funding and fundraising plan is important, as the sources of funding for the implementation of sustainable development agendas are limited. Less than half of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members are meeting the target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI)²³. Shortfalls in foreign assistance have not been matched by improvements in domestic revenue. **According to the SDGs Center for Africa, the domestic revenue gap remains large: 20% of African countries generate less than 15% of their GDP through domestic revenue** (SDGs Center for Africa, 2019). Mr. Paul Mpuga, Chief Country Economist at the African Development Bank (AfDB) -Addis office, draws attention to the very low tax mobilization capacity (17% on average) in Africa (APRM, 2021a). In several African countries, domestic mobilization might be overturned by growing national debt. For instance, **Ghana** had experienced a downward trend in the total public debt-GDP ratio. The reversal resulted from the financial sector incurring cleaning up costs that had not been anticipated²⁴. However, the total debt by the end of 2019 was GH¢217,990.7 billion (62.4% of GDP), up from GH¢173,102.2 billion (57.6% of GDP) at the end of 2018 (IDA & IMF, 2019). **Debt management has implications for sound policy making by freeing up more resources for effective public policy making and engagement mechanisms (APRM, 2021a).**

Budgets need to be better aligned to the planning process to implement the SDGs:

²³ See <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm>

²⁴ The 2021 budget statement presented to the Ghanaian parliament on 12 March proposed the introduction of a financial sector clean-up levy of 5% of banks' profit before tax, intended to help defray outstanding commitments in the sector. The levy will be reviewed in 2024.

National budgets are mostly not aligned to the planning process for the implementation of international agendas, such as the SDGs or Agenda 20163. Some countries completely lack a strategic framework to finance the implementation of the SDGs, such as **Madagascar** (Government of Madagascar, 2021). There are a few examples of ex-post alignment of budgets for coherent policy making. In **South Africa**, a methodology has been developed to allocate spending as recorded in budget documents to the achievement of specific SDGs²⁵. Considering the current allocation of spending by SDG can inform the reallocation of spending to be consistent with the country's commitments for sustainable development. This is certainly a first step, nonetheless, **the ideal approach would also help align the budget during the planning process and have that budget regularly checked and updated.**

Contrary to national budgeting, **ODA is usually already earmarked for particular SDGs— notably goals targeting energy, health, and education** (OECD, 2018a). The ODA focus on energy is partly explained by the substantial cost of energy infrastructure as well as the fact that support to the sector mainly comes from loans and equity investments, and loans have grown faster than grants in the recent past (Development Initiatives, 2015). Foreign direct investment outflows from the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) have increased over the past decade, with China leading the way. In fact, in 2017 foreign direct investment outflows from Africa increased by up to 8% from 2016 (UNCTAD, n.d.). Private sector involvement is also important to achieving the 2030 Agenda. For example, more than 600 companies and other stakeholders from Africa are participating in the UN Global Compact across 35 countries²⁶.

4. Way forward: Promising approaches that can be harnessed across the region and capacity gaps

Policy coherence is not a onetime exercise, it is not an entirely technical approach, it is a process and requires concerted stakeholder participation. As such, policy coherence is influenced not only by institutions but also mindsets (ideas and interests), which means **people are at the centre**. While **COVID-19** is undoubtedly one of the greatest threats the world has faced in recent years, it **has also provided an opportunity for greater African regional and national/subnational collaboration**. The ability of a government to consistently design and implement coherent policies for sustainable development post COVID-19 will depend on the **mechanisms, tools and processes** used by the administration to coordinate planning, policy, budgeting, and regulatory development.

²⁵ Using the United Nations Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators, each sub-programme within each vote of the 2018 South Africa National Budget was assigned an associated SDG (when appropriate) and an associated SDG target (when possible).

²⁶ See <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/engage-locally/africa>

In this regard, it will be **key for governments to possess the right set of capacities** to design and implement strategies that will foster policy coherence. State capacity is recognized as a fundamental pillar of economic development, as public institutions construct the legal and fiscal structures that determine the allocation of resources in an economy (Page & Pande, 2018).

