

# 13. Guatemala: Approaching Different Types of Evaluation with the SDG Voluntary National Review. A Point of Debate against “Evaluations: a Missed Opportunity for the SDG Voluntary National Review”

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*We have dogmatized statistics as a way to scrutinize achievements, forgetting the value of individuals and the planet evaluating their own progress.*

In paragraph 72 of the “Transforming Our World” declaration, governments highlighted that a follow-up and review framework would be a vital contribution to its implementation, agreeing that this framework should be characterized by self-evaluation and countries’ measurement of their own progress. In line with this, the National Council of Urban and Rural Development—the highest authority for development in Guatemala which monitors the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—led the production of the voluntary national review following the guidelines emanating from the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Guatemala’s aim when producing this review was to show the world, in a very honest way, “where the country stands on its journey and how much is still required for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. By doing so, it allowed for self-evaluation to reveal the challenges and areas upon which the country must focus its efforts, in order to speed up implementation and meet the targets established within the framework of the aforementioned Agenda.

The Government identified some major challenges prior to preparation of the voluntary national review, mainly related to the limited availability of data, in particular itemized data. Additionally, there is a challenge involved in ensuring the participation of various interested parties with an open data platform and a responsible, transparent reviewing process, as well as in evaluating progress in implementation by measuring the contribution of all interested parties, since the monitoring and evaluation systems are designed only for the Government’s actions, and now that we have an agenda with multiple agents, we ask ourselves how to account for the actions of enterprises and of civil society under the same umbrella. In this regard, it was decided to conduct different types of evaluation, including consulting with citizens themselves in order that they evaluate their own progress.

The Agenda evaluation process was carried out along four lines. The first involved assessment of the conditions generated in the country by the process of adjustment of the Agenda to the national context. The consultation was carried out with the different levels and sectors of the Government, civil society, academia and the entrepreneurial sector in 2016 and the first quarter of 2017, alongside the prioritization process,<sup>61</sup> the integration of SDG targets with the national targets already established by the current long-term development plan and even the development of a logo and a national campaign for the harmonized Agenda.

The second type of evaluation is a more typical “impact or results” format, revealing information on each of the indicators prioritized by the country and accounting for the “state of play of the indicators”. It was drawn up based on the available statistical information, placing focus on the national situation and the different degrees of progress observed at the level of social groups and different parts of the country, which led to the identification of development gaps and the need to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable in a differentiated way.

Furthermore, the process for producing the report added value for the country by prompting the exploration of a specific strategy for generation of statistics for indicators for which no statistical information is available, as well as signaling the main challenges involved in their monitoring.

In parallel, intersectoral workshops were held to define statistical information for the SDGs, including the statistical series for each indicator and the systematization of any reference to challenges contemplated in the current public policy frameworks, thus defining the proposal for data sheets that would be presented to the representatives of Guatemalan society in the sectoral workshops for feedback and validation. It could even be said that these workshops saw an initial or diagnostic assessment for considering the value closest to 2015 and, for the target, the one approved by consensus by all the representatives of Guatemalan society. The voluntary national review allowed for the setting of 33 baselines for measuring the SDGs and the K’atun National Development Plan. It is important to note that, depending on the case, the target may or may not be the same as that proposed in the declaration, given that it was aligned with the national planning framework to respond to the specific context and reality of the country.

Subsequently, sectoral workshops were held to reflect on the process of Guatemala’s appropriation of the SDGs and the statistical capacity of the region and the country at aggregate level. Likewise, there were discussions about the state of play of the indicators for which there was statistical information, alongside the baselines, targets and data sheets in accordance with the work carried out in the statistical research workshop. The sectoral debate allowed for definition of and agreement upon the baselines, targets and data sheets for the SDG indicators for which there was statistical information and the approach strategies for those for which there were not. Furthermore, for the indicators lacking statistical information, the competent institutions for leading the approach strategy were analysed.

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61 The SDG Agenda prioritized by the country comprises 17 goals, 129 targets and 200 indicators.

Section 2 of each SDG heading, “alignment of the State’s response with the achievement of the SDG”, attempts to carry out evaluation during implementation, highlighting the most important actions and interventions conducted by the private sector, civil society, international cooperation and the public sector. Gathering of contributions from each of the sectors of the Guatemalan State was compiled through questionnaires about the actions and interventions that the various public institutions, entities, agencies or bodies have implemented and are implementing and which contribute in some way to successfully eradicating poverty, ending hunger, guaranteeing a healthy life, reaching gender equality, building resilient infrastructure, creating inclusive industry, promoting innovation and conserving oceans and life below water.

Section 3 of the SDG heading discusses “young people’s perception of the targets prioritized”. Given that Guatemala is a country with a large demographic dividend—adolescents and young adults (13 to 29 years old) make up 33 percent of the total population—it was decided to include the perception of adolescents and young people to demonstrate the population’s opinions. It was an ex-post type evaluation, produced jointly with the United Nations Children’s Fund via seven perception questionnaires for adolescents and young people regarding the problems linked to the SDGs, promoted via the U-Report platform. The questionnaires were jointly prepared and reviewed by the Adolescents and Young People Executive Committee and they were voluntarily completed by the U-Report users.

This consultation with adolescents and young people regarding the SDGs contributed to raising awareness and allowed the Government to compare the main results of the indicators with the perception of Guatemalan society and, to the surprise of many, the results of much information from the young people’s perception questionnaire are consistent with official statistical data.

With the information from the diagnoses and from statistical and sectoral workshops, alongside what was gathered in each of the above-mentioned sections, the SDG headings were put together by each thematic team and reviewed and revised prior to their being shared with the sectoral representatives.

Finally, the preliminary results from the voluntary national review were presented at validation workshops, including the results from the sectoral workshops where the base-lines, targets and data sheets of the indicators were defined, as well as the implementation strategy for the generation of information for the indicators lacking data, the alignment of the State’s response and young people’s perception of prioritized targets. After the presentation of the SDG preliminary report, a space was opened for the validation of and feedback on the report.

The recommendations and remarks of the sectoral representatives were included in the assessment presented to the Alignment, Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, as the body designated by the National Council of Urban and Rural Development, which ultimately approved the final content of the report.

In summary, the voluntary national review was a timely exercise that was able to take advantage of current conditions and experiences. In the case of Guatemala, the review also served to bring the various actors (civil society, the private sector, international cooperation

and the Government) to the same reviewing table, encouraging the country to assess its own progress.

The voluntary national review allowed for an overview of the country's situation in terms of "sustainable development" to be obtained through indicators with official statistical information, but moreover (and more importantly, in the author's view), consultation with adolescents and young people regarding the SDGs contributed to raising awareness and allowed the Government to compare the results of the main indicators with the perception of Guatemalan society, which proved to be very much consistent with one other, and we should ask ourselves why, given that each result uses different types of evaluation.