

Peer learning workshop “Policies for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: exchange of best practices on the basis of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews”

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Summary of discussion (prepared by the secretariat)

Institutional set-ups for SDGs monitoring and implementation and the role of the national environmental authorities

In the majority of countries, the national environmental authorities do not play the coordinating role in the national institutional set-ups for implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Such set-ups commonly include a high-level political body in charge of coordination and guidance, such as a national coordination committee on SDGs, supported by interministerial working groups led by responsible ministries. The high-level political bodies are often under the umbrella of a powerful minister or higher authority. Interministerial working groups are responsible for strategic vision, implementation and monitoring and are often technical, but in some countries more political. National SDG coordinators (high-level officials) have been appointed in some countries. Parliamentary commissions in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda have been set up in some countries. Cooperation takes place in a variety of forms, from consultation processes to stakeholder participation in the national coordination committees on SDGs. National statistical offices play a key role in monitoring.

The national environmental authorities are an irreplaceable actor in the national institutional set-up for implementation and monitoring of SDGs. In most countries, the national environmental authorities lead the national efforts on the “Planet” dimension of the 2030 Agenda. In fact, in many countries, the national environmental authorities pioneer the work on the 2030 Agenda and there is often difficulty in building ownership of the Agenda in sectoral ministries.

The common challenge for the national institutional set-ups for implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda is breaking the silos for effective work. Another important challenge is adapting the SDGs to the level of plans and actual implementation.

Integration of SDGs into national policy frameworks: the case of environment-related SDGs

Many countries of the region have already defined national targets and indicators based on SDGs (so-called “nationalization” or “localization”) and some of them are assigned to national environmental authorities. SDGs assigned to national environmental authorities commonly include goals and/or targets belonging to Goals 6, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 but there are cases when targets under other goals are also assigned to environmental ministries or they are co-responsible for such targets together with other ministries.

Many countries are now revising the national strategic documents on environment. This is an opportunity for the national environmental authorities to integrate SDGs into the national strategic frameworks. Good examples of adaptation of national policies to the 2030 Agenda are already available in the UNECE region.

Some countries, when undertaking an inventory of the availability of global SDG indicators, also work on their “assignment” to national programmes or other strategic documents. This would enable the monitoring of SDG indicators as part of the monitoring of national strategic documents.

Some countries work on integration of SDGs not only into policies but also in the legislation. There are ideas to make “SDG assessment” part of the regulatory impact assessment or other relevant screening processes for drafts of new legal and regulatory acts.

Some countries have started efforts to bring the SDGs to the local level through organizing local seminars on SDGs and producing local indicators. However little experience is yet available in this area.

Data availability for SDGs: the case of environmental data and indicators

The production of environment-related indicators requires collaborative efforts of the statistical offices, national environmental authorities and many other actors (health, agriculture, forestry, hunting, emergency response authorities). In many countries, the limited capacity of environmental authorities to provide reliable administrative data on environment-related indicators is among the weak links.

The lack of a common approach at the international level to ways of collecting data and information on environment-related indicators is a constraint for effective work on indicators nationally. Sufficient information is not available on the plans of various custodian agencies to gather data by surveys only, so there is no clarity at the national level with regard to which Tier III indicators would not require the regular production of data by countries.

In some countries, the national vocabulary on global SDG indicators is behind. The absence of terminology in the national language impedes the collaborative effort of the statistical offices, national environmental and other authorities to define and operationalize the national indicator frameworks in support of the SDGs.

EPRs and SDGs

The added value of incorporating the SDGs into EPRs is that they are a powerful tool for the national environmental authorities to raise awareness of the relevant SDGs. In turn, addressing the SDGs in the EPRs facilitates further incorporation of non-binding EPR recommendations into the national policy documents, which are mandatory for implementation and supported by financial allocations, thereby contributing to the implementation of EPR recommendations and, simultaneously, the achievement of SDGs.

The EPR Programme already plays an important role in providing countries with policy advice on the achievement and monitoring of the SDGs, as demonstrated by the reviews conducted in 2017-2018. A country-tailored approach should continue to ensure that EPRs remain practical and useful to the countries.

There are several ways to strengthen such support from the Programme in the direction of making the SDGs even more pronounced in the EPR reports and the EPR process. These include:

- EPRs could provide direct recommendations on the achievement of SDGs (so far, the links to SDG targets were included in the chapeaux to EPR recommendations, and the recommendations on SDGs were provided in the boxes on SDGs inside EPR chapters);
- EPRs could include more extensive assessments of the implementation of a larger number of targets, if agreeable to a reviewed country;
- EPRs could produce more exhaustive SDG boxes, since SDG boxes in EPRs are recognized as particularly useful;
- The EPR Programme could produce one additional by-product – a short executive summary devoted to SDGs;
- EPR launches could be re-designed to clearly link them to SDGs.

EPRs are external assessments that objectively show gaps and challenges. In this way, they can complement the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) that are important instruments for creating ownership of SDGs within countries but often result in an overall positive picture. EPRs can provide input to VNRs and vice

versa. Overall, the EPR Programme and the reviewed countries could maximize the co-benefits from the VNRs and other 2030 Agenda-related processes such as the MAPS missions to countries.

Building ownership and awareness for SDGs

Awareness on the SDGs has been growing but remains insufficient both within the national environmental authorities and, even more, outside the environmental ministries. There is an insufficient level of engagement of different sectors. Awareness and ownership at local level is clearly low.

Educational system is the key mechanism for building ownership and awareness of the SDGs. Efforts should start at the level of kindergarten to enable achieving profound and sustainable changes. A number of countries have already integrated SDGs into curricula at various levels. Addressing behavior challenges like the culture of consumption is of paramount importance for the progress with SDGs.

Numerous tools are already used by the governments and the national environmental authorities to build ownership and raise awareness of SDGs. Such tools include: national SDG signs, dedicated websites and platforms to engage about SDGs, dedicated forums, dashboards, advertisement campaigns in public buses, use of advertisement boards in airports and other transportation hubs, dedicated statistical publications on SDGs, national, regional, local seminars and training of trainers on SDGs. The work of the national coordination committees on SDGs can be used to spread the message.

While targeted efforts to raise awareness on the SDGs are important, the national environmental authorities can do a lot to lead SDG implementation by example. This could be done through reducing waste generation, water and energy consumption, introducing green public procurement, working to decrease carbon footprint, etc. Such work can build on existing platforms such as the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme and the ISO standards.

The implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a dynamically developing area. Changes take place every day, both globally and at national level. Peer learning is extremely important at this stage.