Building the capacity of leadership cannot be overstated for its importance for policy coherence. Transformational leadership begins with possessing the right mindsets, including attitudes, for propelling growth and wellbeing. **A survey by the OECD in early 2020 with 595 expert participants (thereof 310 policy makers) from all world regions, found that policy practitioners perceive governance or leadership-related challenges as the main obstacle to achieving policy coherence and the SDGs (OECD, 2020a).**

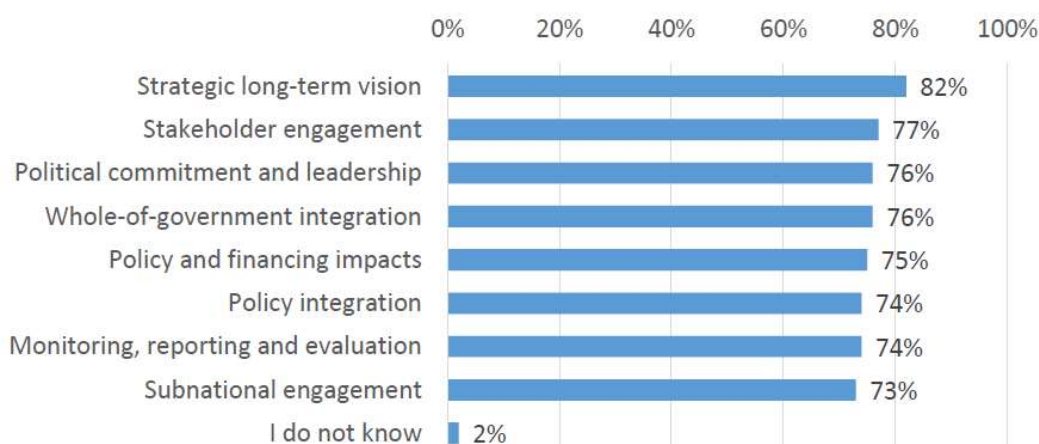


Figure 3 - Areas where governance related challenges are seen as an obstacle to achieve policy coherence in support of SDGs (percentage of respondents). Source: OECD 2020a.

African countries will need to, as highlighted in the baseline developed by APRM, **develop and use more sophisticated tools and approaches for policymaking** (APRM, 2021a). For instance, the pandemic showed that **more people can be engaged with less costs, provided the appropriate technologies are in place**, which makes closing the digital divide an automatic priority for a post COVID society. Along these lines, three main areas were highlighted by the 2021 World Public Sector Report as specific capacity development needs on tools and methods for policy coherence brought to surface by the pandemic: **“managing the trade-off between containing the virus and keeping economies open; limiting and counteracting the impacts of the pandemic and policy responses to it on inequality; and inter-generational equity”**(UNDESA, 2021c).

In terms of stakeholder engagement, communication and information sharing remain critical. For instance, in 2020 only 15 out 54 (28%) of African countries managed to host a separate stand-alone website for the SDGs to keep a repository that is updated periodically (SDGs Center for

Africa, 2020). This suggests the need for African countries to establish an updated SDG website that provides a snapshot of priorities and progress on the status of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. **For effective stakeholder engagement, countries would need to make the commitments official.** In Costa Rica, a society-wide pact to implement, monitor and evaluate the SDGs was signed in 2016 by the country's executive, legislative and judicial powers, as well as by a range of non-governmental stakeholders including civil society, public universities and the private sector (Government of Costa Rica, 2020).

Vertical coherence is another salient issue based on the review conducted for this paper. Countries highlight the importance of vertical coherence in their VNRs. Zambia' and Ghana's VNRs recognize enhancing vertical policy coherence as a key area for capacity development (Government of Ghana, 2019; Government of Zambia, 2020). In order for this to happen, one important step is to **strengthen effective linkages between VNRs and VLRs, and more specifically, to strengthen links between the processes to prepare both.**

A big challenge to policy coherence is the so-called "winner-takes-all" politics, which is blamed to undermine policy continuity, exacerbate polarization, and nurture a sense of exclusion and marginalisation of those who are not affiliated with the ruling party. Therefore, **long-term vision and planning horizons are essential for supporting present and future needs in a balanced manner.** They are also fundamental for ensuring that efforts on SDG implementation go beyond electoral cycles, government programmes or cabinet compositions. Policy incoherence needs to be tackled with the **design long-term development plans, but they should be binding for all successive governments and the enabling conditions for their implementation and monitoring should be in place.** Ghana's National Development Plan Commission (NDPC) has developed a 40-year development plan (the 2057 vision, to mark the 100th anniversary of Ghana's independence), but this plan is not binding to following governments (Abubakari et al., 2018).

