WORKING PAPER

SDG Compass guide

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORKS AND TOOLS TO OPERATIONALISE AGENDA 2030

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SDG COMPASS GUIDE
Practical frameworks and tools to operationalise agenda 2030

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About the SDG compass guide

The context

Over the last years, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have changed the framework of development cooperation. It is now part and parcel of a global development agenda, i.e. the 2030 Agenda, that was adopted by UN Member States in 2015. This Agenda offers for the first time in history a global frame of reference that transcends the aid sector and the traditional North-South paradigm. It not only integrates the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, but also addresses the drivers of poverty and vulnerability by pledging to leave no one behind. The SDGs are ambitious, universal, integrated and indivisible.

Belgium, as a donor of development cooperation, is committed to contributing to the realization of the 2030 Agenda and has therefore decided to use the SDGs as a compass for future development efforts (HIVA and IOB, 2020: 11). To support this goal, a Policy Supporting Research (PSR) was launched in which HIVA-KU Leuven and IOB-UAntwerp explored opportunities for Belgian development actors to align their work with the SDGs and Agenda 2030.

The final report of the first year of this PSR-SDG study (HIVA and IOB, 2020) integrates findings of a scoping study and two field missions conducted in 2019 in Benin and Uganda. It provides an overview of the state of affairs and current practices of Belgian development cooperation towards the SDGs, and offers recommendations on how different development actors can (further) align their policies and programmes with the SDG framework. The final report was built around three principles that the research team identified as central to the SDGs and Agenda 2030:

- Leaving No One Behind & Universalism
- Indivisibility & Interconnectedness
- Multi-stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs)

This practical guide is similarly centred around these three principles. It builds on the first year of research and the resulting final report, and integrates the findings from a second research stage involving further literature study, analyses of specific development cooperation programmes, and interviews.

The aim of this guide

This SDG Compass Guide aims to provide practical and operational support to development actors in their efforts to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate their interventions in a way that respects and contributes to Agenda 2030. It selects and discusses a number of potentially useful practical (operational) frameworks and other instruments, and provides guidance on how to use these tools.

In particular, it offers guidance on how organisations can (further) integrate the SDG principles of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) & Universality, Indivisibility & Interconnectedness, and Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) in the different stages of their programme cycles and the overall development cycle.

As there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint to integrating the SDGs in development cooperation, this guide **does not prescribe a best-practice approach or optimal recipe**. It does not intend to be prescriptive nor normative. It rather **offers a 'menu' of different ways forward** for integrating the goals and principles of Agenda 2030 in development efforts. Organisations can pick and choose from the tools presented in this guide to develop their own preferred recipes tailored to their vision, expertise, mandate, and capacities.

Who is it for?

The SDG Compass Guide is addressed to **all governmental and non-governmental development actors** who are looking for practical guidance on how to further mould their organisation and programmes to Agenda 2030 and the underlying principles.

How to use this guide?

For each tool we indicate: for which actor it may be (most) useful (⚲) and in which phase of the programme cycle (⏃). These indications are only suggestions and certainly not prescriptive, nor normative.

Moreover, this guide **does not have the ambition to be exhaustive**. Its main value lies in lowering the burden for development actors to identify relevant tools, in providing a starting point for further exploration, and in offering some basic guidance by identifying and discussing good practices, key questions, illustrative examples, and tips and tricks for applying specific tools.

The tools we propose in this guide are stand-alone tools. This does not imply, however, that they cannot be **combined, integrated, and adapted so as to fit the context, needs, and opportunities of an organisation and its goals**. We strongly favour a creative approach that allows actors to make manageable changes and improvements, and encourage actors to explore other tools not included in this guide that may be well (or better) suited.

In **Appendices 6 and 7** you can find an 'SDG proofing toolkit', that offers a **roadmap or executive summary** to this practical guide, and offers guidance (through FAQs) on how to use the SDG proofing tools.

Finally, this practical guide is part of an online [capacity building package](#) provided through the [project website](#), where you can find project **publications** including the practical guide and SDG proofing toolkit, **video summaries of the content of the practical guide**, and supplementary video material.

In particular, you can find **videos** for
- [Chapter 1](#) on Leaving no one behind & Universality
- [Chapter 2](#) on the transformational approach, Indivisibility & Interconnectedness, and MSPs
- [Chapter 3](#) on windows of opportunity (an overview of the whole chapter)
- [Subchapter 3.1](#) on Theory of Change
- [Subchapter 3.2](#) on Risk Analysis
- [Subchapter 3.3](#) on Joint Strategic Frameworks
- [Subchapter 3.4](#) on the Instruction letter process
- [Subchapter 3.5](#) on Results frameworks and indicators.

1 | Leaving no one behind (LNOB) - Universality

Leaving no one behind (LNOB) in the SDG framework and Agenda 2030

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community **pledged to 'leave no one behind'**. The principle of LNOB can be seen as a three-part imperative: to end extreme poverty in all its dimensions, to curb horizontal (between groups) and vertical (within groups) inequalities – in particular when caused by discrimination of marginalized populations – and to take action to reach the furthest behind first (progressive universalism). **Who benefits from progress** becomes as important as how much progress is realised.

LNOB also goes well beyond an anti-discrimination agenda. It embodies the recognition that expectations of trickle-down progress are naive, and that structural constraints and power relations need to be addressed to ensure that everyone is included in future progress.

As such, the LNOB pledge is **in the first place a call on governments** to step up their efforts to create inclusive societies, and to take responsibility for those that have been left behind in past progress. Universal social protection, education, and health care; redistributive tax policies; and anti-discrimination policies and laws are key instruments in realising the three-part imperative of LNOB that belong to the realm of public policy and national governments. It also compels governments to consider which countries are left behind, which groups are left behind within a country, and who is left furthest behind within these groups.

Nevertheless, Agenda 2030 also emphasizes that the **SDGs can only be achieved through society-wide, transformational change, which governments cannot realize alone**. Business and civil society play a key role as well, both as partners to governments' development efforts and as agents of change in their own right.

Source: HIVA and IOB (2020)

You can find a video summary of this chapter, along with additional video material on LNOB, in the project's capacity building package.

1.1 Implications of LNOB for Belgian development cooperation

LNOB in current practice and the link with a human rights based approach (HRBA)
The LNOB principle and its focus on issues of marginalization, inequality, and poverty are not new to (Belgian) development cooperation – especially given Belgium's focus on poverty reduction, fragile states, and least developed countries. For many actors these issues have always been their core business, and some have a long tradition of working with the poorest and most excluded in society (HIVA and IOB, 2020).

The growing importance of the HRBA in (Belgian) development cooperation also represents an important step towards LNOB. A HRBA necessarily involves the ambition to leave no one behind, as human rights are held unconditionally and intrinsically by everyone. In addition, those furthest left behind often face the largest obstacles in claiming their rights and holding duty bearers accountable – for instance because they tend to be disconnected from relevant services, networks, and decision-making institutions. Hence, progress on human rights will often mean progress on LNOB as well. In fact, given that human rights are anchored within international norms and standards that governments have a legal obligation to meet, **a HRBA offers a valuable programming tool for translating the vision of LNOB into action** (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2020; Zamora et al., 2018). In other words, the LNOB principle presents an overall goal (realizing sustainable development for all) that can be operationalized in different ways (through different approaches). The HRBA is one such approach.

Many Belgian development actors thus already contribute implicitly or explicitly to LNOB in different ways. The first aim of this chapter is therefore to **guide organisations in highlighting or making explicit their existing LNOB efforts and contributions**.

Moving beyond current practice

At the same time, it is important to recognize that past efforts have often failed to include the poorest in progress (Bhatkal et al., 2015), and that **development cooperation needs to take deliberate action** beyond current practices to reach those who have been left behind (DI, 2017a; Partos, 2015; UNDP, 2018). For **governments**, the LNOB pledge sets out three clear imperatives: end extreme poverty, curb inequalities, reach the furthest behind first. These imperatives cannot be directly applied to **individual non-governmental organisations (NGAs),** and need to be translated into approaches and guiding principles that can accommodate the sector's diversity of activities, capacities, and resources.

Who are the *furthest* left behind?

Getting a good understanding of poverty, vulnerabilities, and inequalities within a country or intervention zone is an important part of planning and implementing NGA programmes. Identifying who is the *furthest* left behind, however, can be a complex (and politically sensitive) exercise involving normative and ethical considerations. In practice, there is often a heterogeneous mix of groups and individuals that face deprivation and disadvantages on different (multiple) dimensions, and therefore have different – sometimes conflicting – needs. Although there are several tools that can support NGAs in analysing who is the furthest left behind, not all actors have the capacities to take on such a complex task for each programme. In addition, there are other ways of operationalising the LNOB principle that do not require identifying who is the furthest left behind.

Rather than formulating strict LNOB imperatives for each individual actor, the second aim of this chapter is therefore to offer **several possible approaches and strategies** for moving beyond current practices regarding LNOB **– from low-cost incremental steps to more ambitious systematic approaches.**

The rest of this chapter offers practical guidance on how to operationalise different approaches, by discussing selected frameworks, guiding questions, datasets, and other tools that can accommodate a variety of organisations, activities, and levels of LNOB ambition. The overview we give is not exhaustive, but is meant to highlight a subset of existing tools that we consider particularly interesting or practical, and to offer a starting point for further exploration.

1.2   Two approaches to realizing LNOB: targeting and/or mainstreaming [1]

> "Considering the ever changing contexts, there is not "one" way to implement LNOB, as there is no blueprint. … It invites us to reconsider if our actions and projects are reaching this goal."
>
> - *SDC (2020)*

Many or most organisations in the Belgian development sector work in countries that can be considered (far) left behind. Within these countries, however, certain groups are more excluded or disadvantaged than others. The LNOB principle emphasizes the need to address inequalities, vulnerabilities, and exclusion within countries as much as across countries. Working in a left behind country (e.g. least developed country) presents an important contribution to LNOB, but further steps are necessary to address persistent poverty and exclusion at other levels as well.

This does not mean that operationalising LNOB requires you to target the poorest or most vulnerable groups in your intervention area. Some organisations do target such groups (e.g. DBA working in the most disadvantaged villages in Benin; Terres Rouges working with homeless children in Benin and Senegal). Other organisations take a more universalist approach (e.g. WSM working towards universal social protection in West-Africa and Asia) or have goals that require targeting other groups (e.g. Rikolto working to improve economic opportunities for coffee and rice cooperatives in D.R. Congo) (HIVA and IOB, 2020).

> **Targeting or universalism – or both?**
>
> There is a lively debate around the pros and cons of targeting and universalism in social policy and development cooperation (see e.g. Devereux, 2016; Kidd, 2018). Recent voices advocate a mix of tailored approaches. Devereux (2016) for instance argues that essential social services (education, health, water) need a universalist approach, while social safety nets or welfare should be targeted on the basis of need (see also Desai, 2017). Agenda 2030 similarly emphasizes an approach of progressive universalism, where actions for the poorest and most marginalised people are prioritised and fast-tracked within systemic approaches that aim to address the complex root causes of issues such as poverty and unequal power structures (HIVA and IOB, 2020; UN, 2019).

In their Guide to LNOB, Partos emphasizes that both targeted and more systemic or universalist approaches are important parts of a **'twin-track' strategy to LNOB**.

Targeted approaches are necessary to address pressing needs, and to give far left behind groups the kind of specific attention they need to get out of their disadvantaged or marginalised situation.

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[1] This categorisation of two approaches is largely inspired by the Guide to LNOB of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC, 2018).

Mainstreaming attention for inequality and exclusion in more systemic or universal programmes is also important, to make sure that left behind groups get access to development in a sustainable way, and do not depend entirely on targeted interventions or parallel systems (Partos, 2015).

> The Partos Guide to LNOB is a particularly useful tool if you work on economic development. You can find more information on pg. 95.

Although both types of approaches – LNOB targeting and LNOB mainstreaming – are important, the implications and strategies for operationalizing them can be quite different. We therefore offer specific practical guidance in this chapter for each type of approach, whenever relevant. In practice, the distinction is of course not so clear-cut. Many programmes will fall across the two and combine elements of both approaches in different ways (see box 1.1).

Box 1.1: LNOB targeting and mainstreaming: mixing and matching

In their Rwanda program, the NGA *VVOB – Education for development* (VVOB) aims to improve access to quality education for all children in their intervention area, among others by investing in training of teaching and school staff. Specific attention for gender equity is mainstreamed throughout the programme and formalised in their Guide to Gender Mainstreaming, which gives practical details on how VVOB integrates a gender perspective in each step of the programme cycle. Finally, VVOB identifies girls as a vulnerable group when it comes to accessing quality education, and takes targeted measures to support this group in particular. For instance, as hygiene is important for girls' school attendance, VVOB seeks to improve sanitation and hygiene education and services in schools through a partnership with Rode Kruis Vlaanderen.

Source: VVOB (2017)

The Belgian Development Finance Institute (DFI) BIO also combines several elements of an LNOB targeting and mainstreaming approach in their efforts to mobilise financing for sustainable development. BIO's investment strategy for instance mentions a focus on projects that target underserved groups in a particular sector (e.g. women in the financial sector). BIO also emphasizes investments that benefit micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), based on the hypothesis that such investments contribute to job creation, higher incomes, and poverty reduction for disadvantaged populations. In addition, BIO mainstreams attention for inclusive development in several ways, including through

- the addition of financial inclusion and gender to its nine development goals used to assess a project's development impact ex ante

- the recently developed organisation-wide Gender Strategy, which among others aims to develop gender-sensitive project ecosystems at all levels

- being a signatory to the "2X Challenge", an ambitious target to mobilise funds that will help advance women as entrepreneurs, business leaders, employees, and consumers of products and services that promote their economic participation.

Source: BIO (2021)

What approach you choose, and how far you take each approach, **should be informed by local context and needs, and by your own vision, activities, capacities, and LNOB ambitions**. A 'light' mainstreaming approach could be suitable for NGAs whose goal is to generate wide-ranging benefits by focusing on specific catalyst groups (such as civil society organisations, schools, entrepreneurs). Governmental actors who are fully committed to the LNOB pledge, but whose expertise and resources are more useful for promoting broad-based economic development, might adopt a comprehensive, programme-wide mainstreaming approach. Actors working in contexts where particular exclusion mechanisms are especially difficult to overcome (due to e.g. deeply rooted, multi-dimensional discrimination), or actors who have the expertise to reach the ultra-poor or most marginalized in their area of work, might prefer a strong LNOB targeting approach.

The **wider debate on targeting versus universalism** offers some relevant considerations as well. For instance, organisations working on the delivery of essential social services (e.g. education, health) might prefer to target everyone within their intervention area, rather than more narrow left behind groups (equality principle), and rely on the LNOB mainstreaming approach to reflect on mechanisms of exclusion and vulnerabilities within their target groups (see box 1.1). In contrast, when there is a clear, particular need of far left behind groups, the LNOB targeting approach might make more sense ideologically (needs principle) and pragmatically (efficient use of funds) (see e.g. Devereux, 2016).

> Looking for **inspiring examples** on how to operationalise LNOB?
> Check the GIZ Leave no one behind guidelines for Project planners and practitioners. It summarizes key aspects of LNOB implementation, and discusses inspiring project examples across four regions (Bennett, 2020).

Table 1.1 uses key guiding questions to summarize, for each approach and in different stages of the programme cycle, the different possible steps that you can take to:
- make existing contributions to the LNOB principle explicit;
- aim for a stronger operationalization of the LNOB principle.

Some questions are relevant or useful for all organisations; others are not. The table is thus not a prescriptive list of steps to take, but an overview of what different types of organisations *can* do to operationalize LNOB. Table 1.1 is part of a more general *SDG proofing tool,* which you can find in Appendix 6 along with additional explanation in the form of an executive summary structured around FAQs.

The rest of this chapter discusses a comprehensive framework and data sources that can help you to address relevant guiding questions. The framework offers practical guidance on how to operationalize LNOB in a targeting or mainstreaming approach in different stages of the programme cycle.

> The rest of the chapter focuses on general or broadly applicable tools for LNOB. Appendix 1 presents a number of additional more specific or thematic tools.

Table 1.1   Key guiding questions for operationalizing LNOB

	Targeting approach	Mainstreaming approach
Preparation/ Analysis (e.g. context analysis, sector analysis, …)	1) Have you identified which groups are (at risk of being) left behind within the intervention area (country, region) and from what they are excluded? 2) Have you analysed why they are left behind and by whom they are excluded (considering intersecting factors)? 3) Does your analysis rely on clear definitions or criteria for poverty, marginalization, exclusion, …? 4) Does your analysis include the perspectives of those (at risk of being) left behind?	
Planning & implementation (e.g. theory of change, risk analysis, results framework, …)	1) Do you explain how your choice of target groups and the planning of activities is informed by the LNOB analysis? 2) Does your theory of change (ToC) clearly outline how your intervention expects to contribute to (sustained) positive change for the target groups? 3) Have you reflected on whether design and implementation reinforce existing exclusion mechanisms, or disadvantage vulnerable people within and/or beyond your target groups? 4) Have you tailored remedial action, either by yourself, your partners, or other actors, to address/mitigate any negative or exclusion effects (e.g. in the risk analysis)?	1) Does your theory of change outline how your intervention expects to indirectly benefit (important) left behind groups? 2) Does your risk analysis include reflections on whether design and implementation might exclude (important) left behind groups from (the benefits of) the intervention within and/or beyond target groups? 3) Have you adapted strategies or identified remedial action, either by yourself, your partners, or other actors, to address/mitigate any exclusion effects?
	Are (far) left behind groups that might be affected by the intervention involved in planning & implementation in an active and meaningful way?	
Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)	1) Does the MEL plan provide sufficient information about change at the level of the target groups and the (in)direct contribution of the programme towards those changes? 2) Are there explicit mechanisms for participation of the target groups in MEL?	1) Does the MEL plan include systematic reflections on the implications of the intervention for any left behind groups who (according to the ToC) may benefit indirectly? (e.g. through existing secondary data sources without you having to collect data on groups that are not direct target groups) 2) Does the MEL plan include systematic reflections about potential negative effects and remedial action for left behind groups (e.g. as identified through the risk analysis)?
	1) Do you analyse who benefitted (positive change), who lost (negative change), and who may have been excluded from the intervention within the target groups? 2) Does the MEL plan provide sufficient space for learning about important mechanisms and dynamics of exclusion and vulnerability, and to follow up on risks?	

1.3 Translating the LNOB principle into practice: the SDC three step guide to LNOB

In its Guidance to LNOB, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC, 2018) explains how it will implement the LNOB pledge throughout its activities as a governmental agency for international (development) cooperation, but many of the guidelines and tools are relevant for other types of development actors as well. Below we discuss the main elements of the framework and offer some additional guidance on how you can apply it to your programmes – for instance through the theory of change.

SDC Guidance – Leave no one behind (2018)
⚲   *Focused on governmental actors, but also relevant for non-governmental actors*
⧗   *Can be used throughout the entire programme cycle*
⊙   https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Poverty-Wellbeing/leave-no-one-behind/Pages/LNOB.aspx

The SDC guide is built around three steps in the programme cycle: (context) analysis, planning & implementation, and monitoring & evaluation (see Fig. 1.1).

Figure 1.1   The three steps of the SDC Guide to LNOB (SDC, 2018)
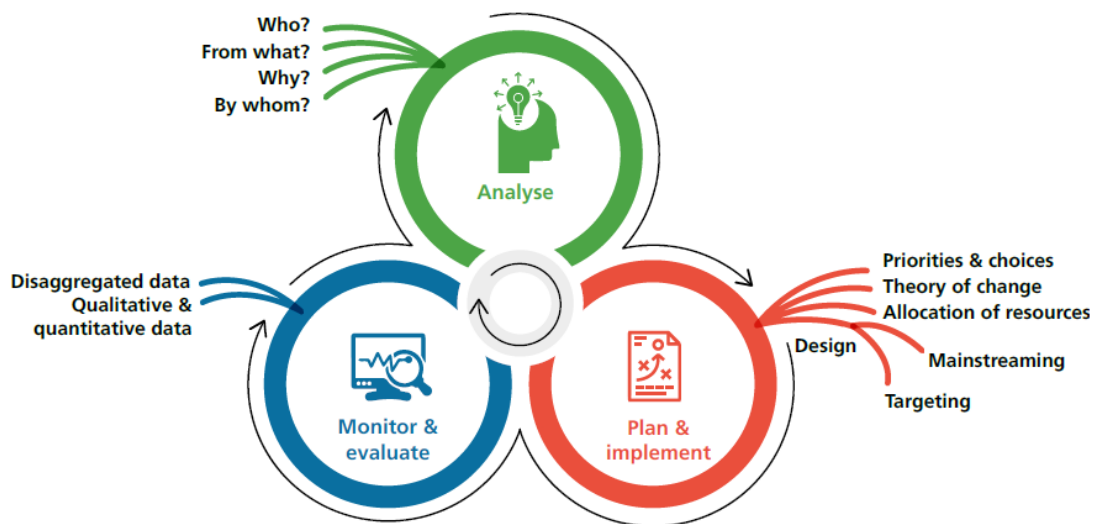
1.3.1 (Context) analysis

The first step in operationalising the LNOB principle, for both the mainstreaming and targeting approach, is to run an LNOB analysis that answers four questions:

- Who is (at risk of) being left behind?
- From what is this person excluded?
- Why?
- And by whom?

> You can rely on several analytical tools to answer these questions, such as poverty analysis, gender analysis, political economy analysis, or the classification tree method. On its Poverty Inequality website, the GIZ offers a Project Cycle Toolkit that includes useful guidance on operationalising LNOB, including indicators, inequality analysis tools, guidelines, and case study examples.

When answering these four questions there are four main guidelines to keep in mind:

- Start from a clear understanding of LNOB;
- Consider multiple dimensions of poverty or exclusion;
- Include the perspectives of the left behind in your analysis;
- Rely on disaggregated data when possible.

First and foremost, a solid LNOB analysis needs to start from a **clear understanding of what it means to be left behind**, and what parameters or criteria you will rely on to capture this. The SDC guide implements this by explicitly defining key concepts such as inclusion, minimum standards of living, and vulnerability, at the start of their LNOB guide. It also distinguishes three key areas from which people can be excluded: markets, services, and spaces.[2]

Second, considering **multiple dimensions of poverty** helps to avoid a too narrow focus on income poverty, which may result in overlooking some of the most excluded groups (see also box 1.2).

> On pages 18-19 you can find a dataset that provides information on three key dimensions of poverty (living standards, health, and education) for many countries: the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index.

The framework offered by the SDC guide can of course be used in combination with other frameworks to deepen the analysis.

The UNDP LNOB framework for example looks into **five intersecting factors of exclusion**: discrimination, place of residence, socio-economic status, governance, and vulnerability to shocks (see Fig. 1.2). Those at the heart of two or more of these intersecting factors will likely be among those the furthest left behind (UNDP, 2018). For instance, ethnic minorities living in remote areas can face especially large barriers to accessing markets, services, and spaces.

The UNDP framework for analysing LNOB can also be usefully combined with the SDC approach to get a good understanding of *why* people are being excluded.

Figure 1.2 Five key factors for understanding who is (at risk of) being left behind (UNDP, 2018)
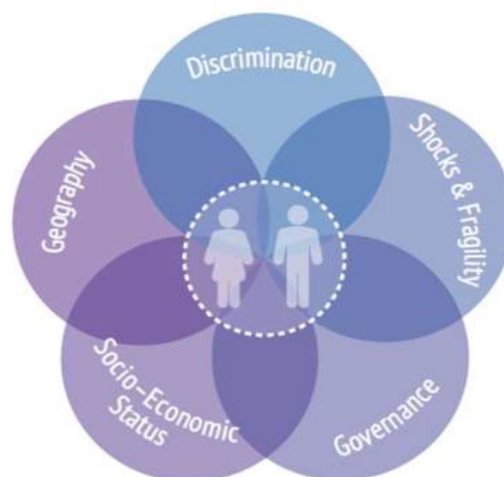
The SDC guide identifies three 'levels' or mechanisms of exclusion:

- limited ability to participate;
- limited opportunities to participate;
- limited scope for participating with dignity.

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2   In their framing of the who and from what questions, the SDC draws on earlier work on inclusion and social policy by the World Bank (2013).

You can overlay these three mechanisms with the five factors of exclusion of the UNDP framework **to understand what limits the ability, opportunity, or dignity to participate for a particular group**. Geographical remoteness, for instance, often limits the ability to access food markets or health services when necessary (see e.g. Gabrysch and Campbell, 2009). Being part of an ethnic minority can limit your opportunities to obtain proper housing, even when you have initial access to the housing market (see e.g. Bracht et al., 2015). Finally, not having the economic means (income, housing) to present yourself in a proper way, can limit your ability to participate with dignity in markets, services, and spaces (Partos, 2015). This type of exercises can not only guide a deeper, more systematic analysis of the causes of exclusion, but also help you to identify entry-points for action and objectives for change (UNDP, 2018).

Box 1.2: LNOB analysis – Understanding multidimensional inclusion and exclusion in education

The NGA VVOB takes the multidimensional nature of poverty and exclusion into consideration by developing an internal document that explores what 'inclusive and equitable education' means to the organisation, and what factors contribute to exclusion in education – considering several potential barriers such as socio-economic status, gender, and ethnicity.

Source: VVOB (2019)

As for the third guideline: **including the perspectives of the left behind** is key to a solid LNOB analysis. First, the mechanisms of marginalization and exclusion relate in important ways to personal experiences and aspirations – in particular for the mechanism of dignity. Second, own perspectives can be crucial information to fully understand the complex and often hard to detect barriers and challenges faced by the most vulnerable and excluded groups, as well as the associated power relationships. Third, the poorest and most excluded can be so isolated that they are 'invisible' to many, and identifying them (accurately) might only be possible by involving them or their representatives in the process. Box 1.3. illustrates how the organisation Hope Enterprises relied on this approach to involve the poorest and most marginalized in their education program.

Finally, **relying on disaggregated data when possible** is crucial, so that any diagnostics are based on evidence. The approach of Défi Belgique Afrique (DBA) in Benin, explained in box 1.3, gives an example of how you can go about collecting such data yourself. You can also consult existing data sources such as (inter)national statistics – although the availability of disaggregated data remains a challenge.

Box 1.3: LNOB Analysis – Identifying the most disadvantaged and excluded

Hope enterprises runs an education programme in one of the most deprived areas of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in a large garbage dumping area with slums built around it. The programme explicitly focuses on including the poorest of the poor: those living in the slums or on the garbage dump, those affected by leprosy or HIV-AIDS, and those working as garbage collectors. The process of inclusion starts by involving the poorest in the identification and selection process. More specifically, Hope enterprises selected a recruitment committee made up of representatives of the poor and the poorest of the poor themselves (in this case people who live on the garbage dump), in addition to local government representatives. The public announcement was also complemented with door to door visits by the recruitment committee and fieldworkers, to make sure that the most isolated and marginalised people were informed and able to respond. Finally, the selection process ended only when all stakeholders involved agreed on the list of participants.

Source: Partos (2015)

The NGA Défi Belgique Afrique (DBA) promotes the development of agricultural value chains owned and operated by local communities. In order to identify the most vulnerable zones and groups in Benin, DBA follows a multi-stage process. As a first step they looked at national studies that had analysed fragile or vulnerable municipalities. In those studies, several of the at risk rural municipalities were identified as the poorest in terms of accessibility to infrastructure, income, and health care. In a second stage, DBA made use of a multisector approach to identify specific risk factors at the level of the next administrative layer ('communes'). Through various exchanges with the communal authorities and those locally responsible for agricultural development, health care and social centers, they identified the most vulnerable districts with the highest degree of poverty. Once this stage was completed, DBA designed and completed survey guides to select the poorest villages as well as an individual survey sheet derived from the national Household Food Safety study in Benin. These sheets collected 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.

Source: HIVA and IOB (2020b)

1.3.2 Planning & implementation

As discussed above, the SDC framework proposes two approaches to operationalising LNOB that can also be combined: mainstreaming LNOB thinking into programmes, and developing specific programmes targeted at far (the furthest) left behind groups. Here we provide more details on how you can put each approach to practice in the planning and implementation stage.

In the SDC guide, for both approaches the analysis from step 1 – including importantly the perspectives of the excluded - should feed into programme planning as the basis for making informed choices, setting priorities, and selecting explicit target groups. In the LNOB targeting approach, these groups will be among those far left behind, while this is not necessarily the case in the LNOB mainstreaming approach.

When the intervention area, priorities, or target groups are already determined by past work, existing expertise and resources, or partnerships, the analysis from step 1 should feed into the next steps, starting with the development of the theory of change.

In the **LNOB mainstreaming approach**, **the theory of change can be used to describe how the intervention expects to directly or indirectly affect far left behind groups at different levels**, including the policy and institutional level if relevant. Influencing actors who engage with far left behind groups, for instance through capacity building of civil society organisations, is a way of indirectly affecting those groups.

Key is to consider positive and negative effects, and to reflect on any risks of excluding those already far left behind within and possibly beyond the target groups in your intervention area from the (benefits of the) intervention. If important exclusion mechanisms or other harmful effects might occur, you can adjust your programme strategies or plan for remedial action – either by yourself, by partners, or by other actors. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) can play a key part in facilitating such remedial action, for instance by promoting policy dialogue with governments or by bringing together actors with complementary resources and expertise (see also section 2.3).

As the SDC guide illustrates: "In a government water supply programme for the whole population, for example, specific groups may be excluded for reasons of income poverty. With the mainstreaming of leave no one behind into the programme, the design of the programme integrates a policy dialogue for subsidising (or otherwise supporting) groups left behind in order to guarantee their access to and use of drinking water." (SDC, 2018: 14).

In the **LNOB targeting approach**, **the theory of change should clearly describe how the intervention will contribute to (sustained) positive change for the target groups.** The SDC recommends to combine external expert views with beneficiary assessment, to include the knowledge and perspectives of the target groups into planning and prioritisation. More generally, beneficiary assessment can be an excellent tool for facilitating meaningful bottom-up participation of marginalized groups. In this approach it is also important to ask yourself whether design and implementation might reinforce existing exclusion mechanisms, or disadvantage those already far left behind within and possibly beyond your target groups.

> The SDC website offers guides to beneficiary assessment, as well as other relevant tools on e.g. participatory poverty assessment and theories of change and impact hypotheses.

Regardless of the approach, analytical tools such as stakeholder analysis or actor mapping (see also section 2.3.1) can be useful in this stage to get a good handle on the (possibly large) number of actors affected by your intervention; the web of political, social, and economic power relations; and the different implications for LNOB. Engaging with different types of actors such as civil society organisations, community leaders, or volunteers and social workers, can be necessary to identify hard-to-detect dynamics of exclusion and reach far left behind groups. In addition, left behind groups are often excluded from governance and decision-making processes. Facilitating and promoting bottom-up political and policy dialogue between (different levels of) government and the representatives of left behind groups, is an important part of achieving sustained and transformational progress, and at the same time supports empowerment as an independent goal (Bosmans et al., 2016; SDC, 2018; UNDP, 2018). Box 1.4 illustrates how capacity building of farmer organisations contributed towards the empowerment of smallholder farmers to participate in food security governance.

Box 1.4: Empowering smallholder farmers to participate in food security governance

The Farmers' voice program, funded by the EU and Agriterra and coordinated by Trias Uganda, was implemented in collaboration with the Eastern Africa Farmers' Federation and four national farmer organisations in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. The programme aimed to empower smallholder farmers, who are often excluded from decision-making processes, to participate in food security governance, and to strengthen farmer organisations at the subnational, national, and regional level. The programme involved a strong focus on capacity building, took a "learning by doing" approach, and relied on a specific tool – the Farmers' Advocacy Consultation Tool (FACT) – to promote bottom-up formulation of policies and better dialogue between farmer organisations and policy makers. An external evaluation of the programme concluded that the use of the FACT tool had improved the capacity for writing inclusive policy proposals for all farmer organisations (although there was room for quality improvements), resulting in a total of 14 policy proposals presented at sub-national and national level.

Source: Arkesteijn and Bateisibwa (2015)

1.3.3 Monitoring and evaluation (and learning)

In the **LNOB mainstreaming approach**, the monitoring and evaluation process would include a reflection on whether the anticipated effects on far left behind groups materialized; whether any remedial action was effective in dealing with exclusion; whether anyone within the target groups remained excluded from the (benefits of the) intervention; and whether far left behind groups were importantly affected in any unforeseen ways. Depending on your capacity and resources, you can collect information in different ways, from specific disaggregated indicators in the results framework to interviews with key informants, field observation, or secondary data sources. Across all methods, however, a key objective is to include the voices of excluded groups. The information gathered in this process can be an important source of information for internal and external learning on LNOB, for programme adaptation, and for lobby and advocacy efforts.

In the **LNOB targeting approach**, the contribution to positive changes for the target groups needs to be monitored and evaluated through specific, disaggregated indicators in the results framework. An important part of this evaluation is to assess whether some subgroups within the target populations remained excluded. Heterogeneous effects might occur across income groups, age groups, gender, ethnicity, etc. Box 1.5 gives an example of how this approach is implemented by the NGA We social movements (WSM). Box 1.6 discusses the particular challenges of measuring distributional impact for DFIs such as BIO.

For each approach, the SDC guide gives a set of possible evaluation questions, and offers examples of people-centred (i.e. intended to monitor the results for people's lives) and system-level (i.e. intended to monitor the progress of systems) LNOB-sensitive indicators across thematic areas.

Overall, participatory monitoring and evaluation has various benefits, and involving left behind groups specifically (directly through their representative organisations) presents another good way of empowering these groups to participate in a meaningful way in the development processes that affect them. Explicitly including participation and empowerment in your results framework (e.g. in outcomes, outputs, or indicators) can help to institutionalise and systematise such approaches.

