ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARDS THE SDGs:
IDENTIFYING PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION IN GEORGIA

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Like all United Nations member states, Georgia pledged to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) at the historic General Assembly session in 2015. Commitment to the SDGs by the country’s leadership has been strong.

To ensure effective coordination across different ministries and state agencies, an **SDG Council** has been established under the Government Administration.

To adapt the 2030 Agenda to national circumstances, **95 nationalized targets** have been defined. An online **monitoring system** has also been set up to measure progress.

Georgia presented its **first Voluntary Progress Report** on SDG progress during the High-Level Political Forum in 2016; a second one is scheduled for **presentation in 2020**.

With four years already elapsed in the SDG timetable, Georgia welcomed support offered by the UN Country Team in 2018 in identifying priority areas in which concerted efforts could be made to remove bottlenecks and unlock swifter progress towards the SDGs.

This booklet summarizes this effort and presents the key findings and next steps.
The first step in this effort was to assess the degree to which national and sub-national policy documents (strategies, action plans, regulatory acts) were aligned with the SDGs.

UN experts reviewed 54 different strategies – 36 national and 18 subnational – and also assessed the SDG alignment of Georgia's Association Agreement with the European Union (EU).

The next step was to assess the extent to which national budgets reflected the priorities mapped out in the strategic documents. To this end, the experts reviewed the national budget Basic Data and Directions document for 2017-2020 (2019-2022 budgeting cycle).

A third step was to conduct a “complexity analysis” to assess the degree to which achieving SDG targets in one area could help to accelerate progress in other areas.

Preparatory desk research was conducted during February-April 2019 by a team composed of UN staff and expert consultants with input from all UN agencies represented in Georgia.

In May 2019, a two-day interactive workshop was held to consult and validate the findings with representatives of ministries, state agencies, members of parliament and NGOs.

The findings presented here reflect the conclusions agreed during these consultations.
Integration of nationalized SDGs into Georgia’s development planning is very high. The 36 national strategies incorporate **85 percent** of the country’s nationalized SDG targets.

The EU-Georgia Association Agreement that entered into force in 2016 alone incorporates **63 percent** of the country’s nationalized SDG targets – by far the largest share of any Georgian strategy or planning document. This high degree of alignment shows the extent to which the European integration agenda and Agenda 2030 are mutually reinforcing.

Moreover, the Association Agreement includes targets missing from other national strategies.

**Taken together, the 36 national strategies plus the Georgia-EU Association Agreement cover 93 percent of the country’s nationalized SDG targets.**

As is shown in the spider graph on the next page, the 7 percent of targets that are missing are for SDGs 5 (Gender), 10 (Equality), 16 (Peace) and 17 (Partnerships).

**One key finding from the research is thus that supporting implementation of the EU Association Agreement is an excellent proxy for promoting progress on the SDGs.**
Alignment of national strategies with SDG targets for each SDG

- 1. Poverty
- 2. Hunger
- 3. Health
- 4. Education
- 5. Gender
- 6. Water
- 7. Energy
- 8. Growth and Jobs
- 9. Infrastructure and industrialization
- 10. Inequality
- 11. Cities
- 12. Sustainable Consumption and Production
- 13. Climate change
- 14. Oceans
- 15. Lands
- 16. Inclusive governance
- 17. Partnership

36 national documents plus the EU Association Agreement

Association Agreement alone
The **95 nationalized targets** selected by Georgia to adapt the global SDG agenda to national realities are built around Georgia’s international commitments. The targets selected are tailored to the country’s current monitoring capacity and ensure that sufficient data will be available for each target. This means that some of the 17 goals have only one or two Georgian targets, limiting their scope.

And some important targets adopted globally for the SDGs have not been nationalized at all. This is particularly the case for the “Planet” goals (11, 12, 13, 14, 15), but important issues covered under SDG 5 and 17 are also absent in Georgia. Some of these reflect challenges that are very relevant for the country, such as target 5.4 (Unpaid care and domestic work), which can help drive policy reforms.

