

The SDGs as a compass for the Belgian development cooperation

CASE STUDY: BENIN

Sarah Braeye, Jan Van Ongevalle,
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Contents

List of abbreviations	5
List of tables	7
1 Introduction	9
1.1 Background of the study	9
1.2 Objectives	10
1.2.1 General objective	10
1.2.2 Specific objectives	10
1.3 Methodology	12
1.4 Report outline	12
2 SDG context in Benin	13
2.1 Current socioeconomic context: brief overview	13
2.2 Benin & the MDGs	14
2.3 SDG integration in Benin's national and local development policies	14
2.4 Health care in Benin	17
2.5 Agricultural development in Benin	18
3 Leaving no one behind & universalism	19
3.1 LNOB - on the radar but yet mainstreamed	19
3.2 Good practices & opportunities	20
3.2.1 Examine: understanding who is being left behind and why	20
3.2.2 Empower: strengthening civic engagement and voice	23
3.2.3 Enact: strengthening integrated, equity-focused policies, interventions & budgets	25
3.3 Challenges & remaining questions	26
3.3.1 Political challenges	26
3.3.2 Conceptual & technical challenges	27
3.4 Tentative policy recommendations	28
4 Multi-stakeholder partnerships	29
4.1 Multi-stakeholdership as an add-on	30
4.2 Towards multi-stakeholdership as a defining element	31
4.3 Opportunities to move towards an ecosystems perspective?	32
4.4 Tentative policy recommendations	33
5 Indivisibility & Interconnectedness	35
5.1 Horizontal integration across thematics, sectors and geographies	36
5.1.1 Internal coherence and inter-pillar links	37
5.1.2 Prioritization & integration of transversal themes	39
5.1.3 External coherence, partnerships and synergies	40
5.2 Tentative conclusions & recommendations	41
6 SDG integration in programme cycle & results framework	43
6.1 Different entry points for the SDGs in the programming cycle of the bilateral cooperation	44
6.1.1 Steps taken by Enabel and DGD to measure contribution to the SDGs	44
6.1.2 Steps taken to integrate SDGs in the results framework of the Benin portfolio	46
6.2 Potential added value for integrating SDGs into the results frameworks	47
6.3 Challenges & potential bottlenecks	48

6.4 Tentative policy recommendations

49

References

51

List of abbreviations

ALDIPE	Association de Lutte pour un Développement Intégré et la Protection de l'Environnement
ARCH	Assurance pour le Renforcement du Capital Humain
BIO	Belgian investment company for developing countries
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DI	Development Initiatives
GNI	Gross national income
HDI	Human Development Index
HIVA	Research Institute for Work & Society (KU Leuven)
IOB	Institute of Development Policy
LDC	Least developed country
LIC	Low-income country
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIC	Middle-income country
MSME	Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises
MSP	Multi-stakeholder partnership
NGA	Non-governmental actor
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official development assistance
PAG	Programme d'Action du Gouvernement
PCD	Plan de Développement Communal
PC2D	Plan de Croissance pour la Développement Durable
PND	Plan National de Développement
PPP	Public-private partnerships
PSD	Private sector development
PS4D	Private sector for development
PSR	Policy-supporting research
PSRSA	Plan Stratégique de Relance du Secteur Agricole
PUSS	Plateforme des utilisateurs de service de santé
PNUSS	Plateforme nationale des utilisateurs de service de santé
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOTC	Severely off-track country
TFP	Technical and financial partner
VNR	Voluntary National Review

List of tables

Table 4.1	Types of multi-stakeholder approaches (adapted from Pollet & Huyse, 2019)	30
Table 5.1	Seven types of interactions between SDG targets (Nilsson et al., 2016)	36
Table 6.1	Extracts from the results framework of Enabel's Benin portfolio (not all indicators shown)	47

1 | Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have changed the framework in which development cooperation works. Development cooperation is now part and parcel of a broader ‘2030 Agenda’ that integrates the economic, social and environmental dimensions and addresses the drivers of poverty and vulnerability by ensuring that no one is left behind. The SDGs are ambitious, universal, integrated and indivisible. Belgium, as a donor of development cooperation, is committed to contributing to the realization of those ambitious goals. The Belgian Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) has therefore decided to use the SDGs as a compass to guide the future Belgian development efforts. Its ambition is to:

- (a) move from silos towards an integrated approach with the SDGs as a compass;
- (b) to ensure complementarity between the Belgian actors and development cooperation channels (DGD, bilateral agency, NGAs, BIO);
- (c) monitor the Belgian contribution to the SDGs, and;
- (d) to invest in a process of action-based learning.

As to guide the Belgian government in her ambitions, in January 2019 the DGD commissioned a long-term Policy Supporting Research (PSR), called ‘SDGs as a compass for the Belgian development cooperation’. The research was assigned to the Research Institute for Labour and Society (HIVA-KU Leuven) and the Institute of Development Policy (IOB - University of Antwerp), both having extensive experience with development cooperation and policy-oriented research.

This one year study includes (1) a scoping exercise among different Belgian development actors, exploring the state of play of SDG-integration in Belgium; (2) field work in two case study countries, Benin and Uganda, to explore the reality of SDG integration on the ground; and (3) the development of a conceptual framework that provides practical recommendations and pointers on how different development actors can strengthen SDG integration within their respective policies and programmes.

During the first phase (Scoping phase; April-July 2019), the study examined the state of play of SDG integration among different Belgian development actors, including actors of the governmental and non-governmental cooperation, as well as the Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO). It was examined how these different actors relate to Agenda 2030, how they are working with the underlying principles of the SDG framework, and how they are tracking and reporting their contribution towards the SDGs. Challenges and opportunities for SDG integration were also documented. The central methods involved interviews with representatives from the different cooperation channels and key informants at the international level (e.g. OECD DAC project on the SDGs as a shared framework for results, ...) and a review of internal documents and relevant international literature. The scoping exercise was concluded with validation workshops for the respective cooperation channels to validate and when necessary adjust provisional findings.

As a second phase in the PSR study, HIVA and IOB conducted field work in two case study countries, Benin and Uganda, to explore local current practices and policies related to Agenda 2030. The field work complemented the findings of the scoping phase. The main findings from the two case

studies are to be presented at the National Restitution Workshop that will take place in Brussels on 28 November 2019. This report presents the main findings from the fieldwork that took place in Benin between 15 and 30 September 2019.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General objective

The overall objective of the field study was to provide insight in the integration practices and processes of the Agenda 2030, complementing the findings of the scoping phase. The field work aimed to clarify and aid the process of using SDGs as a compass for the Belgian development cooperation.

1.2.2 Specific objectives

The field research explored the current practices, challenges and opportunities related to SDG integration among different actors of the Belgian development cooperation in Benin and Uganda. More specifically, the research aimed to:

1. Explore the current state of play with regard to SDG integration within the programmes of different Belgian development actors (bilateral, non-governmental, BIO) in Benin and Uganda, as well as these recipient countries' development policy and action plans;
2. Identify barriers, concerns and challenges related to SDG integration;
3. Explore opportunities for strengthening SDG integration in various stages of the programme cycle of the Belgian bilateral cooperation (e.g. instruction letter, country strategy, country portfolio, intervention level) as well as the non-governmental cooperation (e.g. joint strategic framework, programme planning and implementation);
4. Contribute to the development of conceptual frameworks that can guide Belgian development actors in further SDG integration in different phases of the policy cycle.

The analysis took place at strategic (policy) and operational level, thereby focusing on the integration of specific SDG principles¹ as well as tracking and reporting on contribution towards the SDGs.

These aims translated in the following research questions for the field work:

¹ SDG principles: indivisibility & interconnectedness, universality & leaving no one behind, inclusiveness, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Cluster 1: policy making and strategic choices	
Research question 1 – What policy was/is being developed by different international and national development actors regarding SDG integration?	<p><i>Areas of focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SDG integration in policy documents - Explicit or implicit objectives regarding SDG integration - How are (can) policy objectives regarding SDG integration (be) translated into practice? (aspirational/normative dimension versus actual practice)
Research question 2 – Which strategic choices did different international and national development actors make regarding the approach and methods in support of SDG integration?	<p><i>Areas of focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classification of the observed SDG integration strategies: incremental, integrated, and transformative - Dominant principles in the approach of the respective actors: LNOB, and/or inter-linkages, and/or multi-stakeholdership, ... - The extent to which SDG integration strategies are evolving together with changing ideas/insights (cf. adaptive management vs static management)
Cluster 2: approach and management of SDG integration	
Research question 3 – How are policy principles and strategic choices regarding SDG integration translated into interventions and cooperation with the partners?	<p><i>Areas of focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SDG integration in programmes and interventions: explicit/implicit; upstream/downstream; hands-on/hands-off - Resource provision for SDG integration - Mobilisation of expertise on SDG integration
Research question 4 – How is the governance of SDG integration efforts organised at actor-level and between actors?	<p><i>Areas of focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SDG governance at actor level, between actors, within and across sectors - Cooperation between different stakeholders (bilateral, multilateral, private, NGOs + interactions with governmental institutes) - Provision of resources for SDG integration
Research question 5 – How is SDG integration monitored and evaluated by different international and national development actors?	<p><i>Areas of focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See OECD-DAC framework² How do providers plan for, measure and use results information? - Roles & responsibilities of different actors
Cluster 3: indications of emerging effectiveness of SDG integration strategies	
Research question 6 – What initial findings are emerging on the effectiveness of different SDG integration strategies?	<p><i>Areas of focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence of emerging effectiveness in M&E reports and based on expert opinions - Collecting perspectives on what works well and what doesn't (barriers, concerns, challenges, lessons learnt)
Cluster 4: identification of entry points to improve SDG integration	
Research question 7 – What entry points can be identified to improve SDG integration within different cooperation channels and between channels?	<p><i>Areas of focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of specific areas where there is traction and support for SDG integration - Identification of entry points for SDG integration within and between actors - Political-economy analysis of opportunities for SDG integration

² OECD Concept Note 'Using the SDGs as a shared framework for results: tailoring and strengthening SDG-linked country-level results frameworks'.

1.3 Methodology

The field research encompassed the following key modes of data collection:

1. A review (desk study) of relevant documents, strategies and development plans of governmental and non-governmental development actors, existing (inter)national studies on SDG integration, analyses and statistics;
2. Field visits enabling consultations, in-depth interviews, and focus-group-discussions with relevant stakeholders in Benin;
3. Participant observation through participation in an Enabel restitution workshop.

For more detailed information on the methodology, we refer to the Field Work Inception Report which specifies the methodology and planning of the field visits to Benin and Uganda that took place from September 15th till September 29th 2019 and September 30th till October 14th 2019 respectively.

1.4 Report outline

This case study report starts with an overview of the current SDG context in Benin, including an assessment of the commitment of the Beninese government to achieve and integrate the SDGs in its national development plans. In the following chapters, a glance is cast on the ways in which and to what extent the Belgian development actors in Benin take into account the underlying principles of the Agenda 2030. The respective sections focus on: (1) Leaving No One Behind and Universalism, (2) Multi-stakeholder partnerships, (3) Indivisibility and interconnectedness, and (4) SDG integration in the programme cycle and results framework.

By combining the input of the interviews, focus-group discussions, desk research and participant observation, we are able to deduct current practices, challenges, opportunities and some guiding reflections for the future.

2 | SDG context in Benin

2.1 Current socioeconomic context: brief overview

Benin enjoys a fairly unique reputation in Africa as a stable, secure and democratic country.³ The most recent presidential elections held in March 2016 were won by the multi-millionaire cotton tycoon, Patrice Talon.

To date Benin, however, remains a Low Income Country (LIC) and also figures on the global list of Least Developed Countries (as of Dec 2018). In the last 3 decades, Benin has seen positive economic growth with annual gross domestic product (GDP) increases of between 2% and 6% (OECD 2018; World Bank⁴). Growth accelerated driven by vibrant port activity, a sound agricultural sector and an increase in public investments (particularly infrastructure)⁵. For 2019, the IMF predicts growth rates of approximately 6.7% (IMF, 2019). Benin nevertheless remains a heavily indebted country⁶ with one of the highest poverty rates in the world, especially compared to other sub-Saharan African countries (UNDP, 2014). In recent years the poverty rate (measured at the national poverty line) has even increased (OECD 2018, DI 2018). The population is young (half are under the age of 18) and a large part of the population works in the informal sector and agriculture⁷ – more than half of the population lives in rural areas where the poverty rates are high (particularly in the northern agrarian areas) and which are also environmentally vulnerable due to drought and climate change (OECD 2018). Overall, Benin is in the bottom quartile of the 2017 Human Development Index (HDI), with large development gaps existing in several key domains, as illustrated by low staffing in the health sector, limited access to sanitation and electricity, low literacy rates, etc. (OECD, 2018; IMF, 2019).

In the short term, there are a number of general risks. The country still scores quite high on the Fragile States Index (73.6 FSI), ranking 75th on a total of 178 countries.⁸ A second risk arises from the lower-than-expected growth in Nigeria (which would weaken Benin's exports, fiscal position, and activity); and further deterioration of bank profitability (which may weigh on credit provision) (IMF, 2019b). In the medium term, growth prospects are heavily dependent on the ability to revive participation of the private sector and attract foreign investors (IMF, 2019). National authorities also agree that agriculture and port activity will be key drivers of medium-term growth and that there are uncertainties about the pace of increase in private investment (ibid, see also data retrieved from interviews). As such, achieving development objectives will require a thorough transformation of the Beninese economy (IMF, 2019).

Despite some progress made in a number of developmental domains, achieving developmental successes in a country like Benin still remains challenging. Even where individual projects or programmes are successful, the broader challenge spurring transformative change will play out over decades. The economic growth, despite the improvements noted since 2011, has not been vigorous

3 www.worldbank.org/en/country/benin/overview

4 www.worldbank.org/en/country/benin/overview

5 www.worldbank.org/en/country/benin/overview

6 Benin is on the list of Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC).

7 The agriculture sector in Benin currently employs around 70% of Benin's workforce and contributes approximately 23% of its GDP. The industry is also responsible for 75% of Benin's export income and 15% of the Government's revenue, yet it remains underdeveloped.

