

INTEGRATING VNR FINDINGS INTO GOVERNMENT ARCHITECTURE

WHAT IS IT?

In addressing how VNR findings are integrated and advanced through government infrastructure as related to SDG 16 ([targets and principles](#)), this module looks at:

1. National SDG coordination mechanisms and structures,
2. National budgets and how they can be aligned with the SDGs, and
3. How SDG 16-related VNR recommendations can be deliberated and advanced through government ministries and departments.

In so doing, it highlights linkages to National Development Plans (NDPs), national action and strategic plans, sector strategies, and other relevant frameworks.

NATIONAL SDG COORDINATION MECHANISMS

WHAT IS IT?

[National SDG coordination mechanisms and structures](#) coordinate, collect data, plan, monitor efforts, and support the delivery of policy and programmatic outcomes.

[Coordination structures](#) bring together government institutions and incorporate the SDGs into integrated policies and corresponding budget lines, with actions attributable to the responsible ministry, department or agency. They also increasingly include CSOs, NHRIs and other stakeholders.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

As such, these structures and mechanisms provide an opportunity for collaboration, dialogue and knowledge-sharing across institutions and sectors, policy cycles, and levels of government.

When coordination is designed with clear roles and responsibilities, ministries and government departments are better held to account in translating the VNR into political action, policy, or programming.

While [increased stakeholder participation](#) may, at times, slow processes, experience indicates that inclusive structures enhance accountability, trust, and, ultimately, performance



Bottom Line: When a VNR is part of a nationally owned, inclusive and participatory process, effectively integrating VNR findings into national architecture through transparent and multi-stakeholder processes [leads to more responsive and accountable institutions](#).

HOW IS IT APPROACHED?

In [2018](#), 31 out of 46 VNRs mentioned new or existing structures to oversee SDG implementation. In 2019, 47 countries, or [more than half of those reporting](#), set up new coordination structures often through a multi-stakeholder SDG Commissions, Councils, Working Group or Task Forces.

By 2021, with many countries reporting for a second or third time, [various adaptations to coordinating structures were mentioned, from structures being added to or expanded to shifts in responsible ministries or government bodies](#).

COMPOSITION AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Often led or housed within a ministry or the executive office
- Can include line ministries, national statistical offices and commissions, NHRIs and other independent equality bodies, as well as civil society, the private sector, academia, local and regional actors, and others.
- Such bodies are often responsible for coordinating the development of national SDG implementation plans and/or integrating SDG implementation into existing plans.
- This may also entail [maintaining timeframes, defined responsibilities for government actors and institutions, and transparent deliverables subject to regular reporting](#).

Integration with other national coordinating bodies, including with the National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-Up on human rights, for example, [is considered good practice](#). (More on linkages with human rights mechanisms can be found in Modules 9 and 12.)

Case Study: An Evolving Tool in Coordination, Inclusion, Accountability, and Implementation: The SDGs Council, Georgia

In 2017 and after its 2016 VNR, Georgia created the SDGs Council to facilitate SDG implementation and monitoring. It is chaired by the Government's Head of Administration, co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and reports to the Prime Minister. In 2019, the SDGs Council was separated from the Public Administration Reform Council and was established as an independent entity. The below briefly details the Council's evolution for stronger impact.

Composition: Since 2017, the Council has grown to include over 15 public institutions, including deputy ministers from all relevant line ministries, state agencies, mayors and elected co-chairs of thematic working groups from civil society. In addition, parliamentary committees, UN Agencies, and other International Organizations (IOs) may be asked to participate, though without the right to vote.

How it Works: Its coordination mechanism operates through a three-part structure: the Council itself, the Secretariat (the Policy Planning Unit within the Administration), and four Working Groups: Economic Development, Democratic Governance, Social Inclusion and Sustainable Energy and Environment Protection. In 2019, the Council's composition changed, with the Working Groups' operational methods made more inclusive, with chairs or co-chairs (including civil society and the UN) having stronger advocacy and decision-making roles. (Working Groups include the private sector, academia and other IOs.)

Where It Gets Its Information: The Council now draws its data from the SDGs National Document (the Matrix) and the Electronic Monitoring System (EMS). The Matrix reflects global and Georgia-adjusted targets and indicators, baseline indicators, data sources, and the responsible entity. The SDGs Matrix also includes scorecards. Through EMS, launched in 2019, ministries are directly informed should they fall behind. In terms of policy, the Council can now make recommendations to line ministries and others, with EMS providing a concrete monitoring instrument. Recommendations are often tied to the national Policy Development and Coordination System, with further links made to Georgia's Public Administration Reform efforts.