It is particularly important to incorporate global targets that are “means of implementation,” since these are by design intended to help build the institutional capacity for achieving other goals.

A timely **review of the nationalized targets**, with an eye to **supplementing them where relevant with adapted indicators agreed at global level**, could therefore serve a constructive purpose.
Several central national strategies contain a large number of nationalized SDG targets.

But even the Georgian government strategy that is most aligned with the SDGs, for “freedom, rapid development and welfare,” with its total of 39 targets, cannot compete with the **Georgia-EU Association Agreement**, which contains **60 of 95 nationalized targets**.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strategies with best coverage of the nationalized SDG targets (number of targets/95)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom, rapid development &amp; welfare government program 2018-2020</strong> - 39 targets</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rural Development Strategy (2017-2020)</strong> - 20 targets</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SME Development Strategy (2017-2021) and action plan</strong> - 15 targets</td>
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<td><strong>State Concept for Health Care System (2014-2020)</strong> - 13 targets</td>
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<td><strong>Social-economic Development Strategy 2020</strong> - 11 targets</td>
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<td><strong>Third National Environmental Action Programme (2017-2021)</strong> - 12 targets</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Development Program (2018-2021)</strong> - 12 targets</td>
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In line with the methodology adopted globally by the UN for this kind of analysis, the SDGs were grouped into five thematic clusters: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership.

Two SDGs stand alone because they concentrate a range of hugely challenging initiatives under a single summary heading. “Peace,” for instance, covers justice, rule of law and the institutions of governance, making achievement of SDG 16 a precondition for progress on any of the other Global Goals. “Partnerships” covers the financial resources required to ensure global success on the SDGs.
Judging by the sectoral breakdown of nationalized SDG targets, Georgia is currently focusing most heavily on “people,” with “prosperity” coming second, “peace” third, and “planet” fourth.
Institutional Ownership of the SDGs

Judging by the current “ownership” of SDG targets, five Ministries have the biggest role to play:

- Economy and Sustainable Development (with 29 SDG targets identified in its strategies);
- Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs (26 targets);
- Education, Science, Culture and Sport (26 targets);
- Environmental Protection and Agriculture (25 targets); and
- Regional Development and Infrastructure (19 targets).

Responsibility for some nationalized SDG targets – 1 (Poverty), 8 (Employment), 16 (Peace) – is already explicitly shared across multiple institutions. This is positive, provided that horizontal communication and coordination are effective.

By contrast, responsibility for some SDGs – 3 (Health) – is dependent on a single national strategy and is vested with a single government institution (here the Ministry of Health). This approach looks to be too limiting to generate the needed cross-sectoral momentum.

Clearly, advancing Agenda 2030 will require better coordination and coherence across institutions.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the EU Association Agreement supports cross-sectoral coherence for SDGs 2 (Hunger), 3 (Health), 5 (Gender) and 10 (Equality). This is another argument for treating the Association Agreement as an engine for progress on the SDGs.
The review of 18 sub-national strategies revealed a wide variation in the degree to which municipalities and regions are incorporating the SDGs into their local planning processes.

In the documents reviewed, the number of SDG targets contained in sub-national strategies ranged from a low of five (for Poti and Rustavi) to a high of 36 (for Kvemo-Kartli).

The SDG targets most commonly cited at local level were:

- 1.3 Social protection
- 7.1. Access to energy
- 8.3. Development-oriented policies
- 8.9. Sustainable tourism

By contrast, none of the sub-national strategies reviewed mentioned SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) or SDG 14 (Life below Water).

Sub-national alignment with the 17 SDGs is represented graphically on the next page.
Clearly, greater understanding of the SDGs is needed at regional and municipal levels.
Funding for the SDGs is uneven

Having established a high degree of alignment between national strategies and the SDGs, the research then looked into the alignment between the SDGs and national budgets. Prioritizing SDG targets without allocating the finances needed to achieve them would at best be a half-measure.