8 <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>

enough to reduce poverty and it is also clear that it has not yet benefited the poorest 20% of Benin's population (OECD 2018, DI 2018). This is also shown by the country's high scores on the Human Inequality coefficient (36.3%) (UNDP, 2018b).

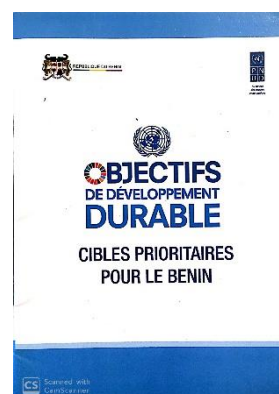
2.2 Benin & the MDGs

In Benin, over the period 2002-2015, the MDG development framework has been one of the guiding principles in the development of various national strategies, policies, programmes and projects with different objectives (in the medium and long term) and mechanisms for operationalisation.⁹ These include three generations of poverty reduction strategies: 1/ the 2003-2005 Document de Stratégie de Réduction de la Pauvreté (DSRP), 2/ the 2007-2009 Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de la Pauvreté (SCRP) – first generation, and 3/ the 2011-2015 Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de la Pauvreté (SCRP) – second generation. These different frameworks of operationalization of the MDGs in Benin have also been translated into tools of planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of policies. Resource and contextual constraints explained the prioritization of seventeen (17) targets out of the twenty-one (21) with a set of thirty-five (35) indicators. However, at the end of their implementation, the evaluation found quite a mixed record as various bottlenecks have limited progress towards the achievement of the targets.

In fact, overall progress made in the framework of the policies for implementing the MDGs have been quite contrasted, leaving significant challenges in terms of poverty and inequality.¹⁰ According to UNDP (2017), of the seventeen targets monitored and evaluated in Benin, only two targets were achieved (target for reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS, target for the service of debt). In 2015, it therefore appeared necessary to reverse trends and to capitalize lessons from the implementation of the MDGs for the success of future development policies in the country, especially in prospect of Benin's entry into the new paradigm of sustainable development, i.e. Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

2.3 SDG integration in Benin's national and local development policies

With the advent of the new Government (April 6, 2016), a new dynamic of public action has been launched with a stated ambition to undertake far-reaching reforms to give greater impetus to sustainable economic and social development in the country. As such, Benin has asserted its commitment to developing and implementing public policies that aim to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (RDB, 2018). The country was also involved in the design of the Agenda 2030 as pilot country and has published a Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2017 and 2018. The current Beninese government has the ambition to focus specifically on reducing poverty and vulnerability, especially for the poorest 20% of people through an entire set of institutional reforms to coordinate, monitor and evaluate the country's further development and contribution to Agenda 2030. As in many other countries (Chimhowu, 2019), the emergence of the global SDGs has in part spurred the emergence of new national planning. A national agenda for the appropriation of the SDGs was adopted, which in turn led to the preparation of the national Beninese report on the prioritization of SDG targets (RDB, 2017).

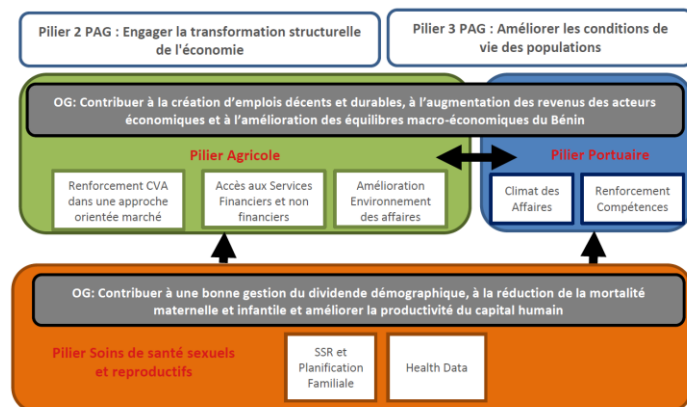


⁹ RDB – République du Bénin (2018). *Programme de Croissance pour le Développement Durable (PC2D) 2018-2021*. https://finances.bj/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/pc2d_2018-2021_complet.pdf

¹⁰ UNDP (2017). *Priorisation des cibles des objectifs de développement durable (ODD) au Bénin*. <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/benin/docs/odd/Rapport%20de%20priorisation%20des%20cibles%20des%20ODD%20au%20Benin.pdf>

According to the Beninese Directorate-General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs, the participatory nature of the Agenda 2030 has made it possible for Benin to carry out a participative consultation process at country level, together with UNDP. During that process different thematic workshops have been organised for governmental executives at different levels, who in turn drew up documents that were used in the process of defining the priority SDGs for the country. The aim of the government has been to use the results of this participatory process to inform discussions on updating the various national development planning and programming documents, including the PND¹¹, PC2D¹², PAG¹³, etc. According to the Directorate-General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs, all these frameworks should serve to operationalise the SDGs in the country.

The **Benin Government Action Programme (PAG)**,¹⁴ the national development programme adopted in December 2016 and devised on the basis of earlier discussions regarding the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (COP21), constitutes a five-year programme. It is stated to be the sole instrument guiding government action and is used to define ministries' activities and allocate the national budget. In general, the programme is structured around 3 main pillars (democracy and good governance, structural transformation of the economy and improvement of living conditions), 45 flagship projects and 9 key sectors aimed at improving productivity and living conditions.¹⁵ The action programme aims to boost the country's economic growth through job creation, promoting the private sector (local and international) and infrastructural development.¹⁶ Two key sectors have been identified as pillars or vital drivers of the country's economic development: agriculture and the Autonomous Port of Cotonou, which weighs 30% of GDP and constitutes the real economic heart of the country. Both sectors are currently being considered as "undervalued, despite their strong potential"¹⁷. As a third pillar, the government of Benin identified 'the improvement of the living environment' as a key priority within the Revealing Benin programme, which includes a focus on 'Improving basic social services and social protection' (i.e. the provision of healthcare equipment and facilities and widening the access to medical care, etc.).



The financing of the PAG (approximately €13.8 billion euros over the period 2016-2021) should be realized for 39% through public budget spending against 61% coming from the private sector, mainly through PPP contracts¹⁸. This clearly demonstrates the government's vision of giving the private sector a pivotal role in the country's general development. This financial pattern, however, still presents many challenges in terms of mobilization (of domestic resources, as well as private investment).

11 Plan Nationale de Développement 2018-2025 (National Development Plan 2018-2025)
 12 Programme de Croissance pour le Développement Durable 2018-2021 (Growth Programme for Sustainable Development 2018-2021)
 13 Governmental Action Programme (Benin Government Action Plan)
 14 Benin Révélé - <http://revealingbenin.com/>
 15 World Bank (2019). www.worldbank.org/en/country/benin/overview
 16 Coopération gouvernementale avec le Bénin – Lettre d'Instruction
 17 <http://revealingbenin.com/en/invest-in-benin/>
 18 <http://revealingbenin.com/en/why-benin/>

The overall development and operational direction of the Revealing Benin programme is managed by the Bureau of Analysis and Investigation, who directly reports to the Presidency. In addition, the government has set up a monitoring and coordination system structured around a number of different bodies¹⁹. Also several other reforms are ongoing in Benin in order to implement the PAG. Among them is the creation of independent public agencies in charge of managing and executing the public investment projects (IMF, 2019, cf. interviews). So far, six agencies have been created that ought to be in constant contact with the relevant government ministries²⁰. The exact role of these agencies is, however, not yet clear on the part of the national ministries nor on the part of the Belgian development actors (embassy, Enabel, NGAs). There also exists a genuine lack of transparency in fiscal reporting, limited monitoring and control of expenditure processes, etc.) on the part of those agencies (IMF, 2019).

With specific regard to the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda, all strategic initiatives in Benin at the national and sectoral level with regard to the SDGs are currently being coordinated by the **Directorate-General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs** – which is one of the directorates of the Beninese Ministry of Planning and Development. The Directorate consists of a multidisciplinary team (sociologists, demographers, economists, statisticians, planners, ...) and is charged with a variety of tasks: ensure capitalization/consolidation of achievements in the implementation of SDG policies, follow SDG indicators and recommend measures for their achievement, ensure alignment of public policies and programs on SDG, ensure the quality of interventions in favor of the SDGs in the priority actions program, multi-annual expenditure programming documents and the annual working plans of sectoral ministries; and monitor the financial and physical implementation of interventions, measures and policies in favor of the SDGs and to report to the minister.

Whereas this Directorate-General is responsible for the SDGs at the national and strategic level, other actors are responsible for its concrete implementation. As such, the directorate designated various **focal points at the level of the ministries** who are responsible for the operationalization of the institutional framework (at 22 of 24 ministries, 1 focal point per ministry). They take up the prospection, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the national development plans with regards to the SDGs. The focal points have all received training with regards to Agenda 2030 and are the first actors to assist the Directorate-general in their general mission with regards to the SDGs. In theory, they are also involved in all Directorate's actions.

Secondly, next to the level of the focal points, there is the level of the civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGAs. They have their own framework with regard to the SDGs and are currently being coordinated by '**Maison de la Société Civile**'. Through this institute, the Directorate-General has set up a consultation framework together with the NGOs and CSOs that consists of 4 thematic groups (social, economic, environment, governance). It is planned to set up semestrial consultations and evaluations to which all involved actors are invited.

Apart from the focal points at the ministries and the CSO-level, there is also a third level of actors involved in the implementation of the SDGs, namely a group of **academic researchers**. Their task is to reflect, make analyses and make recommendations with regard to certain specific questions and thematic domains.

19 1/ Council of Ministers (CM) who gives general guidelines and examines and approves implementation reports, 2/ The Flagship Project Monitoring Committee (CSPP) supervised by the President of the Republic; 3/ The Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (CSE) supervised by the Minister of State for the Plan and Development, and 4/ Sector-Specific Monitoring Committees (CSS) chaired by ministers.

20 <http://revealingbenin.com/en/why-benin/>

Recently national the Beninese Directorate General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs set in motion a process of spatial planning with regard to the SDGs through the organization of a national session with the aim to maximize the impact on the local level (financial beneficiaries) through the national priority interventions. Benin has no homogeneous communities; the needs are significantly different depending on each community, and consequently so are the priorities of each community. Through this process the Directorate wants to assure that all communities are involved and active in the process of SDG-implementation.²¹ *«Il faut que les communes puissent dégager à travers ces cibles prioritaires des actions phares à fort impact aux ODDs qui puissent changer leurs habitudes dans leurs communes.»* At the level of communes, there are currently Communal Development Plans (PCDs). However, the Directorate-General states this to being one of their biggest challenges: i.e. they really want to every community to set priorities in their PCDs and focus on what they really need, instead of blindly following the priorities of international organizations. *«Forcément, il faut que la commune elle-même puisse s'exprimer par elle-même et savoir de quoi elle a besoin pour son développement. D'où la phase de spatialisation: c'est un processus pour promouvoir la participation des niveaux bases. « le développement de la commune par elle-même.»»²²*

In the context of the PAG, the government started the process of the National Development Plan (PND) 2018-2025 and its first operationalization document, the Growth Program for Sustainable Development (PC2D) 2018-2021. When creating the PND, the anchoring with the PAG was considered, as the latter needs to provide operational content to the PND.

2.4 Health care in Benin

Research has shown that providing universal health care improves health outcomes for poorer people to a greater degree than it does for the average citizen, as poor people are less likely able to pay for private medicine or tertiary treatment (Engen et al, 2019).²³ In certain aspects of health, e.g. sexual and reproductive health, costs tend to be higher for women (already a vulnerable group), which further discriminates them. The government of Benin has identified the improvement of living environment as a priority for the 'Revealing Benin' programme (=Pillar 3).²⁴ This entails introducing a new policy on social protection and access to basic social services for all citizens, especially the most deprived. Currently a significant lack of social protection diminishes the financial resources of many Beninese people, especially the poorest. Problems are: ineffective emergency policy in health care, delays in provision of drinking water and safe sanitation facilities, etc. The action plan of the government involves providing every community with healthcare equipment and facilities, access to drinking water, widen access to medical care by recruiting more doctors, the introduction of a social protection policy with individual beneficiary contributions supplemented by a government subsidy, ... The aim of the latter is to provide social protection for the poorest and most vulnerable (ultimate aim is to support four million Beninese through a universal health coverage system). This major project comprises four packages of social services: health insurance, education, pensions, and micro-loans.

Another key priority within Pillar 3 is to provide access to drinking water for the entire population by 2020. At present, almost half of the total population does not have access to drinking water. Here, the government makes a clear link with SDG6 in their program which is to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. The exact aim of the government is to develop water production and distribution systems all over Benin to meet the needs of 5.8 million people.

21 « Il faut que les communes puissent dégager à travers ces cibles prioritaires des actions phares à fort impact des ODDs qui puissent changer leurs attitudes dans leurs communes » (quote by a representative of the Directorate-General).

22 Interview reference by a representative of the Directorate-General

23 Engen, L., Hentinnen, A., & E. Stuart (June 2019). How donors can deliver on the 'leave no one behind' commitment. ODI Working paper 557.

24 Presidency of the Republic of Benin. Government Action Programme. 2016-2021 summary.

2.5 Agricultural development in Benin

The Benin economy depends to a very large extent on the agricultural sector (one third of GDP, two thirds of employment). In Benin, this sector is dominated by small and medium-sized farms, which together account for about 95% of total agricultural production.²⁵ Given the importance of the agricultural sector in the fight against poverty and its enormous potential in terms of land, water and people, the Beninese government has put in place a Strategic Plan for the Recovery of the Agricultural Sector (PSRSA) for the period 2010-2015. The overall objective of this plan was to improve the performance of Beninese agriculture, to make it capable of ensuring food and nutritional sovereignty in a sustainable matter and to contribute to the economic and social development of Benin to the achievement of the Millennium Goals for Development and Poverty Reduction (MDGs). The plan strongly emphasized the return of young graduates to agriculture, the modernization of cultivation practices and the processing of local production.²⁶ However, the realization of the plan was hampered strongly by the very poor infrastructure in the country (transport, water, energy, etc.). As announced in the context of the Government's national Action for 2016-2021, specific investments are now being made to try to overcome these challenges. Key priority 4 'improving economic growth' focuses on 3 strategic sectors: agriculture, digital economy, tourism/culture, and transport.