Box 1.5: Targeted monitoring and evaluation - We Social Movements (WSM) Programme on decent work

The WSM programme on decent work aims to advocate for and improve access to the right to social protection and decent work for vulnerable workers in the informal and formal sector (e.g. garment workers, domestic workers, sex workers, migrant workers, health workers). Indeed, targeting vulnerable workers in the informal sector alone would carry the risk of leaving behind the formally employed in precarious sectors, for whom access to social protection or decent work is by no means guaranteed.

The programme's monitoring and evaluation framework also pays particular attention to two groups that tend to be especially vulnerable in this context: young workers and women. For two key indicators – the number of persons from the target group having (i) better social protection and (ii) more decent working conditions – the framework specifies what share should be made up of women and young workers, and reports on the actual share of women and young workers in reported changes.

Source: WSM IIAV BIS (2017)

Box 1.6: The challenge of measuring the distributional impact of development finance

Most EDFIs, including BIO, have made laudable efforts in recent years to strengthen impact measurement (BIO's website and online Theory of Change provide more information). To go further, BIO could strive to provide more information on the distributional impact of their investments within the broadly defined target groups, to better understand their contribution to the LNOB principle. For instance, there is by now a solid evidence base for the positive impact of DFI investment on job creation, but to understand who is included in this progress, information is needed on who gets these jobs, and what the quality is of these jobs (ODI and EDFI, 2019). BIO already tracks the share of women in the workforce for relevant projects; frameworks such as the SDC Guide to LNOB might provide inspiration on how to measure and evaluate progress on decent work for other types of disadvantaged or underserved populations. There can be a tension between promoting broad access to basic goods and services (such as energy) through privately managed infrastructure, and ensuring universal access, when the cost excludes the most disadvantaged or vulnerable (Simon, 2018).

Addressing these questions is a complex task, and more research is needed to assess to what extent such trade-offs and risks of exclusion emerge for what types of sectors, projects, and vulnerable groups. To tackle this challenge, DFIs such as BIO certainly need sufficient M&E capacity and resources to collect and analyse the necessary data. More generally, such questions call for reflections on what impact is expected of BIO and on what areas BIO is currently fit for purpose. One potential way forward is to explore the possibilities of strengthening BIO's mandate and capacities for engaging in dialogue or MSPs with policy makers and other development actors, to mitigate potential trade-offs and risks of exclusion (e.g. through subsidised energy access for vulnerable groups) (see also Byiers et al. (2016), and ODI and EDFI (2019)).

The online web source for the SDC Guide to LNOB is continuously updated and features other key resources, such as information on good practices, and relevant links on the topic of LNOB from the

SDC as well as other relevant donors and organisations (e.g. UN, OECD, ODI, GIZ). Some examples are information on the implications of COVID-19 for LNOB, events, trainings, and thematic working aids (in relation to agriculture & food security; education; decentralization & local governance; employment & income; health; migration; water) (click images below).

| SDC Guidance | Thematic Working Aids | Good Practices | Relevant Thematic Links |

1.4 Data tools for LNOB

> "Data are the lifeblood of decision-making and the raw material for accountability. Without high-quality data providing the right information on the right things at the right time; designing, monitoring and evaluating effective policies becomes almost impossible."
>
> - *UN (2014: 2)*

> People-centred data refers to data that focuses on results for people's lives, rather than on systems, institutions, or policies.

Central to the LNOB pledge is the **need for disaggregated, people-centred data**, to understand who is left behind and to determine whether they are being included in progress. This **remains a key challenge**. National administrative data systems often have important gaps in terms of representativeness, level of disaggregation, and reliability – especially for groups that are (at risk of) being left behind. There are several reasons for these gaps, including limited capacities and lack of political will. Also, the poorest and most marginalized tend to be difficult to locate and trace over time (e.g. migrants, street children), and some groups might be reluctant to participate in data collection efforts out of fear of stigma or persecution (e.g. members of the LGBTQIA+ community). Standard survey tools such as population surveys (e.g. Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)) or living standards surveys (e.g. Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS)) are useful data sources, but are generally not up to the task of including all groups and individuals being left behind (UNDP, 2018).

When the necessary data are not available, an **alternative option is to collect the necessary data yourself or through MSPs**. Belgian development actors already do this to some extent, and several organisations have built up specific expertise on how to reach out to vulnerable and excluded groups, consider their perspectives, and handle data (e.g. Terre rouges working directly with street children) (HIVA and IOB, 2020). The (Belgian) development sector could capitalize on this by organizing initiatives to document and share this existing expertise and lessons learned.

Yet, not all organisations have the (financial, technical, human) resources to organize representative and regular collections of disaggregated data for all relevant left behind target groups, with the necessary level of detail. Donors and stakeholders need to show **some degree of flexibility in accepting different types of data** given limited resources and capacities, such as interviews with key informants and field observation.

Nevertheless, the current data revolution opens up possibilities for finding innovative and cost-effective ways of gathering disaggregated LNOB data. Technological innovations such as mobile phones, GPS, or drones have led to a boom in the volume and types of data available (e.g. geospatial data) and have opened up opportunities for collecting, processing, and sharing data at a faster and more detailed level than ever before (e.g. real-time feedback). Although it is crucial to be aware of risks related to the right to privacy and data control, and of growing inequalities in data access and the ability to use it, there are **real opportunities for mobilizing the data revolution to make progress on the LNOB pledge** (UN, 2014).

The UN has started building a website that will gather resources on the data revolution, and has released a [report](#) that specifically addresses how the data revolution can be mobilized for the SDGs (UN, 2014). The report contains a discussion of data trends, challenges, and opportunities in the context of the SDGs, and offers some inspiring examples such as the one discussed in box 1.7.

> **Box 1.7: Data for LNOB - A mobile application for sensitive data collection on vulnerable children**
>
> The RapidFTR (Rapid Family Tracing and Reunification) app is an open source, volunteer-driven mobile application and data storage system designed to securely collect and share information on children who have been separated from their families in disaster situations, so that they can be registered for care services and be reunited with their families. The application relies on software that is used for mobile banking to ensure that sensitive information such as photos is only accessible to authorised users. In certain locations, RapidFTR reduced the time it took for families to access relevant information from more than six weeks to just a few hours. Given the open source nature of the system, it is possible to adapt the system to securely collect and share information on vulnerable children for several other purposes, such as education or civil registry systems.
>
> *Source: UNICEF, cited in UN (2014)*

Research interventions are increasingly exploring the potential of data collection strategies relying on ICT technology to *"**empower populations by enabling the collection and distribution of information as an alternative mechanism of governance**"* – especially in contexts or areas where the capacity of governments to collect data is limited (Van der Windt, 2014: 144). 'Crowdsourcing' or 'crowdseeding' data directly from the people affected by certain events (e.g. conflict, natural disasters, harvest failure, disease outbreak), or directly from people involved in service delivery as users or providers (e.g. education, health care, drinking water), can be a fast and cost-effective way of mapping events and collecting disaggregated, detailed, and localised data that reflects people's own perspectives and experiences (UN, 2014). Box 1.8 discusses an example of a research intervention that used crowdseeding to map violent conflict.

> **Box 1.8: Data for LNOB - Using SMS to collect detailed, real-time data on conflict in Eastern DR Congo**
>
> In the '*Voix des Kivus'* project*,* a research team from the University of Columbia explored the potential of using mobile phones and SMS to 'crowdseed' detailed real-time data on conflict in Eastern DR Congo. The project was implemented in the province of South Kivu between 2009 and 2011 – a time when there was intense violent conflict between multiple parties. In a certain number of (randomly selected) villages, the project provided mobile phones and credit to three types of reporters in each village. One reporter represented traditional leadership, one represented women's groups, and one was elected by the community. The intervention also trained the reporters to send either a simple message containing a pre-determined conflict-specific code, or a standard "full text" message giving more details. Messages were received by a cell phone linked to a portable computer, which used freely available software (FrontlineSMS and R) to automatically filter messages, code their content, and synthesize the information into a central database.
>
> Although the broader societal impact of the intervention was limited by security and ethical considerations, the researchers received positive feedback from participants, who felt that the project gave them a voice and allowed them, for the first time ever, to put the events that affect their daily lives 'on the map'. In addition, the research team was often better informed about daily events in the area than local actors such as humanitarian organisations.
>
> The Voix des Kivus website offers guidelines on how to implement similar projects, including source codes for the software used. See the project website for more information.
>
> *Source: Van der Windt and Humphreys (2014)*

Below we present a **number of datasets** that bring together different types of quantitative measures on poverty, inequality, and vulnerability, for a large number of countries. The tools can be useful to compare data across countries and regions. Although within-country disaggregated data is not always available or easily accessible, these datasets can usually also help to paint an overall picture of exclusion across different dimensions within specific countries. This can serve as a starting point for priority setting, allocation choices, LNOB analysis, and lobby and advocacy work, and it can provide reference points for formulating expected outcomes, targets, and results indicators. Finally, you can use these data tools as a source of inspiration and learning on how key concepts such as multidimensional poverty, vulnerability, and inequalities can be defined and measured in different ways.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*
⧖   *Context analysis, formulation of programmes, and monitoring and evaluation*
⊙   http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-MPI (website)
        http://www.dataforall.org/dashboard/ophi/index.php/ (interactive dashboard)

The MPI paints a picture of multidimensional poverty across 105 developing countries from 2007 to 2019, and will be regularly updated in the future. The 2019 dataset covered 5 billion people, or more than 70% of the global population. The main benefit of the MPI is that it extends the concept of poverty beyond income poverty and beyond the simple 1.90 $ poverty line – although it also tracks

these data. The MPI calculates the number and proportion of people in poverty, as well as the intensity of poverty, based on three dimensions captured by 10 indicators: health (child mortality, nutrition), education (years of schooling, enrolment), and living standards (housing, water, sanitation, electricity, cooking fuel, assets). It includes cut-offs to identify those in severe poverty, those in acute poverty, and those vulnerable to falling into poverty.

The freely available MPI dataset offers data for many countries, including the MPI headcount, intensity of deprivation, inequality among the poor, and a breakdown of the MPI into its three dimensions and 10 indicators (in terms of percentage contribution to deprivation) for all countries, at two or more points in time whenever available. The interactive dashboard allows you to browse interactive graphs and download data for specific countries disaggregated by age, region, or rural-urban categories when available (subnational data is available for more than 80 countries, and time-series data for 50 countries).

The annual Global MPI Reports by the UNDP and Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) give details on the calculation of the MPI, discuss global trends from the lens of a selected topic, and offer links to several other resources. The 2019 report for instance analyses global and within-country inequalities and discusses the importance of disaggregated data. Fig. 1.3, taken from the report, illustrates well how averages can hide wide disparities across and within countries. Uganda's national multidimensional poverty rate (55.1 percent) is similar to the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (57.5 percent), but the rate of multidimensional poverty in Uganda's provinces ranges from 6.0 percent to 96.3 percent - a range similar to that of the whole region (UNDP and OPHI, 2019).

Figure 1.3   **Averages hide large disparities in poverty across and within countries (UNDP and OPHI, 2019)**
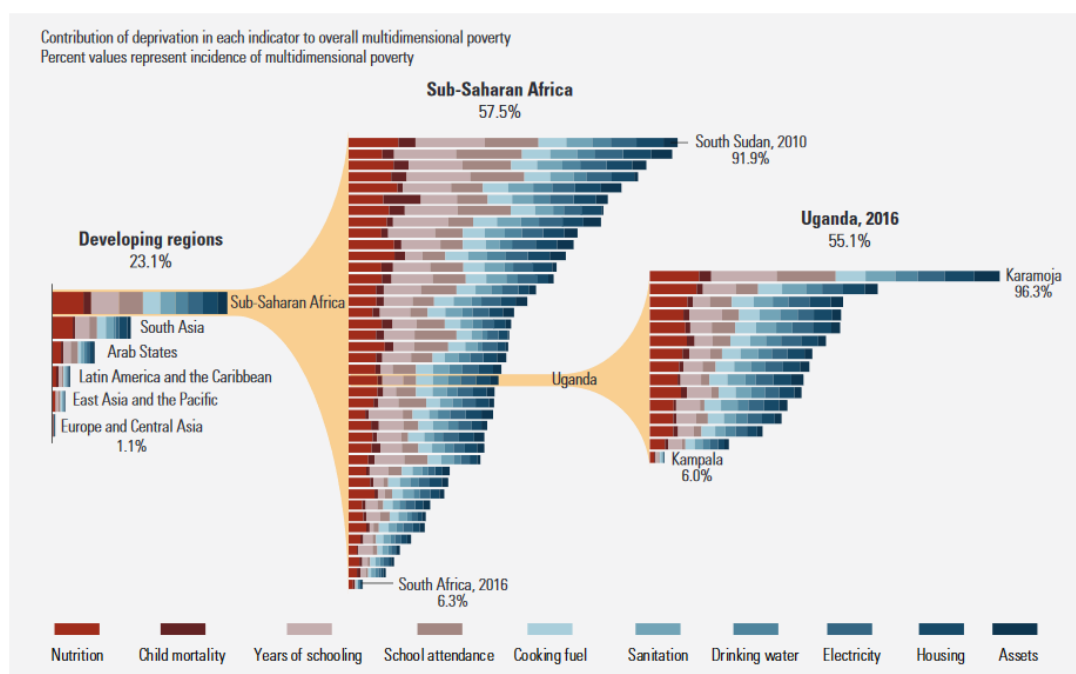
The 2020 report is also of special interest, as it focuses on the role of the MPI in ending poverty within the SDG framework and Agenda 2030. In particular, it discusses the interconnectedness of

goals, and zooms in on the role of the MPI in specific thematic areas such as work and employment, education, or climate change and the environment (see also Chapter 2).

> In the Global MPI reports you can also find the dofiles used to calculate the MPIs for each country in different years. With Stata or R software, you could replicate the calculations and disaggregate the data along your dimensions of interest.

By looking at different measures of poverty (headcount, intensity, vulnerability, …) and different dimensions of deprivation, along with some degree of disaggregation, the MPI can be a useful starting point for LNOB analyses. While not sufficient to get a complete picture of the left behind, it can deepen your understanding of what poverty means in a specific country context and where the (furthest) left behind can be found.

World Inequality Database (WID)

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⏳   *Context (analysis) and formulation of programmes*

⊙   https://wid.world/

The WID is a repository of global information on inequality (created by an international academic consortium). It allows you to explore – through user-friendly visuals – inequality across countries and regions, as well as the state and evolution of inequality within a vast number of countries (see Fig. 1.4). Country-level data include different inequality measures and indicators, such as wealth inequality, income inequality, average wealth, and income distribution (e.g. top 10%, bottom 50%). Full country-level datasets are easily downloadable.

Figure 1.4   Share of national income of the bottom 50% (WID, 2020)
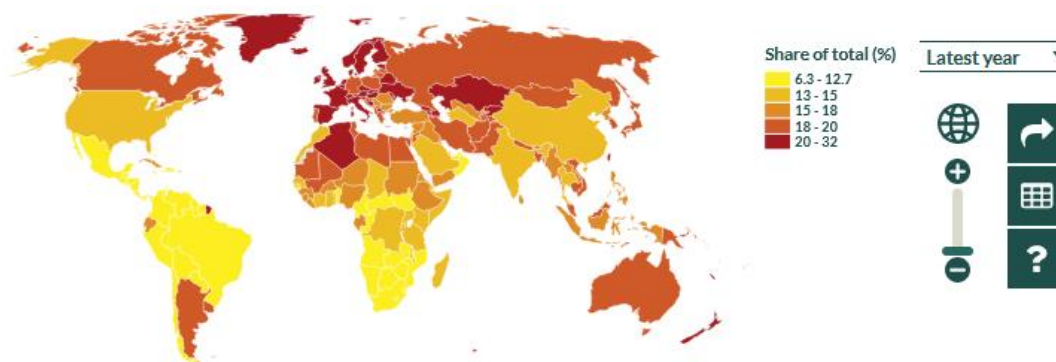
P20 initiative – gathering information on the poorest 20%

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⏳   *Context analysis, formulation of programmes, and monitoring and evaluation*

⊙   https://www.devinit.org/resources/p20-in-my-country/ (country level)
      https://www.devinit.org/resources/p20-initiative-data-to-leave-no-one-behind/ (global level)

The P20 initiative is a data initiative that gathers information on the poorest 20% of people globally and aims to do the same for all countries worldwide. Detailed disaggregated information on the poorest 20 % is currently only available for Benin. For other countries, the website offers information

on selected human development dimensions, such as income, health, education or nutrition - depending on data availability.

The P20 initiative plans to track progress for the poorest 20% on three leading indicators related to income, nutrition and civil registration over the next 15 years, while working to improve data collection and disaggregation by wealth quintile, gender, geography, age, and disability. While income and nutrition are among the usual suspects in wellbeing or human development indicators, civil registration is an interesting addition from the perspective of LNOB, as civil registration is *"vital for people to access services, welfare and rights, and for governments to capture important information about their citizens for effective decision-making."* (DI, 2017b: 11).

The P20 (in its current form) offers a short, specific, macro-level answer to the question of how many people are left behind in what areas, which can be used for lobbying and advocacy purposes. It can also serve as a benchmark for the current situation of the left behind, from which you can measure contributions to positive change (e.g. increased access to education for X people among the poorest 20%). Governmental actors could consider applying or supporting the full-fledged P20 approach as it has been done for Benin in cooperation with the SDC, to realise some considerable advantages in the context of LNOB:

- generating comprehensive evidence for poverty reduction policies and assessing whether progress is really working for the poorest in a country;

- developing policies that do not widen the gap between the poorest 20% and the rest (DI, 2017a).

> The Development Initiatives website, which hosts the P20 Data Initiative, also offers many other potentially interesting [publications and resources](#), such as how to deliver the commitment to leave no one behind in the context of Covid-19.

Overseas Development Institute (ODI) – Leave no one behind Index 2019

⚲ *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*
⏳ *Context analysis and formulation of programmes*
☉ https://www.odi.org/publications/11441-leave-no-one-behind-index-2019

The ODI Leave no one behind index shows the extent to which governments are 'ready' and 'on track' with the LNOB principle since 2017, for 159 countries. Readiness is measured through three categories – ready, partially ready, and not ready – and reflects an assessment and monitoring of the extent to which government systems are set up and ready to meet their LNOB commitment.

The index comprises 3 thematic components:

- **data**: are countries undertaking the surveys necessary to identify those at high risk of being left behind?
- **policy**: Do countries have key policies in place that address the needs of those at risk of being left behind in areas that previous research as identified as critical;
- **finance**: are governments investing adequately in three key sectors: education, health and social protection?

Fig. 1.5 shows how, according to the ODI index, a large share of assessed countries are ready in terms of data, but less than half are 'policy ready'. The index can be a useful source of information

on the partner country's perspective and ambitions on LNOB, and can help to assess to what extent collaborations with partner country governments will bring challenges and obstacles. This in turn can inform priority setting and allocation choices. In addition, the index can be a starting point for assessing the need for capacity building and areas where improvements are most needed.

Figure 1.5   **Selected examples of analyses based on the ODI LNOB index (Chattopadhyay and Manea, 2019)**

Figure 4   102 countries are 'data-ready' in 2019, accounting for 65%
Data dimension, 2018 and 2019 indices (%)
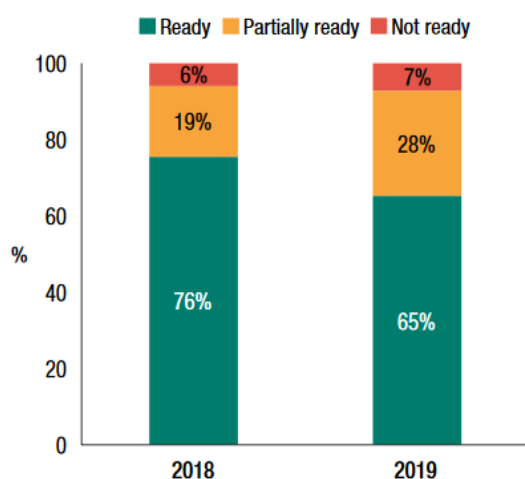
Figure 5   A decline in the proportion of countries 'policy-ready' in 2019
Policy dimension, 2018 and 2019 indices (%)
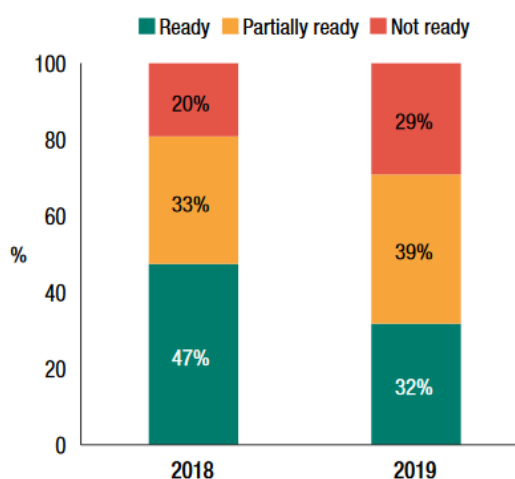
Note: Percentages need not add to exactly 100% due to rounding-up of components.

Other useful data sources:

Human Development Reports & Index: composite measure of human wellbeing and many other data, including country profiles and the Gender Inequality and Gender Development Index

Freedom house index: information on access to political rights and civil liberties

BTI transformation index: political and economic transformation processes and governance

IIAG: information on performance on governance of African governments

Danish Institute for Human Rights: information on human rights and SDGs (cf. Appendix 1)

World Bank Open Data: a host of information on poverty, health, education, environment, …

WHO Global Health Observatory, Health Equity Monitor and Health Equity Assessment Toolkit

FAOSTAT: information on agriculture and food security (disaggregation across several dimensions)

1.5 Concluding thoughts on LNOB

> *"We work hard to achieve structural changes in the societies we work in. Such changes are difficult to achieve, and success is not guaranteed. But even when we do see changes, are we reaching those people that need us the most? Evidence shows that we do not reach them if we do not make that extra effort. By definition, these groups are not lifted up in a general wave of economic development. The wealth does not trickle down. In fact, there are many structural reasons that prevent it from doing so. Without opening our eyes to those reasons, even the wealth in our own programmes will not reach them."*

There is still a large group of people that has not or barely benefitted from past progress, and that remains excluded from the programmes of governments and NGAs (Bhatkal et al., 2015; Partos, 2015). Leaving no one behind therefore needs development cooperation to move beyond current practice. This **extra effort can come in different forms**, from targeting the ultra-poor, to mainstreaming a gender perspective throughout your programming cycle, or simply making sure that your programme is accessible to everyone in your target group and does not reinforce existing exclusion mechanisms. Whatever the approach, a key part of addressing exclusion is understanding the reasons behind it. We therefore see a **good LNOB analysis as a key building block** of any extra effort towards LNOB.

'Leaving no one behind' may sound like a complicated and daunting task, but there are many opportunities and options for operationalising it in a way that fits your organisation and capacities. In addition, the resources that you put into **making your programme more inclusive can improve its quality**, for instance by opening up your analysis to more diverse perspectives, or identifying previously undetected inefficiencies. In general, **inclusive systems tend to be more sustainable and effective** than parallel systems for marginalised groups, which are often costly and can end up being counterproductive by maintaining groups separated from the rest of society (Desai, 2017; Kidd, 2018; Partos, 2015).

In addition, a growing number of examples shows that the inclusion of marginalised groups does take some extra time and resources, but **does not have to be very costly** (Partos, 2015). The data revolution presents new cost-effective opportunities for involving those that are hard to reach, improving access to information, and making marginalised groups more visible (UN, 2014). Also, low-cost solutions might already be locally available – for instance through financial resources and safety nets organised by local governments or grass-roots movements – and just need to be made more accessible to marginalised groups (Hodgson and Knight, 2016). Finally, the costs of inclusion can be kept in check by taking accessibility into account early on in the planning phase (e.g. through the principle of *universal design*), rather than taking costly measures to correct for barriers and exclusion mechanisms later on (Partos, 2015).

We have emphasized that our aim is to present practical guidance and tools that you can tailor to your needs, capacities, and LNOB ambitions. We do believe, however, that there is room for formulating **a bolder collective standard for good LNOB practice** - one that is flexible but also represents an ambitious commitment to LNOB. Apart from promoting Agenda 2030, such a jointly upheld standard could serve to adopt a shared language and globally recognised reference framework, which in turn could contribute to a more coherent public image, increased legitimacy, and better integration of the sector.

Our suggestion for such a jointly upheld standard would integrate the principle of 'do no harm' with the LNOB principle to say that **programmes should avoid *as much as possible* to reinforce existing mechanisms of exclusion or further disadvantage groups that are already vulnerable, disadvantaged, or marginalised *in important ways*.**

This implies that organisations, to the best of their knowledge and capacities, take steps to analyse whether their interventions contribute to any existing exclusion mechanisms or negative changes for groups that are far left behind - not just within but also beyond target groups. If there is a risk of further exclusion or other harm, organisations can adjust programme strategies or integrate remedial action (by themselves, by partners, or by others) in the intervention's theory of change.

The qualifiers *as much as possible* and *far* left behind or *in important ways* are key. First, we cannot expect all organisations to engage in the highly complex task of identifying who is the *furthest* left behind in a given intervention area (see supra). Second, interventions can have many small and indirect effects on many different groups. It will often not be feasible to take into account *all* potential effects or trade-offs for *all* groups that face some form of exclusion, marginalisation, or deprivation. Organisations will need to **set boundaries on the groups and individuals that they consider** in their analysis and theory of change.

Setting such boundaries is an important discussion that should be revisited throughout the programming cycle. Boundaries will depend on context and on who is involved in the discussion, and might shift over time. The two other SDG principles of MSPs and Indivisibility & Interconnectedness can be helpful in such a discussion, to inform strategic choices, set priorities, and address issues such as risks of exclusion. Mapping the presence of other development actors for instance can be useful to divide analytical work and data collection efforts, share information and resources, and find opportunities for remedial action through partnerships. Identifying important links between your intervention and other thematic areas or SDGs can help you to better understand who will be affected by your intervention, and identify particularly vulnerable groups at the intersection of these interlinked areas (who could be the groups you focus on).

Regardless of whether such a bold collective standard for good LNOB practice is adopted, any efforts to realise the LNOB principle need to be built **on two overarching principles: "nothing about us without us", and empowerment**. Groups that might be affected by your programme should be involved in the programme cycle in a continuous way. Marginalised groups might need specific support to overcome barriers to active participation, such as past experiences with stigmatisation and discrimination. Empowering such groups to make their voices heard and taking along their feedback in the programming cycle will be of great help to make your programme more inclusive. Besides, empowering marginalised groups to self-organise and lobby for their inclusion in e.g. government policies can in itself be a valuable contribution to LNOB. Finally, as there is still much to be learned about making development sustainably inclusive, the perspectives and feedback of left behind groups are key inputs in the process of learning and experimentation that is needed to continue making progress on LNOB.

2 | The transformational approach: upgrading interlinkages and multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)

2.1   The transformational approach

Systemic change or system change lies at the heart of the SDG agenda. Advancing the 2030 Agenda must involve an urgent and intentional transformation of socio-environmental-economic systems in order to ensure human well-being, societal health and limited environmental impact. This implies a profound shift away from business as usual. The principle of Indivisibility & Interconnectedness of the SDG framework embodies this need for systemic change, as the 17 SDGs should be considered in their entirety rather than addressed as a series of individual goals. This hinges on the ability of actors to identify and address trade-offs between different goals and targets, while maximising co-benefits and positive cascade effects. MSPs play a key role as well, as complex and interlinked goals can only be achieved through coherent, integrated, and coordinated strategies at the local, national, and international level (HIVA and IOB, 2020; UN, 2019).

> You can find a video summary of this chapter, along with additional video material, in the project's capacity building package.

To realise system change at the necessary scale and speed, the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (UN, 2019) identifies six crucial entry points for action and four levers of change at each entry point, visualised in Fig. 2.1 below. Although each individual lever is a powerful agent of change, the report argues that transformative change will only occur when all levers are combined in a coherent way at each entry point.

Although some entry points may seem to single out specific goals (e.g. sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition), a key feature of the framework lies in the connections between the different entry points. A systemic perspective requires us to consider and reflect on the underlying systems, and take into account trade-offs and knock-on effects across entry points. The framework further highlights the need for MSPs, explaining what types of collaborations between governments, civil society, the private sector, and research at different levels are necessary to effectively and coherently act on all four levers in each entry point.

> The Executive summary / FAQs of the SDG proofing tools in Appendix 6 gives more information on systemic approaches or system thinking and how you can use it to operationalize the SDG principles in your programmes.

Figure 2.1   Pathways to transformation in the 2019 SDG report (UN, 2019)
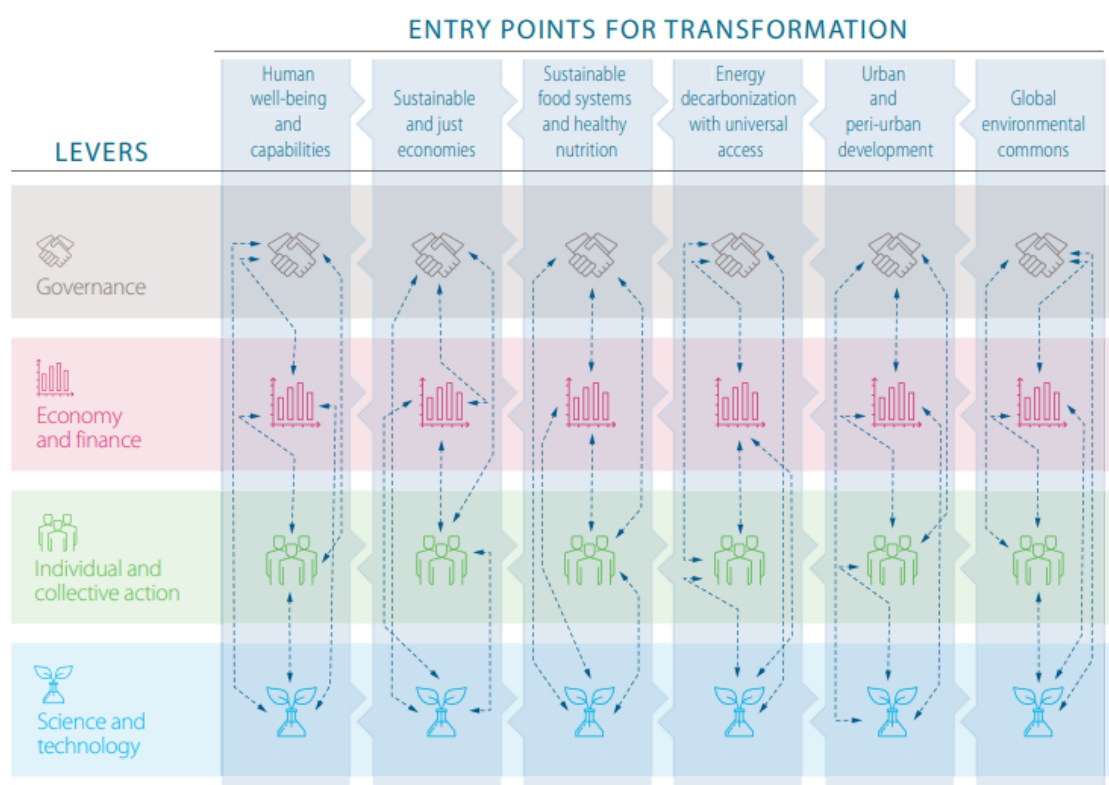
Note: Pathways are integrated and context specific combinations of levers to achieve transformational change towards sustainable development through the six entry points.

The framework and overall report can provide guidance and a useful reference point for developing Joint Strategic Frameworks (JSF), but can also serve to inform the design and implementation of specific programmes through a systemic lens. Box 2.1 applies the UN framework to the agricultural programme of Rikolto in DR Congo. Box 2.2 discusses how Belgium's agency for bilateral development cooperation (Enabel) is moving to a more integrated approach in its country programme for Benin, and box 2.3 discusses how DFIs such as BIO might further support transformational change.

> Rikolto's systemic approach to its agricultural programme in DR Congo is based on the Sustainable Sector Transformation Model for agriculture. Such sector models can be useful to translate Agenda 2030 to the more specific realities and needs of particular sectors.

The rest of the chapter delves further into the question of how to operationalise the principles of indivisibility & interconnectedness and MSPs. Section 2.2 discusses tools that can help you to identify and understand interlinkages in your intervention area. Section 2.3 turns to MSPs and presents tools that can help you to navigate the questions of what type of partnerships to engage in and how to make different types of MSPs work.

Box 2.1: Rikolto's agricultural programme in DR Congo – acting on several entry points and levers through a systemic approach

Rikolto's programme to support coffee and rice cooperatives in DR Congo explicitly takes a sector-wide perspective by identifying five blocks in which transformation needs to take place. These blocks represent various points along the coffee and rice value chains as well as the institutional environment in which these are embedded: 1) market regulation; 2) input provision and technical assistance; 3) organisation of producers in cooperatives; and 4) strengthening pf product demand through e.g. traceability. The fifth block involves the development of a sector-wide dialogue, common strategy, alignment of support and investment, and common monitoring and evaluation.

By pursuing the synergetic goals of supporting and strengthening the production capacity, incomes, and policy influence of coffee and rice farmers through the institutional structure of cooperatives, the programme acts on two entry points: sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition, and sustainable and just economies.

In terms of the levers of change, the lever of *individual and collective action* plays a central role in the program, but some action is taken on the other three levers as well. Lobby and advocacy work regarding market regulations and a generally favorable institutional environment act on the *governance lever* (although limited state capacity severely constrains possibilities); their activities on supporting input provision, product quality, and access to agrofinance act on the *economy and finance* lever; and technical support to promote productive, sustainable agricultural practices acts on the *science and technology* lever.