Funds budgeted for each of the 17 SDGs are presented in the graph on the next page, using as the main source the Basic Data and Directions (BDD) document for 2017-2020 (updated for the 2019-2022 budgeting cycle). Whereas state funding was allocated for all SDGs, not all were explicitly targeted (including SDGs 5, 13 and 14), so other reports were used to estimate spending amounts.

Peace (SDG 16), Health (3), Education (4), Poverty (1) and Infrastructure (9) and Equality (10) received the largest shares of the budget, and thus can be considered de facto national priorities.

For other SDGs, however, funding was less generous and visible. For Gender (5), and the “Planet” goals (6, 12, 13, 14 and 15), programmed amounts accounted for only 3 percent of the total.

The review of the data was preliminary and the findings, while intriguing, would need to be explored in greater detail and with greater rigor to understand the impact of spending on each of the SDGs. Large amounts spent on education might not be delivering hoped-for results, for instance.

This first look suggests that spending priorities might need to be revisited in light of a detailed analysis of budget allocations towards each nationalized SDG target. Setting rhetorical priorities is one thing; committing the funding needed to achieve them is another thing altogether.
Budget allocations for the 17 SDGs, 2019-2022
An interconnected agenda

The analysis then looked at the connections between the different nationalized SDG targets. The idea was to identify targets that had a high degree of connection with other targets, and then to select a few priority areas – defined as “accelerators” in the methodology – where a concerted effort could unblock bottlenecks and clear the way for more rapid progress across a range of targets.

The image below is a visualization of the interconnections detected among the Georgia targets:
High-impact targets

The analysis pointed to a number of areas which have strong interlinkages with other SDGs and whose progress should therefore be considered a priority in Georgia’s efforts to achieve the SDGs. Some of these are judged to be moving in the right direction; others are badly off course.

On target:
- 8.1 Economic growth per head
- 7.1 Access to energy
- 7.2 Renewable energy
- 1.4 Equal rights for resources

Off course:
- 8.5 Employment
- 8.6 Youth unemployment
- 2.3 Agricultural productivity
- 3.9 Pollution and contamination

Specific SDG targets are proposed as having particularly high potential for cross-sectoral impact:
- 4.4 By 2030, increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship;
- 4.3a By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university;
- 8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services;
- 11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management; and
- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
In May 2019, the results of the MAPS study were consulted with more than 30 representatives from nine ministries, the Government Administration, UN agencies, members of Parliament and civil society.

Participants divided into five thematic working groups organized around the “5Ps” of the SDGs.

Their first step was to define five concise vision statements that summarized their aspirations for Georgia’s future development to 2030.

They also discussed the results of the research into national and sub-national strategies, budgets and SDG targets and priorities; supplemented the research findings with additional data and evidence; contributed their insights and agreed on conclusions and next steps.
People
… women and men in Georgia, including the poor and the most vulnerable, will enjoy equal and equitable access to quality healthcare, life-long education, economic opportunities, decent jobs and social security to fully realize their potential; and exercise their rights free of violence;

Prosperity
… Georgia will enjoy greater connectivity with domestic and international markets, and better access to energy and public services and more equal distribution of economic benefits.

Planet
… people in Georgia will live in a green, clean, safe and sustainable environment, with well-managed agricultural and non-agricultural land, resilient and sustainable infrastructure, and a population sensitized to environmental issues.

Peace
… Georgia will develop stronger institutions by making them more accountable, effective and inclusive; promote tolerance and respect for diversity among its people.

Partnerships
… Georgia will improve mobilization of domestic and external resources; achieve a high level of fiscal decentralization including allocation of resources at all levels; and develop a robust M&E system generating statistics which are disaggregated and comparable.
Building on the recommendations from the research, and after lively discussion, the working groups agreed on four priority areas for action aimed at dynamizing Georgia’s progress towards the SDGs.