Overall, it has been Benin's aim to make agriculture the main driver of its economic growth, wealth and job creation. As such, the government has planned to establish seven regional hubs of agricultural development, and to promote the development of high added-value sectors: pineapples, cashew nuts, cotton, maize, tapioca and rice.²⁷ Within the sector of agriculture, the Beninese government also wants to promote private investment and create more arable land (in Ouémé Valley) to encourage (2500) young people to get into the farming business. This, however, does not prevent the country from becoming more and more vulnerable to exogenous shocks, such as climate changes that further increase the risks associated with agriculture, price fluctuations of cotton and oil, as well as developments in neighboring Nigeria, the economic giant in the region and the destination country of 80% of (re)exports of Benin.²⁸

25 DBE (2018). *Inclusief en duurzaam ondernemerschap in de landbouwsector in Benin. Welke perspectieven inzake de strategische integratie van Belgische expertise?*, FOD Buitenlandse Zaken, Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Brussel.

26 Ibid.

27 Presidency of the Republic of Benin. Government Action Programme. 2016-2021 summary.

28 DBE (2018). *Inclusief en duurzaam ondernemerschap in de landbouwsector in Benin. Welke perspectieven inzake de strategische integratie van Belgische expertise?*, FOD Buitenlandse Zaken, Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Brussel.

3 | Leaving no one behind & universalism

Despite impressive development progress in recent decades, income and wealth inequalities continue to increase, both between and within countries, putting hard-won development gains under threat. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, The UN calls on all Member States to place the Leaving No one Behind imperative at the centre of their strategic frameworks, political orientations and global action plans and to reach the furthest behind first. As the vast majority of DAC members (OECD, 2018), Belgium is committed to leave no one behind.

This part of the report unpacks the meaning of this pledge in Benin with a specific focus on the unique role and added value of development co-operation and official development assistance (ODA). It looks at what does committing to leave no one behind means in practice. Clearly, there is no single response to this question. This report uses the latest evidence, data and perspectives on LNOB from a range of Beninese governmental actors, and actors from the Belgian (and other) governmental and non-governmental development cooperation that are currently active in Benin. It looks at who is left behind, strategies, readiness and capacity of the different stakeholders to tackle LNOB and the concomitant challenges and opportunities for the future.

Defining LNOB

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 193 UN Member States pledged to ensure “no in will be left behind” and to “endeavor to reach the furthest behind first”. People get left behind when they lack the choices and opportunities to participate in and benefit from development progress relative to others in society.

The ‘leave no one behind’ approach captures three concepts that are critical to improving the welfare of societies: (1) ending extreme poverty (in all its forms), (2) reducing inequalities among both individuals (vertical) and groups (horizontal), and (3) addressing discriminatory barriers, which could arise from geography or aspects of social identity.

Key to LNOB is the prioritization and fast-tracking of actions for the poorest and most marginalized people – known as progressive universalism. Putting the furthest behind requires deliberate laws and policies. If instead, policy is implemented among better-off groups first and worst-off groups later, the existing gap between them is likely to increase.

LNOB also goes well beyond just being an anti-discrimination agenda; it is a recognition that expectations of trickle-down progress are naïve, and that explicit and pro-active attempts are needed to ensure populations at risk of being left behind are included from the start. It means dealing with structural constraints and unequal power relations.

(ODI, 2016; UNDP, 2018)

3.1 LNOB - on the radar but yet mainstreamed

The results of the field visit show that the LNOB principle is not yet mainstreamed across the interventions of different development actors. There is also no common understanding of what it means or how to address it. In various cases it was referred to as something of an ‘ideal aim’ that is not always realistic or feasible to address during the interventions, due to a multitude of constraints such

as limitations in budgets and human resources, restricted time of interventions, specific terms of reference, geographic access, priorities of partner country, lack of data, operational hurdles, etc.

At the same time, the results also show that in fact, most development actors do address aspects of LNOB in their interventions although they may not explicitly refer to it as LNOB. They rather specify that their programs are trying to ultimately reach vulnerable groups. They do this from different angles or perspectives depending on their specific history, experience and thematic expertise. From their particular background and specific contexts, actors make specific choices about target groups, intervention strategies and geographic focus.

A review of the various programme documents as well as the interviews show that development actors are already working on different intersecting factors that contribute to people being vulnerable and left behind (see fig. 1). Furthermore different actors already use different strategies or ‘levers of change’ to operationalise elements of the leave no one behind principle. UNDP (2018)²⁹ refers to three mutually reinforcing “levers of change” to act on ‘leaving no one behind’ as spelled out by UNDP (2018): 1) Examine = strengthening access to disaggregated and people driven data and information; 2) Empower = strengthening civic engagement and voice; and 3) Enact = strengthening integrated, equity-focused SDG policies, interventions and budgets in order to respond effectively to left behind communities (e.g. access to social protection, schooling, health care, land, agricultural inputs, credit, ...).

The next paragraphs provide some examples of ongoing interventions by different actors where aspects of the LNOB are already being implemented. These provide useful insights in potential good practices and approaches but also rich lessons about challenges and remaining questions that need further exploration. Some tentative policy recommendations are also provided in the last paragraph.

3.2 Good practices & opportunities

3.2.1 Examine: understanding who is being left behind and why

Taking advantage of linkages between LNOB and human rights based approaches?

People who are left behind in development are often economically, socially, spatially and/or politically excluded – for example, due to ethnicity, race, gender, age, disability or a combination of these, leading to multiple discriminations (UNSDG, 2019). They are disconnected from societal institutions and lack information to access those institutions, networks, and economic and social support systems to improve their situation. As they are not being consulted by those in power, they lack voice. Apart from that they are also often absent in official data and as such invisible in the development of policies and programs.

People left behind are those most at risk of not enjoying their civil, cultural, economic, political or social rights. As such, there is a lot of complementarity and synergy between the SDG-principle of leaving no one behind and the human rights-based approach (HRBA) (UNSDG, 2019). Both approaches include the principles of non-discrimination and (gender) equality as key elements and require proactive measures to address inequalities and to reach the furthest behind. Both HRBA and

²⁹ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/what-does-it-mean-to-leave-no-one-behind.html>

LNOB also promote active and meaningful participation throughout the entire planning and programming process. Hence, as a programming tool anchored international norms and standards – HRBA provides a valuable methodology to translate the vision of LNOB into action (UNSDG, 2019).

The field work shows that many Belgian development actors in Benin include a rights based-approach (HRBA) in their interventions strategies or at least integrate human rights as a transversal theme in their programs. This means they look at people as persons with universal and transversal rights. Those who cannot enjoy certain rights are then being considered vulnerable or being left behind. Depending on their historic background, mission and expertise, development actors may refer to the right to food, natural resources, access to water and sanitation, health care, decent work, social protection, education, etc., as an attempt to prevent exclusion and to leave no one behind. The fieldwork also reveals that apart from including different human rights as transversal themes within program design, different organizations focus on ‘community approaches’ and the principle of ‘inclusivity’, which – in their own right – have clear links with the principle of LNOB.

Join for Water – Community approach & (gender) inclusivity

As with many other Belgian development actors, Join For Water has not been working directly on the principle of LNOB. They have, however, taken up human rights as a transversal theme throughout their programs, in particular the universal right to safe water and sanitation. Apart from that, also other elements within their organizational strategy might be contributing to the principle of LNOB. One such strategy is the use of a ‘community approach’, within which there is a strong focus on the principles of inclusion and community solidarity.

For Join For Water, inclusion means ‘involving’ disadvantaged groups in the community on the basis of equal rights and duties. Within the context of the organisation’s activities, this means that women and underprivileged groups must benefit from the same water rights as all other users. After all, in times of water shortage, they are the first groups to suffer exclusion. Through an approach intent on gender-inclusion, the experience and expectations of these groups are taken into account in the planning, execution and management of the programmes. According to Join For Water, the inclusion of women and the underprivileged does not only enhance the longevity of the programmes, it is also a way to promote gender equality within organisations, communities and families.

Need for LNOB adapted data collection tools and processes

Both HRBA and LNOB approaches also require local and disaggregated data to understand who is left behind and why, and to determine whether development interventions are reaching these groups. To ensure inclusion, countries require the resources, technical capacity and political will to collect and analyse such data, and to use this data to inform policy-making and provide services at both national and sub-national levels (ODI, 2016). This however remains a key challenge, also in Benin. Various Belgian development actors report on significant data gaps in national censuses, especially on groups that are being (or risk to be) left behind, due to technical and capacity issues and because data are not collected regularly. On the other hand, NGOs themselves lack resources (financial, human, time) to do representative and frequent collection of disaggregated data themselves. Also the most vulnerable and disadvantaged may themselves resist their participation in data collection due to stigma and mistrust of institutions. Hence existing standard survey tools (such as household budget surveys) will likely be insufficient to capture those being left behind (UNDP 2018). To fill gaps and complement quantitative data, governments and stakeholders will need to be open and flexible

enough to employ new technologies³⁰ and rely on new qualitative and innovative sources; including, most critically, mechanisms to listen, understand and respond to the left behind themselves.

From the field visits it was learned that organizations who develop and implement programs more directly focusing on the most vulnerable and those most left behind have built up specific expertise to reach out and listen to them and to handle data around LNBO (e.g. DBA working with the most vulnerable groups at village level, Terre rouges working directly with street kids). Also the Benin government has taken certain steps to better understand who is being left behind and the underlying reasons for this. The cases below provide some examples of these experiences. They represent potential good practices that could be of interest to other organizations who seek to operationalise the LNOB principle.

Benin's focus on the poorest 20% of people (P20)

Throughout interviews and official state documents, the government of Benin has expressed its wish to commit to the principle of LNOB. In fact, LNOB now takes up a central position in all Benin's public policy and actions (Development Initiatives 2018; OECD 2018) and the government has decided to focus on reducing poverty and vulnerability for the poorest 20% of people. To define who is (or risks to) being left behind in the country, the Directorate-General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs has undertaken a research, informed by the P20 Approach³¹, with support from the government of Switzerland. Applying the P20 approach, which looks at non-monetary variables, has some considerable advantages in order to determine the needs of extremely poor people and key vulnerabilities: 1/ it provides more comprehensive evidence for poverty reduction policies, 2/ it allows to confront the reality of whether progress is really working for the poorest people in a country and as such allows for the development of future policies that are more in tune with this reality (OECD 2018).

DBA: Identifying the most vulnerable

In order to identify the most vulnerable zones and groups, DBA has followed a process consisting of several stages.

As a first step they used existing documentation following national studies that had looked at municipalities at risk. In those studies, various rural municipalities were identified (e.g. Za-Kpota, Zagnanado, Zogbodome, Djidja, Agbangnizoun) which were among the poorest in terms of accessibility to infrastructure, income, and health care.

In a second stage, DBA made use of multisector approach to identify specific risk factors at the level of the communes. Through various exchanges with the communal authorities, those locally responsible for agricultural development, health care and social centres, they identified the most vulnerable districts where the degree of poverty is felt most. Once this identification stage was completed, they designed and completed survey guides for the selection of the poorest villages in addition to an individual survey sheet derived from the national Household Food Safety study in Benin. These sheets provided information on the level of access to different services and goods: household income, food and nutrition, infrastructures of all kinds, health care, drinking water and sanitation, etc.

³⁰ See also: https://www.enabel.be/story/5-questions-etienne-mugisho-health-expert-burundi?utm_source=Local+Time+Enabel+newsletter&utm_campaign=aef78bb06e-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_11_05_11_37&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9ee2450653-aef78bb06e-174625093

³¹ The P20 approach focuses attention on the poorest 20% of people, who are often also the most vulnerable. This includes everyone currently in, or vulnerable to, absolute poverty, as well as those who by reasons of their identity (age, disability, belief, ethnicity, sexual orientation) are most vulnerable to poverty or exclusion. The P20 approach proposes that countries, donor agencies and civil society organisations choose a small number of bellwether indicators in line with their own priorities and monitor those regularly to show the public and politicians what progress is being made (Development Initiatives, 2018).

Finally, DBA developed a summary sheet that put more emphasis on the objectives of the project based on a number of specific parameters, such as the availability of lowlands, the existence of rivers, the main production activities, the existence of a social organisation that integrates youngsters and women in production activities, working conditions, income levels, infrastructure problems (roads, schools, markets, health facilities, electricity, etc.), etc.

According to DBA, improving the quality of life of the beneficiaries (regarding access to healthcare, schooling, drinking water, real estate and equipment, improvement of housing, ...) has a multiplier effect in the communities.

3.2.2 Empower: strengthening civic engagement and voice

To fully understand and effectively address the various factors contributing to vulnerability and being left behind there is need for direct and on-going feedback and engagement from vulnerable and marginalized populations. Hence, agenda 2030 calls for efforts to strengthen the voice and capacities of left behind communities and people but also strengthen the capacities of local civil society, relevant institutions, associations and community networks to engage decision makers and to build consensus on the policies required in favor of LNOB (UNDP, 2018). This will also involve building capacities of national and local authorities to be inclusive, responsive and accountable to their populations, with a special focus on vulnerable people left behind (Ibid). This line of action is also closely linked with the rights based approach which – as previously shown - is already taken up by various actors within the Belgian development cooperation.

HRBA and LNOB strongly focus on the empowerment of ‘right holders’ to claim their rights, to become active partners in development and to have their voice heard in the process. The results of the field visit show various examples of strategies and efforts made by the Belgian stakeholders to take into account this important dimension of LNOB, such as the development of consultation or civil society platforms.

Défi Belgique Afrique (DBA)/ALDIPE – Consultation platforms

In collaboration with the NGO ALDIPE (Association for Combating Integrated Development and Environmental Protection), DBA promotes the development of agricultural value chains owned and operated by local communities. To create the necessary conducive environment within the community the programme supported the setting up of a consultation platform at the municipal level, which constitutes a place of exchange and expression of the voices of the different actors including community members as well as staff from the municipality. The exchanges make it possible to hear different constraints of different actors and to try to reach a consensus on how to preserve the interests of all and to set up a plan of action. As such, DBA aims for an endogenous development which will allow people to take decisions with the municipal authorities in their territory.