Source: Rikolto (2016)

Box 2.2: Bilateral country programme Benin – Moving from sectoral silos to a more integrated approach

The bilateral country programme of Enabel for Benin has taken steps to move away from sectoral silos towards a more integrated approach. The programme intervenes in three thematic areas, instead of sectors: health (sexual and reproductive), food systems (pineapple supply chain) and infrastructure (port of Cotonou). The context analysis and theory of change describe interlinkages between the different thematic components. The development of the port of Cotonou, for instance, is argued to facilitate development of the pineapple value chain by improving access to foreign markets. Enabel further conducted a detailed mapping exercise for the various actors and their relationships across the three thematic areas. This exercise (i) revealed complementarities and potential synergetic partnerships, and (ii) identified geographical and thematic entry points for action.

Source: HIVA and IOB (2020)

Box 2.3: Opportunities for strengthening a transformational approach as a DFI

DFIs are increasingly called on to take their contributions to sustainable development to the next level by orienting themselves more strongly towards transformational change (IOB, 2019; ODI and EDFI, 2019; Shift and WBCSD, 2018; UNSDG, 2020). In an evaluation of Dutch ODA relying on private sector instruments, the IOB (2019: 97) finds promising results for the potential of human rights due diligence (HRDD) to strengthen businesses' sustainable development impact, and recommends the sector to *"combine a risk-based approach ('do no harm') with an opportunity-oriented (value creation, 'do good') approach."*

BIO already takes steps in this regard at the individual client level, by supporting clients who want to maximize positive environmental and development impacts beyond minimum E&S compliance – for instance through dedicated Technical Assistance grants (BIO, 2021). The Human Rights Opportunity Report of the Shift and WBCSD (2018) might provide inspiration on ways in which BIO can further support the private sector in leveraging opportunities for shared value creation and sustainable development impact. Similarly, the Danish Institute for Human Rights has developed a database that offers real-life business examples of how HRDD can contribute to the achievement of specific SDGs and targets. By supporting the capacities of businesses as duty bearers to respect and actively promote human rights, BIO is also well positioned to play a complementary role vis-à-vis other Belgian development actors, who typically focus more strongly on supporting rights holders.

Another route for DFIs to promote transformational change is to more strongly support and stimulate economic transformation dynamics at the sector or value chain level (ODI and EDFI, 2019: 59). For instance, to avoid weakening the market position of individual clients, the Dutch DFI FMO takes sector-wide initiatives to promote livable wages (IOB, 2019). DFIs are also well placed to coordinate action to build or strengthen markets that act on key leverage points for sustainable development. The IFC Scaling Solar initiative for instance is working to build a regional market for solar energy across Africa by supporting governments to mobilize privately funded solar energy projects.

More research is needed for DFIs to fully understand their potential transformative impact, but a more systematic engagement with other development actors and stakeholders might support BIO in its efforts to identify transformative investments. Reflections at BIO are ongoing on how to more systematically engage stakeholders in E&S Management; it might be useful to also consider how more systematic engagement of other development actors could facilitate more strategic prospection as well. For instance, pooling capacities and resources whenever possible to analyze interlinkages between SDGs in a particular country, region, or sector, might support BIO in identifying areas where its investments can leverage important co-benefits or mitigate trade-offs between different goals or targets.

2.2 Indivisibility and interconnectedness: mapping and understanding interlinkages

> "All SDGs interact with one another – by design they are an integrated set of global priorities and objectives that are fundamentally interdependent. Understanding the range of positive and negative interactions among SDGs is key to unlocking their full potential at any scale, as well as to ensuring that progress made in some areas is not made at the expense of progress in others."
>
> - *ICS (2017: 7)*

So far, much (academic) work has gone into identifying interlinkages at the level of goals and targets (within and between goals). This research has relied on several approaches – including literature review, modelling and statistical analysis, and expert judgement (or a combination of these) – and has resulted in a set of tools that you could describe as **'macro-level interlinkages tools'**. These tools generally **map interlinkages based on cross-country or country-specific analyses**, and often **categorise them** based on particular characteristics, such as the strength of the nature of the interaction (e.g. positive, negative, facilitating, prerequisite). Some of the tools are interactive websites, which lend themselves easily to a quick scan of positive interactions and negative trade-offs between goals or targets.

You should keep in mind that such macro-level interlinkages tools are per definition limited because they **lack contextualisation**, and the nature, strength, and potential impact of real-world interlinkages will always depend on local context (ICS, 2017). Macro-level interlinkages tools present **simplifications, but they can nonetheless be useful**. You can use them as a building block for more contextualised analyses, as a starting point for identifying potential partners, or as a guiding tool for setting priorities and defining implementation strategies when a more elaborate and contextualised analysis is out of range.

Below we discuss some tools that can guide you through different steps of interlinkages analysis, from the most general level to highly context-specific analysis.

Overview of interlinkages between all SDGs
⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*
⧗   *Context analysis*
⊙   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf   https://kumu.io/jeff/sdg-toolkit

The 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (UN, 2019: 6) gives an overview of interlinkages between SDGs in one summarizing table (see Fig. 2.2 below). The overview is particularly informative as it shows not only how each SDG influences and is influenced by all others, but also how strong these links are (indicated by the size of the circles), and to what extent the overall link is due to synergies or trade-offs.

Fig. 2.3 presents a simple overview map of interlinkages that shows the number of linked targets between each pair of SDGs. It gives a more straightforward picture than the table above, but gives no information on whether the links are positive (co-benefits) or negative (trade-offs). It could be useful nonetheless to offer starting points for discussion, or simply to narrow down the set of SDGs you want to look at in the table above. It also gives you a quick idea of which SDGs are 'most central' in this web of connections: the larger the SDG icons, the greater the number of other SDGs they are linked to.

These overview tools can be useful to identify which SDGs are most likely to have important interlinkages with your programme's SDG of focus – or key objective(s) – at a very general level. They can be used in a first step of your interlinkages analysis, where you determine which SDGS you will focus on in further (more in-depth) analysis (as it is not practical or feasible to explore and take into account all interlinkages).

In later stages, it is still possible to move outside this initial scope of analysis when it becomes clear that specific interlinkages with other SDGs matter in the given context. For instance, a programme promoting the participation of women in governance and decision-making might initially select SDGs 1, 2, 3, and 4 as the ones to study in further interlinkages analysis, based on the figure and table below. However, further context analysis or stakeholder consultation might reveal that women's increased weight in decision-making can affect the way that local public resources are spent on infrastructure projects, highlighting potential interlinkages with SDG 9.

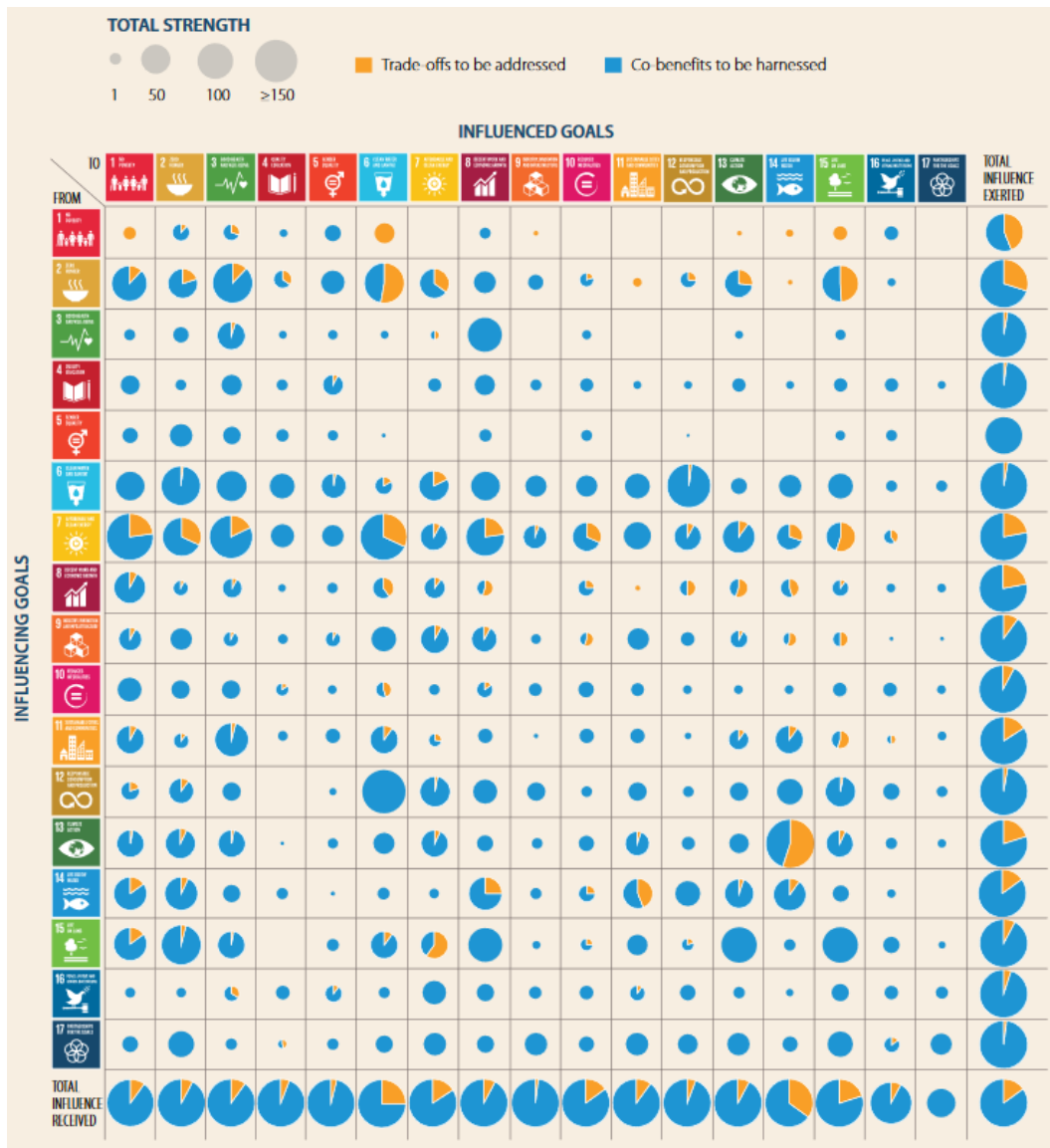**Figure 2.2** GSDR Overview of interlinkages between SDGs (UN, 2019)

Figure 2.3   **Number of linked targets for each pair of SDGs (Kumu, 2016)**

This map was built using an online, open-access mapping tool – <u>Kumu</u> – that you can use to create your own maps of systems or actors. For more details, go to pages 38-39.

As a next step in your interlinkages analysis, you can start exploring more detailed information on interlinkages by looking at specific targets for the SDGs selected in the first step.

Joint Research Centre (JRC) – Interlinkages and policy coherence for SDG implementation

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧖   *Context analysis, formulation of programmes, identification of partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation*

⊙   https://knowsdgs.jrc.ec.europa.eu/intro-interlinkages (interactive tools)
https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC115163/sdg_interlinkages_jrc115163_final_on_line.pdf (publication)

The JRC has developed a macro-level, systematic mapping of 'agreed-upon' interlinkages between all targets, based on a review of academic literature up until 2019. Interlinkages are considered to be 'agreed upon' when different methods reach the same conclusions. The findings were translated into an <u>interactive Interlinkages Visualisation tool</u> that allows you to explore synergies and trade-offs at the level of targets (see Fig. 2.4 below). The website also gives information on what sources and methods were used for this analysis, and thereby provides a list of potentially useful studies to check for examples of interlinkages between particular SDGs (on the right in the explanatory notes, click on *literature*).

The JRC also developed an <u>interactive Enabling SDGs tool</u> that enables you to map, visualise and analyse how the SDG targets of most relevance in your specific context influence each other (using

a method also used by the SEI SDG Synergies tool discussed below, see pg. 39). The tool builds on a [study](#) that looked at existing EU legislation to identify target-level 'policy nodes' where synergies are possible. In particular, the JRC categorised pairs of targets based on the number of policies they 'have in common', i.e. the number of policies that affect both targets. These policy nodes are likely most relevant for the EU to guide the identification of priority areas for action and resource allocation, but can also inform decisions of other actors regarding which policy areas to prioritise in lobby and advocacy work in light of maximising co-benefits and mitigating trade-offs.

Figure 2.4   **JRC Interlinkages visualisation tool**
above: synergies and trade-offs for SDG 4; below: synergies for Target 15.1 (ecosystems on land) (left), and alternative visualisation of trade-offs for SDG 8 (right)

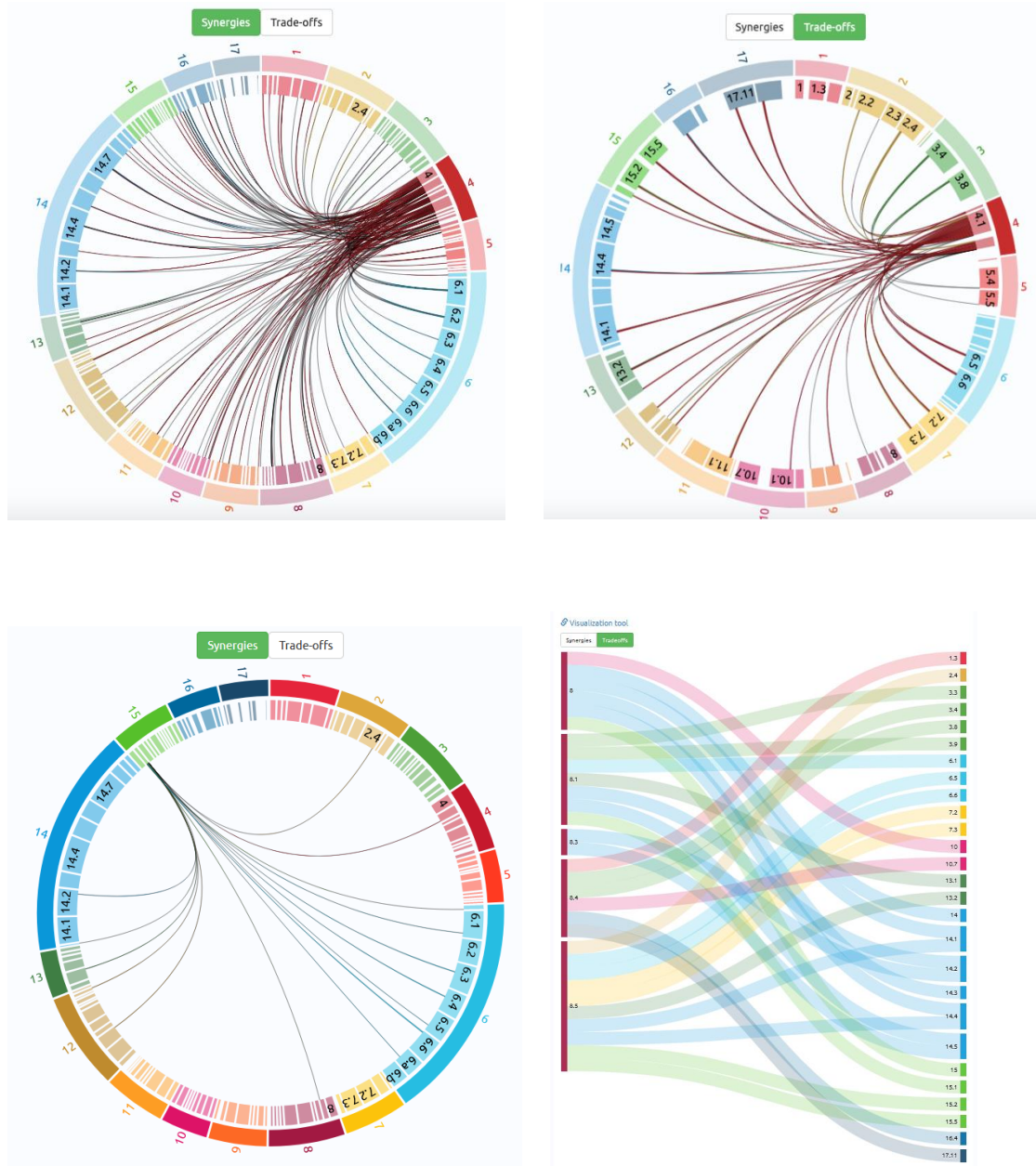| **Institute for Global Environment Strategies (IGES) - SDG interlinkages analysis and visualisation tool** |
|---|

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧖   *Context analysis, formulation of programmes, identification of partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation*

☉   https://sdginterlinkages.iges.jp/index.html (website)
           https://sdginterlinkages.iges.jp/visualisationtool.html (tool)

The IGES has developed an <u>interactive online visualisation tool</u> (see Fig. 2.5) that provides a country-specific mapping of interlinkages at the level of targets (and goals) for a number of Asian and African countries.[3]

Figure 2.5   **IGES tool, interlinkages between two targets of SDG 2 and those of SDG 1 and 15 (and SDG 2) - Tanzania**
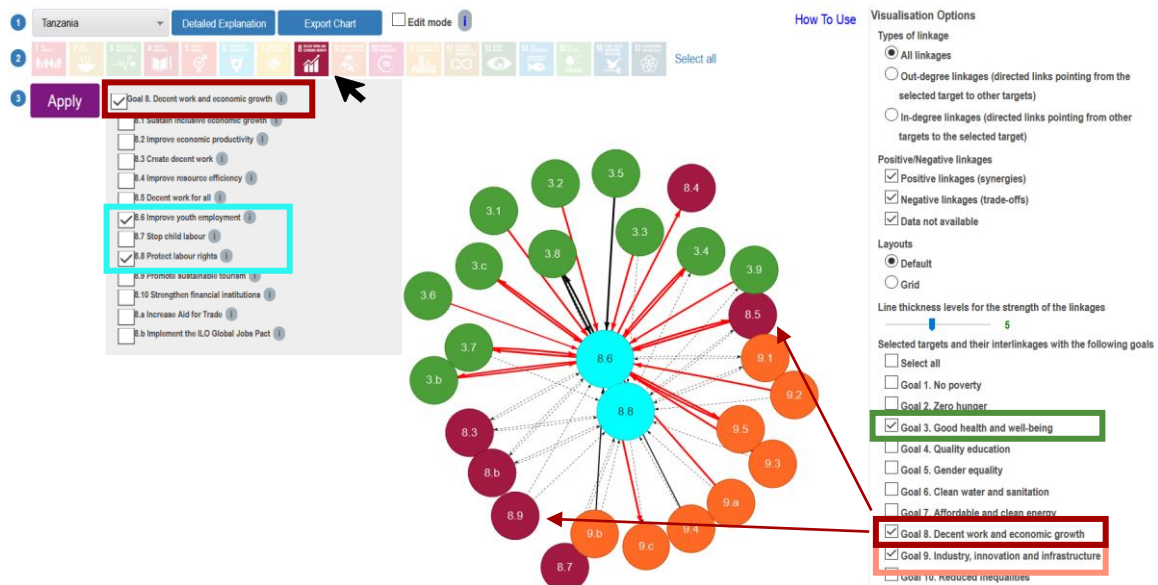
If you work in one of these countries, you can rely on this tool to explore positive (red) and/or negative (black) interlinkages between targets for that country context. In particular, the tool allows you to explore:

- interlinkages between all targets within the same SDG;

- interlinkages for all targets of one SDG and all targets of other SDGs;

- interlinkages between specific targets (of one or multiple SDGs), and other SDGs (see Fig. 2.5).[4]

The interactive tool offers different visualisation options, including looking only at interlinkages from the selected target to other targets ("out-degree", e.g. how does progress on target X affect progress on other targets?) and from other targets to the selected target ("in-degree", e.g. which targets affect

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3   Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand and Vietnam.

4   The tool always requires you to include in the bottom right box the SDG that you selected in the upper left bar. Otherwise no results are shown. This means that you will always see how the targets selected in the upper left bar (shown in blue) are linked to the other targets of that SDG (see Fig 2.5: all targets for SDG 2 are shown, but only the ones selected in the upper left bar are in blue – you see all interlinkages for these targets only).

progress on target X?). The tool also allows you to compare target-specific interlinkages between different countries.

To get a better handle on the complexities of interlinkages, you can summarize the results of this type of macro-level or national-level analysis in an overview table such as the one shown below (Fig. 2.6). That is, for your SDG of focus (SDG 3 in the example below), list the targets that are directly interlinked with (the targets of) your SDG. (You could use colour codes to indicate co-benefits and trade-offs.)

> Looking for applied examples to jumpstart your own analysis? Appendix 2 presents a number of tables and infographics on interlinkages in several thematic areas (e.g. education, health) that might offer inspiration.

Figure 2.6   **Overview table of targets directly linked to SDG 3 (Good health and wellbeing) (Le Blanc, 2015)**

	"Extended" set of targets: Targets from other goals that directly refer to health
	Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
2.2	by 2030 end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons
	Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
6.1	by 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
6.2	by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations
6.3	by 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, and increasing recycling and safe reuse by x% globally
	Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
11.2	by 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons
11.5	by 2030 significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of affected people and decrease by y% the economic losses relative to GDP caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with the focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations
	Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
12.4	by 2020 achieve environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle in accordance with agreed international frameworks and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

Finally, when you want to do a **more contextualised analysis**, a particularly useful tool is the 'SDG Synergies approach' developed by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) (Weitz et al., 2019).

Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) – SDG Synergies Approach

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⌛   *Context analysis, formulation of programmes, identification of partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation*

☉   https://www.sdgsynergies.org/ (website)
        https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/sei-brief-2019-sdg-synergies-2.pdf (summary)
        https://www.sdgsynergies.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SEI_SDG-Synergies-Manual-V03.pdf (user manual)

Central to the SEI SDG synergies approach is a three-step process of collaborative analysis involving different types of stakeholders: (i) Customisation, (ii) Scoring interactions, and (iii) Analysis.

First, the group of stakeholders makes a **customised selection of targets to consider** in the analysis. This selection will depend on the given context and on what the specific set of stakeholders involved considers to be important and relevant targets. A possible guiding question could be 'Does target X relate to issues that are central to sustainability in this context?'. Importantly, the selection of targets in this step also determines which stakeholders should be involved in the next step.

In the **second** step, the group of stakeholders **scores each direct interaction** based on a guiding question, such as 'If progress is made towards Target A, how does this influence progress towards Target B'? Focusing on direct interactions only is key at this stage, as it keeps the scoring exercise feasible.

> Although focussing on the goals and targets of the SDG framework can help you to reflect on your programme's contributions to the SDGs, you could also apply this approach more directly to the specific objectives of your programme.

The SEI recommends to use two scoring systems. One ranks interactions from strongly promoting to strongly restricting (Weimer-Jehle, 2006). The second uses a point scale to distinguish between seven types of interactions: indivisible; reinforcing; enabling; consistent; constraining; counteracting; and cancelling (Nilsson et al., 2016) – Fig. 2.7 below explains each type. The SEI approach proposes to enter the interaction scores in a cross-impact matrix, as in Fig. 2.8, to obtain an overview.

In the **third** step, the interaction scores of step 2 can be used as a basis for engaging in a **deeper analysis** that considers indirect interactions, clusters of interacting targets, and other network effects. The SEI approach again proposes to use the cross-impact matrix as a basis for this analysis, but you do not need it.

Different types of network analysis can be used to identify any network effects (see e.g. Weitz et al., 2018). You can for instance map indirect "ripple" effects, where progress towards Target A intensifies or reduces the ways in which Target B affects *other* targets. Understanding such ripple effects, and other ways in which progress towards certain targets affects the whole system, can be very helpful to understand how progress on goals and targets will play out in the real world in a given context.

> This very short and accessible comment by the authors of the scoring tool gives a good explanation of the tool and how it can be used. It is directed at policy makers, but useful for anyone looking to better understand and leverage interlinkages (Nilsson et al., 2016).

Figure 2.7   Seven types of interactions between targets (taken from Nilsson et al., 2016: 321)

GOALS SCORING
The influence of one Sustainable Development Goal or target on another can be summarized with this simple scale.

Interaction	Name	Explanation	Example
+3	Indivisible	Inextricably linked to the achievement of another goal.	Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is indivisible from ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership.
+2	Reinforcing	Aids the achievement of another goal.	Providing access to electricity reinforces water-pumping and irrigation systems. Strengthening the capacity to adapt to climate-related hazards reduces losses caused by disasters.
+1	Enabling	Creates conditions that further another goal.	Providing electricity access in rural homes enables education, because it makes it possible to do homework at night with electric lighting.
0	Consistent	No significant positive or negative interactions.	Ensuring education for all does not interact significantly with infrastructure development or conservation of ocean ecosystems.
−1	Constraining	Limits options on another goal.	Improved water efficiency can constrain agricultural irrigation. Reducing climate change can constrain the options for energy access.
−2	Counteracting	Clashes with another goal.	Boosting consumption for growth can counteract waste reduction and climate mitigation.
−3	Cancelling	Makes it impossible to reach another goal.	Fully ensuring public transparency and democratic accountability cannot be combined with national-security goals. Full protection of natural reserves excludes public access for recreation.

The **participation of a variety of stakeholders** is central to the SEI SDG synergies approach. Not only does it improve the analysis by bringing in different perspectives and making optimal use of existing expert knowledge; it also produces other equally valuable outcomes: facilitating dialogue and partnerships between different types of stakeholders across sectors, a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities, an identification of common interests, and a stronger ownership and consensus among stakeholders (Weitz et al., 2019: 2). This way, the approach also creates room for working on the LNOB principle and on MSPs.

A final advantage is that the approach is inherently tailor-made. The first step makes each application necessarily unique to the constellation of setting, targets, and stakeholders under consideration, and the overall approach leaves room for adjusting the depth and breadth of the analysis to your specific intervention area, needs, and capacities.

To provide inspiration and starting points for discussion in the different steps, you could rely on the macro-level interlinkages tools presented above, and/or consult existing reports and studies. A background paper by Nilsson (2016) for instance offers tables with examples of important positive and negative interlinkages for a number of SDGs, along with information on the evidence base for each interlinkage and a score based on the scoring tool presented in Fig. 2.7. Fig. 2.9 below shows extracts of these tables for SDG 2. The report also provides useful examples that illustrate how interlinkages can play out in real life.

Figure 2.8   A cross-impact matrix developed by the SEI SDG Synergies approach (Weitz et al., 2019: 2)
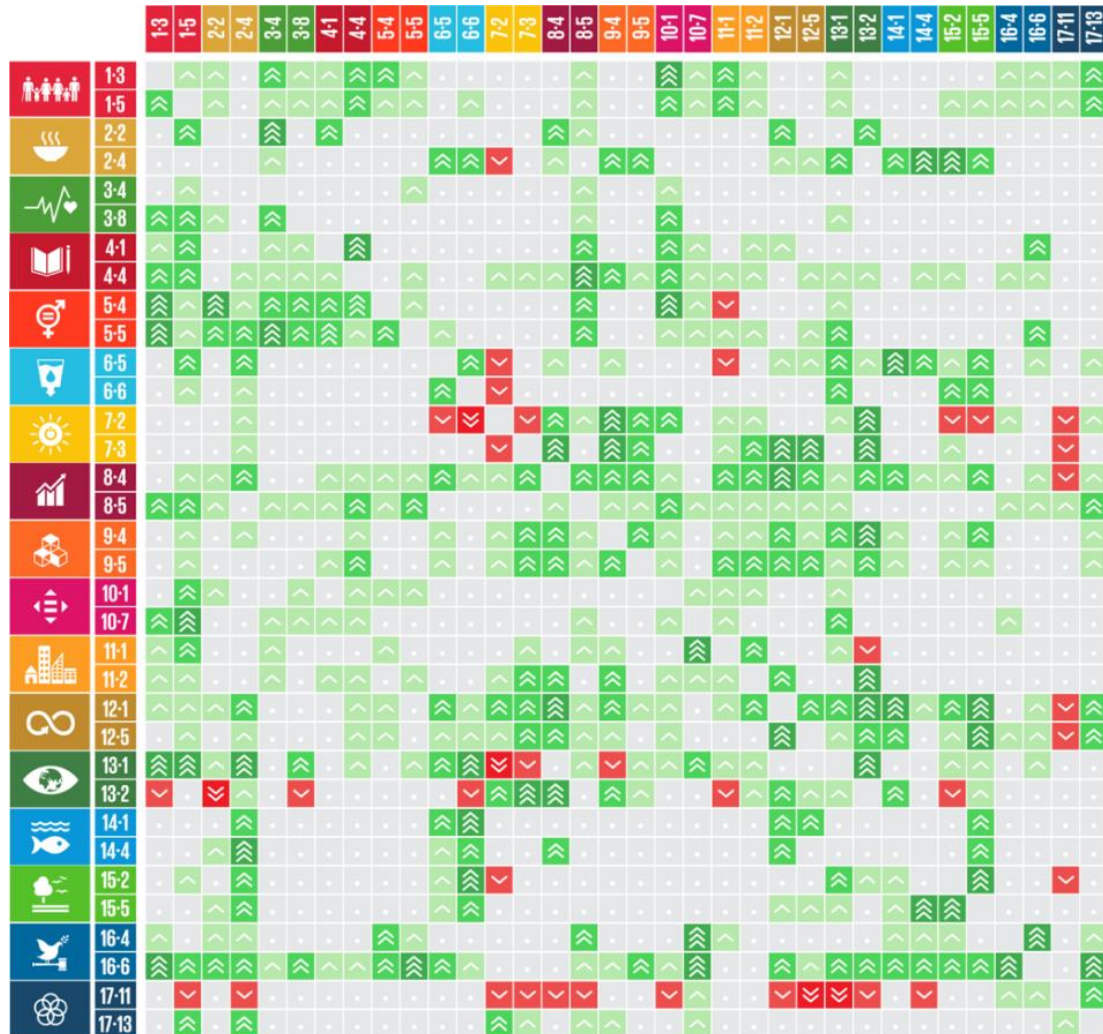
Notes: Green shows positive interactions: red negative ones. Shading and chevrons indicate the score (darker colour and more chevrons imply a higher score). You should always read the matrix in the same direction: from the left column to the top row. That is, the scores always indicate how progress on target X *in the left column* affects progress on target Y *in the top row*. As interactions are about effects in both directions, the matrix thereby shows the score for each direction within a pair of targets. This is important, as the scores are not always the same in both directions. For instance, progress on target 1.3 (on the left) has a somewhat positive impact (light green) on achieving target 1.5 (at the top). In the other direction, the score is higher: progress on target 1.5 (on the left) has a stronger positive effect (darker green) on achieving target 1.3 (at the top).

> On the SEI SDG synergies website, you can find real-life examples of applications of the SEI synergies approach in Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Colombia, and the EU. A SEI report on Mongolia describes how the approach was used to analyse interlinkages between integrated water management and other SDG targets. It gives practical details on implementation through workshops, as well as examples of the identification and scoring of interlinkages in the Mongolian context. The SEI website also gives a preview of the SEI synergies **online tool** that is being developed to support the application of the approach.

Other studies have done more in-depth analyses of macro-level interlinkages within a particular subset of SDGs, or for a specific thematic area. The International Council for Science (ICS, 2017) for instance has studied interlinkages between SDG2 (Zero Hunger), SDG3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG14 (Life below Water). See also Appendix 2.

Figure 2.9   Selection of important interactions for SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and illustrative examples (Nilsson, 2016)

2 ZERO HUNGER		Important interaction	Key dependencies (geography, technology, governance)	State of knowledge (agreement, evidence base)
EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE INTERACTIONS				
+3	Ensure sustainable food production (2.4)	< Indivisible from reducing marine pollution, in particular nutrient pollution (14.1) and overfishing (14.4)	Coastal zone and technology dependence, but see potential counteraction below	As targets are formulated, they are indivisible per definition
+3	End malnutrition in children (2.2)	>Indivisible from ending preventable child deaths (3.2)	Malnutrition leading to children dying is strongly associated with least developed and fragile states, areas of conflict, etc	Strong agreement and knowledge base, including how to manage it
+3	Access to food (2.1)	> Nutritious diets is indivisible from reduction in burden of non-communicable disease (3.4)	Generally applicable but in very different ways, undernutrition in some countries, obesity in most countries, and unhealthy diets almost everywhere	Strong agreement and increasing knowledge base, but much science needed on the mechanisms
+2	End malnutrition in children (2.2)	< Reinforced by universal access to sanitation and hygiene (6.2), diarrhea killing nearly a million children under five each year.	Burden of diarrhea strongly linked to developing countries. Prevented by clean water, improved sanitation, and hand hygiene	Strong agreement and knowledge base
EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS				
-1	Double agricultural productivity and small farm income (2.3)	>Constrains protection of terrestrial ecosystems (Goal 15)	Interaction significantly dependent on resource constraints. In some cases, productivity enhancements might counteract biodiversity if mono-culture technologies are prioritized.	A contradictory and complicated evidence base, highly contextual. Whether organic and eco-systems based approaches are more or less productive in the long term is not entirely clear
-2	Double agricultural productivity and small farm income (2.3)	>Counteracts in some cases the reduction of marine nutrient pollution due to the need to apply more fertilizer that can result in leakage (14.1).	This interaction depends strongly on geography (coastal zones) and vulnerability of ocean ecosystem but also technology (precision in applying agrochemicals)	Unclear knowledge base
-2	Access to food (2.1)	>May counteract sustainable water withdrawal (6.4) and reduction of chemicals releases (12.4)	If global consumption of cereals and sugars is replaced with a more healthy garden-vegetable rich diet, the use of inputs including agrochemicals may rise, but strongly dependent on regional context, governance and technology	Emerging knowledge

2.3   Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs): tools and illustrative examples

MSPs have received a lot of attention as essential instruments for taking on the complex goals of the 2030 Agenda. However, MSPs are no silver bullet or miracle solution. Cooperation does not always come easy, and there are specific challenges to working with different interest groups across sectors – particularly if they span the boundaries of business, government, civil society, and science. MSPs need to be carefully designed and facilitated, and the levels of commitment and expectations of the partners need to be monitored and managed. It is clear that MSPs sometimes fail to attain their objectives or work inadequately because of insufficient investment in creating a shared understanding of perspective and motives, clear and measurable goals, a shared language, and true consensus on working processes in the partnership - including evaluation and review mechanisms that allow joint learning and continuous adjustment. Making MSPs work will rarely happen naturally 'on the go'; you need to deliberately set aside time and resources for this.