Impact of the VNR: The updated SDGs Council played a crucial role in **Georgia's 2020 VNR**. The Secretariat acted within its new mandate to coordinate the process. Working Groups provided information and recommendations to the draft documents and, after several rounds of review, the Council, defined as a political decision-making body, adopted the final version of Georgia's 2020 VNR.

Take-aways and Going Forward: A clear division of labor and mandates, with proper civil society engagement, ensured a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach to Georgia's 2020 VNR, focused on progress and accountability. Wide-reaching communication mechanisms were still lacking.

* This case study is based on interviews with the Policy Planning Unit within the Administration of the Government of Georgia.

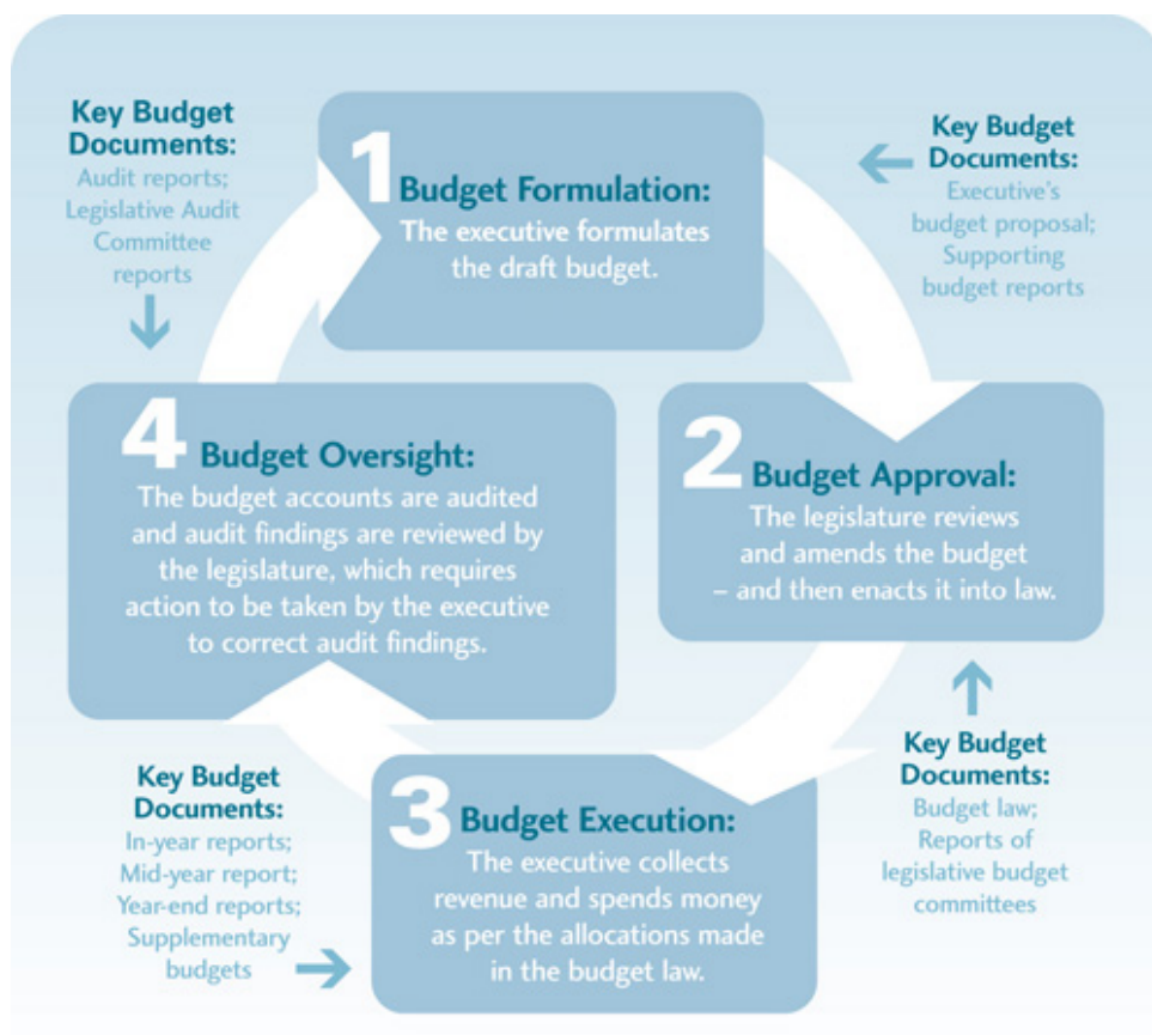
ALIGNING BUDGETS WITH THE SDGS

WHAT IS IT?