Other concrete examples of that derive from their so-called territorial approach:

- Literacy projects encourage people to speak up and take up different roles in the community: a recent survey among former alpha learners shows that before the literacy sessions only 8% of the participants dared to speak in public, versus 98% after the sessions. Moreover, whereas before 47% of the people took up a role in the community against 94% after the sessions.
- The setting up of delegates at the village level and their connection to the members of the Associations for the Consumption of Drinking Water allows them to better interpellate the municipality on their public obligation and responsibilities.

Initiative of ‘Health service use platforms’ through the Enabel health program in Benin

One strategy used by Enabel in Benin to facilitate the participation of ‘right holders’ (in particular vulnerable groups) in decision-making processes, has been to install civil society platforms of service users within health care (PUSS³²). These **independent** platforms are being put in place at the local level (in 5 districts) and at the national level (PNUSS³³). They are built on the notion that ‘health’ is broader than just ‘services’ as they are also about health rights (e.g. equitable access to quality health services, protection against medical hazard, etc.). As such they respond to the expressed need for a comprehensive approach that includes multi-stakeholder engagement and a HRBA.

The platforms regroup **all actors of both the demand and supply side**, including civil society groups (groups of youngsters, women groups, local NGOs, mutual health insurance, community health workers), private services, and services from other sectors as well as local authorities. They are managed by the district health authorities. The aim is to engage both sides into a **regular dialogue (partnership)** in order to improve the access and quality of health care, to extend health services at community level, to prevent people from being excluded, to realize multi-stakeholder advocacy of rights holders vis-à-vis the provision of care and the health system, discuss challenges, assure monitoring of access and quality of services, management of complaints, etc.

In that sense, the PUSS may have a valuable contribution towards the instauration of the national health insurance scheme (ARCH³⁴), which is currently being rolled out by the Beninese national government.

As referred to in the previous example, the results of the field visit also show various examples of advocacy work towards duty bearers, involving a variety of strategies. Different actors appear to have specific expertise or experience to take up this role at different societal levels. From the fieldwork it has become clear that the bilateral development cooperation (Enabel) and the Belgian Embassy often have more power to engage directly with duty bearers at the national but also at a more decentralized level in those areas where the Belgian cooperation is active. Certain NGOs together with their partner organisations on the other hand have closer access to local communities as well as well as policy makers and public service providers at a local level. Other cooperation actors in turn prove capable of bridging the different levels through targeted strategies.

In fact, the first common strategic target within the joint strategic framework (JSF) of Benin (2018) is to “Ensure a participatory democracy in which civil society interacts with the authorities, in a context of good governance, with a view to sustainable development based on the values of peace, justice and respect for human rights.” Linked to this target, there are different approaches (contributions) mentioned that are to be enforced/applied by the participating actors: e.g. Advocacy actions vis-à-vis supra-local authorities to consolidate decentralization; inform populations and civil society organisations about their rights and obligations within the context of decentralization in Benin; support populations (especially women) and CSOs to reinforce their implication in the orientation of development and in their role as ‘watch dogs’; reinforce capacities of individuals, communities and civil society with regard to the defense of human rights and the protection of vulnerable groups; and to reinforce the capacities of and advocate vis-à-vis public powers to reinforce the juridical system of human rights and child protection (CSC Benin, 2018). In fact, throughout the JFS, the role of the civil society is highlighted numerous times.

32 PUSS: Plateforme des Utilisateurs de Services de santé.

33 PNUSS: Plateforme Nationale des Utilisateurs de Services de santé.

34 ARCH: ‘Assurance pour le Renforcement du Capital Humain’. This presidential national health initiative has been piloted for the first time in July 2019 in 1 district in Benin.

World Solidarity (WSM) – Focus on HRBA and multidimensional and multi-actor strategies

The mission of WSM (the NGO of the Christian Workers Movement and its constituent organizations) is to defend labor rights (decent work) and the universal right to social protection, and to prevent and eradicate poverty and exclusion. To reach this goal, WSM has set out different strategies.

One is to assume a Rights based-approach (HRBA) methodology, which brings to LNOB a focus on rights, empowerment, meaningful participation and capacity development (UNSDG, 2019). This becomes apparent in various of the organization's strategic choices, as for example in the way they define groups that are most vulnerable or left behind. WSM specifically focuses on workers/employees who are unable to enjoy their rights to social protection and decent work, i.e. workers within the informal economy (which is more than 80% of people in W-Africa) and workers who may be formally employed in precarious sectors (e.g. artisanal mining, bus- and taxi drivers, etc.) but do not enjoy social protection or other social rights. In order to enable these groups to benefit from universal social rights WSM focusses its activities according to the following dimensions: 1/ prevention of risks, 2/ promotion of potentials (training and micro-credits), 3/ protection of vulnerable groups, and 4/ transformation.

This fourth dimension is closely related to HRBA and focusses on empowerment of 'right holders' to claim their rights, to make their voice heard and to empower and mobilize them as active partners in development. To realize this objective, WSM supports workers (through technical, legal support) to establish labor unions, health insurance funds, federations of unions and funds, and more importantly, multi-actor networks and platforms that also include other organizations that share the same values and vision (e.g. other labor unions and health insurance funds, youth and women organizations, actors within the informal economy, ...). This way they create national and international networks on social protection that helps to engage in advocacy towards policy makers and to have real weight in defense of workers' rights. Not only do the unions, funds and federations represent the needs of the most vulnerable, sometimes the latter are also engaged to directly speak up to policy makers. For example, it has been made possible for miners to address the Benin parliament directly regarding their needs.

3.2.3 Enact: strengthening integrated, equity-focused policies, interventions & budgets

In relation to operationalising the LNOB principle, the 2030 agenda stresses the importance of moving out of the traditional thematic silos and engaging with a wide variety of relevant stakeholders. A stronger systemic (and integrated) approach is seen as prerequisite for being able to deal with the multiple factors contributing to vulnerability and the risk of being left behind (UNDP, 2018).

While there are still many hurdles and challenges to be tackled before such systemic approach could become mainstreamed among Belgian development actors, there are some interesting developments in that direction in new programs where the SDGs have been considered more strongly in the program design as illustrated in the case of the new Benin bilateral programme.

Bilateral programme Benin - Towards a systemic and integrated approach across different thematic sectors

A notable example is the new bilateral programme that is making an attempt to operationalise a more systemic approach. This involves for example a more thorough mapping of the various actors³⁵ and their relationships across the various thematic systems in which the programme works, namely Health

³⁵ According to the SDC guidance note on LNOB, The complexity of tackling leave no one behind calls for an integrated approach to addressing the dynamics of multidimensional poverty and the mechanisms of exclusion. In operational terms, the integrated approach brings together a range of actors – national and local authorities; specialists in humanitarian aid, development, human rights, and peace and security; civil society; and the private sector – who contribute to collective achievements. (SDC, 2018, p. 14).

(sexual and reproductive health), Agriculture (pineapple supply chain) and Transport (Port of Cotonou). This mapping helps the programme to identify potential entry points within the various thematic systems. Furthermore, the programme's theory of change in relation to reaching the vulnerable is based on the programme's commitment to capitalize on the linkages between the three thematic sectors in which it works. Within the agriculture sector, Enabel is particularly focusing on female producers of pineapple. It is assumed that their insertion in the pineapple value chain (through support in the production process and transport via the port of Cotonou) will lead to an increased income that will benefit the whole family. At the same time, part of the activities under the health component of the programme occur in the port area of Cotonou where many workers (e.g. port workers, vendors,) are female and vulnerable particularly also in relation to access to health care. Interestingly, according to Enabel Benin staff, this systemic approach is also being followed through in their monitoring and evaluation system which considers the whole programme portfolio instead of different systems for different thematic programme components (as was more the case in previous programmes). There is now also a portfolio manager who has to supervise the synergy between the three thematic programme components.

Although Enabel strongly focuses on 'family farms' (*exploitations familiales*) in their agricultural programme, they are aware that they are not always able to reach the most vulnerable as they work with farmers or potential entrepreneurs who already have reached a certain capacity level (e.g. access to land, able to read and write, ...). At the same time Enabel has developed some strategies to facilitate access for the more vulnerable, especially women and youngsters, e.g.:

1. Subsidizing certain activities for which a set of criteria is developed that allow the poorer to apply relatively easier than other groups of people (= a strategy that is being more and more generalized within Enabel);
2. Actions to reach more youngsters: focus on themes that interest them -> focus on digitalization and start-ups (instead of supporting them to become classic producers, they support them to become active as service producers, e.g. digital systems to do agricultural follow-up);
3. Linking up actors within the value chain: By bringing producers together with a processing company, and then the processing company with a trader, a win-win situation is created. This approach is widely used in Atacora and Monocofou and is now is also recognized at the national level.

3.3 Challenges & remaining questions

Several of the major challenges related to the principle of LNOB have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter. They are further explored in the next paragraphs and supplemented with some additional concerns and questions.

3.3.1 Political challenges

As was already mentioned earlier, the government of Benin has committed to the LNOB principle with a focus on reducing poverty and vulnerability for the poorest 20% of people. One example is Benin's current Action Programme for Social Protection 2016-2021, which aims to increase the proportion of people covered by social protection services to more than one third (OECD 2018) and involves taking charge of the health care of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the country (PRB, 2018). At the same time there are serious questions among development actors to what extent LNOB is really a state priority and how the operationalization of certain policies and strategic plans will be financed. As a matter of fact, the 'Revealing Benin' programme³⁶ (2016-2021) is estimated at a total cost of 13.78 billion Euro of which only 1,36 billion has been secured to date. The government

³⁶ Presidency of the Republic of Benin. Government Action Programme. 2016-2021 summary.

seeks to engage the private sector through public-private partnerships in order to fund 61% of the action plan in addition to (semi-)concessions loans from technical and financial partners. In a similar vein, the government has been perceived by some development actors as favoring large commercial farming over small scale family farming which receives only limited support, or for whom the available support systems prove to be unreachable due to administrative constraints. Also the current insecurity in the North of the country makes certain geographic areas characterized by high levels of vulnerability inaccessible for development organisations. During the interviews in Benin it was highlighted by various development actors that the alignment with national priorities may pose a barrier for them to operationalise the LNOB principle in their interventions.

3.3.2 Conceptual & technical challenges

Getting to know the LNOB groups can be a considerable challenge. This is particularly the case in contexts where there is a large number of poor and vulnerable people and where broader forms of support may be considered more appropriate (Engen et al. 2019). Also the definition of ‘who is vulnerable’ strongly depends on the parameters used as ‘vulnerability’ remains a relative concept. The most vulnerable, from a political point of view, may not be the same as the economically vulnerable and if an organisation decides to include climate parameters, this may yet lead to targeting other segments of society. What probably matters most is that development organisations, when developing their expertise and interventions, are able to **make their parameters explicit** and clearly outline the needs of the identified vulnerable groups and the ways in which their interventions will respond to the needs of these groups.

Furthermore, the principle of LNOB also requires a reflection by development organisations on the unintentionally though potentially negative impact of supporting certain population groups on other (vulnerable) population segments within the recipient society in which they intervene. Although various respondents in Benin have mentioned this challenge during interviews, they appear to lack concrete instruments to monitor and evaluate these kind of **negative spill overs** on the ground.

Another highlighted challenge relates to the **lack of available national data** or information about LNOB groups in the recipient country. Apart from significant data gaps, development partners also indicate that the available national information is not always reliable. Join For Water, for example, referred to the national data on the access to drinking water, which after some time, turned out to be based on the wrong calculations. In addition, national administrative data systems often focus on averages and do not disaggregate or measure results for LNOB groups (Stuart et al. 2016). Hence projects or programmes will have to collect disaggregated data themselves. At the same time, it was learned from the interviews that the collection of disaggregated data regarding LNOB can be labor intensive, costly and time consuming due to various reasons:

- Household surveys organised from a LNOB perspective may need to be held at individual level instead of the household level to learn about intra-household resource transfers and individual consumption patterns. This detail may be necessary to find out if specific household members are at risk of being left behind e.g. older people, female members or people living with a disability;
- Extra costs may be incurred to ensure confidentiality and privacy of LNOB groups to avoid the risk of discrimination or victimisation.

Human rights mechanisms might provide qualitative and contextualized information and analysis about issues that are hard to capture through statistical data (DIHR, 2017). This information can help guide the re-evaluation of monitoring frameworks, making marginalised communities more visible to policymakers and duty bearers. Also, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has defined 6 main components of a human rights-based approach to data, which should

guide data collection in all circumstances. These are: participation, data-disaggregation, self-identification, transparency, privacy, and accountability (DIHR, 2017; OHCHR, 2018).

Furthermore, besides the lack of available data, there also exist considerable **cultural barriers and community dynamics** that require longer term engagement to build the necessary relationship and trust with LNOB groups within particular areas of intervention. After all, marginalized groups may not want to be publicly identified for various kinds of reasons (e.g. existing discrimination patterns based on gender, ethnicity, etc.). In certain contexts for example, people living with HIV or LGBT populations or groups who are prosecuted may become more vulnerable if publicly identified. It was also reported during some of the interviews that women may not be allowed by their husbands to participate in project activities or to speak in public. Furthermore, some interventions were seen to contribute to intra-communal tensions as certain community members were perceived to benefit more than others.

3.4 Tentative policy recommendations

- **More explicit TOC on LNOB:** Operationalising the LNOB principle in development cooperation programmes will require a more explicit elaboration in the programme's theory of change of how the intervention affects the most excluded. This will require programmes to be able to identify groups left behind and their specific needs, understanding the drivers of their exclusion and considering these factors in the intervention's design, monitoring and adaptive management. Besides specifying the positive impact the intervention hopes to contribute to for the LNOB groups, it should also reflect on any potential negative impact and LNOB groups that may be left out by the intervention or who could be affected negatively. Measures to address these negative trade-offs could then also be highlighted (no harm principle). DGD in dialogue with other development actors could support the development of a practical guide³⁷ to make a programme's TOC more LNOB proof.
- **Strengthening in-country statistics and data management systems:** To address the challenge limited locally available LNOB data in more structural and sustainable way, it would be advisable to explore opportunities to strengthen national and local statistics and data management systems to be able to identify who is at risk of being left behind.
- **Broadening the LNOB toolbox of Belgian Development actors:** While Belgian development actors may have interesting experience in working with vulnerable groups, it was rather difficult during the field visit to find examples of tools or methodologies (e.g. for data collection, outreach, analysis of drivers of vulnerability, ...) that are specifically adapted for LNOB groups. International research and experience shows however that innovative methodologies (e.g. mobile survey technology, remote sensing in combination with household surveys, ...) can play a role in overcoming some of the technical challenges mentioned above. Hence, any learning trajectory to support development actors in strengthening their work related to LNOB (e.g. strengthening TOCs in view of LNOB) may also need to involve capacity development on innovative methods and tools. Furthermore, besides strengthening capacity to deal with technical challenges it would also be useful to harvest good practices and approaches on how to deal with some of the political challenges linked to working with LNOB.