It is worth emphasizing that MSPs are a means to an end; not an end in itself. The idea is not 'partnering for the sake of partnering', but finding new and/or better solutions through partnerships. The first question that you should ask is therefore: **does initiating or participating in an MSP offer opportunities to better address the (complex) challenge(s) that I aim to tackle?** If yes, you should ask yourself what the optimal form of collaboration is (there are many), and what the optimal role of your organisation is in the MSP.

> Looking for guidance on how to select the most appropriate form of collaboration? Check the SDG Partnership Guidebook (discussed on pg. 46).

Most Belgian development actors are involved in MSPs. Over time an evolution has taken place from 'light' versions of MSPs (which were often an add-on to business as usual) towards more integrated, strategic MSPs. The latter go beyond information sharing and coordination and aim at a joint realisation of shared goals (see Fig. 2.10). The upcoming challenge is to enable MSPs to grow to the next level of system approaches or eco-system approaches, so that they can leverage transformational change.

This does not mean that all MSPs *should* take an eco-system approach. Each partnership is unique, and there are no universal best approaches (Partnerships 2030, 2020). A 'light' add-on approach can be an efficient solution in circumstances where more integrated approaches face (too) large obstacles. Within each particular context, the type of MSP always has to match its desired function or objectives, which in turn should match the desired outcome (HIVA and IOB, 2020: 28).

Figure 2.10   **Different types of multi-stakeholder approaches (HIVA and IOB, 2020: 28)**

As an add-on	A more integrated approach	Eco-system perspective
Multiple actors exchange information, coordinate, or work alongside each other to address different components of a development-related goal. Actors implement their own programmes but the interaction generates an add-on value to the existing plans and programmes of the respective partners.	Multiple actors work in an integrated way to jointly address a development-related goal. Different actors are involved in the planning, implementation and follow up of joint programmes.	Contributing to the strengthening of an ecosystem of different societal 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. (e.g.: social and ecological upgrading of supply chains)

Note: These three types are not distinct, separate categories, but approaches that can be plotted on a spectrum.

Eco-system approaches nevertheless will be an essential part of taking on complex challenges and interlinked goals together with different actors (sometimes with opposing views) within a particular societal system. Depending on the context, the focus might be on different combinations of academic, business, civil society, and/or governmental institutions, and the approach might be multi-sectoral or stay within one and the same (sub)sector. Yet, for MSPs to perform optimally, their composition needs to go beyond Belgo-Belge compositions. In its set-up, both the Common Context Analysis and the Joint Strategic Framework are designed to mainly involve Belgian stakeholders. In reality however, development actors have been very active in trying to involve local partners in the

exercise (see box 2.4). These efforts should not only be recognised and valued, but also institutionalized and incentivised.

<div style="border:1px solid #000; background:#f9e0cf; padding:10px;">

Box 2.4: Involvement of local partners in DR Congo

The JSF of DR Congo explicitly refers to the active involvement of local partners. The collaboration process can be somewhat different from one (thematic) constellation of partners to another, but local partners have generally played an important role in thematic discussions and exchanges.

Source: CSC (2016)

</div>

The prominence and importance of MSPs has led to the production of a wide variety of guidebooks and other tools to unlock the potential to cooperate and innovate. Below we refer to a number of rich guidebooks and websites, as well as a number of more specific tools of interest, that can help you to understand important prerequisites and general good practices, answer important questions, and find out how to maximise the impact and value added of MSPs.

2.3.1 Guides and tools for MSPs

Wageningen University – The MSP Guide and MSP Tool Guide

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⏳   *For developing MSPs*

⊙   http://www.mspguide.org/msp-guide

This MSP guide (available in English, French, and Spanish) (Brouwer et al., 2016) and the accompanying MSP Tool Guide (Brouwer and Brouwers, 2017) are built on best practices and give a step-by-step approach to the process of developing MSPs. The guide links the underlying rationale for MSPs to a clear four-phase process model, a set of seven core principles, and key ideas for facilitation. The guide also highlights three emerging good practices in relation to MSPs, which we discuss in more detail in box 2.5. The companion MSP Tool Guide offers more than 60 participatory tools that can facilitate analysis, planning, and decision making (one such tool is discussed in box 2.5). The guide has been written for those directly involved in MSPs - as a stakeholder, leader, facilitator or funder - to provide both the conceptual foundations and practical tools that underpin successful partnerships.

**Box 2.5: The MSP Guide - Three emerging good practices**

We draw out three emerging good practices for designing and managing MSPs from the Wageningen MSP Guide. First, to get a good understanding of the *system* in which you are working, you can expand the scope of analysis from **stakeholders** as such, i.e. actors who have an immediate stake in the program, to **all actors** that might be affected by your programme and might have an interest in or influence on its results.

Second, it is important to go further than identifying **actors** who are **'on board'** and will support or contribute to the program, and also identify **actors** that are **'against you'** and might present obstacles or risks.

Third, it is a good idea to take into account **power**, both as a potential obstacle and as a catalyst for change. The MSP Guide discusses 'working with power' at length as one of seven key principles that make MSPs effective: *"Using power positively means harnessing the maximum leverage to achieve change. … what you can do to understand and influence power structures so that they work for, and not against, the goals of your MSP"* (Brouwer et al., 2016: 75).

The MSP Tool Guide presents a simple tool for distinguishing different types of stakeholders (or actors) according to their level of importance/interest and their level of power/influence towards the objectives of the MSP (see Fig. 2.11, taken from Brouwer and Brouwers (2017)). It can be used to prepare the start of an MSP, or in ongoing reviews of an established MSP, for instance by helping you to identify who is not yet on board but might be (or should be), and who needs to be monitored because of their potential undermining effect.

Figure 2.11   The MSP Tool Guide – Tool 12: The importance/influence matrix for stakeholder analysis
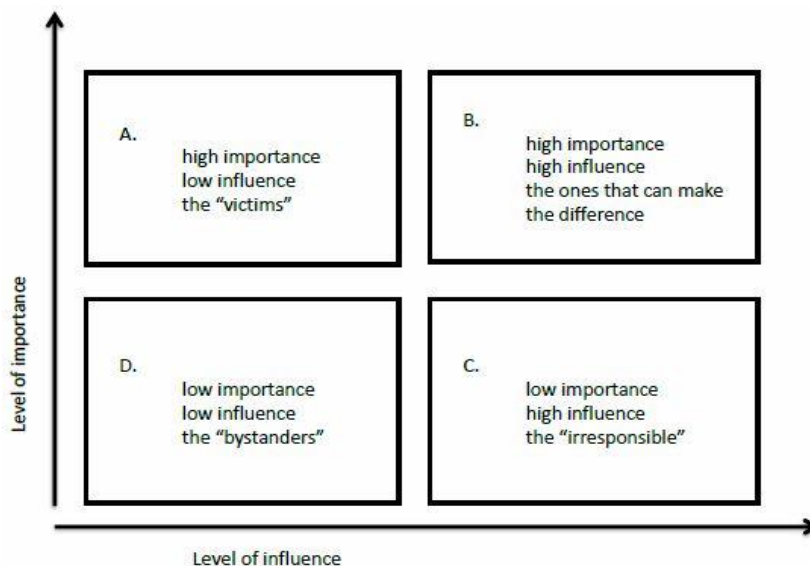
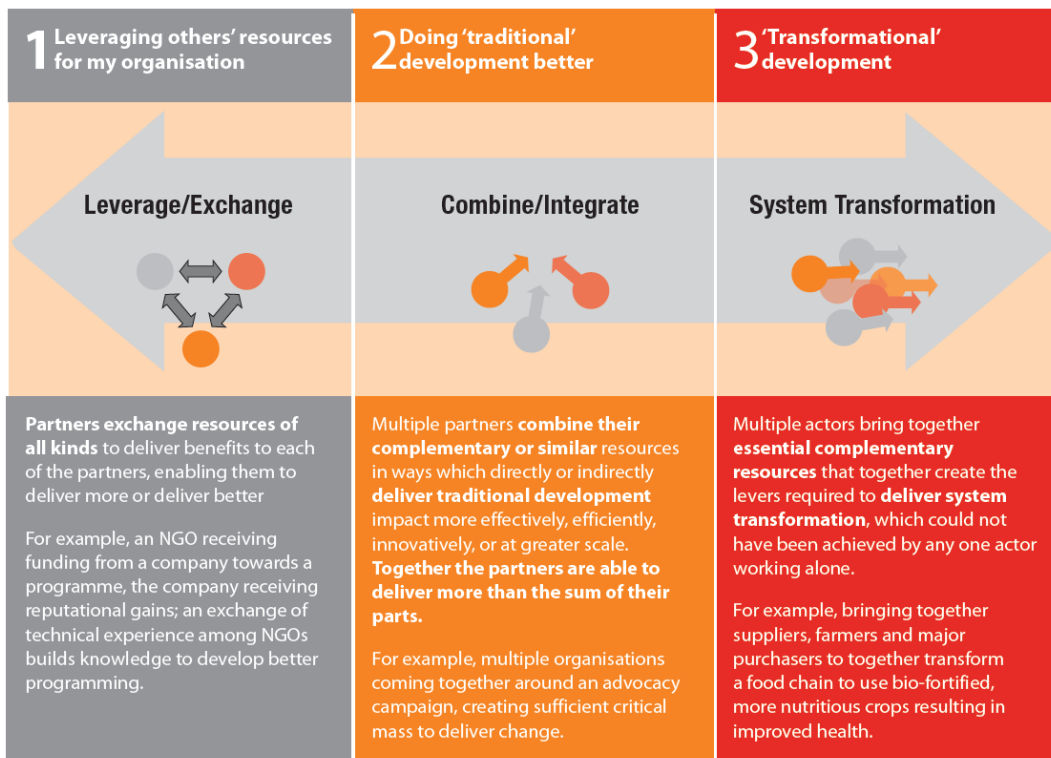⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧗   *For developing MSPs*

☉   https://thepartneringinitiative.org/publications/toolbook-series/the-sdg-partnerships-guidebook/

The SDG Partnership Guidebook (Stibbe and Prescott, 2020) aims to highlight the value of MSPs and provide practical guidance on how to build robust and effective collaborations for realising the SDGs. Fig. 2.12 shows the range of different types of partnerships identified by the Guidebook (which focuses on the second and third type). The Guidebook sets out the key building blocks of successful partnerships, as well as the underlying processes – from initial stakeholder engagement to partnership review – necessary to develop and keep those building blocks in place and maximise partnership impact and value creation. Along with frameworks to help you understand different forms of collaboration and select the most appropriate ones for your objectives, the Guidebook includes a series of tools that can support you in each step of partnership development and management. It also provides guidance on the more underlying, trickier, but essential aspects of partnering– including trust, power imbalances, and the frustrations and challenges of working across different organisational cultures.

The TPI website offers a great deal of other resources, such as The Partnership Culture Navigator, toolboxes, policy papers, and more. It also offers a number of resources specifically on partnering with the private sector (see also box 2.6 on pg. 48 below and Appendix 3).

Figure 2.12   The Partnership spectrum in the SDG Partnering Guidebook (Stibbe and Prescott, 2020)

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships 2030 Platform

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧗   *For developing MSPs*

☉   https://www.partnerschaften2030.de/en/ (general website)
       https://www.partnerschaften2030.de/en/studien-handbuecher-3/ (manuals and literature)

Several organisations have put together a website that brings together knowledge and resources on MSPs and how they can be leveraged to realise the 2030 Agenda. Many resources are available in English, French, and Spanish. You can find among others an MSP library that offers practitioner's manuals, tips and tricks, and academic literature; MSP profiles with real-life examples of different types of MSPs; and a synthesising section on the success factors of MSPs. The library includes detailed step-by-step manuals and tips and tricks on for instance the first steps in MSPs, assessing impact and performance of and in MSPs, and Gender in MSPs.

Tools for actor mapping and analysis

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧗   *Context analysis, system analysis, developing MSPs*

Online tools

- Political Economy Analysis (PEA): USAID Learning Lab Reference Materials
- FSG Guide to Actor Mapping
- List of visualization tools for ToCs that can also be used for actor maps (several are free of charge)
- Kumu: website for creating tailored online maps (free when maps are made publicly available)
- Pando: paying service for creating actor maps, that can later be freely shared and added to
  See also this blog post on using pando to strengthen development systems
- The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI): database centralizing information on activities of different types of organizations in a certain area

The starting point of building valuable and effective partnerships is getting a solid understanding of the web of actors and their relationships for a given context and issue. You can rely on several **analytical tools**, such as stakeholder analysis or political economy analysis (PEA). Many of these are described in the MSP guides mentioned above, and you can find manuals for specific analytical tools online, such as PEA.

Actor mapping tools allow you to visualise complex webs of actors and their relationships at play in a given context, which can help you to develop a more systemic understanding of the issue and the associated networks of relationships. You can find many guides to actor mapping online, and there are a number of websites that allow you to create, share, and update maps. Kumu is one such website that is open to all, free to use (as long as maps are made public), and offers a user-friendly way of creating visually attractive interactive maps with many functionalities (see Fig. 2.13 for an example). A particularly interesting feature is the possibility to upload an excel file with data, and to visualise different kinds of information.[5] You could for instance make the 'size' of the actor vary with its type (private sector, NGA, government) or (financial) power/influence. Finally, the Kumu website offers a great deal of examples, tutorial videos, and general user support.

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5   In particular, through the import format users can import a local spreadsheet or use the Google Sheets integration to build maps from live data. You can even crowd-source a map by making your Google Sheet publicly editable.

Figure 2.13   Detailed Kumu map on the links (flows) between climate change and conflict (and areas for partnerships)
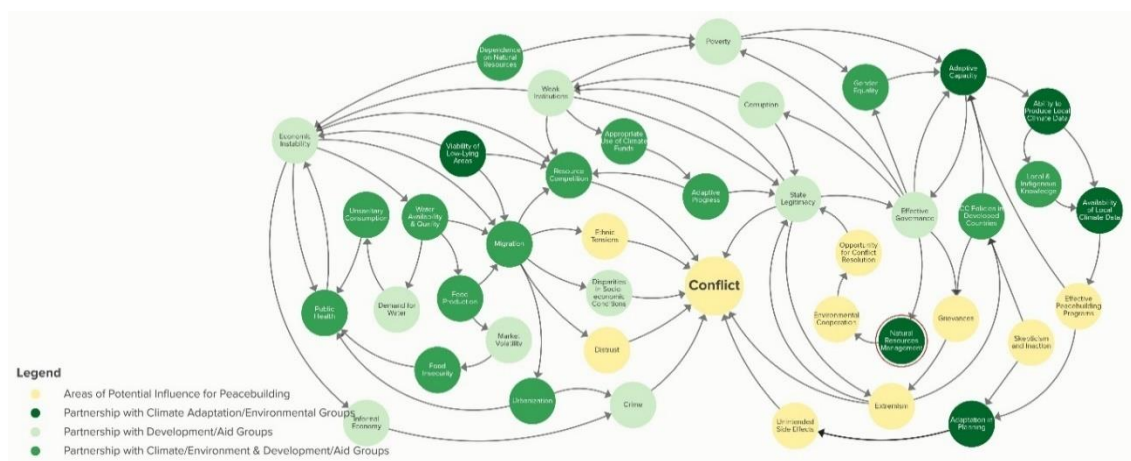
Another potentially useful source of information is the database created by **The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).** It provides a centralised source of information on the activities of more than 1000 organisations, including donor governments; UN agencies; NGAs; foundations; and business; in a particular geographic or thematic area at a global level. It records the location, sector or policy area, results, and finances of the activity. All Belgian development actors are required to publish information on their activities using the IATI standard. Although the database or 'd-portal' is a work in progress and has some imperfections at the moment (e.g. user-friendliness is being improved), it can provide a useful starting point for understanding which actors are present in your area, beyond development actors and beyond Belgian actors.

Box 2.6: How to partner with the private sector for sustainable development?

Agenda 2030 recognizes that business has a clear role to play in achieving the SDGs. When partnering with the private sector, a number of specific risk should be taken into account – notably the risk of conflicts of interest and misalignment of objectives (profit objectives of the private sector might conflict with the goals of the intervention or of the affected communities). Other important risks to consider are the reinforcement or exacerbation of existing power imbalances, and a lack of (appropriate) accountability mechanisms (Brooks and Porteous, 2020).

When looking for private sector partners, it is useful to start with a careful consideration of the following questions:

- **What private sector actors can add value to your programme (who) ?**
  Note that the private sector includes the full range of commercial entities, from smallholder farmers, through small and medium-sized businesses, to large multinational companies.
- **In what ways should these actors be involved (how) ?** What type of collaboration is appropriate or desirable given the objectives of the programme, the transversal themes, and the guiding principles such as inclusivity? In particular, how will the profit motive of businesses be reconciled with LNOB considerations?

The SDG Partnership Guidebook discussed above includes a section on partnering with business. Appendix 3 presents a number of additional guidebooks and toolkits on partnering with the private sector that can help you to decide who to partner with, and how.

Illustrative examples of successful MSPs

Successful MSPs can take many different forms, and its participants can have quite diverse roles and degrees of engagement – from partner to contractor, champion, disseminator, funder, informer, or critic (Stibbe and Prescott, 2020). We end this section by highlighting a number of successful examples of different types of MSPs as a source of inspiration. Of course, while the following examples may be considered successful MSPs, each may be at different stages of implementation or maturity, and they do not provide guarantees for immediate success regarding the objectives they pursue.

> The Human Rights Opportunity Report (Shift, 2019) discusses 15 real-life cases of MSPs involving the private sector aimed at tackling particular human rights issues (liveable wages, forced labour, gender equality, and land-related human rights). The report is written for businesses, but is relevant for anyone looking for inspiring examples of successful MSPs – in particular those who want to partner with businesses to address human rights issues (e.g. along whole value chains). On the Shift website you can easily browse an interactive version of the report.

> Hungry for more inspirational examples? Check the SDG partnerships platform, where you can filter by SDG, regions, and specific action networks or databases such as decent jobs for youth, or case studies on water and energy. The SDG Partnership Guidebook also offers more illustrative examples.

A systemic value chain approach aligns objectives across actors to make chocolate more sustainable

Beyond Chocolate is a high-profile MSP established in December 2018. As the Belgian chocolate industry is one of the world's largest importers of cocoa beans, the partnership has the ambition to impact positively on the lives of approximately 275,000 smallholder cocoa growers in Africa, Latin-America and parts of Asia. More specifically, Beyond Chocolate wants to contribute to ecological and social upgrading of the cocoa supply chain of the Belgian chocolate industry by ending deforestation, stimulating education for future generations, and providing a living income for cocoa growers.

The objective is to get all chocolate produced or sold in Belgium to comply with certification standards and/or be covered by a corporate sustainability scheme by 2025. In 2025, the signatories will also comply with agreements included in the Cocoa & Forests Initiative. By 2030, the goals related to a living income for cocoa growers and deforestation will need to be achieved. The Beyond Chocolate partnership was signed by more than 100 stakeholders from the chocolate industry, public sector, NGAs, retail sector, universities, trade unions, impact investors, labels, and member organizations labels.

Source: HIVA and IOB (2020)

Bringing together knowledge and resources to develop new and accessible health care solutions

GSK is a global pharmaceutical business that researches, develops, and manufactures health care products such as vaccines and pharmaceutical medicines. In 2013, the company entered in a long-term global partnership with Save the Children to develop new ways of reducing child mortality. The partnership combines GSKs expertise and capacities in health care with Save the Children's expertise in working with the most vulnerable children and communities to improve access to qualitative basic health care, develop child-friendly medicine, and advocate for stronger child health policies locally and globally.

Specifically, the partnership has resulted in the immunisation and treatment of over 100 000 children (for malaria, diarrhoea, and pneumonia), and in the development of an antiseptic gel (derived from an ingredient of common mouthwash) that is used to protect new-borns from infections.

Source: Stibbe and Prescott (2020) and GSK (2020)

Aligning programmes and resources to produce inclusive citizen-generated data for social accountability

Everyone Counts is a partnership between Care International, World Vision, and a software firm called Kwantu. The partnership aims to give citizens, including marginalized groups, a voice in evaluating public services. The initiative relies on community scorecards, an existing participatory method that allows citizens and service providers to evaluate the quality of public services (e.g. school, clinic) through indicators that they determine themselves. Both parties are then brought together to develop a plan for addressing the issues. The data from these community scorecards are digitised and brought together on a shared ICT platform, that also coordinates the use of social accountability tools to assess whether public services are meeting the needs and rights of citizens, to identify quality issues, and to monitor progress on SDG indicator 16.6.2 (Percentage of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services).

Between the three founding partners, the method has been upscaled to 40 countries and more than 1400 facilities, and the aim is to go even further by partnering with more organisations.

Source: Stibbe and Prescott (2020) and Kwantu (2020)

A global platform to facilitate and coordinate international action to end malaria

The Roll Back Malaria (RBM) Partnership to End Malaria is a global platform that brings together more than 500 actors from sectors for coordinated action against malaria. Partners include governments of malaria endemic countries, their bilateral and multilateral development partners, the private sector, NGAs, community-based organisations, research and academic institutions, and community health workers. Important objectives of the partnership are to align and support partners in achieving international targets for malaria control and elimination by creating a framework for action, raising public awareness, sharing aggregated technical information, mobilizing funding, and linking resources.

Although progress has stalled in recent years, the partnership is recognized for having played a key role in facilitating important breakthroughs in malaria eradication in the past decades.

Source: RBM Partnership (2020) and Hussein et al. (2018)

Strengthening academia-industry-government through a triple-helix approach: Swedish universities and SIDA in Tanzania

The programme of SIDA at the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) was in first instance directed to research activities at the University of Dar-Es-Salaam with regard to molecular biology and biotechnology. One of the offshoots of the programme was developed following the triple helix model, a collaboration academia-industry-government. This included the establishment of so-called 'cluster initiatives', for example around mushroom and seaweed farming by way of 'cluster initiatives'. Clusters are group of firms 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, labour and raw materials.

Both governmental and academic actors have played an important role in catalysing cluster formation, by facilitating the access to technology, and by building mutual trust among the firms involved. Originally initiated through seed money from SIDA as far back as 2003, Tanzania's mushroom growers association today has a membership of 4000. The seaweed sector attracted over 23000 farmers of which 90% were female. Seaweed has become an important ingredient in food processing as well as in other consumable products (soap and toothpaste). By 2015, there were 67 cluster initiatives in Tanzania, some flourished, others did not take off. While the final outcome of the eco-system approach shows a mixture of success and failure, the case demonstrates that it is perfectly possible to strengthen ecosystems around innovative entrepreneurship through a model of multistakeholder-oriented research collaboration.

Source: HIVA and IOB (2020: 33-34)

Researchers partner with civil society, government, and the community to tackle complex challenges in Ghana

In 2015, the Old Fadama slum of Accra, Ghana, was suffering from repeated cholera outbreaks and a level of violence and unsafety so high that it was considered a government 'no-go' zone. The area had virtually no water or sanitation infrastructure and extremely poor housing conditions. Participatory action researchers began working with civil society organisations, community leaders, and different levels of government to resolve these complex challenges. After three years, the MSP successfully implemented an intervention to install basic sanitation infrastructure, which relied on data from 300 research participants working on sanitation, and stimulated similar projects by other actors external to the MSP.

In 2018–19, the partners moved on to address the next priority challenges: unsafety, a lack of proper solid waste management, and the need for a health clinic. The initial participatory action research intervention was replicated with the support of community organisations and (female) leaders in Old Fadama, the Madina slum of Accra, and four rural communities in northern Ghana, growing to involve 2,400 stakeholders and an additional 2,048 beneficiaries.

Interestingly, communication for the original sanitation intervention and subsequent projects happened through a WhatsApp Group, in which the research team, community members, and government – technical staff, ministry officials, and even a member of Parliament – shared their ideas with the other stakeholders in real time.

Source: Kritz (2020)

Involving communities and local knowledge to arrive at sustainable and empowering solutions for marine conservation in Madagascar

Marine protected areas are an effective way of protecting and restoring fisheries. Often these are created by governments designating certain areas as protected, and prohibiting all fishing activities. The problem is that this top-down approach can endanger the livelihoods and food security of local fishing communities, making it difficult or impossible to respect such regulations.

By partnering with scientists and local fishing communities in Madagascar, Blue ventures succeeded in finding an alternative. In dialogue with fishing communities, they designed systems of repeating cycles of short-term closures of fishing grounds. This strategy combined local knowledge on fisheries with scientific research on marine conservation, to create a system that was effective in restoring fish stocks *and* boosted local catches and incomes. The partnership thus arrived at a realistic, sustainable, and locally owned solution that exploited the co-benefits of restoring fish stocks for ecosystem health and local livelihoods. It also sparked a grass-roots conservation movement (Locally managed marine areas - LMMAs) that empowered local fishing communities to take leadership in protecting their environments and communities. Today, the LMMAs cover 11% of Madagascar's seabed.

Source: Blue Ventures (2020) and TED talk by founder

An integrated cross-sector MSP to improve food security in Benin

The AMSANA initiative in Benin, funded by the Belgian Fund for Food Security (BFVZ), provides an example
of an integrated MSP. It involves a collaboration between four NGAs (Protos, Red Cross, Iles de Paix, Louvain Cooperation) and Enabel (previously BTC). The goal of the initiative was to address food security in a holistic, multi-sectoral way by focusing among others on agricultural production, environmental sustainability, health, and entrepreneurship. During the formulation of the programme, in which all partners were involved, the roles and responsibilities of the Belgian partners were clearly outlined. 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, cooperatives, local NGAs, and other donors).

On the one hand, the MSP allowed the programme to take advantage of complimentary expertise and resources on nutrition (Red Cross), water management (Protos), microcredits (Louvain cooperation), family horticulture and sustainable maize production (Iles de Paix), and institutional support and coordination (Enabel). The partners saw the close collaboration with local actors and an adaptive programming approach, which allowed plans to change based on lessons learned during implementation, as key elements for programme effectiveness and durability of results. On the other hand, the partners also recognized that the full potential of MSPs had not yet been realized and that more needed to be done to talk about a truly joint programme. With the termination of the BFVZ financing there was also a strong concern that the different actors would revert back to their own spheres of work after the programme has ended.

Source: HIVA and IOB (2020)

Leveraging co-benefits for gender equality, health, and energy access in Indonesia: Clean cooking

Biomass fuels (e.g. wood, coal) are used by many Indonesian households for cooking and access to energy, but the resulting air pollution is a major cause of illness and death (4 percent of all deaths). The Indonesia Clean Stove Initiative was set up in response to increase the use of clean cooking technology among communities that rely on biomass fuels. The Initiative brought together the Indonesian government, Indonesian civil society organisations, private sector companies, and the World Bank. The programme incentivized private sector suppliers to distribute clean cookstoves and complemented this with community-based training and awareness raising campaigns to increase effectiveness. The programme is expected to benefit women in particular, who bear the duty of firewood collection and face the highest health risks as the main users of cookstoves.

This specific programme is embedded in an overall strategy to promote energy access and address health risks due to air pollution, which also involves a shift of subsidies from kerosene to liquid petroleum gas. The share of gas in the overall energy mix grew from 1.7 percent in 2006 to 8 percent in 2015. The Indonesian government is currently working to make sure that these subsidies reach the households that are furthest left behind in terms of energy access.

Source: UN (2019: 83)

2.4 Concluding thoughts on the transformational approach

Taking interlinkages seriously is an important concern in the 2030 Agenda. Given limited capacities and resources, however, organisations will inevitably have to make strategic choices regarding what interlinkages to take into account, to what extent, and in what ways. Some actors might want to invest heavily in moving to a systemic approach, while other might (have to) limit themselves to integrating considerations on a few key interlinkages into the program. **We have selected the tools above with the aim of offering a diverse set of options that can be tailored to different ambitions and capabilities**. They allow organisations to choose the depth of analysis – from a quick, low-threshold analysis based on global mapping exercises to deep systemic analyses in multiple stages; to go for limited or elaborate stakeholder involvement; and to decide on the breadth of analysis – from a focus on one important nexus for their main goal to considering all important direct and indirect interlinkages of all goals of a program.

MSPs are already well entrenched in current practice. The challenges lie in maximising the impact and value of MSPs, in moving towards more integrated or eco-system approaches when this has value, and in further breaking away from a Belgo-Belge set-up. We stress, however, that an MSP is instrumental to the realisation of the SDG goals - a means to an end - and not a goal in itself. The first and foremost criteria for MSPs must be their functionality and added value (which are interrelated). Hence, MSPs need to be made up of functional partners, which certainly involves local partners.

Recognising the importance of context and tailored solutions, we do offer a few recommendations or guidelines that can help organisations in taking concrete steps in upgrading interlinkages and partnerships. A particularly refreshing point of attention is to think about negative trade-offs in more substantive ways. Many organisations already pay attention to positive synergies, but negative effects are often treated in more instrumental ways, i.e. by identifying (possible, potential) negative impacts on the intervention as risks or assumptions (for the intervention). How an intervention itself might negatively impact other developmental goals, targets, or interventions is usually considered to a lesser extent, possibly in part because such concerns are not integrated in evaluations. These more substantive forms of interlinkages thinking need to be taken up to a larger extent by organisations to move towards more integrated or systemic approaches.

Joint Strategic Frameworks (JSFs) provide a window of opportunity to take interlinkages into account within MSPs. In particular, it allows actors to explore in a collaborative or participatory way how certain strategic choices may affect each other positively and negatively, or how certain choices in the framework may interact with other donor and/or government strategies (positively or negatively). The collaborative nature of the process can also improve the quality of analysis by bringing in different perspectives (beyond Belgian actors) that allow knowledge sharing and learning, including the expertise of local organisations and target groups. Section 3.3. below delves deeper into the JSFs as a window of opportunity for operationalising the SDG principles.

Agenda 2030 heavily promotes the transformational approach, but at the same time acknowledges the complexity of transformational change. Complex change tends to need longer time horizons and is unpredictable: systems are dynamic, shocks occur, realities change, and actors adapt their behaviour. Interlinkages analyses and MSPs might (and often will) need to be updated over time, as an organisation moves through the programme cycle. Development approaches that build in continuous learning – importantly through stakeholder engagement and feedback mechanisms – and allow for flexibility and programme adjustment can be especially valuable to deal with the complexity

and dynamism of systems. Similarly, donors need to embrace flexibility and make room to fail, learn, and adapt. Organisations adopting a transformational approach should be supported and incentivised, in particular in their efforts to take into account interlinkages and to set up or deepen MSPs.

Table 2.1 again uses key guiding questions to summarize different steps that you can take to translate the transformational approach into practice in your programs and interventions. As was the case for Table 1.1 in Chapter 1, this table is part of a more general *SDG proofing tool*. You can find this tool along with additional explanation in the form of an executive summary structured around FAQs in Appendix 6.

> The problem driven iterative adaptation approach (PDIA) is an example of an approach where adaptation takes central stage, and you explicitly work with dynamic processes and tight feedback loops. An online PDIA toolkit based on guides and videos is freely accessible. See also section 3.1.

Table 2.1   Key guiding questions for operationalising Interconnectedness & Indivisibility and MSPs

	Interconnectedness & Indivisibility (Interlinkages)	MSPs

Preparation/ Analysis (e.g. context analysis, sector analysis, …)	1) Have you gained a solid understanding of the important interlinkages in the system in which you are working?
	  a) What are important issues/what change is needed?
	  b) How are these issues linked? (what are important co-benefits and trade-offs?)
	2) Was your system analysis co-created by relevant (local) actors (including marginalised groups)?
		1) Do you have a solid understanding of the relevant actors and their relationships in the system in which you are working?
		2) Have you analysed which actors can support or contribute, and which actors might present obstacles or risks, taking into account interest and power or influence?
		
		If there is no MSP:
		3) Does an MSP offer opportunities to better (e.g. more systemically or sustainably) address the (complex) challenge(s) that your programme focuses on? Have you identified valuable partners and forms of collaboration?
		
		If yes, or if an MSP already exists:
		4) Have you identified an added value of your participation in the MSP, and reflected on your optimal role in the MSP?

Planning & implementation (e.g. theory of change, risk analysis, results framework, …)	1) Have you identified important positive and negative interlinkages between your intervention area and other goals or targets?
	2) Have you taken important (positive and negative) interlinkages into account in the design and implementation of your theory of change (e.g. in objectives, strategies, risk analysis, indicators)?
	  a) What co-benefits can you leverage?
	  b) What trade-offs should you avoid or mitigate?
		1) Does your risk analysis consider potential obstacles or issues that the MSP or its members might create (e.g. conflicts of interest for private sector actors, inefficient use of resources, …)?
		2) Have you reflected on strategies or remedial action to deal with such risks (possibly only internally)?
		3) Are local actors (beyond institutional actors and including marginalised groups) involved in an active and meaningful way when relevant?
		4) Can all partners participate in decision-making when they want to? Do they have a voice?

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)	1) Have you reflected on the extent to which the intervention leveraged pre-identified co-benefits and mitigated pre-identified trade-offs? Was a good balance struck? 2) Have you reflected on unexpected co-benefits and trade-offs or limiting / reinforcing interlinkages? 3) Does your MEL plan provide sufficient space for learning about important interlinkages (co-benefits and trade-offs) and to follow up on risks?	1) Have the different partners reflected on whether the MSP adds value (do the benefits exceed the costs?) and whether its positive impact can be improved (e.g. via new partners, other collaboration forms, contribution of the partnership to specific outcomes) 2) Have you adjusted partnerships based on lessons learned? 3) Are partners involved in MEL when relevant, including local actors and marginalised groups?