1. Decentralized development
Disparities between urban and rural areas remain amongst the most profound in Georgia. Target 2.3 (agricultural productivity) is a major challenge for Georgia, since agriculture accounts for a huge share of rural employment while generating only meager economic results. Negative demographic dynamics mean the countryside is aging rapidly as young people escape to the cities. Decentralized development focusing on promotion of new diversified economic activities (8.2, 8.9) can help overcome the bottleneck of low-productivity agriculture, all the while reaping the potential acceleration of poverty alleviation (1.4). This process should be supported by locally-defined development priorities building on strengthened local institutions (16, 16.7).

2. Investing in young people
The issues facing youth prompted lively discussion during the validation workshop. With 35 percent of youth aged 14-29 not in education, employment or training (NEET), a lack of decent opportunities is an increasing challenge. Inactivity of youth leads to a range of social issues, having consequences for the whole of society and a generation’s future. This was seen as a major bottleneck for Georgia. Focusing in a holistic manner on youth development – quality education, health, human rights, gender equality and participation – and more broadly on human capital development, has the potential of advancing the SDG agenda across the board. It has strong influence not only on areas of employability and prosperity, but it will also support progress in social areas such as access to services (1.4), reduced inequalities (10.2), gender equality (5.2; 5.3) and health (3.7; 3.8).
3. Leaving no one behind
Inequalities of different types were agreed to be a potential threat to Georgia’s progress towards the SDGs, and they emerged as sticking points in all five of the working groups. Ensuring equal opportunities for women (5.5, 5.a) was seen as offering huge potential economic gains, particularly if the burden of unpaid care (5.4) could be addressed. Similar gains in quality of life and well-being were seen in eliminating violence against women and violence against children from daily life (5.2, 5.3, 16.2). The full inclusion of persons with disabilities (10.2) likewise promised benefits. And encouraging greater tolerance and appreciation of diversity, whether in terms of ethnic background, religious affiliation or sexual orientation, were seen as indispensable building blocks for peace (10.3, 16.b). Overall, the working groups endorsed the idea of designating “leaving no one behind” as a cross-cutting priority covering all “5P” areas, in line with the overarching motto of the SDGs.

4. Going green with energy production and consumption
Sustainable energy targets were identified in the analysis as some of the most positively influential. Their important role was confirmed through discussions during the validation workshop, as the issue of access to green energy and developing energy-efficient options is connected not only to the sustainability agenda, but also to health, well-being and prosperity. Ensuring safe and green energy consumption and production (7.2, 7.3) will require resilient and sustainable infrastructure (9.1, 9.2) and will not only significantly advance the environmental agenda, but will stimulate green growth across the country, promote businesses and sustainable production and consumption (12).
- Revisit the 95 nationalized SDG targets to fill conceptual gaps and strengthen monitoring.
- Ensure that missing and newly adopted targets are incorporated into national policy documents.
- Generate disaggregated data to address measurement and policy gaps around the SDGs.
- Integrate the nationalized SDG indicators into the national monitoring and evaluation system.
- Agree on priority areas for action with national counterparts and stakeholders.
- Build awareness of the EU Association Agreement, and other international treaties ratified by Georgia, including the major UN Human Rights Treaties, ILO Conventions and Council of Europe agreements as an integral part of SDG progress.
- Encourage municipal and regional officials to incorporate SDGs into their planning and budgeting processes, and strengthen similar efforts already under way at national and central level.
- Support better communication, coordination and coherence around the SDGs across institutions at all levels.
- Undertake a detailed review of national and sub-national budgets in view of SDG implementation and, where necessary to align spending with priorities, justify shifts in funding to target areas.
- Build a stronger evidence base for action in priority areas, for example by researching the situation, needs and policy preferences of groups that are at risk of “being left behind.”
- Move from analysis and recommendations to proactive programming for SDG implementation.