Experience shows that **coordination mechanisms can only be effective if they go beyond information sharing. A good emerging practice is to provide coordination mechanisms with a clear mandate to anticipate and resolve policy divergences and tensions arising from different sectoral interests.** Required institutional arrangements are usually built into existing governance structures, rather than created anew. This makes it the more important to assign nodal committees with adequate political authority. Experience indicates that **high level arrangements are crucial to institutionalize support for coherence and sustainable development agendas but fail to provide the necessary processes to maintain effective implementation,** monitoring and reporting, which is why they should be accompanied by coordination mechanisms that mobilize more technical parts of government.

Promising practice: Setting up an effective strategic planning council in Mexico

In the past, state planning was often tied to the political parties in office, meaning frequently shifting priorities often not based on the most pressing needs of the population. The State of Nuevo León realized that to meet the need of its citizens, state policy priorities needed to transcend politics and be based on assessed needs, stakeholder engagement and the principles of human, sustainable and economic development, justice and security, transparent and efficient government.

A council was established through the Strategic Planning Law of the State in 2014 to formulate long-term public policy for Nuevo León. A 15-year strategic plan was designed that considered the current economic, social, and political situation of the state and came up with long-term objectives to foster sustainable development and general well-being of the citizens of Nuevo León by integrating the experience and knowledge of people from civil society, academia, businesses and government. The Strategic Plan works in six key areas: human development, sustainable development, economic development, security and justice, effective government, and public finance. Through these six areas, Consejo seeks to ensure the well-being of the citizens of Nuevo León with focus on the most vulnerable populations.

After five years of lessons learned and successful collaboration activities, the council has continued to work on the design of public policy for the state of Nuevo León as a bridge between applied research and public policy recommendations. It also facilitates cross-sector collaboration between key stakeholders to solve the state's most pressing problems. Activities include a knowledge network created to enable multi-sector contribution to initiatives such as on zero hunger, eradication of violence against women, water planning, local transportation, capacity building on information and intelligence analysis, promoting citizen participation on anti-corruption initiatives, investment, and better administration of public servants' pension funds, among many others.

Source: Website: <https://www.conl.mx/>

As mentioned before in this document, policy coherence is affected due to **competing sustainable development agendas**. Attainment of the SDGs is only one of a number of cross-national development agendas in Africa. Some of them pre-date the 2030 Agenda. The existence of multiple development agendas across Africa calls for extensive coordination, management, and administration of the implementation processes. The 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 are both voluntary agendas in terms of their membership, participation, and lack of accountability in case

commitments are not honoured. In many cases, the scope of membership is limited to coordination of stakeholders, dialogues, and reviews of reports. **There is no strong institutional basis for coherence decision making that influences policy change, follow up and reinforcement** (Civil Society Reflection Group, 2018). Therefore, **common reporting mechanisms for both agendas become important**. APRM and the UN can support in creating them and in promoting the development of joint decision making.

Promising practice: Improving policy coherence in Mongolia

The Government of Mongolia initiated a government-wide review of the policy coherence of all strategies, plans and policies (567 policies in total). The objectives of the review are to abolish obsolete policy documents, and to amend policy documents not consistent with long-term goals. A methodology for the review was established with support from the Stockholm Environment Institute. The evaluation process will include participation from all ministries and public institutions involved in policymaking. As part of this process, the Government aims to train policy planners in all areas.