3 | Windows of opportunity for SDG integration

We see five windows of opportunity for integrating the SDGs and its principles in the programme cycle in a practical way: (i) theory of change, (ii) risk analysis, (iii) joint strategic framework, (iv) instruction letter (process), and (v) results framework and indicators. We discuss each of these in more detail below, and offer a number of examples to illustrate (not prescribe) how a programme's contributions to the SDGs and its principles can be highlighted and strengthened.

> You can find **video summaries** for each of these windows of opportunity, as well as an overview of the whole chapter, in the online capacity building package.

3.1 Theory of change (ToC) and adaptive programming

Over the years, there has been a growing body of practical experience and literature on the limited relevance of results-based planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) approaches that follow a logic of linearity, predictability, and control when dealing with complex societal change. Most development problems are 'wicked' problems: complex, interlinked, with multiple actors having diverging needs, interests and different levels of power. This makes change often difficult to predict, hence the need for a continuous learning approach in which adaptation and flexibility figure prominently. Such an approach stands in contrast with the use of linear logic models such as the logical framework ('logframe'). Although the latter remains widespread within international development sectors, a rich variety of more complexity-oriented PME approaches has been developed and implemented over the years across a wide variety of development programmes and contexts. Such approaches recognise that the relation between cause and effect in complex change processes is unpredictable and comes with high levels of uncertainty and emergent outcomes. A notable example is the growing use of ToCs as a basis for a more complexity-oriented approach towards programme design. Most Belgian development actors (NGAs, Enabel, BIO) already use ToCs (mostly in parallel with the logical framework) in their programmes.

The following paragraphs describe how actor focused ToCs that are used as a basis for learning and adaptive programming respond well to the complex character of the SDG framework, and provide opportunities for operationalising the SDG principles within the programme cycle.

3.1.1 Using an actor focused ToC approach

An actor focused ToC departs from the idea that actors make change happen. Although poverty, marginalisation, discrimination, etc. are structural, systemic problems, we know that structures, institutions, or systems do not change by themselves. It takes (local) actors to challenge, confront and change them. In essence thus, developmental change is about changing individual and collective behaviour.

As stated earlier, sustainable development challenges tend to be 'wicked' problems, having multiple links with different dimensions (socio-economic, political, …) and involving multiple actors from all spheres of life (state, market, civil society). Multi-stakeholder partnerships thus become an important means to an end, in particular when considering the SDG principles of MSPs, LNOB, and interlinkages.

Beyond partnerships, this complexity can also pose challenges to the development of a ToC within an organisation. Programmes will need to be built around a multiplicity of actors, and these actors may hold different understandings of the programme's objectives (e.g. what is a benefit to some may be seen as a negative trade-off to others), how to achieve these, and what the roles and responsibilities are of each of these actors. Different power relations will be at play between the different actors. Also, the SDG framework comes with a strong recognition that any societal and sustainable development process needs to be carried and owned by endogenous actors.

Hence, a ToC approach will only be relevant to the extent that it helps a programme to deal with this complexity and to analyse and provide information about the 'messy' day-to-day social interactions between different programme stakeholders and to facilitate and support these interactions (Bossyns et al., 2016). As no single actor or organisation has the capacity to solve complex problems, considering these interactions is an important element of a ToC (Jones, 2011).

Research as well as experience in current programmes of Belgian development actors shows that actor focused planning, monitoring and evaluation approaches (e.g. outcome mapping, outcome harvesting, contribution analysis, narrative analysis, most significant change, sense maker, etc.) can help to ensure that ToCs become more explicit about the different endogenous actors a programme hopes to influence directly or indirectly. They can also facilitate and promote the active participation of local stakeholders within the theory of change process and associated monitoring and evaluation activities in order to learn about progress and adapt the intervention if necessary. These elements are important to avoid a situation where external development programmes may provide services themselves, thereby in the process shortcutting or undermining endogenous actors who are mandated to provide these services (Fukuyama, 2014).

The **'spheres of influence' framework** often used in actor focused planning, monitoring and evaluation approaches such as outcome mapping has proven to be particularly helpful to identify and map the various actors that can be influenced directly or indirectly through a development programme and who plays a key role in achieving a programme's goal.

The spheres of influence framework (see Fig. 3.1), first and foremost, shows that your sphere of control is actually limited. So rather than assuming that the world out there can be 'engineered', this framework heralds the idea that actually, a lot 'out there' is not under the control of your organisation or intervention. If you are addressing a 'wicked' development challenge, the sphere of concern/interest is large and complex, and a lot lies outside your influence and control. The sphere of concern/interest invites you to think about which areas and actors you can influence, including partners and other stakeholders.

Figure 3.1   Spheres of influence model (based on www.outcomemapping.ca)
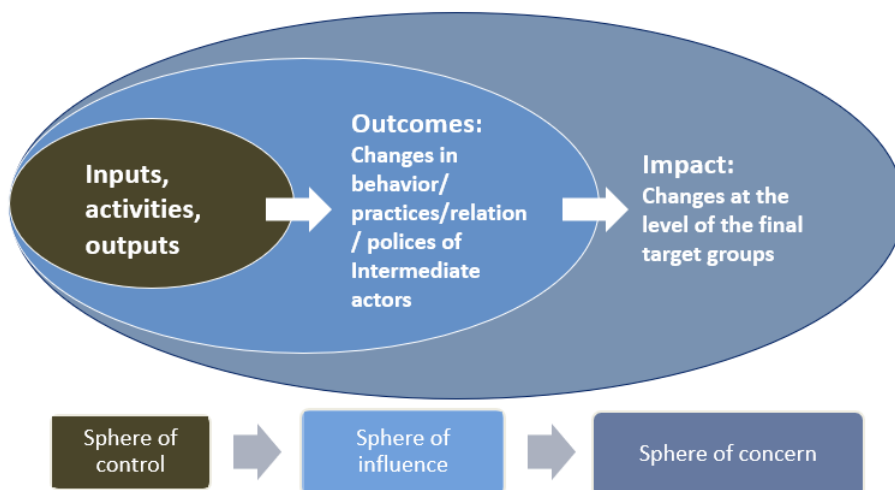
The framework can also facilitate a more in-depth and shared understanding of who needs to influence who within a respective programme and who is expected to do what in order to contribute to the programme's objectives. An important added value of this framework is that the actors who play a key role in contributing towards sustainable change are not abstracted but take a central role within the ToC. It helps programme actors to think about results as changes in the actors whom a programme is trying to influence directly (in the sphere of influence) or indirectly (in the sphere of interest). The model is based on the recognition that these actors play an essential role in achieving sustained positive change for the final target groups.

Fig. 3.2 shows a simplified representation of the actor focused ToC, worked out at the strategic level, of the decent work programme of WSM, IIAV and BIS. This strategic ToC visualises the general strategies of the programme and how these interact, as well as the key categories of actors (partner organisations, multi-stakeholder networks and policy actors) in the sphere of influence whom the three organisations will influence directly or indirectly in order to contribute to a sustained positive change at the level of the final target groups in the sphere of interest (informal and precarious workers in the partner countries and the members of the Christian labour movement as well as the general public in Belgium).

Figure 3.2   Illustration of the actor focused theory of change of the WSM, IIAV and BIS decent work programme (WSM, IIAV, and BIS, 2017)
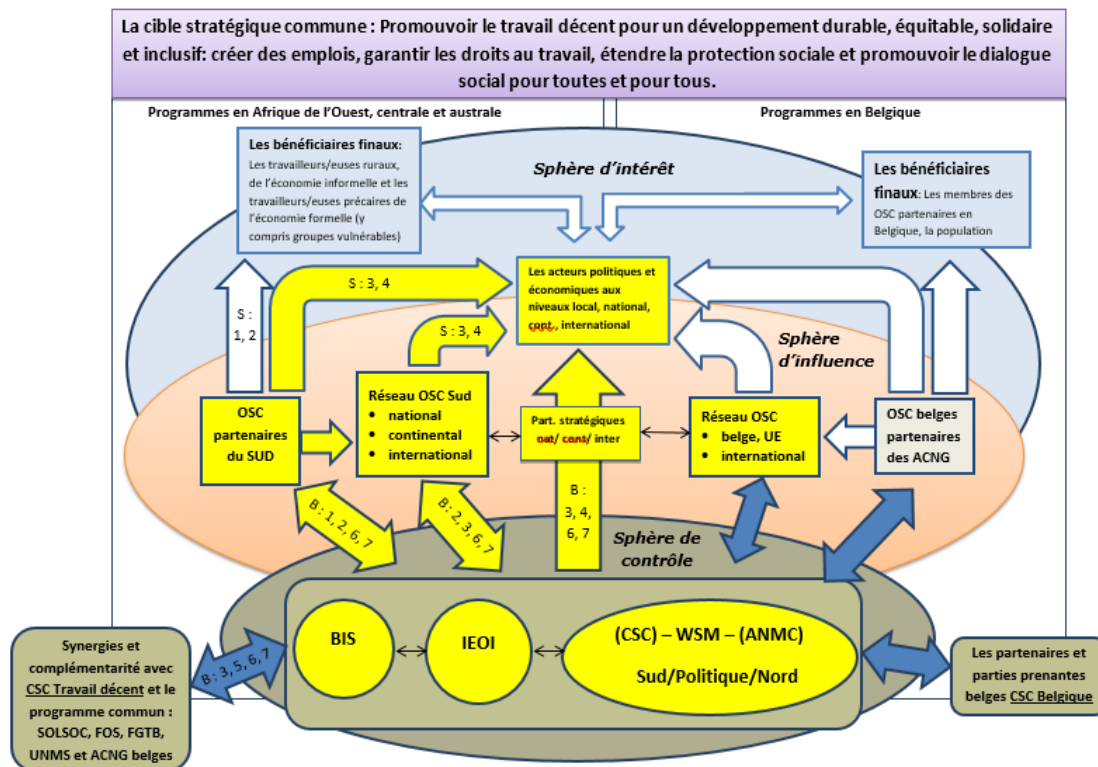
To determine which actors need to be included in which sphere, to identify the changes the programme hopes to see within these actors (e.g. through progress markers or smart indicators), and to establish the different possible strategies for working towards those changes, you need in-depth contextual knowledge and analysis as well as active participation of local actors. Here, the SDG principles of LNOB, interlinkages, and MSPs can be particularly useful to inform such analysis and strategic choices.

- **Operationalising the principle of LNOB within an actor focused ToC**
  Developing an actor focused ToC usually starts by identifying the final target groups, and what positive change the programme seeks to contribute to for these actors. Considering the LNOB principle here can help a programme to be more specific about its final target groups, and to avoid a situation where it might unknowingly leave out specific vulnerable groups. For example, the current joint strategic framework for decent work indicates that the final target groups are mainly (precarious) workers in the informal and formal economy and other vulnerable groups. This includes active and non-active workers, women, youth, migrants, etc. When operationalising the ToC in a particular region or country, the LNOB principle would then require the programme to reflect on who the most vulnerable workers are and how these groups will be considered in relation to other groups. This would also raise interesting questions about how the programme can best support the partner organisations or multi-stakeholder networks in the sphere of influence to represent or assist these (most) vulnerable workers. The causal hypotheses that underlie the causal links within the ToC can then clarify how specific activities or changes at one level in the ToC are believed to contribute to changes at other levels that are relevant for the LNOB principle.

- **Operationalising the principle of interlinkages within an actor focused ToC**

  Reflecting on potential co-benefits or trade-offs as a result of the changes the programme hopes to contribute to within various actors can point to specific strategies to leverage co-benefits or address trade-offs. An example is the question of how a positive social transformation can take place without adverse ecological effects. The results of such reflections could then inform strategic choices about what actors need to be taken on board, what changes the programme hopes to see within the behaviour of this actor, and what activities the programme could undertake to that effect. In the example above, this might involve supporting processes of social dialogue that can facilitate a transition towards new low-emission decent jobs and livelihoods and healthy communities (ITUC, 2018). Another example of operationalising the principle of interlinkages is to address national decent work challenges through a global value chain lens by connecting them to issues arising at the regional or international level. This could increase the number of leverage points (for lobby and advocacy work) and can create opportunities for linking the programme in partner countries with the programme in Belgium (as shown in Fig. 3.2).

Box 3.1 explains how the tools discussed in this section might support an actor such as BIO in the challenging task of strengthening its ToC.

Box 3.1: Building a ToC as a DFI

For actors such as BIO, who are active in a large number of countries and sectors, one way to approach the ToC is to build an **overarching strategic ToC** over a longer time horizon (e.g. 10 years) that can be refined for specific and more short-term projects, but ensures that the long-term vision and coherence are maintained (HIVA-KU Leuven et al., 2020). BIO has made significant progress in this respect in the form of their online ToC. To further clarify the different types of impact (direct and indirect) on different types of actors (clients, suppliers, other businesses through demonstration effects, end-clients, …), and more comprehensively communicate on the hypotheses and evidence that underlie the causal links, BIO could unpack this overarching strategic ToC into a number of **more specific overarching ToCs**.

Finnfund has for instance developed generic or overarching ToCs for each of its main investment sectors: renewable energy, sustainable forestry, agriculture, and financial institutions. These ToCs identify three spheres of influence – economic, social, and environmental – and three levels of impact – direct, indirect, and wider (ODI and EDFI, 2019). The UNCDF takes an alternative approach by breaking down their strategic ToC by outcome type (UNCDF, 2021). The actor-focused ToC approach or the spheres of influence model discussed in this section can be helpful to build such more-specific-but-still-general ToCs, by guiding reflections on what actors are influenced in what ways, and who plays a key role in achieving objectives (HIVOS, 2015)).

3.1.2 Theory of change (ToC) as a process and a basis for learning and adaptive management

As highlighted in the previous paragraph, the complex nature of the SDG agenda demands for more complexity-oriented ToC approaches that respond to the unpredictability and non-linearity of any societal development process. Hence, from such a complexity perspective, a ToC is not static. After its initial development, a ToC should be continuously used to critically appraise the various assumptions made about causal links within the theory, also allowing new assumptions to arise during

programme implementation as the effects of alternative strategies are being explored. This means that a ToC cannot be a rigid plan, but rather needs to be dynamic – being adjusted based on lessons learned during implementation.

This also means that the conclusions of any SDG-related analysis regarding LNOB, political economy, and power relations between stakeholders, and interlinkages and trade-offs, will need to be checked against new information and reassessed on a regular basis using insights obtained during implementation. It also requires an adaptive programming approach that ensures that such insights actually result in adjustments of the programme's ToC. Of course, such an approach requires a learning-oriented monitoring practice focusing on changes at different levels of the ToC and an analysis of the factors or actors that have contributed towards these changes. It also calls for a more flexible result framework, and questions the relevance of rigid predetermined targets as a basis for programme accountability.

An actor focused ToC can provide a useful basis for such a learning oriented results framework that can facilitate adaptive programme management. Indeed, as was indicated earlier, such a ToC requires the programme to clarify (preferably in a participatory way) the changes it would like to see in the actors it seeks to influence or support directly or indirectly.

Furthermore, in line with a complexity oriented approach, an actor focused ToC approach recognises the fact that a programme has no (or limited) control over endogenous actors and that the actual change or the extent of the change is unpredictable. Hence, it requires a programme, at regular intervals, to monitor and learn if its efforts are indeed contributing towards the expected changes and if there are any unexpected (positive or negative) changes that need to be considered.

Results-based management informed by an actor focused ToC approach does not hold rigidly onto predetermined results or outcomes that were formulated during the planning stage. Instead it requires a learning process about what is working and what is not, which can then inform decision making about how to strengthen strategies that are effective and to discard those that are not working. The predetermined outcomes or results during the planning phase therefore do not work as targets to measure success or failure, but instead provide pointers or milestones that can help a programme to learn about how it is progressing and to change course if necessary. Box 3.2 illustrates how progress markers (often used within outcome mapping) provide a practical tool for the formulation of milestones of change and for making a planning, monitoring and evaluation system that is more learning oriented.

When implementing an actor focused ToC approach, performance will rather be measured by the extent to which a programme is learning to be most effective in contributing to impact through the changes it can promote within the actors it supports or influences, and the extent to which it uses this learning to adapt and improve along the way. This helps to create a more 'fail-safe' and trustful environment where project stakeholders can participate in a joint learning process about successes and failures and adjust project activities (if necessary) based on lessons learned. Box 3.3 illustrates how Enabel is using action research to create a conducive environment for learning oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation in the 'She Decides' programme.

Box 3.2: Progress Markers

Progress markers describe observable changes in behaviour or relationships of the actors whom a programme seeks to influence directly (i.e. boundary partners). They differ from traditional SMART indicators in the sense that they are not timed nor necessarily specified with pre-set targets. Only when they materialise do the timing and specifics become clear. They don't have to be seen as rigid targets against which progress is measured. Instead they provide a framework for dialogue or reflection on progress and they can be adjusted during monitoring cycles. Of course, milestones or progress markers that describe change at the level of the actors will be highly contextual and specific for a particular program. While they will not provide a direct measure of specific SDG target indicators (which are located mostly at a much higher macro level), these milestones can be helpful to provide pointers about how a programme is contributing towards particular SDG targets and SDG target indicators.

For example, a decent work programme supporting trade unions to participate in social dialogue for 'just transition' (looking at the transition to low emission jobs) might involve capacity building to strengthen the technical and organisational skills of the trade unions to be able to engage in such social dialogue processes. While the immediate effect of this strategy might be the strengthened capacity of the trade unions and their participation in social dialogue, this would not yet provide a direct measure for relevant targets related to SDG 13 on climate action. However, through its theory of change the programme will be able to explain why this increased capacity represents an important steppingstone for further downstream change, which is relevant for SDG 13. And if any relevant changes more downstream in the theory of change may occur over time (e.g. new policies or regulations or new institutional arrangements), then the monitoring system of the programme may capture these and analyse to what extent the programme was able to contribute to these downstream changes (e.g. the fact that transition measures towards low-emission jobs go hand in hand with a transition towards decent jobs).

Box 3.3: Promoting results-based learning through action research

Enabel is using an action research approach to test underlying hypotheses within the ToCof its 'She Decides' programme. It involves a systematic learning approach of cyclical analysis, intervention, and adaptation, by formulating new learning questions or working hypotheses that are tested through programme implementation and repeating learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation cycles – see Fig. 3.3. Whenever a programme strategy is observed to not be effective, the action research cycle will stimulate deeper learning about the reasons why it is not working and draw insights that can be used for adapting the initial plans and exploring alternatives. Empowerment of programme stakeholders is a key element in action research, as they are actively involved in various stages of the intervention cycle and the action research process.

More generally, the 'She Decides' programme involves a cross-country thematic collaboration that aims to bring together the community of practice in 5 countries of West-Africa on four specific themes. The collaboration involves among others exchange and learning events, and the adoption of a common set of intervention indicators across all 5 countries. The overarching goal is to engage in a collective learning trajectory by comparing and contrasting experiences across different countries, exchanging lessons learnt, and thereby arriving at a 'robust theory' that can be adapted to different local contexts.

Figure 3.3   Learning oriented results based management (Enabel, 2019)
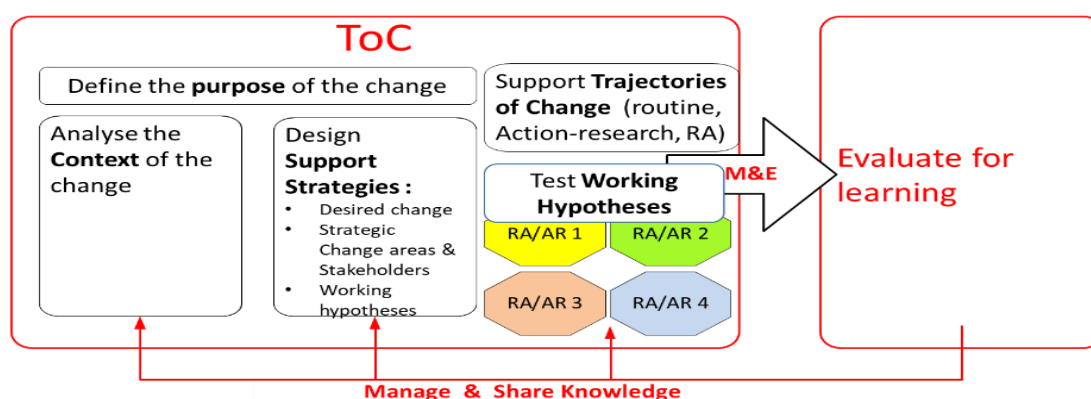
Other useful links for building and visualising your ToC

-    A list of digital tools for visualising your ToC with indications on purpose and cost (several are free)
-    Online system mapping tool that is used for ToC and Collaborative Outcome Map(ping): Kumu
-    Kumu blog post on how systems mapping can help you to build a better ToC (and visualize it)
-    The problem driven iterative adaptation approach (PDIA): A toolkit based on guides and videos
-    How to Monitor and Evaluate an Adaptive Programme: 7 Takeaways
-    What is Political Economy Analysis (PEA) and why does it matter in development?

Resources on system thinking and systems change (complexity-oriented approach)

-    NPC (2018) - Systems change: A Guide to what it is and how to do it
-    NPC (2018) - Thinking Big: How to use theory of change for system change
-    FSG Introduction to system mapping

3.2   Risk analysis

The risk analysis provides opportunities for systematically and explicitly considering LNOB risks, negative interlinkages, and risks associated with MSPs when reflecting about strategic intervention choices and what partnerships to engage in. In particular, it can be an important place, early in the programme cycle, to prioritise risks and identify key trade-offs, and to integrate remedial action in the programme.

Key is to think about risk in two ways:
-    What risks could undermine your intervention's objectives and results? (instrumental view)
-    What risks are produced by your intervention? (substantive view)

As for **negative interlinkages**, you could use the risk analysis to formulate the risk of occurrence of specific negative interlinkages, what the nature and size of the impact would be, and what action can be taken by yourself, by your partners, or by others (e.g. through policy dialogue) to avoid or mitigate negative impact. Existing risk assessment frameworks could easily be adapted to fit this purpose (see examples in section 3.2.2).

> You can find the video summary for this section in the capacity building package on the project website.

Regarding the **LNOB** principle, you can use the risk analysis to reflect on the different ways in which your intervention could actively exclude or fail to reach left behind groups within your target groups, and possibly beyond target groups in your intervention area (see box 3.4). Exclusion might result from an inability to identify and/or reach left behind groups (e.g. street children), from an unwillingness of left behind groups to participate out of fear of stigmatisation or other negative consequences (e.g. HIV patients), or from obstacles to participation created by the implementation strategy itself (e.g. delivery through mobile phone, non-accessibility for wheelchairs).

Box 3.4: Leaving no one behind in fair trade schemes: the risk of excluding farm workers

In the context of agricultural certification programmes, it is important to reflect on how such programmes affect not only smallholder farmers, but also typically vulnerable groups such as migrant workers, seasonal workers, or generally landless labourers – who often face poor working conditions, low wages, and high poverty rates in rural areas. For instance, when agricultural certification programmes (such as Fair Trade) improve the wages and working conditions of farmers, these benefits do not always extend to rural workers – who tend to be the poorest (see e.g. Oya et al., 2018; Meemken et al., 2019).

The risk analysis is a good place to think about the risk of excluding such groups from the benefits of the programme, and how you could avoid or mitigate this risk. An organisation could for instance engage in partnerships to monitor the situation for farm workers, and flag issues to farmer organisations or (local governments).

Finally, in terms of **MSPs**, the risk analysis can be a useful place to reflect on what could go wrong in partnerships and how you will respond to such risks (as MSPs are a means to an end, risks will tend to be more instrumental than substantive here). Examples are the risk of partners pursuing different objectives due to conflicting interests (an attention point when partnering with the private sector), partners not honouring critical commitments (an attention point when programmes depend on particular regulatory or policy change), or ineffective partnerships due to lack of communication or trust.

> The MSP guides presented in section 2.3.1 give extensive guidance on how to deal with the different types of risk associated with MSPs.

Boxes 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7 below use specific examples of Belgian development actors (the bilateral agency Enabel, the NGA Rikolto, and the DFI BIO respectively) to illustrate how the SDG principles can be operationalised in risk analysis and management.

Box 3.5: LNOB in the risk analysis: bilateral country programme for Benin

The current bilateral country programme for Benin (2019-2023) provides a good example of how risk analysis can be used to operationalise the LNOB principle. The programme portfolio's risk analysis lists the various risks related to each intervention, assesses the probability with which they will occur (low, moderate, high), the potential impact on the intervention (low, moderate, high), the strategy that Enabel will use to handle these risks (accept, mitigate, avoid), and what measures will be taken to mitigate the risk if this strategy is chosen.

The Benin programme consists of three interlinked interventions. The first intervention aims to develop the pineapple value chain and agro-business entrepreneurship; the second aims to strengthen the country's main port sector; the third focuses on sexual and reproductive health rights and access to health care, with an important role for digitalization and health data to ensure equitable access to health services.

The risk analysis of the health intervention identifies victims of sexual violence as a group at risk of not being reached due to their fear of stigmatization. Enabel aims to mitigate this risk by collaborating with NGAs and other actors working on sexual violence in the area. Another risk lies in obstacles to accessing the online platforms and applications where health data is stored for adolescents and young adults. The cost of internet access could be such an obstacle. Enabel proposes to deal with this risk by engaging in advocacy work towards the Beninese government through different channels to lower the cost of internet acces.

Box 3.6: Considering interlinkages: Rikolto programme in DR Congo

In its programme for DR Congo, the NGA Rikolto systematically reflects on a number of negative interlinkages, and strategies for avoiding or handling them. The programme provides support to coffee and rice farmers in various ways, including the strengthening of cooperatives, lobby and advocacy work to improve the regulatory environment and business climate, and improving access to inputs and credit.

The risk analysis highlights the presence of important **instrumental** interlinkages between food systems (SDG 2) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) in the context of DR Congo. Political instability in the country for instance, can cause drops in the demand for rice and coffee. The proposed mitigation strategy is to stimulate cooperatives to use effective storing techniques so that stocks can be sold at a later stage. Another risk lies in the failure of governments to implement new labour laws, which after a long period of lobby and advocacy efforts by the cooperatives was extended to include family agriculture. Rikolto aims to rely on existing partnerships to continue previous efforts to strengthen the lobbying and advocacy capacity of the cooperatives (through their umbrella organisations), to keep pressuring the national government through national civil society organisations, the cooperatives, and media, and to request help from the Belgian government.

The programme also recognizes the more **substantive** risk of trade-offs between agriculture (SDG 2) and ecological health (SDGs 13, 14, 15). Rikolto takes action to mitigate this trade-off by promoting agro-ecology and other sustainable agricultural practices.

Box 3.7: Environmental and Social (E&S) Risk Management at BIO

All EDFI members, including BIO, have recently harmonised initiatives to develop systematic E&S Management and Due Diligence (ESDD) policies. BIO is aware of the fact that this ESDD has a more limited scope than Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD), and currently addresses this by requiring certain clients to have a grievance mechanism that can facilitate early indication and prompt remediation. This applies to clients of a higher risk category, or clients for which the ESDD approach based on IFC Performance Standards is deemed not to sufficiently cover a human right in a given investment. BIO also has its own grievance mechanism made available to third parties through their website (BIO, 2021).

BIO is working to further improve their ESDD approach. Through the EDFI platform it is involved in the development of (i) a voluntary Human Rights Guidance Note, and (ii) a broader approach to ESDD through a Contextual Risk Analysis Tool. The tool will serve to identify and understand contextual risk at the country and sector level before specific investment proposals are screened, such as risks related to conflict or corruption. Given that digitalization is a transversal theme for BIO, it might be useful to pay particular attention to contextual risks in terms of access to and control of data. Globally, a lot of capital is flowing to digitalization programmes, but there is a need to ramp up investment in capacity building for data governance, to ensure respect for human rights (e.g. privacy, freedom of expression) by both business and governments (UN, 2014).

Ensuring access to effective remedy is a key part of ESDD (or HRDD), and is especially important for groups that are already vulnerable or marginalized. This requires good grievance management on behalf of BIO and its clients, and BIO is undertaking reflections on how to further improve grievance management and remedy. In light of the accessibility of dialogue-based mechanisms for different types of businesses, including MSMEs, operational-level grievance mechanisms are of particular interest. Many guides are out there; the guide on Understanding and Implementing Human Rights Grievance Management by the Global Compact Network Germany strikes a good balance between practical relevance and strong theoretical foundations, and pays particular attention to the case of SMEs. The Ethical Trade Initiative guide on operational grievance mechanisms discusses case studies of supply chain grievance mechanisms, and offers examples of partnerships with NGOs in grievance management.

3.3   Joint strategic frameworks

The Joint Strategic Frameworks (JSFs) provide an excellent window of opportunity for integrating the SDG principles at the very start of the programme cycle, which can also lay the foundations for developing more 'SDG-proof' individual NGA programmes later on.

Each of the four key elements of the JSF offers entry points for operationalising the SDG principles:

1) The common context analysis
2) The selection of strategic objectives
3) The formulation of learning objectives/trajectories
4) The identification of synergies and complementarities (S&C)

We discuss each of these entry points below. You can find an explanation in video format with additional examples and illustrations in the online capacity building package.

Common context analysis – systematically reflect on LNOB and interlinkages

The common context analysis is intended to be brief, but nevertheless plays an important role as it lays out the building blocks for deciding on strategic objectives and identifying S&C.

> **Key questions** to answer in a common context analysis from an SDG perspective are:
> - What are the big challenges in the country/thematic area?
> - How are they linked to each other? What are important co-benefits and trade-offs?
> - Who is (at risk of) being left behind in these areas?
> - What are important knowledge gaps?

A first important step in answering these questions is to **take stock of what you know**, and sharing this within the JSF network. This knowledge can be based on expertise within your organisation, information obtained from secondary data, existing literature, or external expertise. The SDG index country profiles can be useful to get a first overview of the state of SDGs in a particular country (see box 3.8). Section 1.4 gives an overview of databases that can help you in assessing who is (at risk of) being left behind.

The JSF could be an **open-source, living document** that is continuously updated with data sources and lessons learned on interlinkages and LNOB for a particular country or thematic area. As such, it could be a useful vehicle for sharing information not only among the involved NGAs, but also across programming cycles. Beyond the JSF context, documenting such information on interlinkages and LNOB might also help NGAs in translating the principles to their individual programmes.

To dig deeper into certain aspects of the context analysis, you can rely on the **LNOB and interlinkages analysis tools discussed in Chapters 1 and 2** of this practical guide. The SEI SDG Synergies approach in particular can be useful to collectively identify, clarify and prioritise interlinkages in a specific context. Although the approach assumes the participation of a variety of stakeholders, who is involved (as well as how deep you go in your analysis) can be adjusted to your needs. You might use the SEI approach for instance to bring together participants of various JSFs to reflect on interlinkages across neighbouring country JSFs, or to identify in what ways country-JSFs might be linked to thematic JSFs.

In addition, **system thinking and mapping tools** can be useful to get insight into complex sets of actors and interlinkages (see also section 2.3.1 and pg. 65). An important note here is that system maps are most effective when used as a tool to bring together different types of knowledge, information, or perspectives. That is, they are best used in complement to other approaches (such as a solid context analysis or theory of change – see e.g. this blog).

> This talk on simplifying complexity explains in a simple but enlightening way how 'complex does not mean complicated', and how considering the wider system can help you to better understand and predict change, and find simpler answers to complex issues. "For any problem, the more you zoom out and embrace complexity, the better chances you have of zooming in on the simple details that matter most."

Box 3.8: SDG Index – State of SDGs: which are improving, which are lagging behind?

The SDG Index Dashboard provides data and visual representations of countries' performance on the SDGs, including interactive maps, country profiles, and a user-friendly Data Explorer.

The Country Profiles show countries' specific performance and trends for each of the 17 goals, the overall country-level aggregate SDG index, score ranking, and the respective countries' distance to achieving the SDGs.

Example of SDG index for Rwanda (SDG Index, 2020)

The following series of questions, adapted from the Systemic Design Toolkit, might also help you in **getting a deeper understanding of the system** that underlies a particular development issue or potential strategic objective. They can also help to simply structure and systematise the process of documenting knowledge gaps and formulating learning questions:

- What are the long-term trends affecting the issue?

- What are established ways of doing?
  (how is society currently dealing with the issue? Which rules, social norms, networks, power relations are at play?)

- What are emerging, alternative ways of doing?
  (what are new, innovative ways of dealing with the issue? Have you considered new actors, new technologies, or emerging social norms? Are there important social innovations or local systems that you have overlooked?)

- What are the main leverage points?
  (when imagining the ideal relationship between two actors in the system, such as employers and employees, what factors are critical in moving from the actual relationship to the ideal relationship? These are potential leverage points for change.)

> Both being complexity-oriented tools, systemic design and the actor focused theory of change (ToC) approach have a number of similarities. In both, actors take central stage in your analysis. See section 3.1.1 for more details on the actor focused ToC approach.

Answering these questions through the lens of the SDG principles can also give you hints on how they can be operationalised. For instance, a leverage point might touch on several thematic areas or SDGs (cf. for instance the multiplier effect of education). Similarly, considering the (actual and ideal) relations between vulnerable groups and other actors can help to understand exclusion mechanisms and how to address these.

3.3.2 Taking interlinkages and LNOB along in strategic objectives

In **setting strategic objectives**, there is room to take along both interlinkages and the LNOB principle in different ways. For instance, you could choose objectives where progress is critically important to advance the inclusion of (several) far left behind groups. You could also consider which objectives have the potential to create clear co-benefits for other objectives or SDGs that are lagging far behind in your context. Another way forward that allows you to operationalise both principles simultaneously, is to consider where the interlinkages principle and the LNOB principle might intersect in your context. The following guiding questions can be useful to identify such intersections:

- What co-benefits are the most inclusive (i.e. benefit many people in society) ?