National budget processes typically include four stages:

- Budget formulation,
- Approval,
- Execution, and
- Oversight.

Different actors, including legislators, auditors, CSOs, citizens, the media and donors, play different roles in determining budget decisions, implementation and outcomes.



While [integrating the SDGs into national budget processes](#) has been limited, [efforts are increasing](#).

With initial lessons being drawn from the MDGs, [particularly as related to tracking public expenditures in support of sectoral objectives](#), governments are working to translate SDG policy priorities to budget decisions and processes.

There are various tools and approaches to doing so (noted below), with most countries focusing [on specific SDGs when aligning their budgets](#) rather than an “Agenda-wide” approach.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

National budgets are governments' most powerful economic tool to meet the SDGs and the needs of its people, including those most at risk of being left behind.

While budgets feature in some VNRs, they should do so more prominently, identifying how the 2030 Agenda is prioritized, how SDG initiatives are being funded, and how they are working across ministries to maximize the impact of public resources.

To this end, countries can [highlight budget amounts that are linked to the policies](#) listed in their VNRs.



Bottom Line: Even the most well-intentioned public policy has little impact unless it is matched with sufficient public resources.

HOW IS IT APPROACHED?

According to the [2019 World Public Sector Report](#), **national SDG budgeting** can range from supplying basic information on SDG targets and related budget allocations to “fully-fledged SDG-based budget classification systems that can drive budget prioritization, decision-making, execution, monitoring, audit and accountability processes”.

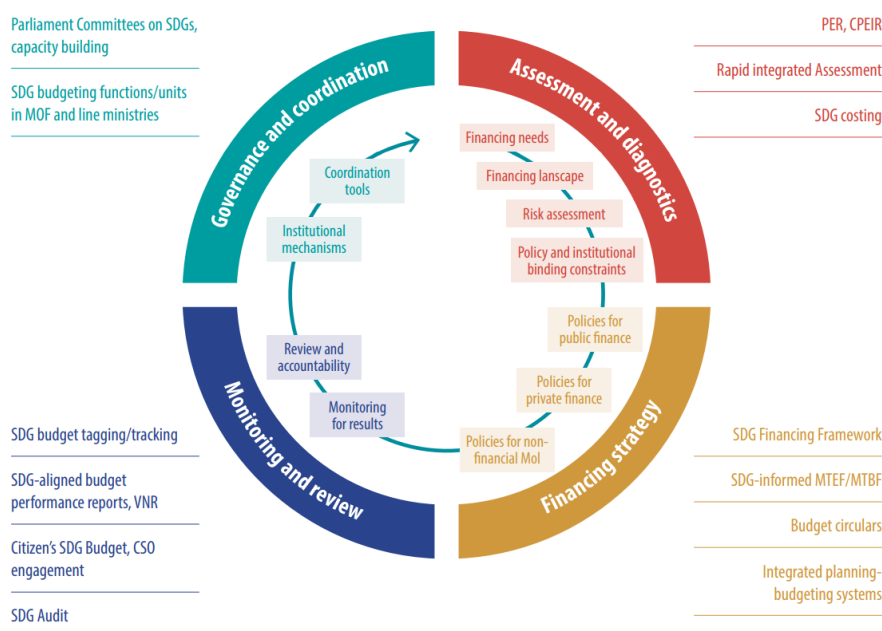
One factor is public finance management reforms, and how these can be undertaken to support SDG implementation and monitoring.

In pursuing “**Budgeting for the SDGs**” (**B4SDG**), there are various tools and frameworks to be applied.

One tool is the Development Finance Assessment (DFA), which identifies opportunities to both use existing resources more effectively and to mobilize additional sources of finance.

Another tool is [Integrated National Financing Framework](#) (INFF). Figure Below)

- INFFs help policymakers map the landscape and strategize for making the most effective use of investment for national development priorities and the SDGs across all sources of finance.
- In partnership with UN Agencies, the IMF and the EU, UNDP is providing technical support to develop INFFs in 58 countries.



The choice of the most relevant tools for each country requires a systematic review of the context, available options for tools, capacity constraints, and timeframe for the reforms.

Case Study: Aligning Budgets with the SDGs and SDG 16 for longer-term National Planning, Mexico

Aligning Budgets with the SDGs and SDG 16 for longer-term National Planning, Mexico

As of, and according to, the [2019 World Public Sector Report](#), Mexico “stands out as having moved the farthest in terms of mapping the SDGs into its national planning and budgeting processes”. Mexico’s efforts to integrate the SDGs into its national strategies and plans started in 2016, shortly after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The [Ministry of Finance and Public Credit](#), which oversees the development of national and sector plans, in partnership with **UNDP and the Office of the Presidency**, which is responsible for national SDG implementation, developed a methodology to monitor and evaluate the performance of the national budget in contributing to the SDGs.