Source: Mongolia, “Assessing SDGs Interlinkages, Interactions, Synergies, Nexuses and Trade-offs”, presentation by Ms. Doljinsuren Jambal, Director, Development Policy and Planning Department, National Development Agency at the Expert Group Meeting on Optimizing SDGs Implementation in the Framework of Integration and Policy Coherence, July 2019, 12, <https://unosd.un.org/events/2019-expert-group-meeting-optimizing-sdgs-implementation-framework-integration-and-policy>

Accordingly, and to sum up, the following capacity development needs have been initially identified from the review conducted for this paper. Some are more general for the region, and some apply more to the different countries studied. This means it will be key to customize capacity building efforts to each country’s particular context and hopefully reach not only national government officials, but also local governments and civil society representatives.

Main capacity development gaps to improve policy coherence in Africa

1. **Leadership skills:** With trainings, for instance, on inclusivity and integration within the context of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, enhancing public financial governance and management, as well as anti-corruption strategies.
2. **Long-term COVID-19 recovery plans:** Going beyond short-term actions and including green investments. This includes strategies to explicitly integrate policy coherence as operational principle in official COVID-19 recovery plans.
3. **Long-term strategic vision:** To ensure well designed long-term development plans are in place and are binding for subsequent governments.

4. **Closing the digital divide:** Development of a specific policy and/or actions to bridge the digital divide with the aim to increase stakeholder engagement and coordination in recovery efforts.
5. **Selection of accelerator SDGs:** The prioritization of themes or SDGs embedded in a systems approach, in order to avoid undesirable impacts on adjacent policy areas.
6. **Tools for systems thinking:** Use of proven concepts, tools and methods to improve an understanding of the complex systemic issues which threaten the future.
7. **Budget alignment:** Revising government budgets and using tools to systematically start integrating SDGs implementation in national budgets.
8. **Improved coordination:** Change in planning practices, in institutional coordination and in the identification of data gaps.
9. **Quality of public spending:** Mechanisms in place to promote the alignment of private and public finance to policy coherence objectives and to track related expenditures,
10. **Transparency:** Beyond financial transparency, strategies to foster transparency in interactions between government bodies, as well as transparency vis-à-vis the population to inform of SDG implementation.
11. **Anti-corruption strategies:** Mechanisms that ensure accountability and transparency of public finance.
12. **Meaningful stakeholder engagement:** Increasing stakeholder involvement and number of different stakeholders in policy making, planning and the VNR process.
13. **Debt management:** Tools, institutions, legal frameworks, or know-how to actively manage debt.
14. **Peer to peer learning:** Spaces and opportunities to learn from promising practices from around the world.
15. **Training to change mindsets:** Capacity development to transform mindsets of public servants.
16. **Resource mobilization strategy:** Plan with breakdown of financing needs into annual, short-term, and long-term, and include actions to ensure that finances are used effectively and transparently.
17. **Reducing domestic revenue gap:** Tax auditing, revenue management, combatting tax evasion, public procurement, etc.
18. **Guidelines to link VNRs and VLRs:** For instance, disseminating the upcoming African regional VLR guidelines to be finalized by UNECA.
19. **Capacity for shadow reporting:** Diversification of stakeholders' tools for conducting independent assessments of SDG implementation.
20. **Improving vertical coherence:** Strategies for multiple levels of government to work together.
21. **Local government capacity:** Administrative autonomy or the financial means to implement functions or services that they are supposed to provide.
22. **Government-wide capacity-building gap assessments:** Tools for self-assessment of capacity development needs.
23. **Integrated monitoring and evaluation tools:** Tools to jointly track Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.



Figure 4 - Main capacity development gaps identified in this paper. Source: Self-developed.

The following table makes some initial suggestions for country-specific capacity development needs, based on the list presented above, as well as the experiences collected for each of the countries. These would need to be discussed with national stakeholders to finetune and complement this table:

Ghana	Prioritization of catalytic SDGs and application of systems approach to assess potential trade-offs (e.g., trade-offs of strengthening the agri-food system). Improvement of local governments capacities in the framework of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Debt management.
South Africa	Meaningful civil society engagement. Financial management and anticorruption.
Madagascar	Meaningful civil society engagement. Budget alignment. Resource mobilization strategy.
Zambia	Improving vertical coherence and long-term COVID-19 recovery plans.
Kenya	Resource mobilization strategy, tools for systems thinking, bridging the digital divide.
Uganda	Anticorruption, effective public spending, transparency.
Côte d'Ivoire	Improvement of local governments capacities. Meaningful stakeholder engagement.