- What co-benefits respond best to the needs of key left behind groups?

- Which trade-offs disproportionately affect already vulnerable groups?

It can also be useful to think about **strategic objectives in terms of cross-sector nexuses** rather than one-sector or one-dimensional objectives. For instance, the conservation of fishery stocks plays a critical role in protecting the livelihoods and food security of many communities, and is an important component of biodiversity conservation and climate action (through e.g. carbon storage). An SDG-inspired strategic objective might then focus on the nexus 'development of sustainable food security and livelihoods through sustainable fisheries', paying attention to the co-benefits *and* potential trade-offs between these goals, and to potential effects on vulnerable groups across these sectors (e.g. effects of banning unsustainable fishing practices on the poorest). Box 3.9 below uses another example to highlight the great potential of recognising and acting on interlinkages across sectors to lift societies out of mutually reinforcing negative interactions (or "nexus syndromes").

Box 3.9: Acting on the nexus of agricultural productivity, land degradation, poverty reduction, and climate change in China

China's efforts to promote agricultural productivity by curbing soil erosion unleashed a whole range of co-benefits for other SDGs. Stopping activities resulting in soil erosion and improving agricultural structures such as terraces resulted in higher yields and boosted livelihoods for many people. Higher carbon storage in the soil, along with more trees and grassland, help to mitigate climate change, and additional benefits included less silting in the Yellow River and less airborne dust in Beijing.

Source: Nilsson (2016: 11)

Looking at strategic objectives through a nexus lens might be useful to promote an **institutionalisation of more systemic approaches**, where you not only consider how other sectors influence your efforts, but look at your own objectives and programmes from the perspective of other sectors as well.

3.3.3 From analysis to (collective) learning: SDG-inspired learning trajectories

The analytical exercises discussed above might provide ideas on how to operationalise LNOB and interlinkages, but they might also give rise to questions for which you have no (clear) answer yet. The evaluation of past programmes can also point to issues in planning or implementation that are not yet fully understood. Such questions might be why certain groups were not reached, what partnerships could mitigate trade-offs or help to leverage co-benefits, or what the precise mechanism was behind an unexpected negative interlinkage.

As collective learning is an important objective of the JSF, the process of building a JSF is a good entry point for identifying strategic knowledge gaps related to the three SDG principles, and to set out (collective) learning trajectories to address these gaps. Such learning trajectories can lay the foundations for operationalising the SDG principles in important ways. They could for instance serve to learn about important interlinkages between the strategic objectives of country-JSFs and (new) thematic JSFs, or to better understand cross-country dynamics of poverty and exclusion (e.g. in the area of climate change and agriculture).

3.3.4 From analysis to SDG-inspired partnerships

Finally, the interlinkages and LNOB principles can provide a lens through which you can search for synergies and complementarities. Once you understand key interlinkages within and between different strategic objectives, it might become clearer which organisations could support you in leveraging co-benefits or mitigating trade-offs. Similarly, understanding the causes of exclusion and vulnerability, also in areas outside of your area of expertise, can help you to figure out what organisations might be able to complement your work, so as to tackle exclusion and vulnerability on several fronts simultaneously. Finally, beyond the JSF context, reflections on interlinkages and LNOB can offer good starting points for thinking about what MSPs could be useful at later stage.

> Section 2.3.2 offers several examples of the power of partnerships to leverage co-benefits, mitigate trade-offs, combat exclusion, and more generally boost your impact on the SDGs.

3.4 The instruction letter (process)

We see opportunities for operationalising the SDG framework and its principles throughout the instruction letter process, shown schematically in Fig. 3.4. Each step is discussed in more detail below, and the project website offers a [video summary](#) of this section as part of the [capacity building package.](#) The SDG Proofing tool for instruction letters in Appendix 7 summarizes key guiding questions and possible tools for different steps of the process.
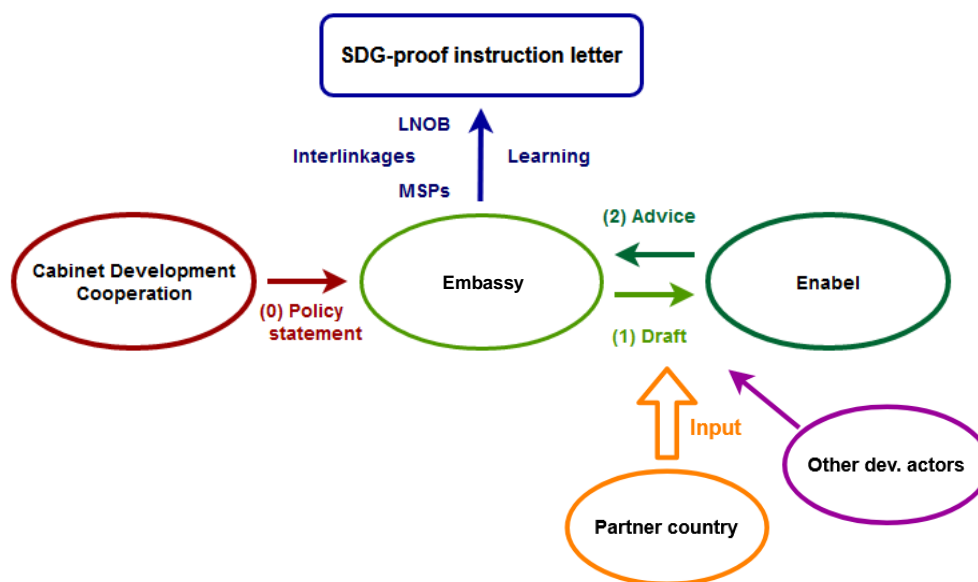
Step 0: policy statement on Belgian development cooperation

Key attention point: focus on identifying priority problems rather than priority solutions

The policy statement on Belgian development cooperation provides the starting point of the instruction letter process and gives direction to the subsequent process by formulating general priorities for Belgian development cooperation. At the same time, the SDG Agenda involves tackling complex problems that take many different forms and need to be addressed in different ways

depending on local context. It also recognises that development can only be sustainable when it is locally owned. The challenge for an SDG-proof policy statement is thus to give direction, while at the same time allowing for sufficient flexibility and room for adaptation so that priorities can be translated into local solutions for local problems – by those who understand the local context.

Figure 3.4   Schematic representation of the instruction letter process

One strategy that can help to do so is to focus on identifying priority *problems* rather than priority *solutions*. By framing priorities as solutions, you skip ahead of the creative process by which different types of solutions can be considered for particular problems (and new, innovative solutions may be thought of) (Center for International Development, 2020). In addition, putting forward solutions reduces the scope for taking along partner country views on how to address a given problem, and what 'sub-problems' need to be prioritised. This in turn creates less room for translating the policy statement to different country contexts in a relevant way.

Some 'solutions' have a clear and immediate connection to an underlying problem, as they are rather objectives than solutions. This is the case for e.g. gender equality or decent work (gender *in*equality or *in*decent work are the problems we wish to fundamentally address). This is less the case for a solution like digitalisation, which is rather a means of addressing more fundamental issues. By prioritising this type of solution, you run the risk of imposing means or strategies that are inefficient, ineffective, or even counterproductive in addressing key development issues in a particular context.

Finding the priority problems

A practical way of testing whether a priority is more a solution than a problem, is by asking the question 'why does it matter?' until you arrive at the core problem that merits addressing in and of itself. For digitalisation, this question will probably lead to a set of answers, such as poor-quality services due to limited accountability, lack of data to inform policies, or limited economic growth due to limited innovation. If it is difficult to arrive at a single core issue this way, the question arises whether the proposed priority (e.g. digitalisation) is a suitable priority for guiding development programmes across a variety of countries (see also the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation toolkit of the Center for International Development, 2018).

3.4.1 Preparation of instruction letter

Overarching: the importance of dialogue with local partners

The embassies face the task of translating the Belgian policy statement to the partner country context. According to the current management contract for Enabel, this step should take into account the comparative advantages of Belgium's bilateral development cooperation, lessons learned from past programs, and partner country priorities. Yet, to arrive at an SDG-proof instruction letter process, there is a need to move beyond a mere consideration of partner country priorities, and move towards **meaningful political and policy dialogue with local partners**, including importantly the **partner country government**, as an essential part of the process.

There are several reasons for this. **First**, **local ownership** of development processes is central to the SDG agenda, and crucial for realising development that is sustainable. **Second**, even when both countries subscribe to Agenda 2030, **priorities might differ**, in which case dialogue is essential to find agreement and alignment. When local context makes alignment difficult – as might be the case for fragile states for instance – the involvement of NGAs at this stage will offer complementary or alternative ways of taking along the priorities of Belgium's policy statement. **Third**, given limited time and resources, **building on existing knowledge** and past work of local partners as much as possible will be more cost-effective. **Fourth**, the complexity of the SDG agenda requires **systemic approaches**, which inherently involve a consideration of the multiplicity of actors and their knowledge/perspectives to gain a good understanding of the system and of systemic change.

> Through its Local Systems framework, USAID (2014) similarly argues that only by engaging with local systems you get the synergies that enable 'locally owned, locally led, and locally sustained development'. The framework sets out 10 principles for engaging local systems, and describes how USAID will apply these in its work.

To truly apply a systemic approach to Belgium's (bilateral) development cooperation, system thinking needs to be applied from the start of the development cycle. This also means that **a variety of actors need to be involved in the preparation of the instruction letter**. Although participatory approaches with meaningful dialogue can require a fair share of time and resources, and therefore might appear costly in the short term, in the longer run it can lead the way to a **far more robust and cost-efficient approach** to sustainable development cooperation (Weitz et al., 2019).

Below we delve deeper into the different steps of the instruction letter process, discussing tools that can support the operationalisation of the SDG principles in more detail. Throughout the discussion, we return to the potential added value of systemic approaches involving multiple actors.

Step 1: draft instruction letter for Enabel

The context analysis carried out in preparation of the instruction letter provides an important window of opportunity to bring in contextualised information on interlinkages and LNOB. Although the embassies are in the driver's seat in this step, the involvement of local partners and other development actors where possible (e.g. Belgian NGAs, local NGOs, national human rights institutions, private sector organisations, universities) will benefit both local ownership and the quality of the analyses.

To support a systemic and problem-driven approach, we recommend to start with an **interlinkages analysis** that departs from reflections on the key sustainable development issues in the country. Key guiding questions are:

- What are the main sustainable development issues or challenges in the country? To what SDGs are they linked? Which are progressing, which are lagging behind or deteriorating?

- How are the different SDGs/issues connected to each other?

- What transformative or complex change is needed to address these issues?

Taking **key development issues as a starting point** rather than the priorities set out by the Belgian policy statement does not mean that the latter are disregarded. Rather, it invites you to take a step back and look at the whole picture, to get a more systemic understanding of how different issues, thematic areas, sectors, and actors are connected, *before* zooming in on priority areas.

> System thinking and mapping tools can be useful for this type of exercises, to deal with the complexities of 'wicked' sustainable development issues. Section 3.3.1 discusses some system tools in the context of Joint Strategic Frameworks, which can be adapted to serve the instruction letter process. Section 2.3.1 discusses system mapping tools, which can help you to get a handle on complex sets of information by visualizing them. Mapping also facilitates the integration of multiple perspectives. See also this talk on simplifying complexity, which explains how considering the wider system can help you to better understand and predict change, and find simpler answers to complex issues.

What tools?
The SDG index website provides country profiles that can give you a good **first idea of** which **SDGs** are progressing and which are lagging behind (or deteriorating) in a particular country.

To **map and understand interlinkages** at this stage, the overview table of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) (see pg. 34) can guide you in a general 'macro-level' exploration of the most important interlinkages for particular SDGs. This information can be cross-checked with the IGES Interlinkages tool (see pg. 35) for the particular country context (if information for your country is available). Country-specific studies on interlinkages can also be consulted, if available.[6] If country-specific information is not available, an alternative is to cross-check the information with the JRC Interlinkages tool (see pg. 37).

Importantly, such initial findings from secondary sources should be discussed with local partners, such as ministries, Enabel, and NGAs, to make sure that they are relevant for the given context (different tools might also lead to different findings). Ideally, you bring these different actors together in multi-stakeholder participatory discussions to obtain and integrate the different sets of expertise and perspectives. The SEI SDG Synergies approach discussed in section 2.2 (pg. 39) is a good tool to support such undertakings.

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6 Useful search terms to find such studies are: SDGs + interactions, interconnectedness, interconnections, indivisibility, integration, interlinkages.

Some selection or **prioritisation** will be necessary in any interlinkages analysis, as many SDGs are interlinked with each other in many ways, and taking all these into account is not practical or feasible. Such prioritisation can be based on the overall '**strength**' of the interlinkage, on links with **Belgian or partner country priorities** (see box 3.10), on the **comparative advantages** of Belgian development cooperation, or on **lessons learned** from past programmes.

Box 3.10: What interlinkages to consider when working on SDG 2 ?

If key development issues in your country relate to agriculture and food security (SDG 2), the 2019 GSDR table suggests that the most important interlinkages in terms of strength might arise for SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 6, and SDG 15 (see Fig. 3.5). For SDG 1 and 3 we expect mostly synergies, while interlinkages with SDG 6 and SDG 15 can involve trade-offs as well. When partner country priorities also involve access to energy, it would be important to consider the interlinkages with SDG 7 as well. If the Belgian policy statement prioritizes climate action, you could take along SDG 13 in a deeper interlinkages analysis as well.

Figure 3.5   Interlinkages between SDG 2 and other SDGs according to the 2019 GSDR (UN, 2019)
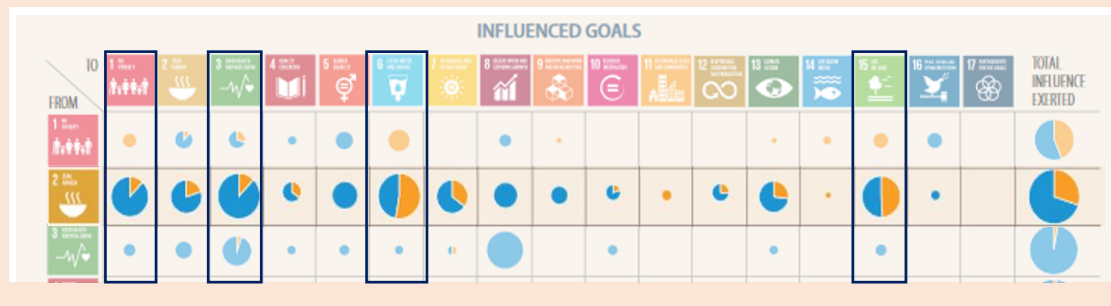
In a next step, you can start exploring **interlinkages at the target level** for the selected set of SDGs, and investigate where there are **important specific co-benefits and trade-offs** in the partner country context that could inform the formulation of general objectives. As the analysis becomes more specific, building on the knowledge of local partners becomes all the more important.

What tools?
The [IGES tool](#) and [JRC tool](#) allow you to explore interlinkages at the target level (see pg. 35-38). Thematic studies on specific SDGs often also look at target-level interlinkages.

The [SEI SDG Synergies](#) tool (pg. 39) offers an approach that enables you to conduct an interlinkages analysis at the level of SDG targets in a participatory, multi-stakeholder way. This type of approach offers several advantages, as well as clear opportunities to operationalise the LNOB and MSP principles.

In terms of **efficiency and effectiveness**, it presents important opportunities to pool resources, data, and expertise, to improve the quality of the analysis and to avoid duplication of efforts later on by individual organisations. In addition, such an exercise could provide valuable information not only for the country strategy and bilateral portfolio, but also for non-governmental actors working in Benin who might not have the resources to conduct this type of contextualised analyses themselves.

In terms of **MSPs**, this approach can lay the foundations for cross-sectoral MSPs by promoting dialogue between different types of stakeholders across sectors; create a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities; and identify common interests (Weitz et al., 2019: 2).

The **LNOB** principle could be operationalised by involving (the representatives of) marginalised and vulnerable groups, thereby building opportunities for active and meaningful participation in decision-making from the start of the development cycle. Such perspectives can also provide essential information to complement national statistics – especially if the quality of these data is imperfect and there is little disaggregation. However, this last principle is likely also the most difficult to implement in practical terms. Box 3.11 discusses some considerations and possible answers.

Box 3.11: Participatory interlinkages analysis - How?

If possible, it can be extremely valuable to organise a multi-stakeholder session to apply the SEI SDG synergies approach. Several tools exist to gather and integrate the perspectives of different types of stakeholders on a particular question in accessible ways. Simple methods such as asking participants to draw their answer to particular questions (e.g. how would higher smallholder incomes affect the availability of decent jobs?) with the [Rich Picture tool](#) or on sticky notes (see e.g. the ['draw toast' method](#)) might be sufficient to stimulate valuable discussions.

An important question for such exercises is **what actors to involve**. Having both technical and theoretical expertise (e.g. local NGOs and universities) will be useful to guide discussions and challenge viewpoints. A second point is who *can* be involved. This will depend on existing relations and networks. For instance, it might not always be feasible or desirable to simultaneously involve local government partners and vulnerable or marginalized groups (e.g. for ethnic or religious minorities, or LGBTQIA+ groups). In such cases, you could organise different sessions (possibly facilitated by different organisations), or gather the perspectives of particular groups in other ways (see also Step 2 below).

When the choice of actors has been made, it is also important to **plan and manage** such multi-actor sessions well, so that each of the participants is able and willing to express their opinions and concerns. If it is unlikely that certain groups will actively participate, for instance because the setting or process is too unfamiliar for them, it is important to adapt the modalities of the exercise, or again find different ways to gather these perspectives.

Next step: LNOB analysis

The LNOB analysis at this stage could aim to answer the following **key questions**:

- What groups are (far) left behind in the country?
- Why are they left behind? What important exclusion mechanisms exist in the country?

Again, it might be necessary to set boundaries to this analysis (especially when time and resources are limited). To continue the systemic approach initiated in the previous step while setting such boundaries, you might consider focussing on the key development issues, the priorities as identified by Belgium and the partner country, and important interlinked SDGs.

What tools?

Sections 1.3 and 1.4 offer a number of LNOB frameworks, analytical tools, and data sources that can help you in analysing LNOB questions. The idea is not to duplicate existing work, but to reflect systematically and pool information on what groups are far left behind for the set of SDGs identified as important. Documenting existing knowledge (field expertise, country-specific studies, data initiatives, etc.) would be an important and useful part of such LNOB analysis – as well as documenting gaps in knowledge and information (see also Step 2 below).

> The Institutional Diagnostics project might be a useful source of information on institutions, socio-political context, and political economy, which can play an important part in exclusion mechanisms. The diagnostics study has so far been done for Benin, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Bangladesh.

Step 2: advice from Enabel

In this step we see room for integrating more contextualised and detailed **input and feedback from the field** on the potential interlinkages (co-benefits and trade-offs), exclusion mechanisms, and other LNOB considerations identified in the analysis above.

Enabel's own staff can provide key input through **lessons learned** from past programmes, which could be based on findings from (participatory) monitoring and evaluation processes or action research. It might be useful to consider whether the institutionalisation of learning tools and approaches at Enabel can be aligned in some way with the instruction letter process to maximally take along lessons learned in future programming cycles. Giving particular attention to interlinkages and LNOB considerations in learning efforts would be an important contribution to operationalising these principles.

Embedding learning in the instruction letter process not only involves taking along lessons learned, but also reflecting on what you do not know (but should know). **Identifying knowledge gaps** can be a crucial element in establishing learning cycles. Such learning questions could be highlighted in the context analysis of the instruction letter and translated later on in specific learning trajectories embedded in country programmes. This also emphasizes the fact that it is not possible to get a full understanding of interlinkages and LNOB-related issues (exclusion mechanisms, poverty dynamics,…) in the process of the instruction letter; rather this process should be extended and deepened, becoming more and more detailed and contextualised through the formulation of country strategies and programmes, and throughout implementation via learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation and adaptive management (see also section 3.1).

Enabel is also well placed to **include the perspectives of left behind groups** in this step of the instruction letter process. This could be done either through direct consultations of left behind groups or their representative organisations (if these relationships are there); by drawing from the findings of participatory monitoring and evaluation activities in which vulnerable groups were

involved; or through partnerships and networks with Belgian and local NGAs or public institutions that know how to reach these groups.

> **Dividing the work**
>
> In case of limited capacities or time for analysis, a more pragmatic approach could involve:
>
> - The embassies focusing on interlinkages analysis in step 1
> - Enabel focusing on LNOB analysis in step 2 (which can start before step 1 is finalised)
> - Jointly integrating the two analyses and deriving implications for the instruction letter

3.4.2 Towards an SDG-proof instruction letter

To summarize, the final instruction letter has the opportunity to operationalise the interlinkages and LNOB principle (and to some extent the MSP principle) by:

- Documenting the results of the interlinkages and LNOB analysis in the context analysis

- Documenting important knowledge gaps that can inform specific learning trajectories – in particular when related to interlinkages or LNOB

- Relying on this information to formulate general objectives or priorities

> **From analysis to SDG-inspired general objectives or priorities?**
>
> To fully take along interlinkages, general objectives could be formulated as nexuses rather than one-dimensional objectives. If the analysis identified specific SDGs as being interlinked with various priorities, you have a clear candidate for such a nexus (see also section 3.3.2 on JSFs).
>
> If certain groups are far left behind on several interlinked or priority SDGs, this provides a strong argument for including them as priority groups.
>
> If certain far left behind groups are likely to suffer a big part of the burden of negative interlinkages, it will be important (from an LNOB perspective) to take this along into the formulation of general objectives. Similarly, co-benefits could be prioritised based on LNOB considerations – for instance when they also benefit very marginalised or vulnerable groups.

3.5 Results frameworks and indicators

The SDG agenda is a global agenda. It represents first and foremost a call to governments worldwide to break away from practices of "growing first and cleaning up later", and deliberately put their countries on a trajectory to sustainable socio-environmental-economic systems (UN, 2019: 136).

> You can find the video summary of section 3.5 along with additional supporting video material in the online capacity building package.

This global perspective is naturally reflected in the indicators of the SDG framework. Many refer explicitly to national policies (e.g. 2.b.1 Agricultural export subsidies) and processes (e.g. 12.5.1 National recycling rate); to aggregate measures, such as all indicators expressed in terms of GDP; or to international dynamics, as is the case for all indicators expressed in terms of official development

assistance. Some targets and indicators explicitly measure changes at the global level, such as those related to the number of countries taking a certain action (e.g. 14.2.1 Number of countries using ecosystem-based approaches to managing marine areas).

We recommend not to use the SDG indicators as a results framework for the sector for several reasons:

- Many of the SDG indicators are impact-oriented**,** and can therefore be difficult to relate to the **intermediate outcomes and processes** that individual organisations realise through their programmes. For instance, target 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) requires transparent, inclusive, and effective local institutions, which is reflected in the SDG indicators. Yet, steps forward in the processes necessary to build such institutions, such as strengthening civil society, empowering rights holders, and building capacities of duty bearers, cannot necessarily be tracked with these indicators. In addition, the LNOB principle itself involves a call to focus not only on action that has a large impact or benefits the highest number of people, but also on action that benefits small left behind groups – who might not be included in aggregate measures and national statistics to begin with (see section 1.4).

- A large part of the development sector consists of NGAs who do not operate at a national scale and **do not have the resources and capacities** to have (and show) a significant impact on the SDG indicators as such.

- Development efforts will often **contribute to the SDG goals in highly contextualised ways**. Direct contributions through interventions thus need to be monitored and evaluated through highly contextualised indicators, rather than aggregate measures and national- or regional-level statistics.

- Actors often also **contribute indirectly to positive change** through their influence on other stakeholders (e.g. local governments or civil society). Such influence can produce cascade effects that the actors themselves cannot necessarily monitor and evaluate, and these indirect effects are difficult to capture through SDG indicators – although they do contribute to changes that promote the SDGs.

- **Data on the SDG indicators is often simply not available** at the disaggregated level at which many actors operate, and actors will often not have the resources and capacities to collect such data themselves.

This does not mean that the targets are irrelevant; **SDG indicators can be usefully integrated or adapted** to support monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Linking programmes and interventions to the SDG framework can be valuable for development actors in two main ways. First, it can support arguments for the **relevance of the programmes**, as well as the relevance of the indicators used to monitor and evaluate activities, by linking them to a global agenda. Second, assessing to what extent results frameworks link up with the SDG framework can inform organisations on where they stand and what opportunities there are for (further) integrating the SDG agenda into their programmes (through the lens of the underlying principles). By acknowledging such links, you can **make contributions to the SDG agenda explicit.**

This section therefore discusses two ways to integrate the SDGs in your results frameworks: **operationalising the SDG principles** through your results frameworks, and **incorporating the SDG targets and/or indicators** in your results framework. The first approach will generally be more suitable for NGAs, while the second approach will be most relevant for the bilateral

cooperation channel. Both approaches can of course also be applied simultaneously by any actor wishing and able to do so.

3.5.1 Using the SDG principles in your results frameworks

As explained above, it is often not practical nor useful to impose SDG target indicators onto development programmes and to expect them to monitor such indicators. The strong contextual nature of any development programme and its often limited influence on national development processes, especially in the case of NGA programmes, makes the SDG indicators not very helpful to learn about a programme's results and to inform adaptive programme management. However, a review of current development programmes (both NGAs and bilateral) shows that there can be an added value in aligning or linking a programme's results framework with the SDG principle and in some cases with SDG target indicators that are relevant for specific programmes.

First, developing a results framework with contextual indicators that takes into consideration the SDG principles can help to strengthen the relevance of those indicators (e.g. indicators specifically related to LNOB, or indicators that relate to the effects of remedial action to address potential trade-offs. Second, integrating the SDG targets within theories of change (possibly at a higher impact or goal level) can help development programmes to more specifically explain how their interventions are seeking to contribute towards specific SDGs through the various levels within their theories of change. So while a programme may not monitor or evaluate its results at the higher impact levels within their theories of change, it will be able to explain how results at lower outcome or impact levels relate to these higher impact levels linked to specific SDGs.

Boxes 3.12, 3.13, and 3.14 below provide some examples of programmes putting this into practice.

Box 3.12: Considering LNOB in the development education programme of DBA

The NGA DBA has taken several steps to make its activities more accessible for youth from a less advantaged socio-economic background. To that effect, DBA is focusing specifically on schools where there is a larger proportion of this target group. In addition, it is also reorienting its activities from international immersion excursions towards intercultural exchange activities with young immigrants or members from the diaspora in Belgium. To measure its reach towards this particular target group DBA included the following indicator into its results framework: *% des participants issus d'écoles à indice socio-économique faible ou moyen et au moyen.*

Box 3.13: Dealing with interlinkages in the agricultural programme of Rikolto

In its programme for DR Congo on strengthening coffee and rice cooperatives, the NGA Rikolto identifies environmental health as a transversal theme. The interlinkages implied by this transversal theme are operationalized through several actions to strengthen sustainable agriculture, such as the promotion of agroforestry and agro-ecology or the development of sustainable waste and water management. Rikolto monitors and evaluates these activities and their results through self-constructed indices that capture different aspects of sustainable agriculture: soil conservation, resource management, climate change mitigation, biodiversity, and landscape management.

Table 3.1   Link between outcome indicator and SDG targets and indicators for WSM, IIAV, BIS program

Outcome indicator WSM, IIAV, BIS	Impact indicator WSM, IIAV, BIS	SDG target indicator	SDG goal and targets
Les réseaux zonal/continental et nationaux mènent des actions politiques auprès d'instances nationales et continentales en faveur du Droit à la Protection Sociale au bénéfice potentiel des travailleurs/euses informels vulnérables et formels précaires:	- Le nombre de travailleurs/euses additionnels des groupes cibles des OSC partenaires qui ont obtenu un nouvel emploi plus digne, ou qui ont amélioré leur emploi existant, grâce aux appuis en formation professionnelle, aux initiatives productives d'économie sociale et solidaire organisés par les partenaires, et à l'assistance juridique - Le nombre de personnes additionnelles des groupes cibles qui bénéficient d'un mécanisme/système de protection sociale (public, communautaire-Mutuelles). - Nombre de projets/propositions de lois et de règlementations légales présentés à des instances législatives locales, ou nationales en faveur du droit à la protection sociale au bénéfice potentiel des travailleurs/euses. De ces propositions, celles qui ont été promulgués/adoptées dans un sens favorable pour les groupes cibles.	10.1.1 Growth rates of household expenditure or income per capita among the bottom 40 per cent of the population and the total population 10.2.1 Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries 10.1 By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average 10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

3.5.2   Using the SDG indicators in your results frameworks

Enabel has **aligned its results framework with the SDG framework** by incorporating SDG targets and indicators at two levels: **development results** to which Belgian ODA contributes (impact and

outcome level) and **development cooperation results** to which Enabel contributes directly or which are attributed to Enabel interventions (outcomes and outputs). The latter case resulted in a list of standard indicators for development cooperation results used agency-wide. In some cases, SDG indicators were exactly integrated; in other cases, SDG indicators were adjusted to enable yearly measurement, focusing on target areas or target populations, and the creation of contextualised indicators for individual interventions (e.g. looking at absolute numbers rather than proportions).

We have replicated this exercise by matching the indicators of Enabel's results frameworks for the Benin and Rwanda country programmes to the SDG framework (indicators or targets). The aim is to illustrate how the results framework of a (bilateral country) programme can be linked to SDG indicators and what can be learned from this exercise. In the following paragraphs, we summarize our findings. We distinguish between several 'types' or 'degrees' of links, and illustrate implications and considerations for each of these with specific examples.

Exact or close match with SDG indicator

Some intervention indicators have a **(near) exact match** with an SDG indicator. **Examples** from the Benin programme are the *reduction in maternal mortality rate,* the *number of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) using modern family planning methods*, and *area under sustainable pineapple cultivation,* or the *increase in pineapple yield in the Benin programme.* For the Rwanda health programme, the only exact match is "*Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods*" (SDG indicator 3.7.1).

Other programme indicators are a **close match**. An **example** for the Rwanda programme is "*Percentage of women aged 18-49 who have ever experienced sexual violence (at province level)*", which combines SDG indicator 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 (making no distinction between violence by partners or non-partners).

For the Benin programme, an **example** is *area under sustainable pineapple cultivation,* which is close to SDG indicator 2.4.1 but measures the area rather than proportion. This difference highlights one of the issues discussed above: the SDG framework, given it global nature, naturally focuses on proportions, as these are better suited to monitor relevant change. At the intervention level, however, organisations often need to adapt these indicators to be fit for purpose, expressing them in absolute terms.[7]

Although differences here are minor, the exercise of linking programme indicators to SDG indicators can be useful to spark internal reflections on 'why certain things are measured this way', and whether M&E can be improved by adjusting indicators. When **adjustments for measurement purposes** make the programme indicators diverge considerably from SDG indicators, organisations can still make explicit links with SDG indicators (as we have done here). We discuss this option further in the next 'type' of link.

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7 There are two main reasons. First, in certain contexts it can be difficult or costly to obtain the necessary data to calculate proportions (e.g. total area under pineapple cultivation). Large informal economies and limited or unreliable national statistics are common reasons for the unavailability of aggregate information. Second, organisations might not operate at a scale that allows targets and results to be defined in terms of proportions. If the expected result of the intervention is very small compared to the aggregate, proportions will not be suitable to capture relevant changes.

Partial match with SDG indicator or clear link to SDG target

- **Missing specification or essential criterion**
  Some intervention indicators are closely related, but do not fully match an SDG indicator because a **level of disaggregation is missing**.

  An **example** from the case of Benin is the *average net income of pineapple producers*, which is related to SDG indicator 2.3.2 (Average income of *small-scale* food producers), but not a full match as the intervention indicator is not disaggregated by size. If all targeted producers are small-scale, the results framework could indicate this to strengthen the relevance of the indicator. If not, Enabel could reflect on the costs and benefits of disaggregating this indicator by producer size. This disaggregation could also allow Enabel to assess whether their intervention is reaching small-scale producers (equally, more, or less than large-scale), and what the **LNOB implications** are. Similar considerations apply to the intervention indicator *Number of businesses having access to financial and non-financial services*, and SDG indicator 9.3.2 (Proportion of *small-scale* industries with a loan or line of credit).

  Intervention indicators might also have no link with an SDG indicator because they **miss a component or criterion that is essential to the target or goal.**

  Examples for Benin are *growth in pineapple production (tons)* and *area converted to pineapple cultivation* cannot be directly linked to any indicator of SDG 2, because they lack a component on sustainability or productivity. Yet, both are key features of SDG 2, given the important negative trade-offs between agriculture and biodiversity conservation, responsible resource use, and climate change. They are taken into account to some extent in the Benin programme through other indicators (area under sustainable pineapple cultivation and pineapple yield), but not here

  This might point to **opportunities for further taking into account negative interlinkages** between agriculture and environmental health. One possibility would be to disaggregate all indicators related to pineapple production, processing, and trade by type of production (conventional versus sustainable), so that overall growth in the pineapple value chain can be tracked as well as the share of sustainable cultivation throughout the value chain. This approach would also allow Enabel to better evaluate how their interventions are affecting the importance of sustainable production throughout the value chain.

- **Outcome-level indicators**
  In various cases, the intervention indicators cannot be linked to an SDG indicator because they are **designed to monitor intervention outcomes**. These outcomes are often highly contextualised and too specific to be linked to a particular SDG indicator, but nonetheless clearly contribute to progress on specific targets. By **linking your indicator to an SDG *target***, you can demonstrate this solid connection with the SDG Agenda without relying on indicators as such.

  Examples from the bilateral Benin programme are the indicators related to the functionality and performance of clusters and producer organisations; the indicators related to the functionality and performance of the provided health services and health information (through digital platforms); or the *number of sexual violence victims having received care (medical or psychosocial).* For the Rwanda programme, the outcome indicator "*obstetrical complication case fatality rate*" clearly is part of progress on indicator 3.1.1 (the maternal mortality ratio).

