



IAIA
International Association
for Impact Assessment

Impact assessment can help countries attain SDGs in the strategic and project decisions they continuously make.



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FASTIPS

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Impact Assessment and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDG framework consists of 17 Goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators that balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social, and environmental. The SDGs replace and build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs are presented in the UN document “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” which was adopted by Heads of State at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2015.

Different from the MDGs, the SDGs are applicable to all countries, not just the low- and middle-income ones. The SDGs define sustainability in environmental, social and economic terms, expressed as protection of the planet, poverty elimination, and more prosperity, that is better distributed. The emphasis for SDG planning, action, monitoring, and evaluation shifts from the global to the national level. Individual countries that adopted the SDGs must define their own national targets, based on the global aspirational goals and targets, and monitor progress toward achieving them. In addition to the “development” focus, the SDGs also have strong “human rights” and “natural resource conservation” foci.

The Sustainable Development goals, targets, and indicators are intended to guide efforts towards sustainable development in the coming decades. Governments, the private sector, and civil society all need to make their contributions to reaching them by 2030. For impact assessment (IA) in its multiple forms—such as EIA, SIA, SEA, HIA—the opportunities to play a crucial role in achieving the SDG targets are significantly greater than they were for the MDGs. IA is already present in IA regulations and policies that many countries have enacted and is therefore ideally positioned to integrate and mainstream sustainability considerations in development planning and decision-making.

FURTHER READING

GRI, UN Global Compact and WBCSD. 2015. SDG Compass – A guide for business action on the SDGs. www.sdgcompass.org

Hacking, T. 2019. The SDGs and the sustainability assessment of private-sector projects: Theoretical conceptualisations and comparison with current practice using the case-study of the Asian Development Bank. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal* 37(1): 2-16.

Nilsson, M., Griggs, D. and Visbeck, M. 2016. Policy: Map the interactions between Sustainable Development Goals. *Nature* 534: 320–322, doi:10.1038/534320a

Nilsson, M. and Persson, A. 2017. Policy note: Lessons from environmental policy integration for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. *Environmental Science and Policy* 78:36–39

www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

1. The global SDG framework will influence national development policies, programs, and projects.
2. Many countries are translating the SDGs into national policy frameworks. This offers great opportunities for the IA community to actively engage in this process.
3. Applying SDG targets will help make IA more objectives-driven, rather than process- or impacts-oriented, thus helping to overcome fragmented approaches in planning and decision-making.
4. IA will bring increased tangibility and practical meaning to SDG frameworks; for example through strategic and sustainability assessments, and the various forms of monitoring included in IA-based environmental, social, and health management plans.
5. The private sector will find that using an SDG framework in their IAs helps them to manage their corporate risks and obligations, for example with respect to human rights.

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO

1. Use the global SDG framework to increase the relevance of IA as a planning foundation for national development policy, program, and project decisions.
2. Seek harmonization of national IA regulations and policy with SDG-inspired development policies and practice, ensuring that SDG targets and indicators are used in decision-making processes.
3. Support the adoption or adaptation of IA guidelines to incorporate SDG principles and concepts, develop sector-based IA guidelines aligned with the SDGs, and generate well-documented case studies that highlight the links between IA and the SDGs.
4. Translate SDG targets into criteria that are specific to a particular project or plan context, addressing the critical risks and limits of acceptable change in the potentially affected ecosystems and communities.
5. Avoid being overly rigid or overly prescriptive: not all SDG targets are relevant for all contexts. Considering sustainable development issues in the local setting may help to simplify the IA scope.

EXAMPLES

- The mining industry considered the relationship between mining operations and the SDGs and mapped its roles, responsibilities, and opportunities. IAs were identified as an important tool to develop actions that support the integration of the SDGs into mining operations in a context-specific manner (CCSI et al., 2016¹).
- SDG6 objectives and targets (clean water and sanitation) were included within the strategic reference framework used in the SEA of the 2015-2021 National Plan for Sewage in Peru, as well as in the SEA of the National Strategic Plan for Water and Sewage in Cape Verde. In the case of Peru, a specific analysis was made on how strategic planning options met national SDG6 commitments.²
- The SDGs were used as the basis for a multi-stakeholder scoping process in the SEAs for water catchment plans in Rwanda. A first screening of the SDGs took place on basis of the “headings” of the SDGs, followed by more detailed prioritizing by looking at the targets under the headings. This resulted in consensus on selecting SDGs 15 and 6 as top priorities, which provided a starting point for the formulation of vision and objectives for the combined SEA/ water catchment planning process.³

¹Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment, UNDP, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and World Economic Forum (2016). White Paper: Mapping Mining to the Sustainable Development Goals: An Atlas.

²MINAM 2016. Informe Ambiental sobre el proceso de Evaluación Ambiental Estratégica (EAE) al Plan Nacional de Saneamiento (PNS) 2016-2021, INFORME TÉCNICO N° 0019-2016-MINAM-VMGA-DGPNIGA/MROJAS, Lima, Perú.

³NCEA, oral contribution

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