³⁷ See for example the Guide on Leave No One Behind from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC, 2018) https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Poverty-Wellbeing/addressingpovertyinpractice/Documents/sdc-guidance-leave-no-one-behind_EN.pdf

4 | Multi-stakeholder partnerships

Defining multi-stakeholder partnerships

Central to the legitimacy and quality of a society-wide agenda is the design of multi-stakeholder policy development and implementation modalities to encourage and facilitate partnerships between government and nationally and sub-nationally active stakeholder networks of civil society, universities, think tanks, the private sector, workers' and employers' organizations, other development actors, and national human rights institutions (UNDP-OHCHR 2010).

The 2030 Agenda calls for the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources across geographies and sectors, in order to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries. The principle is closely linked to the principle of shared responsibility and as such also about moving from the paradigm of “helping the South” to the paradigm of shared issues and responsibilities.

The complexity and scale of the challenges that the SDG framework is seeking to address requires a concerted effort of a wide variety of different stakeholders. Multi-stakeholdership - which promotes effective collaborations for contributing towards the SDGs - therefore constitutes a key principle within the 2030 agenda. Not only does multi-stakeholdership respond to SDG 17 - which advocates a global partnership for development - it also contributes directly or indirectly to all other principles of the SDG agenda. In addition it fosters a more integrated approach linking different thematic sectors and policy domains (cf. section on indivisibility) and can facilitate the operationalization of the LNOB principle. Any renewal of development cooperation in line with the SDG framework will therefore need to give a central role to interventions, policies and structures that integrate this principle of multi-stakeholdership.

Results from the field visit in Benin show that there is consensus among Belgian development actors on the importance of synergies and partnerships around common objectives and challenges, where feasible and relevant. Of course this is not something new that came with the 2030 agenda, as many actors have already built up a long tradition of partnerships reflecting different levels of integration and complexity. On the other hand, it was stated that the SDGs may have contributed to the idea that looking for synergies and partnerships should be part and parcel of any given strategic intervention as no single actor with a one-sided approach is able to make a substantial change in relation to agenda 2030. In this regard, the field visit showed the existence of a multitude of older and newer coordination structures and platforms as well as (initial or exploratory) steps towards more structured and integrated partnerships.

Partnerships come in many shapes and sizes. For this report it was opted to use a pragmatic and functional approach which distinguishes between three levels (types) of MSP approaches which are all relevant but concern different levels and models of integration, ranging from less complex to more complex forms: (1) ‘add-on’, (2) integrated, or (3) with an eco-system perspective (see table 5.1). These different types should not be considered as totally separate categories but rather as approaches that can be plotted on a continuous line (Pollet & Huyse, 2019).

Table 4.1 Types of multi-stakeholder approaches (adapted from Pollet & Huyse, 2019)

As an add-on	A more integrated approach	Eco-system perspective
Multiple actors (mainly from the development cooperation field) work alongside each other to address different components of a development-related goal.	Multiple actors (mainly from the development cooperation field) work in an integrated way to jointly address a development-related goal.	Contributing to the strengthening of an ecosystem of organizations working on a specific theme. Depending on the thematic area, the focus might be on different combinations of academic, business, civil society, and/or governmental institutions.

4.1 Multi-stakeholdership as an add-on

A majority of the coordination structures that could be observed during the field visit fall within the first category of the typology. They offer mainly spaces at various levels where different stakeholders can meet and exchange information.

For example, at a departmental level (e.g. Atacora and Donga), various Belgian NGOs started setting up coordination platforms focusing on specific sectors and involving donors, NGOs and departmental agencies. These platforms mainly facilitate exchange of information between NGOs and staff from the ministry of agriculture about their respective activities. While this has not yet resulted in a strategic collaboration, it has contributed to the cross fertilisation of approaches and potential solutions for common problems that members of the platform face (e.g. development of a tool box around agro-ecology). It also helps to build relationships between members of the platform who in the case of the Atacora platform have taken steps to develop a collaboration with the 3AO³⁸ international alliance on agro-ecology who is active in Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso and Senegal.

Another example (which to a certain extent could also be partly placed in the more integrated approach category) is provided by the **Joint Strategic Framework of Benin** (JSF 2018). This strategic framework has encouraged the establishment of different technical partnerships and strategic alliances on the ground. In Benin, the JSF regroups 19 Belgian non-governmental development actors (ACNGs)³⁹ and Enabel around seven common strategic targets. According to the respondents, so far the JSF certainly has had significant added value. Not only did it encouraged actors to meet each other more often and to share information on approaches, strategies, results, challenges, etc., it has also boosted some to develop new common programs/projects without necessarily having to renounce their own organizational particularities. In addition it was also stated that the JSF-partnerships allow them to address issues from a more systemic point of view - albeit each with his own means and expertise -, to increase efficiency and effective use of resources, and hence to consolidate better results within the limited time span of four to five years.

However, for the JSF-partnerships to move from an ‘add-on’ approach to a more integrated way of working or with an ‘eco-system perspective’, a number of significant challenges still need to be overcome and conditions be taken into account. Various actors indicated that the JSF-partnerships are currently mainly juxtapositions of different programs instead of the expression of genuine collaboration or truly common programs. They also gave a number of possible explanations for this. First of all, the JSF was formulated too late, according to the respondents, namely when they were already well far in the process of programme formulation. This means that the common threads have been

³⁸ <http://www.endapronat.org/annuaire-professionnel/1942/3ao-alliance-pour-lagroecologie-en-afrique-de-louest/>

³⁹ These ACNGs are: APEFE, ARES, Artsen Zonder Vakantie, Croix Rouge de Belgique, DBA, Eclosis, Handicap International, Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp, Iles de Paix, Join For Water, Louvain Cooperation, Médecins du Monde, MEMISA, Plan International, Rikolto, Solidarité Mondiale, Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie (UVCW), Via Don Bosco, VVSG.

searched for in quite a late stage, while in fact there should exist agreements on vision, goals, strategies, practical interventions, finances, etc. before the formulation of the individual programs. Secondly, an integrated approach requires time: organisations need time to get to know one another and to get a clear view on each other's approaches. Join For Water, for example, noted that within the limited time frame it was not possible for them to really explain to Louvain Cooperation what they meant by 'a community approach' and to discuss on how they could integrate both of their programmes to jointly and effectively support the same group of beneficiaries. Also, in reality the number of consultations between different actors was often limited and not all partners appear willing to share all data (problem of transparency). Furthermore, for the synergies to become more effective, there is a need for better follow-up and increased capitalization of lessons learnt. Finally, the question also arises as to whether it is necessary to work with national JSFs or rather with thematic JSFs and if focusing the partnership on the Belgian actors might be counterproductive for fostering local ownership and linkages with local actors?

4.2 Towards multi-stakeholdership as a defining element

At the same time development actors do recognize that the availability of spaces for exchanging information is not enough and that there is need to move towards higher levels of multi-stakeholder integration. To that effect, different NGOs have taken steps to initiate other forms of collaboration, whereby different actors work in a more complementary way (each bringing in their specific expertise) towards a common objective. Important contributing factors that were highlighted by development actors during the interviews included an organic and bottom up approach based on common values and complementary expertise. Also the need to work together during the formulation stage of an intervention was seen as a key contributing factor towards more effective collaboration.

One example is provided by the **UNI4COP programme** which involves a long term collaboration between 4 University NGOs⁴⁰ that is not bounded by specific programs/projects. According to representatives from the constituting organisations some key characteristics of this collaboration include the fact that it was not 'forced' upon the actors (as compared to the CSC). Actors had also taken enough time to formulate a common objective and to develop specific programs. To that effect, different workshops had been organized in the different countries where the 4 NGOs are active to discuss about the common goals and potential ways to collaborate.

Another example that represents a higher level of multi-stakeholder integration (between category two and three) is provided by the **AMSANA initiative** which involves a collaboration between 4 NGOs (Protos, Red Cross, Iles de Paix, Louvain Cooperation) and Enabel (previously BTC). It was the last initiative in Benin to be financed by the former Belgian Fund for Food Security (BFVZ) running from 2015-2020. The programme uses a multi sectorial approach whereby roles and responsibilities of the Belgian partners are clearly outlined during the formulation of the programme in which all partners were involved. Furthermore, each of the Belgian partners also engaged in a collaboration with other local actors during programme implementation (e.g. government actors at national and local levels, cooperations, local NGOs and other donors).

On the one hand, the AMSANA programme was put forward by various interview respondents as a good practice regarding multi-stakeholdership. The added value of working in a holistic and complementary way (addressing food security by focusing on agricultural production, environmental sustainability, health, entrepreneurship, etc.) by taking advantage of the expertise on nutrition (Red Cross), water management (Protos), micro credits (Louvain cooperation), family horticulture and

⁴⁰ University of Liège, University of Namur, UCL, ULB.

sustainable maize production (Iles de Paix), and institutional support and coordination (Enabel) was seen as a particular strength. Also the close collaboration with local actors and an adaptive programming approach allowing plans to change based on lessons learned during implementation was considered as key elements for programme effectiveness and for ensuring durability of the programme results. On the other hand, it was also recognized during the interviews that the full potential of multi-stakeholdership had not yet been realized and that more needed to be done to be able to talk about a truly joint programme. Also with the termination of the BFVZ fund there was a strong concern that the various actors would revert back to their own spheres of work after the programme has ended. Various respondents referred to the importance of a long term vision at the side of the Belgian ministry of development cooperation and DGD in relation to strengthening multi-stakeholder approaches that, as experience and reality in field shows, need time to evolve and mature.

4.3 Opportunities to move towards an ecosystems perspective?

Enabel's new programme in Benin could be seen as an example of an intervention that has taken some initial steps to approach multi-stakeholdership from an ecosystems perspective. One important aspect of the programme that resonates with an ecosystems perspective is its deliberate effort to engage with a wide variety of different societal stakeholders (government, private sector, micro credit institutions, civil society, other donors, academic institutions, local service providers, ...) across the three thematic sectors (agriculture, transport, health) linked to a specific value chain (pineapples). Also its cluster approach regarding the pineapple value chain is in line with an ecosystems perspective. Clusters are groups of firms (including informal SME's) engaged in similar or related economic activities. Firms in a cluster are linked either vertically – in a buyer–seller relation – or horizontally, by competing and collaborating to enhance their efficiency in serving the common markets or acquiring similar technology, labor, and raw materials.

Enabel already has built up considerable experience with such cluster approach in Atacora and Monocofou departments in Benin. This approach involved bringing producers together with a processing company, and the processing company with a trader, in order to create a win-win. The processing company can take out a loan because it has a certain piece of equipment. It then puts the loan at the disposal of the producer allowing the producer to produce and to deliver to the processing company. Enabel also seeks to work together with microcredit institutions to develop financial products that are adapted to the agricultural sector and to SMEs, including individual small scale farmers.

At the same time, there is also a recognition that the huge diversity of partnerships in this ambitious intervention will not be easy and many questions still remain. Already in the chapter on LNOB concerns were raised about how a focus on strengthening entrepreneurship and private sector would reach the most vulnerable. It was raised for example that there is a need for clarity on how DGD defines the private sector. During the interviews, the concern was raised that small scale farmers who usually belong to the informal sector may stay under the radar while they make up more than 80% of the total number of farmers in Benin. On the other hand, and in some cases as a direct consequence of the SDGs, more development actors have come to the conclusion that private companies are central drivers of socioeconomic development as they are responsible for creating and maintaining jobs, deliver a significant contribution to government revenues and as such to public services, and also often lie at the basis of innovations and technical evolution in order to create sustainable prosperity. Furthermore, the development of public private partnerships is also a major objective of the Belgian and the Benin government. There is – however - still quite some uncertainty both at the side of Enabel as well as Belgian NGOs on how such partnerships should be formed (intervention methods, objectives, streamlining of approaches, ...). The key question for most actors appeared not to

be about the relevance of PSD (Private sector development) or PS4D (private sector for development), but rather about ‘which kind of PSD/PS4D’ is relevant and meets for example the LNOB principle?

Join for water has created an international platform (together with DGD) on access to drinking water and sanitation. The final goal is to figure out how to collaborate and report vis-à-vis Agenda 2030. However, for the moment, it appears that nobody really knows how to do it. The first goal of the platform now is to figure out who does what and whom takes on which responsibility.

4.4 Tentative policy recommendations

Agenda 2020 reinforces the need for higher ambition levels in relation to existing multi-stakeholder approaches. To operationalize such higher ambition levels it will be important to make use of the experiences and lessons learned with past and ongoing multi-stakeholder approaches and initiatives.

- **Specifically for future joint strategic frameworks**, it will be important to make sure that negotiations and dialogue during its development take place before the formulation of individual programmes so that there is room for developing more consensus on vision, goals, strategies, opportunities for joint programming, financing arrangements, ... As development actors get to know each other better through their involvement in the current joint strategic framework, these built up relationships can now be capitalized on in the new programming cycle. There are also important opportunities to use the SDGs as a guiding framework to inform joint analysis and strategy development in relation to interlinkages, LNOB, and following up on contribution towards specific SDG targets. The SDGs can also help the reflection on how to address the risk of focusing too much on collaboration among Belgian actors and ensuring necessary space for local actors in the discussions. All this will require the development of conducive policy guidance from DGD as well as practical guidelines and user friendly tools that can assist development actors in the process of developing an SDG proof joint strategic framework. Such guide and toolbox could be developed in close collaboration with development actors and tested in the new programme cycle.
- **How to realise strategic and valuable engagement with the private sector?** According to OECD (2018), increasing the volume of private sector investment in sustainable development is critical to achieving the SDGs. It is clear that also Belgium and Benin strive for strategic engagement with the private sector, given the current focus on establishing Public-Private-Partnerships (PPPs). Many development actors are, however, still left with many questions. For example, how to provide adequate incentives to private corporations for them to fully integrate development investments into their business models? Also, in order to step up efforts to stimulate private investment, there is a need for policy and guidelines or regulatory framework to facilitate this. Specific tools and approaches for (synergies on) PSD and PS4D need to be identified and used according to the intended objectives. These tools and approaches should be SDG-proof. In this respect, Vaes & Huysse (2015, 2015b) for example, offer two helpful frameworks/analytic tools to understand and typify instruments to mobilize private resources. These can help donors and other actors to determine which partnerships with the private sector are better suited to address specific problems or objectives and to subsequently make targeted thematic and operational choices.
- **How can we best capitalise on existing experiences of development actors?** There is a lot of experience with multi-stakeholdership amongst development actors in the field, but in order to move more towards an ecosystem perspective, there is a need for a collective capitalization and reflection on existing tools (e.g. on stakeholder mapping, ...), lessons learnt, etc.