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Uganda case study

The Republic of Uganda has showed promising policy coherence practices when it comes to policy integration and leadership, applying systems thinking and stakeholder engagement using technologies. Main challenges relate to improving vertical coherence and local government involvement, updating data systems, and paying special attention to the negative social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Uganda has made significant progress towards achieving the SDGs by integrating them into national planning and budgeting processes. The National Development Plan III 2021-25 represents a significant milestone in SDG integration as it integrated 76% of SDGs and adapted them to the national context (Government of Uganda, 2020). Currently, it is still necessary to continue expanding the linkages between the SDG framework (and related agendas, such as Agenda 2063, the Sendai Framework, climate goals, etc.) and sector strategies and budgets.

In terms of high-level commitments and transformational leadership, in 2016, the Government of Uganda launched a guiding framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, under the leadership of the Office of the Prime Minister. The coordination framework is developed around five thematic areas: planning and mainstreaming, financing, data management, coordination, monitoring, reporting and reviews, and communication and popularization (Government of Uganda, 2020). To strengthen partnerships, coordination and collaboration, the Government has reviewed the SDG Coordination Framework and the SDG Roadmap. This review has informed the new SDG Roadmap 2021-2025 (Uganda National NGO Forum, 2021). The new roadmap provides strategic guidance on the roles and responsibilities of key institutions and stakeholders on the implementation of the SDGs.

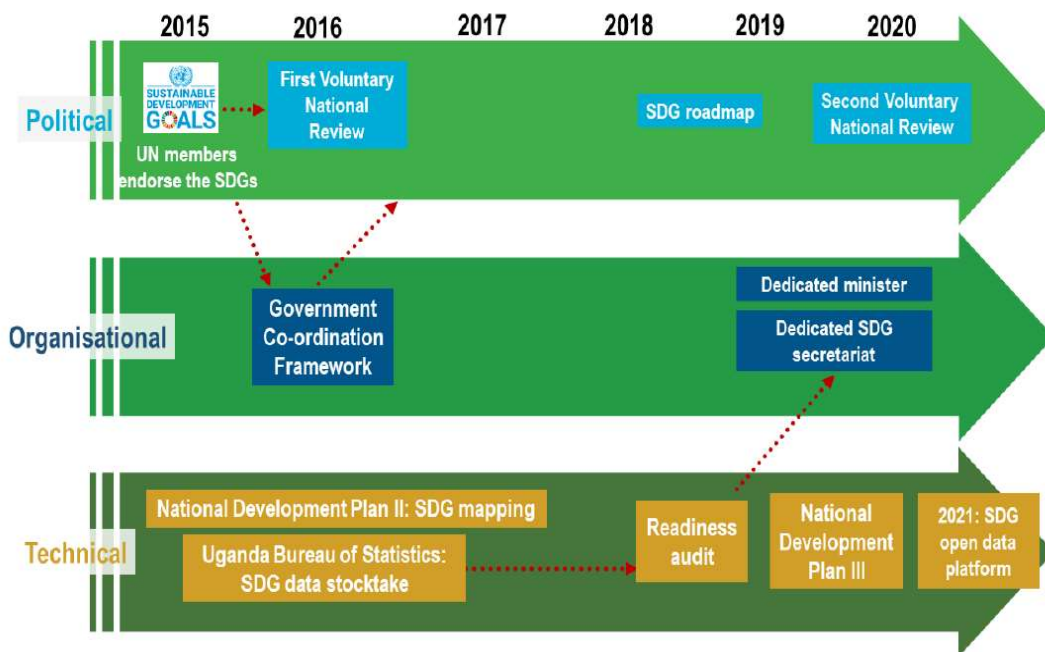
Uganda has built a robust system of coordination that includes both the political and technical arms of government as well as partners and stakeholders in civil society and business. The Technical Working Groups provide a very clear coordination system that requires additional sharpening to ensure stronger synergy and coloration between the core mandates of the groups and the assignment of departments within institutions (Government of Uganda, 2020).