The first step was to **identify links between sectoral strategies and the SDGs’ 169 targets**. Based on these links, the Ministry of Finance then identified budget programmes related to each SDG target. The analysis was reviewed and validated by line ministries. Initial results indicated the need for more disaggregated information to assess the specific contribution of each budget programme to the related SDG target(s), as different budget and sector programmes contribute to the different aspects of each target.

In 2017, the Ministry of Finance integrated the methodology into the 2018 Budget Statement of the Executive Budget Proposal. This brought in the IT systems for budget preparation, which included a module for linking budget programmes with SDG targets or sub-targets and tracking budget execution. Complementary fiscal transparency measures were also adopted, such as integrating a summary of the methodology into the Citizen Budget and publishing the results of this exercise in open data.

According to [Mexico’s 2018 VNR](#), in the 2018 federal budget, 80.7 percent of Budgetary Programmes (BPs) were connected to the 2030 Agenda, while 156 of the 169 SDG indicators are connected to at least one BP. The vast majority of these programmes are linked in some way to SDG 16 .

Take-Aways: Several factors facilitated Mexico’s budget reform process, including: an existing national budget programme structure with performance targets; standing coordination between planning and budgeting processes; existent monitoring and performance evaluation systems; and political will within the Ministry of Finance to develop methodology linking SDG targets with the budget.

Going forward, not just where, but how funds are spent needs to be evaluated, moving beyond mapping to monitoring and evaluation in order to understand the effectiveness of public policies and programming in reaching SDG 16 and all prioritize SDGs.

* Case Study draws from the 2018 World Public Sector Report, with input provided by Mexico’s 2030 Agenda Office within the Office of the President.

ADVANCING SDG 16-RELATED VNR FINDINGS

WHAT IS IT?

While there can be significant variance in how VNR recommendations and findings are taken forward in practice following a VNR, key to the process is ensuring that the VNR is effectively linked to national planning processes, including as related to SDG 16 policy and programming.

[These can include:](#)

- National Development Plans or National Sustainable Development Strategies;
- Sectoral Policies, Plans and Programmes;
- Integrated Financial Frameworks and Fiscal Policies;
- Legislation (discussed in subsequent module); and
- Subnational and local planning (discussed in subsequent module).

And as highlighted in an earlier case study, VNR and post-VNR processes that identify which line ministry or government office is responsible for following through with recommendations is key.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Integrating VNR findings into **NDPs' priorities and policies** specifically in the midterm or final review of national plans in a coordinated manner and from a human-rights-based approach, not only strengthens implementation but increases the potential for policy cohesion across sector pillars.

Further, additional focus should be placed on **connecting and national SDG reports with the VNR**, and the data that is derived from each in order to better link back to NDPs and priorities.

- [While national SDGs reports and VNRs constitute two different outputs](#), they should be approached and used together as part of a larger and longer-term process to achieve the SDGs.

This also applies to related frameworks or multi-stakeholder dialogue processes, such as the [International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding](#) or the [Open Government Partnership](#) for relevant countries.

- To this end, multi-stakeholder dialogues help maintain policy continuity, particularly during changes in government and electoral cycles.

HOW IS IT APPROACHED?

Including following from a VNR, Various tools and approaches are designed to help mainstream the SDGs into national and subnational planning, including as related to reporting. These include:

- "MAPS" ([Mainstreaming, Acceleration, Policy Support](#)) and
- "RIA" ([Rapid Integrated Assessment](#)).

Simple [grid-based tools help explore alignment between existing national frameworks and the SDGs](#).

Beyond development frameworks, the [VNR has also proven a useful tool in galvanizing political will](#) and commitment for national peace and stability processes through an SDG 16 lens.

The following case studies illustrate how the VNR process was used to advance SDG 16 through line ministries, national development actors, and as related to larger political change and reform processes.

Case Study: Advancing SDG 16 through Post-VNR Action: A Directorate for Access to Justice, Sierra Leone

Advancing SDG 16 through Post-VNR Action: A Directorate for Access to Justice, Sierra Leone

Access to Justice and Judicial Reform was central to [Sierra Leone's 2019 VNR](#). Identified in the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) report as one of the primary causes for the civil war, reform of a weak justice sector has since been a priority. For Sierra Leone, the VNR (having presented in 2019 and 2016) entails an integrated, multi-stakeholder process linked to national development planning, with additional links to the [African Union's Agenda 2063](#) and the [New Deal](#). Its 2019 VNR was specifically tied to the Government of Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2019-2023.