5 | Indivisibility & Interconnectedness

Defining indivisibility and interconnectedness

The 17 SDGs are interconnected, indivisible and should be implemented in an integrated manner. In fact, they have been framed with a particular consideration for the interconnectedness of People, Planet, Prosperity, Justice and Peace. Therefore they should be considered in their entirety instead of addressing them as a series of individual goals.

Interlinkages can refer to those between goals (OWG SDGs, 2014), between a goal and other targets (e.g. ICSU, 2017 and ISSC, 2015; UNEP, 2015), or between targets (e.g. IAEG- SDGs, 2015; UNESCAP, 2016; Coopman, et al., publishing time unknown).

There are different types of relationships: 1/ targets are indivisible = progress on one target automatically leads to progress on another, 2/ progress to one target means decrease for the other, 3/ targets cancel each other out.

Taking into account the principles of indivisibility and interconnectedness requires a strong level of policy integration, coherence and coordination across geographies and actors (out of silos) but also parallel strategies at different levels (local, national, international) (Niestroy et al., 2019).

Agenda 2030 is built on the foundational principle that sustainable development is ‘integrative and indivisible’ of all aspects of society (Niestroy et al., 2019). It goes beyond the traditional ‘triple-P’ model of sustainable development (point of intersection of people, planet and profit) as it blurs the lines which previously facilitated compartmentalization of issues and a siloed approach.

The principles of interconnectedness and indivisibility of the SDGs strongly emphasize integrated approaches due to the universality of the SDGs. As sustainable development challenges are closely interlinked, they require integrated solutions, which include the social, economic and environmental dimensions as mutually dependent factors, and that addresses the links between them (e.g. spill-over effects).

As such, the principle of interconnectedness and indivisibility has strong connections to policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD). In fact, SDG target 17.14 calls on all countries to “enhance policy coherence for sustainable development” at all levels of government – local, national and global as a key means of implementation (OECD, 2019). However, as shown in general in various countries’ Voluntary National Reviews and as also mentioned on various occasions during the field-work, this is no easy feat. Not only does it require extensive collaboration and coordinated action across policy sectors (horizontal coherence), but also between different levels of government and administration (vertical coherence) (ibid, Niestroy et al., 2019)). And it also requires balancing short-term priorities with long-term sustainability objectives.

The results of the field visit show that there is general consensus among development actors about the importance of this principle within the added value of the Agenda 2030. They agree that understanding the interlinkages between goals, targets, and indicators can improve dealing with the complexity of sustainable development, and also emphasize the need to take into account interlinkages between sectors, thematics, actors, levels of governments and geographies. They, however, also mention a whole range of challenges, barriers and questions to be answered in order to be(come) truly

faithful to this principle, such as the complexity and changing nature of social contexts which makes it difficult to predict the exact outcome of interventions, budgetary and time-related limitations, horizontal and vertical political inconsistencies, etc. These are further elaborated in the text and also linked to some recommendations at the strategic and operational/technical level.

5.1 Horizontal integration across thematics, sectors and geographies

A specific challenge for development actors is that of sectoral and thematic integration which promotes the eradication of poverty, economic empowerment, and the reduction of inequality but with respect to the ecological limits of the planet’s boundaries (Pollet & Huyse, 2018). It implies, for example, that development programmes on economic growth and entrepreneurship also take into account ecological considerations. Moreover, as was stated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), many of today’s global challenges (e.g. climate change, migration, extreme inequality) will require more than purely national actions and as such concerted efforts of multiple actors at multiple levels (ibid).

Many studies have already discussed the inter-connection between the various goals and targets (UNDESA, 2018, Nilsson et al. 2016). As described in table 6.1, these relationships can range on a continuum from being indivisible, or in other words progress on one target automatically delivers progress on another, all the way to cancelling, implying that progress on one target automatically leads to negative impact on another. Therefore, programmes targeting one or more SDGs, also need to take into consideration the impact on other SDGs, working as much as possible towards positive synergetic results.

Table 5.1 Seven types of interactions between SDG targets (Nilsson et al., 2016)

Interaction label	Meaning
+3 Indivisible	Progress on one target automatically delivers progress on another
+2 Reinforcing	Progress on one target makes it easier to make progress on another
+1 Enabling	Progress on one target creates conditions that enable progress on another
0 Consistent	There is no significant link between two targets’ progress
-1 Constraining	Progress on one target constrains the options for how to deliver on another
-2 Counteracting	Progress on one target makes it more difficult to make progress on another
-3 Cancelling	Progress on one target automatically leads to a negative impact on another

The fieldwork shows that there has been progress achieved in thinking about interlinkages across goals and targets in a more integrated and holistic way. This kind of conceptualization is an essential first step, but it is not always easy to translate this into concrete results on the ground. Although internationally, there exist a number of tools, it seems that no specific tool is currently being used by the Belgian development actors to systematically map existing interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs. We could, however, detect some interesting strategies that are currently being used in the field in Benin – although sometimes on a rather ad hoc basis - to take into account this horizontal integration. Examples include initiatives that seek to strengthen internal coherence and inter-pillar links, external coherence and partnerships/synergies, as well as the integration of transversal themes.

5.1.1 Internal coherence and inter-pillar links

An interesting strategy to take into account the principles of indivisibility and interconnectedness is to create internal coherence at the level of programmes by clearly linking different pillars/segments within one and the same program or between different programs of the same organisation. An interesting example is that of the systemic and integrated approach of Enabel that has already been touched upon in the section on LNOB. Central to that approach is the focus on ‘systems’ rather than ‘sectors’⁴¹, an analysis of the potential interconnections within and between these systems, multi-stakeholdership and the use of action research.

Also at the level of indirect actors, various (smaller and larger) examples have been given of ways in which synergies have been/are being established between different program components. Cebios, for example, currently finances various awareness-raising projects that transcend the classic sectoral division, by simultaneously involving different sectors (agriculture, environment, conservation of biodiversity). Also Louvain Cooperation has expressed its wish to create more sustainable synergies between their agricultural component and access to health care, by linking up agricultural cooperatives and public health insurances.

Bilateral programme Benin - Towards a systemic and integrated approach across different thematic sectors

Enabel envisages a systemic and integrated approach and internal coherence by making clear links between the different components of their country program. This systemic approach has facilitated the determination of partners, their interrelations and thereafter the selection of subsystems within which the Belgian development cooperation can intervene within the scope of a 4 to 5-year program. Within this approach, Enabel doesn’t focus on sectors as such, but rather on ‘**systems**’, e.g. ‘health system’ which inevitably mainly encompasses the health sector, but also has clear interrelations with other sectors. The focus on subsystems, and as such the limitation of scope, also helps them to bridge the barriers of time limitations.

In its Country Strategy for Benin, Enabel has made a first – albeit general - analysis of how initiatives in one domain might positively impact development outcomes in other domains.

First of all, it is believed that initiatives supporting entrepreneurship and descent, rewarding economic activities will generate more consistent and sustainable incomes, that in turn, lead to improved nutritional state and better access to (sexual and reproductive) health care, especially for women and youngsters, increased social wellbeing among woman (status within family and society, self-esteem), which in turn positively influences their sexual and reproductive emancipation.

Secondly, giving attention to the sexual and reproductive emancipation of women and youngsters can positively contribute to the productivity of human capital, and - through family planning – to better control of demographic dynamics in the country. Both element are considered detrimental for the development of entrepreneurship, socio-economic progress, and even security within the country.

Thirdly, the operationalization of a good performing digital data-system (on sanitary issues), should generate a transparent and inclusive dialogue on respect for and protection of rights of all target groups within the 3 program pillars.

And fourthly, the Port of Cotonou is considered a key link within numerous agricultural value chains. Improving the business climate and reinforcing the performance of portal actors should be favorable

⁴¹ For example, rather than talk about the ‘health sector’, they talk about the ‘health system’, which makes it easier to detect and define interlinkages with other domains (e.g. education, agriculture, ...).

for the development of (para) portal chains. Finally, improved health conditions among port workers should also positively impact their general performance.

Of course, it remains to be seen though how this interconnectedness between different program components really plays out in the field in the short and the long term. To evaluate this in a systematic way, Enabel has decided to deploy ‘**action research**’ as a major strategy for monitoring and evaluation. This allows them to evaluate development outcomes and interconnections on an ongoing bases, to look for new alliances where possible or needed, and to find possible solutions for hurdles along the way.

Join For Water – The do-no harm principle (‘water-cycles’), advocacy measures and ‘reversing passes’

As an organisation specialized in water, Join for Water is very much aware of the fact that many of the SDG indicators (not only those of SDG6) are linked to the water sector. They nevertheless consider it very difficult – being a small actor – to really subscribe to the principle of indivisibility in the field. However, some of their current strategies do align well with the principle.

Not only do they point to the importance of water vis-à-vis local actors that work in other domains/sectors and Belgian consumer and industrial producers (through the ‘Water Footprint’ tool), they also try as much as possible to apply the so-called ‘no-harm principle’. By working in small water-cycles – which includes the provision of potable water, actions on sanitation and wastewater - they attempt to enclose the water cycle and recycle. A current research project, for example, investigates in what ways ECOSAN products (for example urine) can be used within agriculture. Two instruction posters on ECOSAN latrines were made in Lokossa. One shows how you do your needs on an EcoSan latrine, the other explains when and how the fertilizers of the EcoSan latrine can be used in agriculture. The posters were made as part of the local social marketing of sanitation (Sani-marketing), in collaboration with VIA Water. Using EcoSan fertilizers can diminish the local use of harmful fertilizers, which - albeit indirectly - also touches upon other SDGs (1, 13, 14, 15, ...).

An additional strategy used by Join for Water in the South entails a focus on ‘reversing passes’⁴². The idea is to take create and facilitate multi-stakeholder platforms that allow for a constructive dialogue between private industrials, farmers, ACNGs, etc. on different ways to (re)use water.

Equally important to the establishment of internal coherence is the aspect of ‘time’. It was noted that **continuity between consecutive programs** is an important prerequisite to account for the principles of indivisibility and interconnectedness. It was stated that the unique Belgian articulation of development cooperation, i.e. among others the Joint Strategic Framework, (JSF) which includes a large number of Belgian organisations (direct and indirect) that push for convergence and that can count on structural funding and programme durations of 3 to 5 years, encourages them to align with Agenda 2030, which, after all, constitutes a long term projection. This articulation has supported various organisations to install continuity between different projects/programs and to build up considerable expertise in a certain domains and long-term collaboration with specific stakeholders.

However, continuity between consecutive programs also strongly depends on **coherence between the policy/political prioritizations** of both the Belgian government and that of the recipient country. This is, however, not always the case. The previous bilateral health programme (PASS-SOUROU, 2014-2019), for example, had strongly focused on non-communicable diseases due to the emergence and aggravation of risk factors related to these diseases that are becoming a great challenge for the national health sector. However, as mentioned in the Instruction Letter for Benin and as also noted

⁴² Loosely translated from ‘des passes inversants’.

by respondents during the fieldwork, the Belgian Ministry of Development Cooperation did not accept Enabel's suggestion to re-include interventions on non-communicable diseases in the new bilateral portfolio for 2019-2023. This despite a strong demand from the Beninese government for Enabel to continue their engagement and efforts in that domain and the recognition by different actors of the existence of an epidemiological transmission with potentially severe financial consequences for the country. The new bilateral health program now instead focuses on the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights and health data, which according to the respondents, has caused a disconnection between the two programme cycles.

On the other hand, it is clear that ruptures in the continuity and policy coherence can also be caused by the recipient government taking – albeit sovereign - policy measures that involve a radical break with the own previous policies and that of development actors working in the country. See for example the Beninese government's recent decision to reorient its policy on social protection by focusing on support for the private sector and by stepping down on the public sector (local mutual health organisations). Although both the Beninese government and the Belgian development actors vision the same goal - that is to provide social protection to all, including the most vulnerable - the perspectives with regard to the best ways in which this objective can be achieved, clearly diverge. In such case, development actors take a rather pragmatic stance. They continue to pursue their own policies from the idea that what is not forbidden is allowed.

5.1.2 Prioritization & integration of transversal themes

Although during the scoping phase of the PSR-SDG research in Belgium, it was mentioned that too little attention is being paid to the many links between different sectors/themes (e.g. ecological dimension within the health care strategy), program documents and data retrieved through interviews show that most, if not all, Belgian actors in Benin currently prioritize different transversal concepts within their programs. Although it is not always denoted as such, this also reflects, to a certain extent, the indivisibility principle. The most common transversal themes are: gender, environment, rights based approach, digitalization (D4D), descent work, entrepreneurship, and engagement with private sector. In addition, also the JSF of Benin (2018) includes one common strategic target (*cible stratégique commune 7*) on transversal themes that cross all other targets within the JSF. These transversal themes are: gender, environment, information – and communication technologies, inclusive intra- and inter-sectoral partnerships, as well as regional partnerships.

Also during the strategic dialogues, it was asked “to pay particular attention to the integration of cross-cutting themes and to ensure that programmes are aligned with the strategic targets and common approaches. This integration has led to the implementation of specific initiatives on the ground, such as for example actions that specifically target women while ensuring that activities do not change the existing balance to the detriment of the latter (cf. gender), the adaptation of technical agricultural methods to combat the effects of climate change (environment), the development of new digital tools for the monitoring and evaluation of indicators (digitization), etc.