The government has engaged in systems thinking to assess synergies and trade-offs of flagship sectoral policies. In this regard, industry, governance, and environment have been identified as accelerators for attaining National Development II targets and the SDGs. This was guided by an Integrated Sustainable Development Goals (ISDG) model focused on systems thinking (National Planning Authority of Uganda, 2020).

CSOs have been engaged in the 2030 Agenda through a coordinated process. The National CSO Core Reference Group (NCCRG) on SDGs is a consortium of CSOs doing work around SDGs. The CSOs under their coalition NCCRG are monitoring the implementation of the SDGs within the existing institutional structures. During COVID-19 lockdowns, online stakeholder engagement has been promoted, which has allowed broad participation and cost reduction. At the same time, and like many other countries, Uganda

is facing the challenges as improvements in technology and innovation are increasingly important factors of success. A recent review by UNCTAD (2020) determined urgent for Uganda to develop a strong STI policy and competent implementation in order to catalyse technology-led growth and development. In the technical and policy review, several key challenges were identified, such as the high cost of broadband data, inadequate access to modern forms of energy and weaknesses in transport and logistics (UNCTAD, 2020).

Figure 5 - Visualising Uganda's SDG journey: Key steps to date. Source: (OECD, 2021)



One aspect that needs improvements is vertical coherence, as interaction between local and national governments is very limited (Uganda National NGO Forum, 2021). Uganda is a deeply decentralized country with several political leaders at various levels playing very important roles in the implementation of government policy. Notably, 66% of the population satisfied by local government services (SDGs Center for Africa, 2019).

Reporting is prioritized with a first VNR submitted in 2019, and the second at the 2020 HLPF (Government of Uganda, 2020). Uganda has progressively improved its capacity to monitor and report on SDG data but there is a need to improve the SDGs data platform. Due to resource constraints Uganda still relies on data that are out of date, with too many people missing from the numbers collected (OECD, 2021). The country provides an exceptional example from the continent in reporting on SDGs, especially SDG 16. Uganda is one of the few African countries which have available data on SDG 16 despite the political sensitivity and difficult measurability (UN, 2021a). This last issue is extremely important due to social impacts of COVID-

19. Through 2020 and 2021, the pandemic led to prolonged school closures in Uganda. These closures exacerbated sexual and gender-based violence against girls. Lockdowns isolated some girls near perpetrators within homes and neighbourhoods and left them unable to access help. Moreover, financial burdens have increased the pressure on girls to work in locations where the risk is high. Cultural and social norms play their part, including through child marriage (The Nordic Africa Institute, 2021).

Côte d'Ivoire case study

Côte d'Ivoire has shown slow progress towards the achievement of the SDGs, which has impacted the country's response capacities and resilience to the current pandemic (SDGs Center for Africa, 2020). In turn, the impact of the pandemic will slow down the achievement of the Goals. COVID-19 has highlighted a capacity gap in human capital and structural inequalities, particularly related to the quality of and access to public health services. These gaps have persisted throughout the process of peace consolidation and economic reconstruction the country has been engaged in since 2011, after a decade (2000-2010) of political difficulties (UN, 2021b).

The government's commitment to the achievement of the SDGs was concretized through (i) the establishment of a multi-stakeholder national consultation framework, (ii) high-level participation in UN SDG meetings in NY and (iii) the inclusion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2016-2020 (Ministère du Plan et du Développement Côte d'Ivoire, 2017). The NDP was organized according to 5 strategic axes: strengthening the quality of institutions and governance (SDGs 11, 16 and 17), accelerating human capital development and promoting social well-being (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 14), accelerating the structural transformation of the economy through responsible industrialization (SDG 8, 12), development of infrastructures harmoniously distributed on the national territory and preservation of the environment (MDGs 6, 7, 9, 13, 15), strengthening regional integration and international cooperation (SDG 10, 17) (Government of Côte d'Ivoire, 2016).