Therefore, and following from the VNR and MTNDP, the Office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, as custodian of SDG 16, embarked on establishing a **Directorate on Access to Justice** to connect formal and informal justice mechanisms under one umbrella entity as a means of more effectively and efficiently answering people's justice needs. For example, in the case of land disputes, the Directorate would help those in the provinces know where to take their judicial issues for recourse (formal or informal, such as alternative dispute resolution). The Directorate will be responsible for coordinating non-state actors, justices for the peace, and informal and customary law processes. In so doing, partnering, and working with civil society will be critical.

The Directorate will also work with other justice sector institutions on implementation and monitoring of relevant SDG 16 targets. These include the Law Reform Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Legal Aid Board, the Human Rights Commission, the Sierra Leone Law School, the Registrar General's Office, and the Justice Sector Coordination Office.¹ Amidst COVID-19 challenges, the Directorate was set to be fully operational by end 2020.

Take-Aways and Going Forward: There should be an SDG 16 Sector Working Group, inclusive of civil society, academics, and justice-related institutions, and with an effective communication strategy. This would support the coordination of SDG 16 stakeholders in monitoring and reporting and help close the gender gap in access to justice.

*Case Study based on 2019 interviews with the Justice Sector Coordination Office, Ministry of Justice, Sierra Leone.

¹ The Justice Sector Coordination Office is working with UNDP to develop a new reporting and monitoring framework for SDG 16. Indicators and targets will be localized, relevant for all institutions required to report on SDG 16, including the police, for example. Data collection, monitoring and evaluation are to be done in partnership with Statistics Sierra Leone, in line with VNR recommendations for a more coordinated approach.

Case Study: Linking the VNR and SDG 16 Implementation with National Reform Processes, Lesotho

Linking the VNR and SDG 16 Implementation with National Reform Processes, Lesotho

The 2019 VNR in Lesotho coincided with its National Dialogue and Reform Process, an effort to bring about transformation, long-term stability, and sustainable peace against a backdrop of decades of political upheaval. **The strategic positioning of the reform process in achieving SDG 16, as captured in the VNR, was such that the VNR became an important policy tool, among others, in continuing the national dialogue process.** Supported by UNDP, the dialogue process led to national consensus on SDG 16-related reforms across a range of sectors. Key steps related to the VNR and longer-term SDG 16 implementation were as follows:

Political commitment and national strategy – Leading up to the VNR and building on the regional intervention of South African Development Community and the Commonwealth, UNDP, with funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund, galvanized political and social leadership among local and international actors, as well as development partners to formulate the roadmap that guided national dialogue and reforms process.

Establishment of clear leadership, horizontal and vertical coordination mechanism – A National Dialogue Planning Committee coordinated an inclusive and participatory national consultation process. National Leaders Forums and Multi-stakeholder Dialogue Plenaries helped bring consensus on reforms and implementation options. **This content became a statement of policy intent in the VNR.**

Coordinated thought leadership and policy articulation – A UN/Development Partners Technical Advisory Group was established to coordinate thought leadership and technical support by experts. This entailed distilling views from consultative dialogues into reform content and implementation options, which were presented to the Leaders Forums and Multi-stakeholder Plenaries. **Content became the policy proposal for SDG 16 embedded in the VNR.**

The National Reforms Authority (created through the NRA Act) – This provides a legal and institutional framework for implementation of the agreed reforms that significantly contributes to attainment of SDG 16. The NRA Act guards against interference and **provides a long-term track for accelerating progress towards SDG 16 by ensuring successful implementation of SDG 16-related reforms.**

The National dialogue highlighted the value of linking the VNR to local realities and national development planning processes. These included: a legislative framework and legal mandate for reform implementation (NRA Act 2019); institutions to oversee implementation; allocation of resources and financing through the budget (Appropriation Bill 2019); and a programme of support for coordinated reform implementation across development partners.

Take-aways and Going Forward: For the VNR to be an effective advocacy tool, there must be national consensus on key development issues and underlying challenges, with a well-defined roadmap to address those issues. To this end, VNR recommendations must be linked to national development strategies and policy priorities for adequate follow-up.

In addition, horizontal, vertical, and technical coordination is critical to inclusion, policy coherence and the formulation of policy proposals that become part of a VNR. In terms of data, national repositories of statistics should be supported to generate, process, and manage SDG 16-specific data, including through related surveys, with academic and research institutions also engaged in national VNR monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

*Case Study draws from insight and input provided by UNDP Lesotho in 2019.