Prioritization of transversal themes by Enabel

As shown by the Country Strategy for Benin and mentioned during the interviews on the field, the new bilateral development program of Benin has prioritized and integrated several transversal themes.

First of all, there is the **environmental strategy** of the Belgian development cooperation (2014) through the promotion of ‘environmental governance’ and the realization of specific environmental support systems (e.g. rational water management, green economy, Cotonou as ‘green port’, eco-

friendly tools and technical itineraries, recyclable packaging, use of local materials, digital management of information, etc.). This is in line with a growing focus within the Belgian development cooperation on the universal fight against climate change, efforts to save natural resources and the promotion of the use of renewable energies.

Secondly, together with BIO-Invest - cf. D4D programme – has put focus on **digitalization** (D4D) in view of (1) better use of (mega)data, (2) better access to data and services (inclusive societies), and (3) the promotion of socially responsible entrepreneurship.

Thirdly, there is the focus on **gender**. Enabel's initiatives regarding the promotion of sexual and reproductive health rights are aligned with the 'She Decides Movement'. This movement is based on a HRBA, includes a multi-actor and multi-sectoral perspective, and prioritizes two main axes: (1) the right to information, access to justice and security (especially for women and girls), and (2) access to sexual and reproductive health services.

And finally, also the notion of **descent work** constitutes a common thread within the new programmes. Thereby special attention is given to the promotion and assurance of decent working conditions for agricultural and port contractors and workers, specifically of women and youngsters.

5.1.3 External coherence, partnerships and synergies

From the interviews and program documents, it has become clear that in order to achieve their program objectives and to account for the principles of indivisibility and interconnectedness, the different Belgian development actors have established different technical partnerships and strategic alliances on the ground. In part, this has been encouraged by the **Joint Strategic Framework of Benin** (JSF 2018), which regroups 19 Belgian non-governmental development actors (ACNGs)⁴³ and Enabel around seven common strategic targets. Since its inception, the JSF stakeholders have met several times in Brussels and Cotonou and have worked on various transversal topics (e.g. digitization, articulation with the JSF on Descent Work, ...). The ACNGs have also developed a kind of cartography, a tool that is intended to further promote mutual knowledge and collaboration between the Belgian actors, but also for other organisations, donors and international institutional actors to improve their knowledge of the work of Belgian actors in development cooperation in Benin (CSC Benin, 2018).

According to the actors on the ground the JSF Benin certainly has some major advantages, as already touched upon in the section on multi-stakeholdership. Various actors have stressed the importance of such or similar **consultation platforms**.

We Social Movements (WSM) – Thematic, multidimensional, multi-actor networks

Solidarité Mondiale does not work with country programs, but with joint programs at the level of subregions. On the African continent, one regional office is based in Cotonou (for the program for W-Africa), another one in Kinshasa.

For several years, WSM has been building with their partner organisations on an international thematic network on the right to social protection. It is composed of some 80 organisations and 21 multi-actor networks around social protection, from all over the world. At the national (Belgian)

⁴³ These ACNGs are: APEFE, ARES, Artsen Zonder Vakantie, Croix Rouge de Belgique, DBA, Eclasio, Handicap International, Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp, Iles de Paix, Join For Water, Louvain Cooperation, Médecins du Monde, MEMISA, Plan International, Rikolto, Solidarité Mondiale, Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie (UVCW), Via Don Bosco, VVSG.

level, WSM is also involved in the JSF on Descent Work, together with other social movements in Belgium.

In general, an important aim of all these networks is to share knowledge. In fact, according to some of the local respondents, all of their actions include the important dimensions of exchange and mutual learning (on approaches, challenges, lessons learnt, ...). Other objectives of the networks are capitalization, the development of common vision, capacity development through complementary strategies, joint action research and to refresh strategic alliances with other international networks (e.g. AIM, GCSPF, ITUC, RIPESS, ...). For WSM, it is also an important advocacy tool and lever to help shape national, continental and international social protection policies.

Through these networks – so do the respondents state – they are able to create bridges within and between countries, between different actors and domains (sectors).

The field interviews, however, also highlighted some important challenges with regard to the realization of horizontal coherence. First of all, there is very little to no coordination, consultation or exchange between the different line ministries at the national level. The same counts for the consultation between different TFPs that are working in the country. Although in Benin there exist various technical working groups at the national level – for example on agriculture – in which representatives of the relevant ministry, TFPs, and ANGs participate, they apparently fail to initiate a real dialogue and are often not up to date (new actors in the field are not invited).

5.2 Tentative conclusions & recommendations

- The results of the field visit show that there is only limited knowledge about useful tools to carry out a more systematic analysis regarding indivisibility or interlinkages amongst the SDG goals, targets and indicators. At the same time the field visit has shown that there are various points in the programming cycle where such analysis would be of added value (e.g. during the development of strategy notes, instruction letters or during the establishment of joint strategic framework, or during programme design). There is therefore need to set up process to develop capacity among development actors to be able to carry out such forms of analysis at different levels in the programming cycle. This could involve the development of practical guidelines with associated tools (drawing from a growing body of literature and experiences with various tools and approaches to map and analyse interlinkages and potential trade-offs). For example, Bruer et al. (2019) discuss existing frameworks for the systematic conceptualization of the SDGs and the interlinkages and interdependencies between them. An overview of existing tools for Understanding Linkages and Developing Strategies for Policy Coherence is also provided by the SDG knowledge hub of IISD (2016)
- Also a collective learning trajectory (or action research) with development actors who want to implement these tools would be helpful. This would provide a conducive environment for knowledge sharing and exchange of experiences, therefore facilitating the identification and analysis of interlinkages and trade-offs.
- It will also be important to consider that every analysis of interlinkages calls for a contextualization. The nature of any inter-linkage depends on the context of the respective country, the level of development, geographical and other characteristics and specific policies which might determine if a given inter-linkage constitutes a trade-off or a synergy. More holistic approaches are needed as the contextual evaluation of several systems together is fundamental.

6 | SDG integration in programme cycle & results framework

The combination of goals derived from the Rio+20 background (biosphere) and MDG background (development) and the wish to turn them into an activating entity for all countries and all stakeholders, have turned Agenda 2030 into a complex body of programs. Much of the design and the governance of the Agenda is about assuring the goals will be implemented, their progress monitored, measured, disaggregated and re-aggregated. This however does not come automatically and it remains to be seen whether the Voluntary National Reviews are sufficiently incentivizing the countries to take full responsibility for their share of the much needed global contributions. A screening of the first Belgian Voluntary National Review, for instance, showed that implementation in the case of Belgium meant that a number of policy plans were produced without much indication of their implementation (timing, stakeholders, accountability)⁴⁴. Also internationally, while a good number of UN member states governments have developed policy for translating the SDGs into day-to-day action, many stakeholders feel they have to decide for themselves whether and to which extent they should integrate the SDGs in their own strategy (Bachus et al. 2018)⁴⁵.

To help promote action and follow up on progress related to agenda 2030 and to ensure data-consistency across different contexts, multilateral agencies like UNDP⁴⁶ and OECD⁴⁷ have been pressing on the need for using the SDG-indicators universally. Specifically for development cooperation OECD DAC has worked on practical guidelines to integrate the SDGs into the results frameworks of development cooperation actors (OECD, 2018)⁴⁸. These guidelines have informed initial steps taken by DGD and Enabel in the development of the bilateral programme portfolio's under the new management contract.

This chapter of the field report explores the steps taken by DGD and Enabel to integrate the SDGs in the programme cycle of the governmental development cooperation and how they translate into the portfolio of the Benin bilateral programme. Initial experiences by field staff with the integration of the SDGs into the results framework are also discussed. In addition, the chapter highlights some potential advantages and remaining challenges and concerns among different development actors (Enabel as well as NGAs) in relation to the expectations of tracking one's contribution towards specific SDGs.

44 <https://www.mo.be/analyse/een-rapport-zonder-cijfers>

45 Bachus K., Pollet I. and Steenberghen T. (2018), The SDGs as a Lever for Change in Policy Practices, research report commissioned by the Federal Council for Sustainable Development, Brussels.

46 <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2018/how-will-we-navigate-towards-2030--well-be-using-maps-.html>

47 <http://www.oecd.org/dac/results-development/results-documents.htm> An SDG-based results framework for development cooperation, Paris, January 2016.

48 OECD (2018), The 2030 Agenda and Development Co-operation Results. Policy Paper 9.

6.1 Different entry points for the SDGs in the programming cycle of the bilateral cooperation

Enabel's management contract stipulates that it should systematically give evidence of how its programme contributes to specific SDG targets referred to in the instruction letter of the minister of development cooperation. In the case of Benin, the instruction letter (drafted by the embassy with input from Enabel and reviewed and approved by the minister of development cooperation) explicitly refers to 8 of the 49 SDG targets⁴⁹ which are also prioritized in the Benin action plan (PAG). These targets are linked to the general objective elaborated in the instruction letter (see box 6.1) and considers priorities of the Belgian and the Benin government. For the Belgian side these priorities are outlined in the various thematic strategy notes of DGD. A notable example is the strategic note on agriculture and food security (DGD, 2017) which provided guidance for the development of the instruction letter for the Benin bilateral programme.

Box 6.1 - General objectives and key pillars in the instruction letter for the Benin bilateral programme

General objectives:

- 1) Contribute to the creation of decent and sustainable employment, increased income of economic actors and households and the improvement of macroeconomic conditions in two key economic sectors (agriculture and health) in Benin;
- 2) Contribute to the reduction of demographic pressure and maternal mortality and to improve the development of human capital.

Key pillars:

- Develop inclusive and sustainable agricultural entrepreneurship;
- Improve the skills of port workers;
- Improving access to sexual and reproductive health and rights - 'She Decides'.

After finalization and approval of the instruction letter the relevant strategy notes of DGD also provide guidance regarding the choices that need to be made during the development and implementation of the actual programme portfolio (intervention). The development of a results framework is a key element of the programme portfolio. In view of the 2030 agenda, both DGD and Enabel have taken initial steps to provide guidance on how to develop a result framework with appropriate indicators that can help bilateral programmes to track their contribution towards relevant SDG targets. These steps as well as some reflections from the field in Benin are discussed in the next paragraphs.

6.1.1 Steps taken by Enabel and DGD to measure contribution to the SDGs

In the run up to the new management contract with Enabel, both DGD and Enabel have taken initial steps to provide guidance on how to measure contribution towards the SDGs.

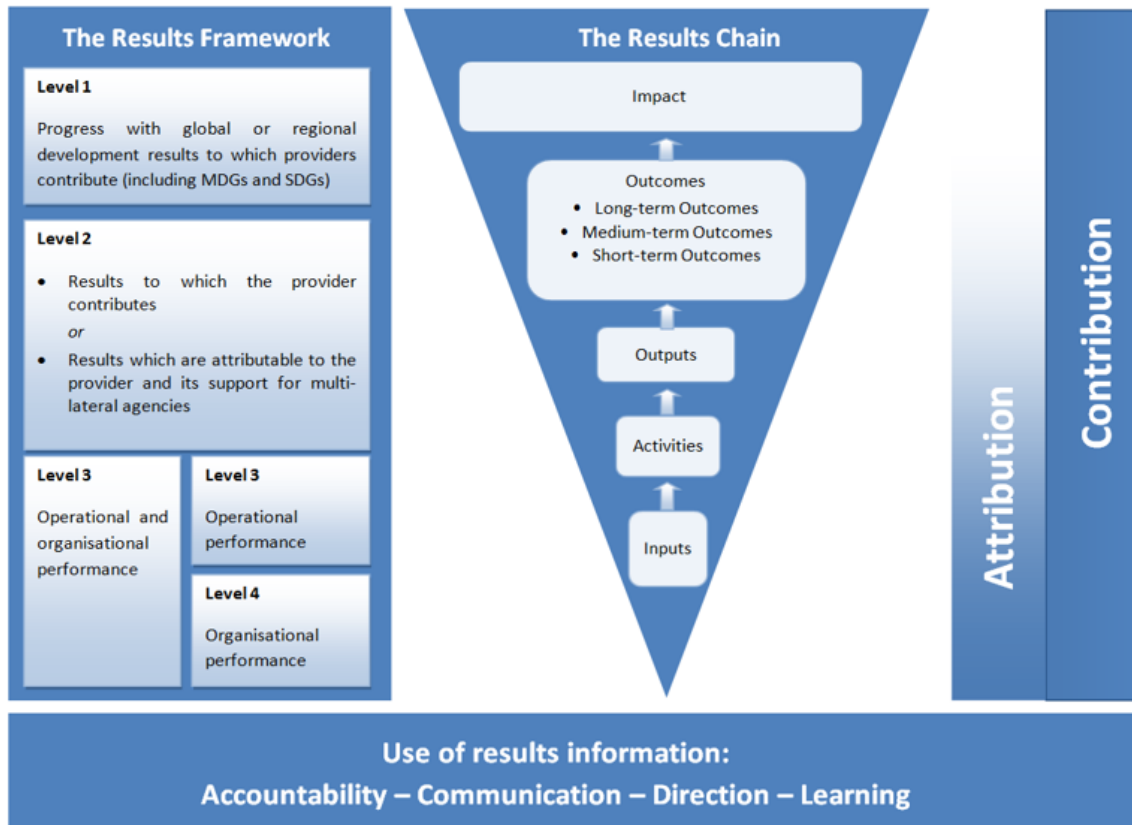
DGD worked out a list of 29 corporate indicators (still work in progress) for specific SDG targets that fall under the main priority sectors in which the Belgian development cooperation is engaged. DGD expects Enabel to integrate the corporate indicators that are relevant for specific interventions.

Enabel developed a (draft) policy note on 'Development and Cooperation Result Indicators' which proposes 62 indicators that field teams can choose from when designing the result frameworks of their respective interventions (programme portfolios). This list also includes the corporate indicators worked out by DGD. An introductory note explains the selection process of these indicators,

⁴⁹ The instruction letter refers to the following SDG targets to which the bilateral programme in Benin is expected to contribute: 1.4, 2.3, 3.7, 4.4, 8.2, 8.5, 11.a.

whereby the relevance for Enabel interventions, the robustness of the indicators and the availability of data were important criteria.