The Government is finalizing its 2021-2025 National Development Plan (NDP) and has identified new pillars: deepening governance and modernization of the State; transformation of the economy; development of human capital; strengthening social inclusion; and regional development and support to infrastructure. These themes are quite similar to the ones highlighted in the last NDP, with the exception of environment and sustainability which seem not to be prominently featured anymore.

The multi-stakeholder national consultation framework is the technical decision-making body for the implementation of the SDGs in Côte d'Ivoire. It is a team made up of key ministries and certain actors identified by the United Nations and is responsible for validating the VNR on the implementation of the SDGs (UNECA, 2018). This framework has worked to ensure awareness, ownership, and commitment of Ivorian actors to the participatory debates related to the adoption of the SDGs. The meetings and preparatory work of this consultation framework led to (i) the official launch and public information on the SDG process in Côte d'Ivoire on 26 August 2015; (ii) the organization of a technical workshop from 27 to 29 August 2015 to draw lessons from the follow-up to the MDGs, to ensure ownership of the SDGs and to propose a roadmap for stakeholders on the SDGs; and (iii) the preparation of thematic notes for interactive dialogues during the New York summit.

According to the Ministry of Planning and Development, Côte d'Ivoire has been successful in the following activities for SDG implementation (Ministère du Plan et du Développement Côte d'Ivoire, 2017):

- Making policies consistent with the NDP and integrating the SDGs. The Ministry of Planning is responsible for policy coherence, implementation, and the good coordination of resources.
- Voting of the State budget by the Parliament, paying particular attention to monitoring the amounts allocated to financing the SDGs. The Parliament also took stock of existing laws by considering related SDG targets.
- Organization of thematic commissions to advise the executive on the process of monitoring the SDGs by the Economic and Social Committee.
- Revision of regional and municipal development plans by Local Authorities in light of the NDP and mainstream the SDGs into them.
- Citizen monitoring by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in favour of an effective implementation of the 2016-2020 NDP, promoting consultations between the various parties.

The Permanent Technical Unit is the body in charge of monitoring and evaluating the Sustainable Development Goals in Côte d'Ivoire. At the monitoring level, Côte d'Ivoire has a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics and periodically organizes national surveys. However, the poor availability of statistical data, especially at the regional level, hinders the targeting of development interventions for the most vulnerable (SDGs Center for Africa, 2019). The response to these bottlenecks is addressed through the development of an NDP monitoring scorecard that incorporates SDG indicators, the development by the United Nations system of a single programmatic framework linked to the NDP and which places particular emphasis on the development of the national statistical system (*Advocacy for the Implementation of the SDGs in Côte d'Ivoire. Côte d'Ivoire Consultative Group on the NDP, 2018; UNECA, 2018*).

An interesting example of an action for policy coherence relates to the government's goal to reduce poverty. In order to achieve that goal, the government aimed to promote education for all and established free and compulsory school for every child until age 16. With this action, the net education rate went from 68% in 2012 up to 87% in 2016 (UNECA, 2018). Additionally, UNECA (2018) highlights a good example of peer-to-peer learning and cooperation involves Cote d'Ivoire and one of the other countries reviewed for this paper, Ghana. In April 2017 both countries agreed on a deepening in their coordination of cocoa production via their respective regulators, the Conseil du Cafe-Cacao and Cocobod. The decision has been highlighted as positive for both countries and is expected to decrease cocoa price volatility in the future. Finally, Côte d'Ivoire has extensive experience with Public Private Partnerships (PPP) since independence in 1960. It is a pioneer in PPP in French-speaking Africa because it has been using this tool to finance and accelerate its development for more than 50 years in the fields of drinking water, electricity, ports, toll bridges, railways, etc. Such partnerships will be crucial to achieve the SDGs (Government of Côte d'Ivoire, 2019).

In the medium term, the government of Côte d'Ivoire will need to seek support to implement the following actions:

- I. Strengthening the national planning and statistics system
- II. Strengthening the capacities of stakeholders for the implementation of sustainable development

- III. Maintain the country's socio-political stability
- IV. Promote sustainable production and consumption patterns
- V. Ensure the financing of the implementation process of the SDGs
- VI. Create a framework for consultation and coordination of actions for the implementation of the SDGs
- VII. Increase outreach and ensure better institutional networking