The selection and in some cases the reformulation of SDG target indicators as well as the development of guidelines on how to use them are strongly aligned with OECD guidelines that structure the results framework with SDG indicators according to the following common three levels in the results chain:



Level 1: Development results: global or national development change to which Belgian ODA contributes (impact and outcomes);

Level 2: Development Co-operation results: results to which Enabel contributes directly or which are attributed to Enabel interventions (outcomes and outputs);

Level 3: Delivery and performance information of Enabel (outputs, inputs and management information).

Within the Enabel guiding document, corporate indicators are suggested for levels 1 and 2 of the results chain.

- Level 1 indicators correspond with SDG-indicators of the Tier 1 type, i.e. indicators which:
- Are sufficiently robust (conceptually clear; based on an internationally established methodology);
 - Measure results at impact-level;
 - For which data are supposedly available at country-level (for at least 50% of the countries/population in every region where the indicator is relevant);
 - 29 such indicators have been selected in the list.

Level 2 indicators correspond with either (a) Tier 1 type data but in a disaggregated or adapted way, (b) Tier 2 or 3 type data (which are less robust, measuring outcomes and outputs respectively, and for which data may not be available at country level), (c) ‘corporate’ Enabel indicators that are not included in the list of SDG indicators but with a clear link to the targets. The note further adds the following explanation:

- Some of the SDG indicators have been adapted in order to make it feasible to measure them every year;
- The use of level 2 indicators for projects will require baseline studies to be produced during the preparation phase, to be completed by the start of the intervention. Yearly follow-up will need to be assured by using disaggregated data provided by the recipient country or an international organization, either by proper collection;
- 33 such indicators have been selected;
- These are comparable to the overall results framework of the Belgian ODA, in which 22 indicators have been determined for the Belgian governmental development cooperation⁵⁰.

6.1.2 Steps taken to integrate SDGs in the results framework of the Benin portfolio

A review of the results framework of the Benin portfolio, learns that at least 4 of the 8 SDG targets prioritized in the instruction letter and associated indicators that also belong to the corporate indicators of DGD and Enabel find their way into the portfolio’s results framework. This is illustrated by table 7.1 which highlights some parts of the portfolio’s results framework (not all indicators are shown). The table shows for example that SDG target indicator 8.5.2 which is a corporate DGD and Enabel indicator has been used as one of the indicators for the portfolio’s global objectives. Hence it provides a tool that can help the programme to collect information related towards SDG target 8.5⁵¹ (pertaining the promotion of decent jobs) which is one of the priority areas stated in the instruction letter. Another example is provided by corporate indicator 2.4.1 which is used as one of the indicators for the specific objective regarding the development of value chains and agricultural entrepreneurship. Again this indicator can help the programme to track and report monitoring information related to SDG target 2.4⁵² which is related to ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices. Interestingly, while SDG target 2.4 was not explicitly mentioned in the instruction letter, it does provide a strong linkage with the transversal theme of environmental sustainability. Working towards this indicator can also help the programme to be aware of negative trade-offs from its efforts to strengthen banana production as measured by some of the indicators under result 2. As shown in figure 6.2 some of the indicators under result 2 are similar to the DGD and Enabel corporate indicators related to SDG target 2.3⁵³ and used to measure increase in agricultural production. Again these indicators provide the programme with a means to track and report information on SDG target 2.3 which is also a priority areas mentioned in the instruction letter.

50 FOD (2018), Opvolging van de Belgische bijdrage aan de Duurzame Ontwikkelingsdoelen in het kader van de gouvernementele samenwerking, Brussels: FOD DGD. This list of indicators could be seen as the minimal set which agencies could use as a basis and which they could expand to what they think is relevant.

51 SDG target 8.5: D’ici 2030, parvenir au plein emploi productif et garantir à toutes les femmes et à tous les hommes, y compris les jeunes et les personnes handicapées, un travail décent et un salaire égal pour un travail de valeur égal.

52 SDG target 2.4: By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.

53 SDG target 2.3: By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

Table 6.1 Extracts from the results framework of Enabel's Benin portfolio (not all indicators shown)

Changements visés (Bénin bilatéral programme)	Indicateurs (+ source de vérification) in Bénin portfolio	Enabel corporate indicator (level 2)	DGD corporate indicator (level 2)	SDG target indicator (UNSTATS)
Objectif global: Contribuer à la création d'emplois décents et durables, à l'augmentation des revenus des acteurs économiques et des ménages, et à l'amélioration des équilibres macroéconomiques du Bénin	Nombre d'emplois FTE décents créés (Source INSAE, désagrégé par tranche d'âge et par sexe)	8.5.2 Number of full-time (equivalent) jobs created and maintained	8.5.2 Net additional jobs created	8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities (Tier 1 - robust)
Objectif Spécifique pilier 1 (chaînes de valeurs ajoutée CVA et entrepreneuriat agrobusiness): Renforcer de manière inclusive et durable les CVA ciblées et leur positionnement sur le marché, en œuvrant à répondre aux goulots d'étranglement clés de celle-ci et à la professionnalisation des agri-entrepreneurs y impliqués, ...	Nombre d'hectares cultivés de manière durable	2.4.1 Number of ha of agricultural area (including pastoral, forest, wetlands) under environmentally sustainable exploitation	2.4.1 Number of hectares of agricultural land where sustainable practices are implemented	2.4.1. Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture (Tier 3)
Résultat 2: La compétitivité des CVA est améliorée par une augmentation des marges aux différents maillons	Augmentation globale de la production Nombre d'hectares mis en valeur pour production d'ananas	2.3.1. le rendement par type de culture (output/ha)	2.3.1. Volume of production per hectare	2.3.1 Volume of production per labor unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size (Tier 3)

6.2 Potential added value for integrating SDGs into the results frameworks

Based on observations during the field visit in Benin as well as a review of relevant literature on results based management and the SDGs, the following potential advantages of integrating SDG target indicators in a programme's results framework can be highlighted:

- Using indicators linked to SDG targets that refer to outcomes to which a development programme can contribute, helps to address the challenge of the SDGs being too broad to be measurable. In other words, they can bring the task of tracking one's contribution towards a particular SDG closer to the intervention;
- They provide an intervention with internationally recognized indicators that provide a tool to track and report monitoring information on specific SDG targets. While there are still many questions (see further) about how to collect reliable information and to determine the intervention's contribution, having intervention specific monitoring information about a particular SDG target will be an important element for carrying out any process of contribution analysis;
- Specific selections of SDG target indicators can encourage (even force) development actors to go beyond SDG washing of their existing strategies and interventions, but to take specific effort to operationalize SDG principles such as interlinkages, potential trade-offs, working towards LNOB;
- Using similar internationally recognized SDG target indicators within the interventions of different development actors will not only facilitate aggregation of information but will also provide opportunities for joint programming;
- Using similar corporate indicators in different bilateral country programmes can also facilitate aggregation of monitoring information across different countries at the level of Enabel Brussels; which in turn can facilitate reporting on specific SDGs towards DGD.

6.3 Challenges & potential bottlenecks

- **Measuring contribution towards the SDGs:** The interviews with Enabel field staff in Benin show that relevant (corporate) SDG target indicators⁵⁴ could be found for integration into the result framework and to help establish the baseline of the programme. It was highlighted that these indicators were useful for following up on the programme's progress. However, while respondents acknowledge the link with specific SDGs, they also expressed considerable doubts about how the use of such indicators would allow them to follow up on a programme's contribution to the SDGs.

A review of the theories of change of the programmes of different development actors helps to understand this concern. Development actors (both Enabel and NGAs) have clearly evolved towards a programme approach that seeks to work towards change at the level of local actors⁵⁵ so they can make a more durable positive change towards the final beneficiaries. By working through the strengthening of local actors, programmes can contribute towards results that have more chance to continue after the lifetime of a particular project or programme. This is a positive development which is reflected in the more complex theories of change where one intervention often works through various levels of intermediate actors and has no control and often no direct influence on the ultimate change a programme hopes to contribute to at the level of the final beneficiaries (e.g. farmers, households, women, youth, workers, private sector, LNOB target groups, ...). In such set up, change at the level of the final beneficiaries will not only depend on local actors which the programme seeks to influence directly or indirectly. This means that development programmes often don't have control nor direct influence over the achievement of SDG target indicators (particularly those that are part of the list of corporate indicators of DGD and Enabel) who are usually describing change at the level of the final beneficiaries of a programme.

Interestingly this problem of measuring contribution (and fortunately DGD policy is not expecting attribution) is not something new emerging through the 2030 agenda. It is a common challenge throughout the longer history of results based management. Even before the SDGs, there were lots of questions about the extent to which a development programme could be made accountable for the achievement of specific results at levels within its theory of change over which it didn't have control or direct influence. Fortunately, over the years, a growing body of experience and expertise has emerged around the use of more complexity oriented monitoring and evaluation approaches to track and learn from development results that a programme cannot control. Hence instead of heralding something completely new and unrealistic, the SDGs could become a catalyst for putting extra effort in implementing these complexity oriented monitoring and evaluation approaches in order to measure and learn about one's contribution towards specific SDGs.

- In addition to the contribution challenge, quite a number of **technical and sometimes political challenges** were highlighted by development actor during the field visit. One general concern pertained the limited availability of reliable in-country monitoring data for specific SDG target indicators. As a result, development actors find themselves responsible for organizing data collection themselves, which can be time consuming, costly and putting extra demand on limited human resources. The fact that tracking SDG target indicators is not that useful for programme management is further reinforced by a perceived lack of feedback from DGD regarding our contribution to the SDGs which, according to some respondents, doesn't stimulate the use of the SDGs as a means for programme orientation or reflection. Along similar lines, it was also highlighted that it's

54 In addition to the examples of SDG target indicators provided in table xxxx, the following SDG indicators related to the health component of the programme were used: 3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio in health facilities & 3.7.1 Number of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who use modern family planning methods. Both indicators were used to measure progress in the Health related specific objective of the programme: 'Strengthen rights and access to quality sexual and reproductive health services'.

55 (e.g. policy makers, government administrations, institutions, service providers, community based organisations, etc.)

difficult to find the motivation to invest in processes of data collection if these data will not be useful for learning about a programme's progress and for informing programme management. In addition, there are many questions about transparency about the process aggregation and reporting on SDG achievements at national and global levels.

- **Transforming development cooperation practice:** There was also a feeling among development actors (both Enabel and NGAs) that as for now the SDGs have not yet made a notable difference in the way of results based working. Linking an existing results framework with specific SDGs (SDG labelling) which was mostly the case with the NGA programmes as well as the integration of SDG target indicators in the results framework of the bilateral programme portfolio was rather seen as an external requirement asked for by DGD.

“We have effectively done the TOC, and have added an extra column to it to show which indicator might contribute to which objective. So we’ve done our job, but will that change anything in practice? I do not think so. Not within the current organisation, after all. We do it to satisfy people, but it does not serve as a means of orientation or a means of reflection. We still use our own indicators for this.”(Interview extract)

At the same time, as was also highlighted above, the results of the field visit point towards some opportunities that the integration of the SDGs in a programme's result framework can bring. Certain combinations of specific SDG target indicators can strengthen a programme's consideration of important interlinkages and trade-offs, it can strengthen a programme's attention for specific transversal themes (e.g. decent work and environmental sustainability as was the case in the Benin bilateral programme), it can also direct focus on specific target groups such as LNOB.

6.4 Tentative policy recommendations

- **Taking advantage of Agenda 2030 at different stages in the programme cycle:** To ensure that the SDGs are used as a compass for the Belgian development cooperation, it will not be enough to consider the SDGs during the design stage of an intervention. For the bilateral cooperation for example, there are various potential entry points for the SDGs in the overall programming cycle which are currently not fully exploited. For instance, the field visit could not find strong indications that the SDGs and their underlying principles had been explicitly used as guiding framework by the embassy or Enabel during the formulation of their input or advice for the instruction letter. While reference is surely made to specific SDG targets and priorities of the Benin and Belgian governments, there is only limited information about the underlying analysis related to interlinkages, trade-offs or LNOB that resulted in the selection of the specific priority SDG targets. Similarly, the DGD strategic notes also play an important guiding role in developing instruction letters as well as in the design of specific country programmes. Hence there seems to be strong potential linking the objectives and priorities outlined in DGD strategic notes to the SDGs.

Including such analysis in this early stage of the programming cycle could help to provide guidance on how to operationalize the SDG principles and to facilitate a more strategic selection of SDG target indicators in the results framework. It could also inform the formulation of additional indicators (both quantitative and qualitative) that may be necessary to have the necessary information to carry out some kind of contribution analysis towards specific SDG targets. The same applies for the NGAs whereby the SDGs could be used more strategically as an analytical framework that can guide strategic dialogues with DGD and joint processes of context analysis and strategic planning (see GSK/CSC).

- **Strengthening local statistics and data management capacity:** As was already mentioned in the chapter on LNOB, the SDGs can provide a potential guiding framework to programme specific interventions that seek to support the strengthening of statistics capacity and data management systems in partner countries. The various structures (see box) that the Government of Benin has set up to coordinate and monitor and evaluate its national development programmes related to the SDGs could be explored as entry points for such support. Strengthening local data systems would help to address the data gap in a more durable way. It would also take away some of the burden regarding data collection from development actors during programme monitoring and evaluation.

Structures set up by the government of Benin to coordinate and monitor and evaluate its national development programmes related to the SDGs:

- Council of Ministers (CM): gives general guidelines and examines/approves implementation reports;
- Flagship Project Monitoring Committee (CSPP) supervised by the president;
- Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (CSE): supervised by Minister of State for the Plan and Development;
- Sector-Specific Monitoring Committees (CSS): chaired by ministers;
- Independent agencies: responsible for implementing actions and reforms set out by sector-specific ministries. These agencies are coordinated by the Bureau of Analysis and Investigation (BAI) (is part of the President's office).

- **Strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacity of Belgian Development actors:** Support the development of organisational capacity to use complexity oriented monitoring and evaluation approaches. SDG framework can serve as a catalyst to engage development actors in action learning trajectories where they experiment with various approaches and tools to track their contribution to specific SDGs in their results frameworks. During the field visit, various development actors also indicated to be in favor of more strategic evaluation that goes beyond individual interventions in order to learn about contribution towards specific SDGs or SDG principles. Also the need for more collective reflections about these issues was raised.

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