No link with SDG indicator or SDG target

Finally, in some cases there may be no clear link with an SDG indicator or SDG target. An **example** from the Benin bilateral programme: *Share of the pineapple sector in GDP – growth rate* reflects the goal to increase the importance of the pineapple sector in particular (or in a looser interpretation of agriculture) in the country's economy. There is no sustainable development indicator, target, or goal, that describes such an objective. Unless a convincing argument can be made that the pineapple sector can promote sustainable and productive food systems or sustainable economic growth more than other (agricultural) sectors, there is no clear link with SDG 2 or SDG 8. This type of cases might stimulate reflections on **opportunities to revise and adjust** intervention indicators – and possibly objectives, priorities, or implementation strategies of the programme – so as to increase their relevance towards the SDG framework.

In conclusion, as explained at the start of this section, there may be clear reasons why programme indicators differ from SDG indicators or targets, including measurement issues and data availability; contextualisation of outcome indicators; and alignment with partner country priorities and frameworks. Nevertheless, reflecting on how the programme's results framework relates to the SDG indicators and targets can be useful to:

- reflect on indicator and measurement choices, and the motivations behind them;

- identify opportunities for further SDG-proofing your results framework (or programme).

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appendix 1 LNOB - additional specific or thematic tools

This appendix presents a non-exhaustive list of more specific or thematic tools that can guide organisations in operationalising LNOB.

We start with a number of tools specifically related to the links between the **LNOB principle and human rights.** As discussed above (see section 1.1), the human rights based approach (HRBA) provides a valuable methodology for translating the vision of LNOB into action. Table A1.1, taken from a UNSDG (2019) interim guide on LNOB, explains in more detail how the HRBA relates to the LNOB principle. Below we discuss a number of specific guides and other tools that can support you in operationalising LNOB through a HRBA.

We then present a number of other more thematic tools to support the operationalisation of LNOB.

Table A1.1   Commonalities and complementarities between HRBA and LNOB (UNSDG, 2019)

COMPLEMENTARITIES

HRBA	LNOB
HRBA is a **programming tool** intended to strengthen the quality and focus of UN responses to national priorities. It is normatively based on international human rights standards and principles and operationally directed to promoting human rights.	Addressing inequalities is central to the 2030 Agenda. LNOB is a **guiding principle** of the 2030 Agenda, which is itself explicitly grounded in international law, including human rights.
HRBA is based on human rights obligations that countries have committed to and have a **legal obligation** to fulfil. Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law, including all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, labour rights and the right to development.	LNOB is a **political commitment** that Sstates committed to when they signed on to the SDG Agenda.
HRBA has a clear three- step process for the analysis and assessment stage of programming that identifies who is left behind and why: causality analysis, role analysis, and capacity gap analysis.	LNOB deepens focus on the inequalities, including multiple forms of deprivation, disadvantage and discrimination, and "reaching the furthest behind first". HRBA brings to the LNOB a rigorous methodology for identifying who is left behind and why, looking at root causes.

Both require a **disaggregated data** to identify who is "left behind" and why, and to determine whether development interventions are reaching these groups and addressing the gaps.

The human rights principles **of Non-Discrimination** and **Equality** are key elements of a HRBA and LNOB approach. Both require proactive measures to address inequalities, reaching the furthest behind first.

In both, addressing gender inequalities is a priority

HRBA	LNOB
HRBA focuses on empowerment of "**right holders**" to claim their rights and empower them as active partners in development, ensure their voice in the process; and mobilize, etc. HRBA also focuses on capacity development of "**duty-bearers**" to meet their obligations.	Methodology of HRBA brings to LNOB a focus on rights, empowerment, meaningful participation and capacity development.

Under both, free, active and meaningful **participation** is promoted throughout the entire planning and programming process.

Under HRBA, the international human rights mechanisms can provide a valuable opportunity for strengthening the accountability of Government to address marginalization and inequality.

Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) - SDGs and Human Rights

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧖   *Can be used throughout the entire programme cycle*

⊙   https://www.humanrights.dk/our-work/sdgs-human-rights

The DIHR has dedicated a part of their website to the link between the SDG framework and human rights. The result is an online reservoir of resources and tools, including reports, guides, and datasets, that can be used for analysis, planning and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs using HRBA.

Two tools of particular interest are the Human Rights Guide to SDGs, and the SDG-Human Rights Data Explorer.

The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs is an online interactive guide that shows users the linkages between human rights and the SDGs by listing and describing all relevant human rights instruments for each specific SDG target. Instruments can have an international, regional, or country-specific scope, and range from declarations on all or specific human rights, to conventions on the human rights of particular groups such as children, to protocols and frameworks regarding specific themes such as labour standards and environmental matters. Fig. A1.1 below shows an excerpt from the guide for the first target of SDG 4 on quality education.

The SDG-Human Rights Data Explorer is a searchable database that links specific recommendations and observations of international human rights monitoring bodies to SDG goals and targets. It allows broad searches – for instance by country or SDG goal – as well as highly specific searches by specifying SDG target, period, and particular rights-holder group (e.g. LGBTI, indigenous peoples, children).

The data explorer tool can help development actors to select which vulnerable or excluded groups and which SDG-related thematic areas to prioritise (e.g. in bilateral country programmes); to identify important exclusion mechanisms and ways to address these (e.g. for LNOB integration in interventions); and to empower beneficiaries to hold duty bearers accountable for the inclusivity of programmes implementing the SDGs (e.g. in capacity building work). For instance, in the absence of data or capacities to conduct extensive thorough LNOB analyses, the recommendations and observations of international human rights bodies can serve as a motivation for targeting specific left behind groups, or can guide an assessment of whether the intervention takes into account the voices of marginalised groups. Finally, the Data Explorer can also help actors in identifying important interlinkages between SDGs in their thematic or geographic area, as recommendations and observations are often linked to several SDG goals and targets (see Fig. A1.2 and A1.3).

Figure A1.1   Human Rights Guide to SDGs - Human rights instruments related to SDG target 4.1 (DIHR, 2020)

Goal	Target	Instrument	Article / Description
4 QUALITY EDUCATION Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.	4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. **Indicators** 4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex	**UDHR** Universal Declaration of Human Rights	**26.1** Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
			26.2 Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
		ICESCR International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	**13.1** The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Figure A1.2   **Data Explorer – human rights recommendations across SDGs for DR Congo (DIHR, 2020)**
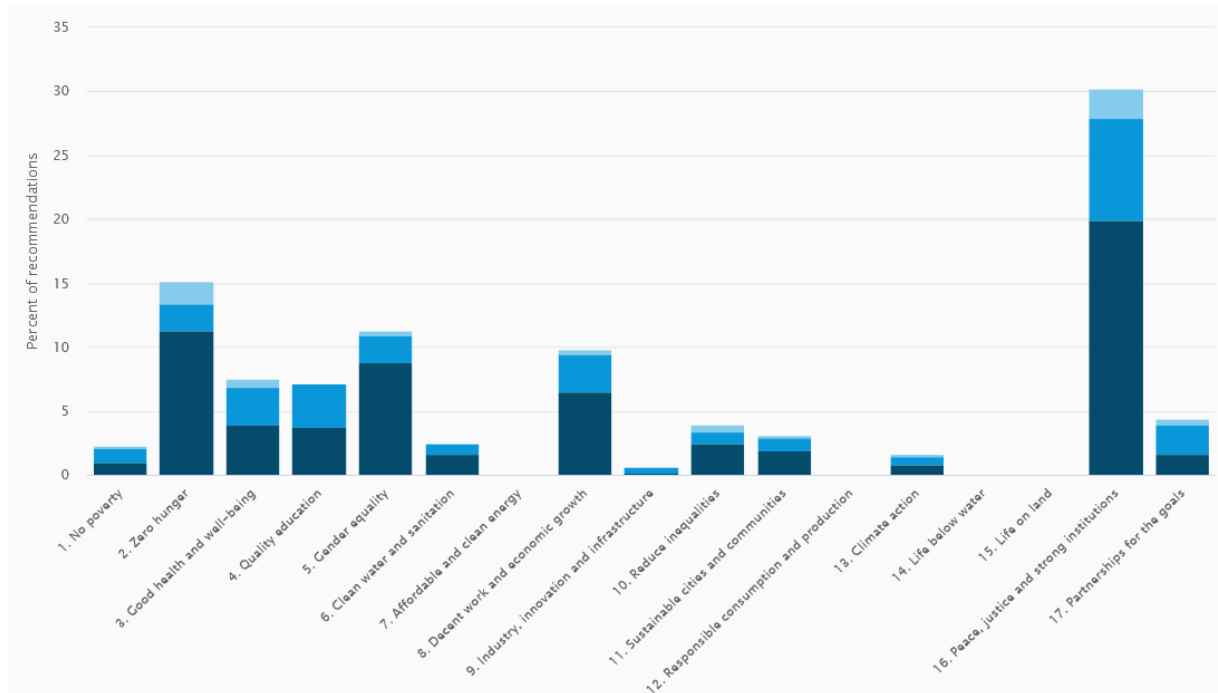

Figure A1.3   **Data Explorer – excerpt for Rwanda and SDG 8 (DIHR, 2020)**

Rwanda

37. The Committee recommends that the State party vigorously prosecute and punish the exploitation of child labour. It also recommends that the State party strengthen the capacity of labour inspectors to monitor workplaces, including in private households, and publish information on such inspections and on the sanctions imposed in order to discourage labour exploitation, especially that of children. It further recommends that the State party: (a) Provide families living in poverty with adequate social protection and create income generating opportunities for them; (b) Design and implement awareness-raising campaigns targeted at domestic workers and families living in poverty, informing them about their rights and the dangers associated with domestic work; (c) Ensure access by domestic workers to legal aid and complaint mechanisms and provide them with adequate victim protection and support, as well as with access to exit schemes.

10.4   16.2   16.3   8.7   8.8

Children

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
Recommendation
2017
Source: CEDAW/C/RWA/CO/7-9
|37|

Rwanda

43. The Committee draws the State party's attention to general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women and recommends that the State party: (a) Ensure that rural women, as well as local authorities, mediation committee members (abunzi) and judicial officers, are made sufficiently aware of women's rights under the Convention and the new legislation regarding women's rights to land; (b) Ensure that rural women engaged in unpaid work or in the informal sector have access to non-contributory social protection schemes in line with general recommendation No. 16 (1991) on unpaid women workers in rural and urban family enterprises, and that those employed in the formal sector have access to contributory social security benefits in their own right, irrespective of their marital status; (c) Protect the occupational health and safety of rural women from hazardous situations; (d) Provide rural women with access to adult literacy programmes and establish poverty eradication programmes specifically targeted at women.

1.2   1.3   1.4   10.4   2.3   4.6   8.8

Women and girls

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
Recommendation
2017
Source: CEDAW/C/RWA/CO/7-9
|43|

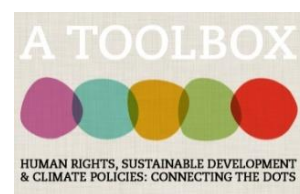| **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) - Human Rights Briefs** |
|---|

- ⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*
- ⧖   *Can be used throughout the entire programme cycle*
- ⊙   https://www.sida.se/en/for-partners/methods-materials/human-rights-based-approach

The SIDA has developed a robust HRBA, and offers several materials and toolboxes on its website that help you to operationalise LNOB through a HRBA. You can find among others thematic briefs that provide guidance on how to apply a HRBA to programmes in various thematic areas, such as education and skill development, peace building, or sustainable rural livelihoods systems. SIDA has also developed briefs that provide basic information on the situation of persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, and children in different countries and regions. These are good sources of basic information to start a context analysis.

| **Franciscans International - Toolbox Human Rights, Sustainable development, and Climate policies** |
|---|

- ⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*
- ⧖   *Can be used throughout the entire programme cycle*
- ⊙   https://franciscansinternational.org/fileadmin/media/2018/Global/Publications/FI-Toolbox_WEB4.pdf

Franciscans International has created a toolbox to help actors in taking an integrated and coherent human rights-based approach to policies and programmes in the area of sustainable development and climate policies. The toolbox maps and compares international instruments and monitoring and advocacy mechanisms that can help to respect and promote human rights at the local and national level, and provides highly

practical information (e.g. government reporting schedules, where to submit information, links to human rights bodies and relevant institutions) to help stakeholders make use of available protection and monitoring instruments.

The toolbox emphasizes the interlinkages between human rights, climate change, poverty eradication, and sustainable development throughout, and gives an overview of which mechanisms are dealing with what topics, where mechanisms overlap (both practically and thematically), and where there is potential for collaboration and coordination. Finally, it explores new initiatives and challenges, discusses opportunities to improve coherence and gives practical information on how human rights can be systematically integrated in (civil society) programmes.

| **Partos – Practical guide on LNOB in economic development** |
|---|

- ⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*
- ⧖   *Can be used throughout the programme cycle*
- ⊙   https://ngo.acodev.be/nl/system/files/node/572/partos_leave_no_one_behind_practicalguide.pdf

This guide draws on the practical and organisational experiences of Partos and its member NGAs to offer practical guidance on how to leave no one behind in economic development, and in particular on how to include ultra-poor and marginalised groups.

The first chapter starts by highlighting the importance of including the poorest and most marginalised, and explores the causes, dynamics, and costs of exclusion (see Fig. A1.4 on the causes and dynamics of stigmatisation). The second chapter presents good practices and lessons learned about the inclusion of marginalised groups in different kinds of economic development initiatives,

with inspirational examples. The third chapter delves more specifically into lessons learned with respect to programme planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Figure A1.4   The causes and dynamics of stigma (Partos, 2015)
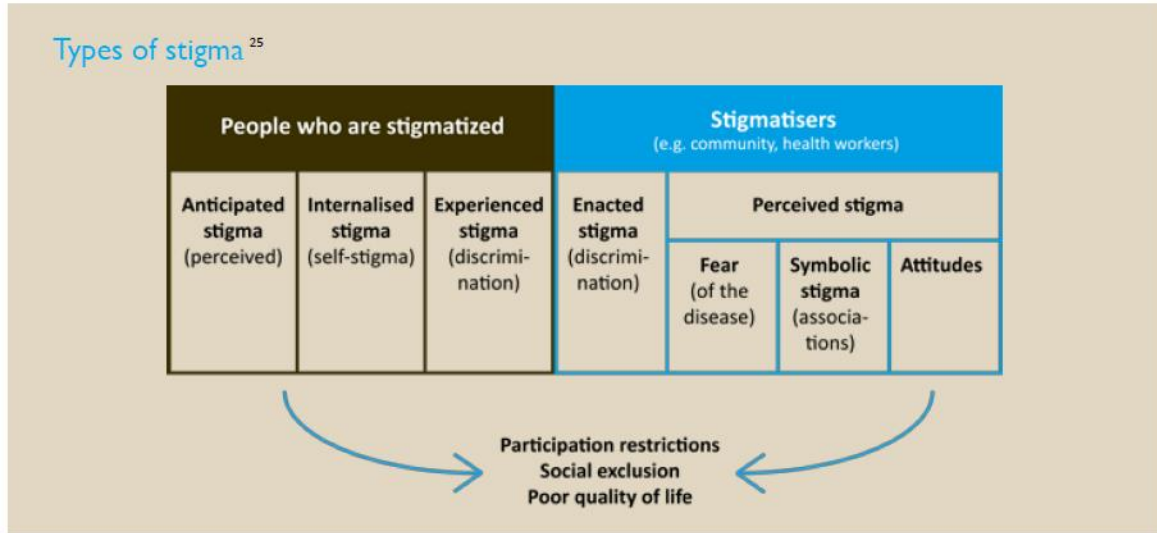
CBM - Disability Inclusive Development Toolkit

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⌛   *Context analysis and formulation of programmes*

⊙   https://www.cbm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/CBM-DID-TOOLKIT-accessible.pdf

CBM has created an elaborate document on inclusive development, with a focus on the inclusion of disabled groups. The document offers an extensive discussion of the concept of disability, digs into the particular challenges and complexities of disability-inclusive development, and provides detailed guidance on how to realise disability-inclusive development in the different stages of the programme cycle. It has been designed as a resource that can be tailored to the needs of particular organisations and that can be added to as the international community grows in experience and new materials become available.

Save the children – LNOB briefing 'realizing the pledge to leave no one behind'

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⌛   *Can be used throughout the programme cycle*

⊙   https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/realising-pledge-leave-no-one-behind

This brief provides guidance on how the international community can take action to implement the LNOB pledge. It sets out the implications of this pledge for policy and practice, and outlines concrete steps (act, align, account) that must be taken to realise the pledge.

See also the organisation's report on Tracking children's progress against the pledge to Leave No One Behind.

⚕   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧖   *Context analysis and formulation of programmes*

⊙   https://www.savethechildren.net/grid

The GRID is another visualised database developed by Save the Children that offers data on critical child outcomes disaggregated by wealth, gender, and location. In particular, the database presents current states, trends, and projections for group-based inequalities at the national level and globally, as well as sub-national inequalities, intersecting inequalities, and specific information on equitable access to services within particular countries.

The database is visualised through two dashboards, which offer a practical, quick, and visually attractive way of understanding inequalities for key SDG indicators between different groups of children, both within a specific country context and across countries (see Fig. A1.5). The global dashboard, in addition to the information on group-based inequalities, also offers 'LNOB maps' that give overviews of the state of affairs in terms of LNOB and inclusive progress across countries (e.g. are all groups on track to reach the SDG?; are gaps between different groups closing?). The country dashboard offers more detailed information within a particular country context. Another useful feature is that both dashboards allow to easily look at the data in table format and find the sources for the data.

**Figure A1.5   GRID - excerpt for under-five mortality in DR Congo**
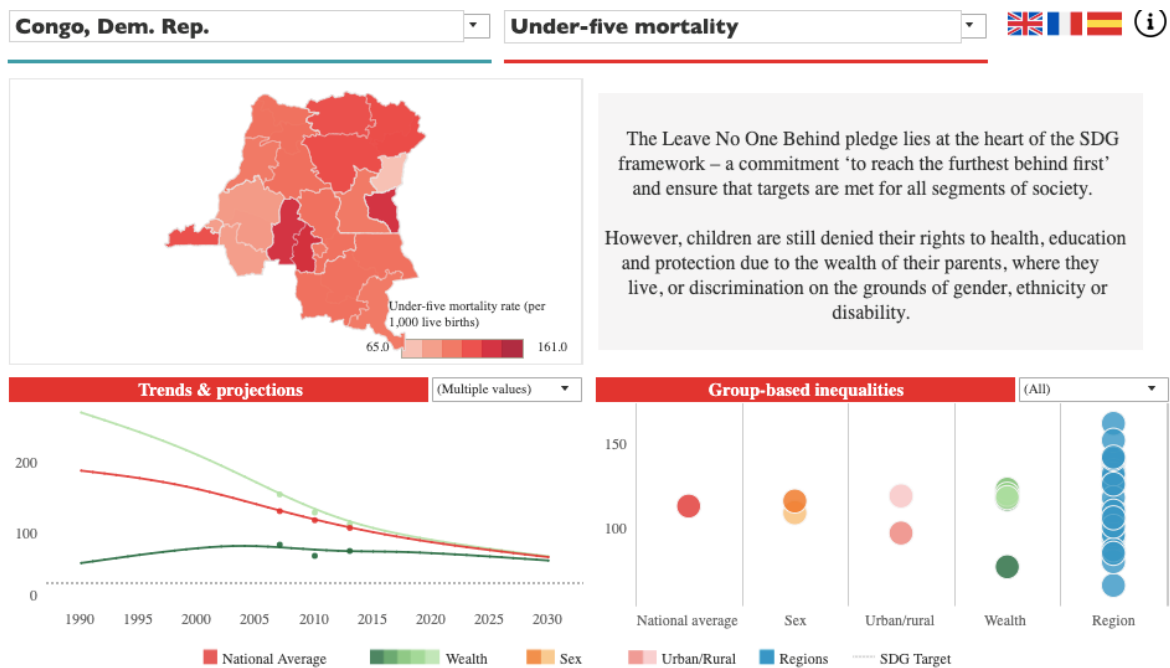
World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE)
⚲	*All governmental and non-governmental development actors*
⧗	*Context analysis and formulation of programmes*
⊙	https://www.education-inequalities.org/

The WIDE is a database that offers detailed information on inequalities in education across and within countries and accessible visualisation functionalities. The database includes information on an extensive set of education indicators, which can be disaggregating by wealth, gender, ethnicity, religion, region, and location, and offers attractive visualisations of the gaps between different groups and how they compare to national averages (see Fig. A1.6).

Figure A1.6   WIDE – excerpt for education access and completion indicators in Benin
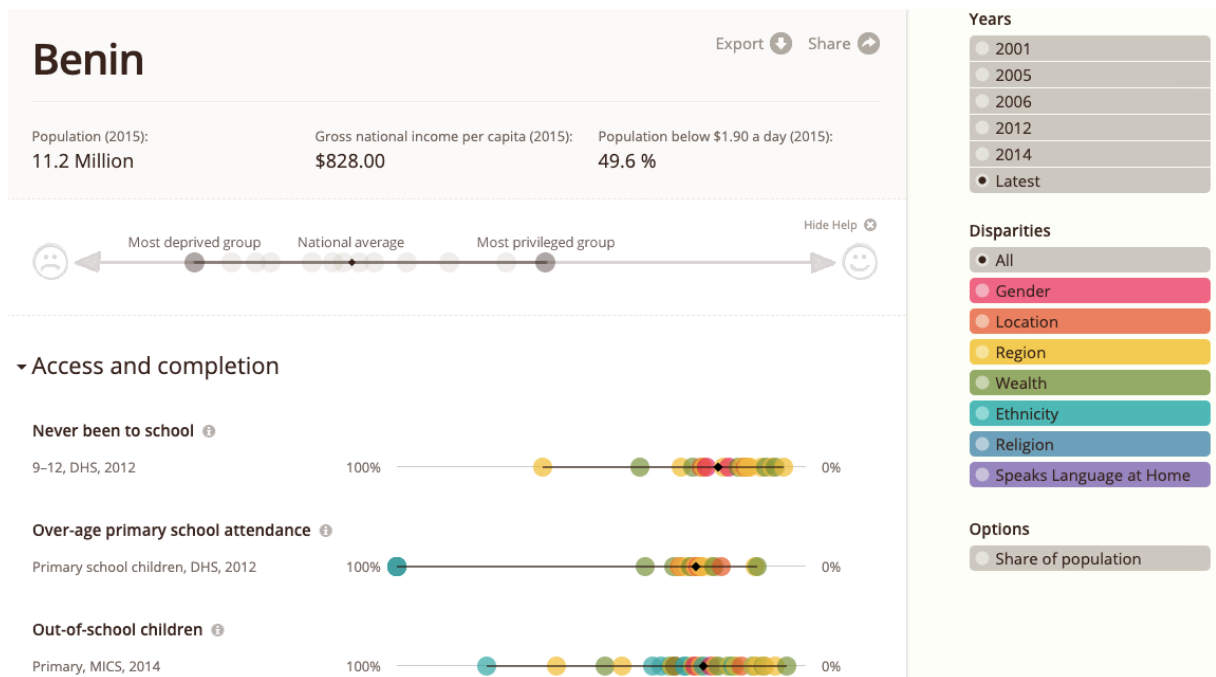
UNICEF - Leaving no one behind guidance on filling data gaps for children
⚲	*All governmental and non-governmental development actors*
⧗	*Context (analysis) and formulation of programmes*
⊙	https://data.unicef.org/resources/resource-type/datasets/

This webpage of UNICEF contains several sources related to leaving no one behind in the context of children, including guidance on using administrative data for children, how to collect different types of data on children and adolescents, and how children experience poverty. It also includes links to several external databases such as the WHO Global Database on Child Growth and Malnutrition, where you can find country-level data disaggregated by gender and residence (urban-rural).

♀   *Primarily governmental actors (especially those active in the health sector)*

⌛   *During implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programmes for adaptive management*

☉   https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250442/9789241511391-eng.pdf?ua=1

This technical WHO handbook is a living document that is intended to support the review of national health programmes in light of LNOB. It presents an 8-step approach (see Fig.A1.7) for operationalising LNOB in health programmes that is primarily targeted at national health programmers, but can be useful to whomever is looking for a step-wise approach to evaluating existing programmes in light of leaving no one behind.

The WHO has also developed a a software application that facilitates the assessment of within-country health inequalities.

Figure A1.7   8 step approach to LNOB (WHO, 2016)
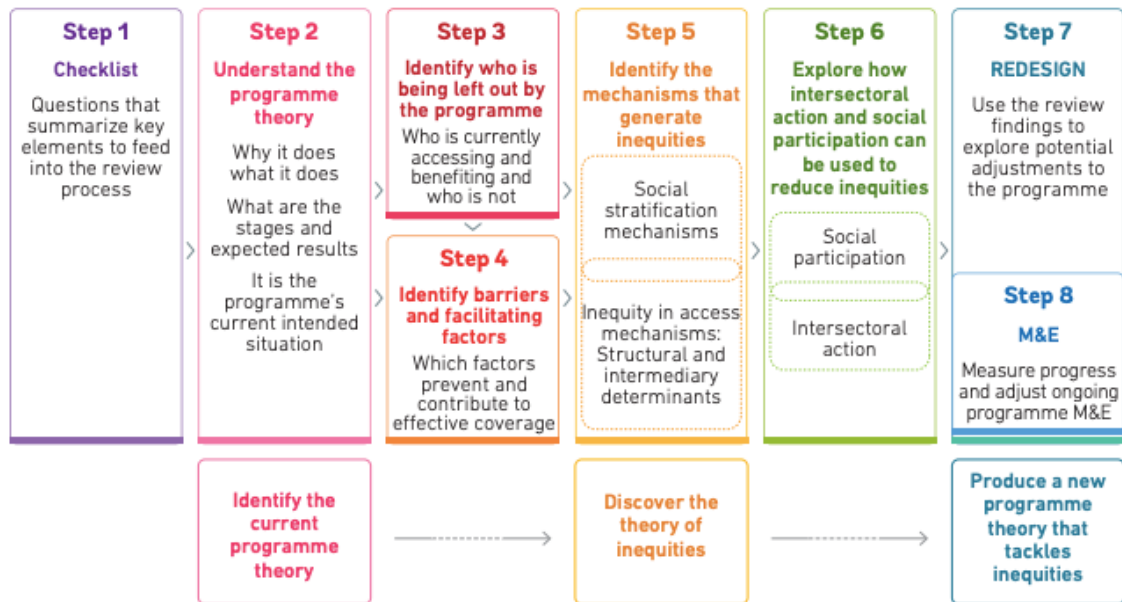
Work of international organisations on LNOB

☿ *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⌛ *Various stages of programming cycle depending on source*

United Nations	UNESCO (2019), The United Nations World Water Development Report 2019: Leaving No One Behind. UNSDG (2019), Leaving No One Behind: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams. Interim Draft.
Overseas Development institute (ODI)	ODI (2019), 'Leave No One Behind' index 2019. Briefing Paper. ODI (2019), Leave No One Behind in Practice: Migration. ODI (2019), Leave No One Behind: Various Resources and Latest Publications.
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	OECD (2019), International Conference on Addressing the Hidden Dimensions of Poverty, 10 May 2019. OECD (2018), Development Co-Operation Report: Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind. Video statement by Ida Mc Donnell, Senior Policy Analyst and Team Lead Development Co-operation Report, OECD. OECD (2018), Development Co-Operation Report: Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind/OCDE (2018), Coopération pour le développement: Agir ensemble pour n'oublier personne
Geneva Academy (Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights)	Geneva Academy (2018), No One Will Be Left Behind: The Role of United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms in Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals that Seek to Realize Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Academy Briefing N°11, Christophe Golay.
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH	GIZ (2020), Poverty-Inequality. Dedicated website on poverty, inequality and leave no one behind. GIZ (2020), Leave No One Behind. Guidelines for Project Planners and Practitioners. GIZ (2017), The 2030 Agenda: How is it Being Implemented at GIZ.
Overseas Development Institute (ODI)	ODI & GIZ, Implementing the commitment to leaving no one behind in cities

# appendix 2 Interlinkages - additional thematic tools

This appendix presents a non-exhaustive list of thematic tools that can guide organisations in operationalising the interlinkages principle within particular thematic areas.

The Financial Times – The Value of Knowledge: The Multiplier Effect

⚲   *Actors working on education*

⧖   *Context (analysis) and formulation of programmes*

☉   https://valueofknowledge.ft.com/other/infographic/

The Financial Times hosts a user-friendly interactive infographic that maps the positive interlinkages from SDG 4 to other SDGs. By clicking on the arrows or SDGs, you can find summarizing explanations behind the positive links, along with illustrative real-world examples and links to case studies and other sources for further reading. Fig. A2.1 shows the information you get on the links between education and life on land when clicking on SDG 15. The website also gives you access to an article on the multiplier effects of education.

Figure A2.1   Value of Knowledge website: infographic for interlinkages between SDGs 4 and 15
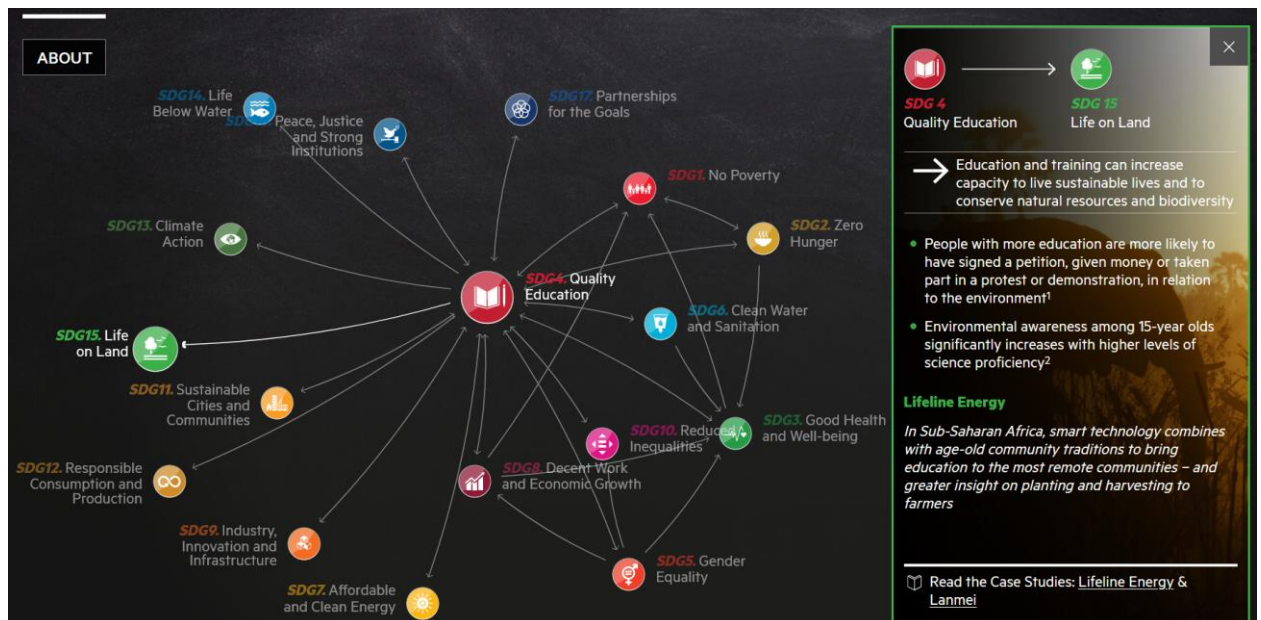
Shulla et al. (2020) - Sustainable development education in the context of the 2030 Agenda

⚲   *Actors working on (sustainable development) education*

⧗   *Context (analysis), formulation of programmes, risk analysis*

☉   (not freely accessible)

One study has applied the Nilsson scoring tool to explore the interlinkages between sustainable development education (part of target 4.7),and other goals and targets in the context of global multi-stakeholder networks of Expertise Centres (Shulla et al., 2020). Fig. A2.2 below shows an extract from a table of the study that summarizes the scoring of different interlinkages and provides explanations for the scores, which might serve as inspiration for your own interlinkages analysis.

Figure A2.2   Extract of interlinkages scoring analysis for sustainable development education (Shulla et al., 2020)

Table 3. Explanations behind the scoring for the influence of the Target 4.7 (column) towards the 27 targets (rows) as displayed in the matrix in Figure 2.

Targets 4.7	Targets	Target Description	Evaluation (−3-3 points)	Explanation
4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through Education for Sustainable Development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development".	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	2	RCEs partners are often farms or small enterprises related to food production. Several RCEs work with indigenous communities and women. It does not obtain the maximal points due to other factors such assess to the resources.
	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	2	RCEs focus on traditional knowledge for food production systems and agricultural practices. They contribute to increase awareness through working with communities.
	3.7	By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes	3	The Targets are positively interrelated through the education component. RCEs contribute to awareness raising and information sharing about the issues of Target 3.7, with schools and communities. Furthermore, RCEs can work on reflecting these issues into school curricula, as one of their objectives is to influence and orient school curricula toward sustainability.
	3.d	Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks	3	The RCEs make considerable contributions in influencing policies and increasing capacity strengthening related to the health issues.
	4.3	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university	2	RCE work is focused on different levels of education, including vocational training. But the access of women and men also depend on other factors.

SDGs Knowledge Platform – Climate and SDG synergies knowledge platform

⚲   *Actors working on health and well-being*

⧗   *Context (analysis) and formulation of programmes*

☉   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/climate-sdgs-synergies2019#home

The Sustainable Development Goals knowledge platform collects resources specifically on the synergies between climate action and the SDGs, such as background papers and specific studies on 'Advancing on monitoring and evaluation for adaptation in the agriculture sectors' and on climate and a just transition to green jobs.

Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition – Diet quality and SDGs

⚲   *Actors working on food systems*

⧗   *Context (analysis) and formulation of programmes*

☉   https://www.glopan.org/SDG

The Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems has published a policy brief "Healthy diets for all: A key to meeting the SDGs" that argues for the central role of high-quality diets and nutrition in achieving the 2030 Agenda. The brief also includes an infographic that discusses the positive interlinkages between diet quality and all other SDGs, and can provide inspiration or a starting point for your own contextualised analyses of interlinkages when you work on SDG 2.

⚲   *Actors working on health and well-being*
⌛   *Context (analysis) and formulation of programmes*
☉   https://www.who.int/mediacentre/commentaries/2016/health-sustainable-goals/en/

The WHO has created an infographic that can provide organisations working on health and wellbeing with inspiration on positive interlinkages with other SDGs (see Fig. A2.3). The link above directs you to a webpage with further resources on how the WHO aims to contribute to the 2030 Agenda through health.

Figure A2.3   WHO Infographic: Health in the SDG era (WHO, 2021)

appendix 3 MSPs – tools for partnering with business

This appendix presents a non-exhaustive list of tools that offer guidance and support for organisations wanting to engage in partnerships with the private sector for sustainable development.

TPI - Practical Roadmap to systematically engage business as a partner in development

ⵀ   *Mostly governmental development actors*

⧗   *(Context) Analysis, formulation and implementation of programmes, monitoring*

⊙   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/climate-sdgs-synergies2019#homehttps://www.thepartneringinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Unleashing-the-Power-of-Business_Roadmap_full_forweb.pdf

The Partnering Initiative (TPI) (Prescott and Stibbe, 2015) has created a practical roadmap to engaging the private sector in sustainable development. The roadmap starts by discussing the context for engaging with the private sector (including the motivations for involving business in sustainable development), where business can have the greatest added value, and important barriers to engaging businesses. The key contribution of interest however lies in the recommended five essential areas for action (see Fig. A3.1). The report describes these areas for action, as well as the different roles that governments, development agencies, business organisations, and civil society can play in each area for action in very detailed, practical terms. The report illustrates all this with real-life examples of effective partnerships.

Figure A3.1   Action areas for systematically engaging the private sector for sustainable development

Action area 1: Create greater understanding of the role that business can play in development through partnership, and build trust between sectors

Action area 2: Define a country's development priorities through open and transparent multi-stakeholder processes, and map the priorities against the resources and interests of business

Action area 3: Create multi-stakeholder platforms to drive partnership action in-country and engage business more systematically

Action area 4: Ensure the highest standards of partnership implementation, and measure and disseminate results

Action area 5: Strengthen institutional capacity for partnering

⚲   *All development actors*

⧗   *(Context) Analysis, formulation and implementation of programmes, monitoring*

⊙   https://thepartneringinitiative.org/tools-partnering-for-inclusive-business/

The TPI website also offers a number of tools specifically for partnering for inclusive business, including a tool designed for use in the scoping and building phase of the partnering cycle that helps to identify where and how business can be engaged as a partner in development. Fig. A3.2 provides an extract of a table that illustrates the different roles that business can play as a partner.

Figure A3.2   Different potential roles of business in partnerships for sustainable development

Business role	Impact on Agenda 2030	Which companies and why?	Role of development partnerships
1. Business doing business Business doing business responsibly, inclusively and sustainably	Creates and sustains livelihoods; reduces poverty; generates taxes; delivers essential products and services efficiently and affordably; catalyses technological innovation; reduces reliance on imports and/or brings in essential foreign currency through exports;	All that are operating responsibly, inclusively and sustainably. **Why**: To deliver long term business value.	Donors, development banks and governments working with business to improve competitiveness and the business environment, support economic growth / private sector development, and run responsible business initiatives. Government can additionally regulate to level the playing field and drive out irresponsible / unsustainable business. Partnerships to support the development of the circular economy.
5. Inclusive business 1: People Companies deliberately targeting the underprivileged as suppliers / employees / distributors E.g. Coca-Cola's engagement of underprivileged people as distributors through the village entrepreneur model	Improved human opportunities and livelihoods for the underprivileged	Companies with operations or suppliers in a country. **Why**: Delivering core business in a shared value approach.	Donors providing funding or technical support to new inclusive business opportunities; NGOs, UN providing technical support and capacity building; government supporting through tax breaks, capacity building etc.
6. Inclusive business 2: Products Companies / social entrepreneurs providing pro-poor or pro-environment products and services E.g. micro-banking, low-cost access to water, solar powered lights	Technological innovation and market-based approaches that can contribute to any development goal	Companies with existing markets or those wishing to create new markets. **Why**: Building new products / markets.	NGOs providing technical advice, access to communities, support; donors providing funding through challenge funds etc.
7. Value chain sustainability / market transformation	Improved human, economic and environmental	Companies involved in the specific value chain / market.	Requires a range of partners acting collectively, e.g. capacity building from NGOs, technical support from

appendix 4 UN resources on SDGs

This appendix presents a non-exhaustive list of useful UN resources on SDGs.

UNSTATS - SDG Website

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧗   *Context analysis and formulation of programmes*

⊙   https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/

The UN Statistics Division has created an SDG website that offers a variety of tools that development actors can use to get a good handle on the goals, targets, and indicators of the SDG agenda. It includes the final Global indicator framework of the 2030 Agenda, which can be useful if you want to link theories of change or results frameworks to the SDG targets or indicators. The website also includes a database with geospatially referenced data per goal, which you can visually explore, use to build maps and conduct analyses, and easily download in different formats.

SDG Good practices website

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧗   *Throughout programming cycle*

⊙   https://sdgs.un.org/sdg-good-practices

This website offers several resources that summarize information on good practices regarding SDG implementation around the world, and includes a link to the SDG good practices dashboard that allows you to search for successful SDG-related initiatives on a geographical map.

SDG Partnerships Platform

⚲   *All governmental and non-governmental development actors*

⧗   *Throughout programming cycle*

⊙   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/

The Partnerships for SDGs online platform is a global registry of voluntary commitments and MSPs that facilitate global engagement of all stakeholders in support of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. You can find more information on the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator Initiative here, as well as more illustrative examples and resources on partnerships for the SDGs.

appendix 5 Linking programme indicators to the SDG indicator framework for two interventions of the Enabel Benin programme

Panel A: Global objectives of the program		
Programme indicator	**SDG Indicator**	**SDG Goal/Target**
Share of pineapple sector in GDP – growth rate		
Number of decent jobs created (full-time equivalent, disaggregated by sex and age)	8.5.2. Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value
Reduction in maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 new-borns)	3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio	3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births
Reduction in infant mortality rate (in institutions, per 1,000)	3.2.1 Under-5 mortality rate & 3.2.2 Neonatal mortality rate	3.2 By 2030, end preventable deaths of new-borns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births
Average age at first pregnancy	3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group	3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes

Panel B: Intervention 1 - Support development of pineapple value chain (VC) and agro-business entrepreneurship		
Programme indicator	**SDG Indicator**	**SDG Goal/Target**
Average net income and gross margin of: - pineapple producers (per Ha) - pineapple processors (per ton) - fresh pineapple traders (per ton) (disaggregated by sex and age)	2.3.2 Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status (8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of employees, by sex, age, occupation and persons with disabilities)	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
Increase in pineapple yield (tons/Ha)	2.3.1 Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size	
- Cluster functionality - Functionality of producer organisations (POs) - Performance of PO federations	⟶	IF evidence that clusters and producer organisations can promote agricultural productivity and incomes of food producers
Area under sustainable pineapple production (Ha)	2.4.1 Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture	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
Improvements in economic incentives: - more favourable fiscal policy - reduction in non-tariff trade barriers		2.b Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round 17.10 Promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organisation, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda
- Growth in pineapple production (tons) - Area converted to pineapple cultivation (Ha) - Processing capacity in pineapple VC - Export growth to different markets		8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries

Panel B: Intervention 1 - Support development of pineapple value chain (VC) and agro-business entrepreneurship		
Programme indicator	**SDG Indicator**	**SDG Goal/Target**
- Number of actors involved in functional clusters[8] - Share of producers engaged in futures contracts - Share of producer-*aggrégateur* contracts respected - Functionality of clusters - Functionality of producer organisations (POs) - Performance of PO federations - Number of innovations supported that improve performance and job creation along VC	? 8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of employees, by sex, age, occupation and persons with disabilities (2.3.2 Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status) ? IF evidence that clusters and POs can promote formal employment and incomes	8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services 8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value IF evidence that clusters and POs can promote productive (agricultural) activities, entrepreneurship, and job creation
Roads opening up area for pineapple cultivation (km)		9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all
- Increase in outstanding loans to pineapple VC - Reduction in interest rates - Number of businesses having access to financial and non-financial services	9.3.2 Proportion of small-scale industries with a loan or line of credit	9.3 Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets

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8   The programme portfolio defines a cluster as a business model based on contractual and equitable relationships between (1) a downstream operator (processor, wholesaler) linked to the market and (2) producer organisations.

Panel C: Intervention 3 - Promoting rights and access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH)/Digitisation and use of health data		
Programme indicator	**SDG Indicator**	**SDG Goal/Target**
- Number of maternal deaths in health facilities - Share of health facilities having qualified staff and technical platforms to deliver emergency obstetric and neonatal care	3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio & 3.2.2 Neonatal mortality rate	3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births 3.2 By 2030, end preventable deaths of new-borns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births
Number of sexual violence victims having received care (medical or psychosocial)		3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes
Number of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) using modern family planning methods	3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods	
- User satisfaction vis-à-vis SRH services - Number of adolescents and youth having benefited from SRH service package - Share of adolescents and youth with good knowledge of SRH rights - Accuracy of health data - Satisfaction of decision-makers (at all levels) regarding their needs for sanitary information - Number of trimestral users of digital platform for sharing health information with general public - Number of trimestral users of documentation centre - Inventory of documented and validated innovations		3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

appendix 6 SDG proofing tool for programmes

The table below presents a number of key guiding questions that you can rely on to make your programmes and interventions more 'SDG proof'. It is not a prescriptive list of questions to answer or actions to take. Its aim rather is:

(1) To guide you in reflecting more systematically and explicitly on the extent to which you have integrated the SDG principles in your programming cycle, and

(2) To help you find opportunities or entry points for a stronger integration of these principles.

Some questions are relevant or useful for all organisations; others are not. The tool should therefore **not be seen or used as a checklist for evaluating programmes** ('the more questions are answered, the better the programme'), but as an overview of what different types of organisations *can* do to strengthen SDG integration.

We have organised the key questions per SDG principle and along different stages of the programming cycle. In practice, the distinction between these different stages is of course not so clear-cut. The tool should therefore be applied in a more integrated way, in accordance with the overarching principles of integrated planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (PMEL) and adaptive management.

Similarly, there are many overlaps and links between the three SDG principles. Hence, you should not deal with the guiding questions in a sequential way within programming stages (e.g. first LNOB, then interlinkages, then MSPs), but rather consider the questions across principles in an integrated way as well. For instance, to get a solid understanding of the system in which you work, you need to reflect on the relevant actors and their relationships – and this is also an important part of analysing whether an MSP canbe useful. In the same vein, to get a good understanding of who is left behind and why, you need to consider the links between different root causes of exclusion (intersecting factors).

The table with guiding questions is accompanied by an **executive summary that provides more explanation on the guiding questions and concepts** presented in the table, and an overview of available tools and supporting material (such as video summaries of the practical guide) that can help you to answer the guiding questions.

This executive summary is largely structured around frequently asked questions about the content of the SDG proofing tool, but **also functions as a roadmap or executive summary to the SDG Compass practical guide**.

Executive summary / FAQs

The three key principles underlying the SDGs, and why they matter

Leaving no one behind (LNOB)

At the end of the Millennium Development Goals era, significant progress had been made, but it also became clear that the world's poorest and most marginalised groups had hardly benefitted from this progress (Bhatkal et al., 2015). The idea of trickle-down progress became widely discredited, and broad recognition emerged that explicit and pro-active efforts are needed to ensure that populations (at risk of) being left behind are included in future progress. In other words, who is benefitting from progress becomes as important as how much progress is being realised.

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community therefore pledged to 'leave no one behind' (LNOB). The principle of LNOB can be seen as a three-part global commitment:

- to end extreme poverty in all its dimensions

- to curb horizontal (inter-group) and vertical (inter-individual) inequalities – in particular when caused by discrimination of marginalised populations

- to take deliberate action to reach the furthest behind first (progressive universalism)

This three-part commitment is in the first place a call on governments to step up their efforts to create inclusive societies and take responsibility for those that have been left behind in past progress. Nevertheless, business and civil society play a key role as well, both as partners to governments' development efforts and as agents of change in their own right (DI, 2017a; Partos, 2015; UNDP, 2018). In particular, there are still people who remain excluded from the development cooperation programmes of governments and NGAs (Bhatkal et al., 2015; Partos, 2015). Leaving no one behind therefore calls on development cooperation actors to move beyond current practice, and take pro-active action to promote a transformation towards fully inclusive progress.

Indivisibility & Interconnectedness (interlinkages)

The principle of Indivisibility & Interconnectedness of the SDG framework embodies the need for systemic or transformational change to deal with the complex challenges of moving to sustainable societies.

It states that all 17 goals should be seen as an integrated and interconnected whole: *"All SDGs interact with one another – by design they are an integrated set of global priorities and objectives that are fundamentally interdependent. Understanding the range of positive and negative interactions among SDGs is key to unlocking their full potential at any scale, as well as to ensuring that progress made in some areas is not made at the expense of progress in others"* (ICS, 2017: 7).

The principle thus calls on actors to go beyond siloed approaches that work towards individual goals or targets in a fragmented manner, and instead work to

- understand and mitigate negative interactions or *interlinkages*
- understand and leverage positive interactions or *interlinkages*

Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)

The complexity, scale, and interconnectedness of the challenges that the SDG framework seeks to address, requires a concerted effort of a wide variety of different stakeholders. As such, the principle of multi-stakeholder partnerships calls for cooperation at different stages and across the boundaries of civil society, private sector, government, and academia, to achieve together what cannot be achieved by working alone. The principle responds directly to SDG 17 (Global partnership), and is closely linked to the notion of shared issues and responsibilities of the 2030 Agenda.

Operationalising the principles – FAQs and resources

Leaving no one behind (LNOB)

FAQ: Do we need to target particularly vulnerable or marginalised groups to contribute to the LNOB principle?

No**.** Leaving no one behind needs development cooperation to move beyond current practice, but this can be done in different ways. Sections 1.2 and 1.3 of Chapter 1 in the practical guide distinguish and explain two broad types of approaches to LNOB:

- LNOB targeting: an approach that targets groups who are (at risk of being) far left behind on the basis of their specific needs
- LNOB mainstreaming: an approach that mainstreams attention for exclusion, marginalisation, and deprivation throughout the programme cycle, but does not necessarily target far left behind groups specifically

In practice, the distinction is of course not so clear-cut, and programmes may fall across both categories in different ways. What approach you focus on, and how far you take each approach, should be informed by local context and needs, by your own vision, activities, capacities, and LNOB ambitions, and possibly by the wider debate on universalism versus targeting (see section 1.2).

FAQ: What does mainstreaming attention for exclusion, marginalisation, and deprivation mean ?

Section 1.3 of the practical guide discusses several possible approaches and strategies, from low-cost incremental steps to more ambitious systematic approaches. An important start is reflecting on whether your programme reaches everyone within your target group, and whether mechanisms of exclusion and vulnerabilities are not being reinforced unintentionally through the programme design or implementation.

FAQ: The LNOB principle can be operationalised in different ways; is there a common goal that we can work towards given the diversity of development actors in the Belgian landscape?

Section 1.5 of the practical guide offers concluding thoughts on LNOB, and proposes a jointly upheld standard that would represent a bold commitment to the LNOB principle. Our proposed standard integrates the principle of 'do no harm' with the LNOB principle to say that programmes should avoid *as much as possible* to reinforce existing mechanisms of exclusion or further disadvantage groups that are already vulnerable, disadvantaged, or marginalised *in important ways*. This would apply in the first place to the target group, but also to the extent possible to other key vulnerable or marginalised groups that might be importantly affected by the programme. This implies that organisations

- take steps to analyse whether their interventions (risk to) contribute to any existing exclusion mechanisms or negative changes for relevant groups

- adjust programme strategies or integrate remedial action in their theory of change (see also next FAQ and section 1.3 of the practical guide).

FAQ: Are we expected to address or mitigate all potential risks of exclusion or harm for relevant far left behind groups (within or beyond our target group) ourselves?

No. Remedial action can be taken by yourself, by programme partners, or other actors. For complex issues, MSPs can offer possibilities to address risks in integrated ways that a single (type of) organisation could not achieve. For instance, expanding access to education through distance learning, or improving digital literacy, might risk excluding already vulnerable groups that do not have access to energy. Partnerships with business or government to expand affordable renewable energy access to populations in need (for instance through community-level, off-grid solar energy) could be a good way of addressing such a risk in a way that does not compromise the goals of climate change mitigation and ecosystem protection. Engaging in a dialogue with policy makers to highlight the LNOB risks that you identified (for instance for populations beyond your target groups) can also be a legitimate type of remedial action.

FAQ: What are key principles to take along in any LNOB approach?

Section 1.5 of the practical guide also discusses that any efforts to realise the LNOB principle need to be built on two overarching principles: Meaningful participation - "Nothing about us without us", and empowerment.

Groups that might be affected by your programme should be involved in the programme cycle in a meaningful way. Vulnerable or marginalised groups might need specific support to raise their voices. Empowering marginalised groups to self-organise and lobby can also be a valuable contribution to LNOB in itself. In addition, the perspectives and feedback of left behind groups are key inputs in the process of learning and experimentation that is needed to continue making progress on LNOB and understand how to make strategies, programmes, and interventions more inclusive.

FAQ: What is the relation between LNOB and a human rights based approach (HRBA)?

Section 1.1 explains that LNOB represents a global commitment to ensure that everyone is included in future progress; it is an overarching goal of Agenda 2030. The HRBA offers a valuable programming tool for translating the vision of LNOB into action, as it is anchored within international norms and standards that governments have a legal obligation to meet. Appendix 1 of

the practical guide explains in more detail how the HRBA relates to the LNOB principle and offers a number of tools that can be useful to link the SDGs to human rights.

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Resources for operationalising LNOB

Read: Chapter 1 of the [practical guide](#) (section 1.5 offers concluding thoughts)

Watch: [Video summary of Chapter 1](#) of the practical guide and additional video material in the online [capacity building package](#)

Tools:
- Guidance on LNOB: [SDC guidance on LNOB](#) and [SDC website](#), [UNDP LNOB framework](#), [GIZ LNOB guidelines](#) and [GIZ Poverty Inequality Dedicated website](#)
- Data tools (section 1.4), including [Multi-dimensional Poverty Index,](#) [World Inequality Database,](#) …
- More specific or thematic tools on LNOB, including on HRBA: Appendix 1

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Indivisibility & Interconnectedness (Interlinkages)

FAQ: What are interlinkages?

In this proofing tool and the practical guide, we refer to interactions between goals and targets (of Agenda 2030, a programme, an intervention, …) as 'interlinkages'. For simplicity, we refer to positive interlinkages as 'co-benefits' and negative interlinkages as 'trade-offs'.

In practice, interactions can take different forms. For instance, simultaneous improvements in the area of food production, health services, and sanitation can lead to synergetic improvements in food security, that would be difficult to achieve when working on only one of these areas. Addressing soil erosion issues can produce positive cascade effects for environmental health in terms of protecting local marine and terrestrial ecosystems, and increasing carbon sequestration in the soil (climate change mitigation). It can also improve agricultural productivity and might thereby even improve local livelihoods. Some examples of negative interlinkages are: climate change mitigation constrains the options for improving access to energy; economic growth through industrialisation can have negative effects on health if it results in contamination and poor waste management; improving agricultural productivity can present trade-offs in terms of the protection of terrestrial ecosystems.

Pg. 40 of the practical guide presents a tool that distinguishes 7 types of positive and negative interlinkages and illustrates each with examples. Section 2.2 offers more tools and examples.

FAQ: Do we have to take into account all interlinkages?

No. Taking interlinkages seriously is an important concern in the 2030 Agenda. Given finite capacities and resources, however, organisations will inevitably have to make strategic choices regarding what interlinkages to take into account, to what extent, and in what ways (see also FAQ 'What system should we consider' below). Some actors might want to invest heavily in moving to a systemic

approach, while other might (have to) limit themselves to integrating considerations on a few key interlinkages into the programme. Section 2.2 of the practical guide offers several tools and options that can be tailored to different ambitions and capabilities. They allow organisations to choose the depth of analysis and extent of stakeholder involvement – from a quick, low-threshold analysis based on existing macro-level interlinkages studies, to deep, participatory, systematic analyses in multiple stages.

The bottom line of operationalising the interlinkages principle is to understand and reflect on interlinkages, and make conscious choices in design, implementation, and monitoring-evaluating-learning that strive to leverage co-benefits and avoid or mitigate trade-offs.

FAQ: How do we consider and deal with negative interlinkages?

Sections 2.2 and 3.2 of the practical guide explain that the risk analysis provides a window of opportunity for more systematically reflecting on negative interlinkages for your programme and interventions. In such exercises, it is important to think about negative interlinkages in more substantive ways, rather than only instrumentally. Many organisations now already think about what might negatively affect the outcomes or impact of their intervention. The interlinkages principle challenges you to consider how *your intervention itself* might negatively affect other developmental goals or other interventions.

Another important point is that you are not expected to avoid or mitigate (risks of) negative interlinkages by yourself. Remedial action can be taken by yourself, by programme partners, or other actors. For complex issues, MSPs can offer possibilities to address risks in integrated ways that a single (type of) organisation could not achieve. For instance, partnering with researchers or business might support the development and dissemination of sustainable agricultural innovations to mitigate the environmental costs of agricultural expansion. Systematically engaging with the knowledge of local communities can similarly bring existing techniques and technologies to the surface that can be usefully integrated or built on to make agriculture more sustainable. Finally, engaging in a dialogue with policy makers to highlight the risks of negative interlinkages that you identified can also be a legitimate type of remedial action.

FAQ: What is a 'system' ?

There are many different definitions of a system (as there are many different schools of thought about systems), but most share a number of key characteristics:

- A system is made up of a set of elements that can be tangible (people, organisations, infrastructure, natural resources, …) or intangible (laws, social norms, values, relationships,…)
- These elements are interconnected and interact through causes and effects, which produces certain patterns over time (i.e. which makes the system 'behave' in a certain way)
- The system is a unified whole that has boundaries

Systems can be ecological, mechanical, organisational, political, cultural, … Social systems tend to be complex, and can be characterised by 'wicked' problems (Abercrombie et al., 2015). Agenda 2030 strongly emphasizes the need for a transformational approach or systems change to address such wicked problems.

FAQ: Why do we refer to systems in the proofing tool?

Thinking about the systems in which you intervene can be very useful for all organisations wanting to take a more integrated and systematic approach to their work. Considering the wider system can help you to better understand the context in which you intervene, in particular how different parts are connected. This in turn can help you to better anticipate different potential intended or unintended consequences, better respond to unintended effects, and better understand how you can leverage co-benefits and mitigate trade-offs or LNOB risks. It can also help you to identify several entry points or levers for change to act on, and who you need to partner with to make this happen (cf. section 2.1 in the practical guide).

System thinking does not need to involve complicated exercises or extensive analysis. Mapping a system is a great way to better understand it, and in its simplest form does not require more than pen and paper, and a group of people willing to share their expertise, perspectives, and assumptions, and reflect critically on them. Section 2.3.1 of the practical guide offers several tools for system mapping (e.g. actor mapping). An important note here is that system maps are most effective when used as a tool to bring together different types of knowledge, information, or perspectives. That is, they are best used in complement to other approaches (such as a solid context analysis or theory of change).

Ideally, a system analysis is collaborative, where you involve several actors in the discussions. Important actors to involve are those affected by the key issues at stake, and those that represent important parts of the system in which you intervene – in particular local partners in the context of development cooperation. Involving (representatives of) marginalised and vulnerable groups presents a good opportunity to enrich your system analysis with often forgotten voices, and makes for an important contribution to the LNOB principle.

FAQ: What system should we consider ? What are the boundaries of 'our' system?

Establishing the boundaries of your system in space and time is an important first step in any system analysis, and will determine the nature and scope of the issue you are addressing. Essentially it means thinking about who and what are involved in the problem and in the solution.

Where the boundaries get drawn around a problem will determine what the solutions can be, and it is good to reflect on this carefully. When you draw the boundaries too broadly, you will consider too much that is beyond your ability to influence or add value to. Drawing the boundaries too narrowly, you will leave out much of what causes a problem, and risk not taking into account forces that may counteract your efforts or forces that can enhance the impact of your actions. The message again is too find a good balance. It can help to have an open conversation in your organisation about what your assets are, and where you can add value to a solution or make a distinctive contribution *(*Abercrombie et al., 2015).

For instance, an organisation seeking to promote decent work might decide not to consider international value chains and policies on decent work as part of their system, since this would make the scope of the analysis unmanageable. Taking into account national-level (or even regional-level) dynamics of trade unions, business organisations, and governments, might nonetheless be important to avoid overlooking important forces and ways to have impact.

An important note is that drawing boundaries around a system is a matter of perspective. "Political questions often arise when thinking about where to draw a boundary around a social problem"

(Abercrombie et al., 2015: 9). Reflecting on this in your organisation and engaging with (local) partners on key questions (i.e. who and what are involved in the problem and solution) can be an important way to operationalise the LNOB principle and foster learning.

Section 3.1 discusses the spheres of influence framework, which can be useful to help answer the question of what the boundaries are of the system that you want to consider. See also the next FAQ.

FAQ: How does this relate to the Theory of Change (ToC)?

Section 3.1 in the practical guide discusses how the ToC – in particular an actor-focused ToC – provides a window of opportunity for operationalising the three principles, including interlinkages. Engaging in a system analysis involves asking much the same questions as you do when building a ToC, and therefore is a good first step towards building your ToC in a more systemic way.

The ToC is also a useful tool for summarising your insights about the system, communicate these to others, and provide a foundation for further discussions and reflections with partners and other relevant actors throughout the programming cycle to learn.

Resources for operationalising interlinkages

Read: Chapter 2 of the practical guide (section 2.4 offers concluding thoughts)

Watch: Video summary of Chapter 2 of the practical guide and additional video material in the online capacity building package

Tools:
- Identifying and understanding 'macro-level' interlinkages: 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report Table, Kumu SDG network map, JRC Interlinkages tools, IGES Interlinkages tool
- Identifying and understanding contextualised interlinkages (participatory): SEI SDG synergies approach, Nilsson 7-point interactions scoring tool
- Transformational approach and system thinking/system change: 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report, NPC (2018) Guide to Systems Change, NPC (2018) Guide to using ToC for systems change
- Additional thematic tools on interlinkages: Appendix 2
- Data on SDGs (for e.g. system analysis): SDG Index website and Appendix 4

Multi-stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs)

FAQ: What is an MSP?

A multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP) refers to partnerships between different *types* of actors, rather than a partnership between several actors within the same category. Types of actors are, among others, national or local governments, multilateral institutions, governmental development actors, non-governmental development actors, the private sector, research and academic institutions, and

communities. Partnerships between different NGAs, for instance, would not be considered an MSP. See also section 2.3 of the practical guide.

FAQ: What type of collaboration is expected from an MSP?

MSPs can involve quite different forms of collaboration, from 'light' versions (often an add-on to business as usual); to more integrated, strategic MSPs that go beyond information sharing and coordination to aim at a joint realisation of shared goals; up to eco-system approaches that work to build or strengthen an ecosystem of individual organisations working together on a particular theme. Section 2.3 of the practical guide explains more on MSPs.

The upcoming challenge is to enable MSPs to grow to the next level of eco-system approaches, so that they can leverage transformational change. This does not mean, however, that all MSPs *should* take an eco-systems approach. Each partnership is unique, and there are no universal best approaches. A 'light' add-on approach can be an efficient solution in circumstances where more integrated approaches face (too) large obstacles. For each particular context, the type of MSP always has to match its desired function or objectives, which in turn should match the desired outcome.

FAQ: Do we always need to engage in MSPs to contribute to the SDG framework?

No. MSPs are a means to an end; not an end in itself. The idea is not 'partnering for the sake of partnering', but finding new and/or better solutions through partnerships. The first question that you should ask is therefore: does initiating or participating in an MSP offer opportunities to better address the (complex) challenge(s) that we aim to tackle? If yes, you should ask yourself what the optimal form of collaboration is (there are many), and what the optimal role of your organisation is in the MSP.

It is important to keep in mind that MSPs are no silver bullet or miracle solution. Cooperation does not always come easy, and there are specific challenges to working with different types of actors or interest groups. MSPs need to be carefully designed and facilitated; you need to deliberately set aside time and resources to create a shared understanding of perspective and motives, clear and measurable goals, a shared language, strategies for managing the levels of commitment and expectations of the partners, and true consensus on working processes in the partnership.

FAQ: How does the MSP principle relate to the other two principles?

Agenda 2030 heavily emphasizes a transformational approach, and MSPs are seen as playing a key role. The complex causes of the challenges embedded in the SDG framework are almost impossible for any one actor to fully address by themselves, and will require coherent, integrated, and coordinated strategies at the local, national, and international level (HIVA and IOB, 2020; UN, 2019). MSPs can foster a more integrated approach that links different thematic sectors and policy domains, for instance by relying on other actors with complementary expertise and activities to mitigate trade-offs or leverage co-benefits. MSPs can also facilitate the operationalisation of the LNOB principle, for instance by partnering with actors who work with hard-to-reach groups or address causes of exclusion.

Overarching the three SDG principles

FAQ: How do the SDG principles relate to learning and adaptive programming?

Agenda 2030 heavily promotes a transformational approach, but at the same time acknowledges the complexity of transformational change. Complex change tends to need longer time horizons and is unpredictable: systems are dynamic, shocks occur, realities change, and actors adapt their behaviour. Interlinkages analyses and MSPs might (and often will) need to be updated over time, as an organisation moves through the programme cycle. Development approaches that build in continuous learning – importantly through stakeholder engagement and feedback mechanisms – and allow for flexibility and programme adjustment can be especially valuable to deal with the complexity and dynamism of systems.

Sections 3.1 and 3.5 explain how actor-focused theories of change and other tools can help you to embed learning and adaptability in your programme cycle and thereby create more opportunities for operationalising the SDG principles. Sections 3.3 and 3.4 discuss how learning and adaptability can be embedded specifically in Joint Strategic Frameworks (3.3) and the development of the instruction letter for Belgian development cooperation (3.4).

FAQ: What is 'systems change' ?

The aim of systems change is to bring about sustained change by changing the structures and mechanisms that make the system 'behave' in a certain way, i.e. that produce certain patterns and outcomes over time. These structures and mechanisms can be policies, relationships, habits, values, resources, or power structures. It is an approach to social change, where you always keep in mind the questions of what change is needed, why it is needed, and what might be the unintended consequences of such change. A systems change approach acknowledges that systems are constantly changing, and rather than thinking in a linear and mechanical way (as is embedded in for instance logframe approaches), it encourages us to embrace the complexity and dynamics of social problems, to arrive at better, more sustainable solutions. Essential to these approaches is that "interventions

remain rooted in action and do not become removed from the people in society they are designed to help" *(Abercrombie et al., 2015: 9).*

The tools discussed in section 3.1 of the practical guide can also help you in dealing with complexity at programme and intervention level.

FAQ: Are all organisations expected to work towards systems change?

No. Systems change is about tackling the root causes of social problems, and Agenda 2030 explicitly recognises that transformational change or systems change is needed to address the complex problems we face in transitioning to socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable societies. See also section 2.1 in the practical guide.

However, systems change takes time, and in the meantime social problems cause immediate, pressing needs. Addressing such needs is an equally legitimate type of social action, and a good balance is needed between this type of action and efforts towards systems change *(Abercrombie et al., 2015: 9).*

Windows of opportunity for operationalising the SDG principles

Resources

Read: Chapter 3 of the practical guide discusses five windows of opportunity for integrating the SDGs and its principles in the programme and development cooperation cycle in a practical way:
  (i)   the theory of change (section 3.1)
  (ii) the risk analysis (section 3.2)
  (iii) the joint strategic framework (section 3.3)
  (iv) the instruction letter (process) (section 3.4 + specific SDG proofing tool in Appendix 7)
  (v)   the results framework and indicators (section 3.5)

Watch: A chapter overview video and video summaries for each window of opportunity, as well as additional video material, in the online capacity building package

-   Chapter overview
-   Theory of change
-   Risk analysis
-   Joint strategic framework
-   Instruction letter (process)
-   Results framework and indicators

Tools:
The windows of opportunity refer mostly to tools discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, except for
-   Actor-focused ToC, spheres of influence framework, and progress markers (section 3.1)
-   Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation toolkit, USAID Local Systems framework

	Leaving no one behind (LNOB)	Interconnectedness & Indivisibility (Interlinkages)	Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)

Preparation/ Analysis (e.g. context analysis, sector analysis, …)	For targeted & mainstreaming approach:
	1) Have you identified which groups are (at risk of being) left behind within the intervention area (country, region) and from what they are excluded?
	2) Have you analysed why they are left behind and by whom they are excluded (considering intersecting factors)?
	3) Does your analysis rely on clear definitions or criteria for poverty, marginalisation, exclusion, …?
	4) Does your analysis include the perspectives of those (at risk of being) left behind?
		3) Have you gained a solid understanding of the important interlinkages in the system in which you are working?
		   c) What are important issues/what change is needed?
		   d) How are these issues linked? (what are important co-benefits and trade-offs?)
		4) Was your system analysis co-created by relevant (local) actors (including marginalised groups)?
			5) Do you have a solid understanding of the relevant actors and their relationships in the system in which you are working?
			6) Have you analysed which actors can support or contribute, and which actors might present obstacles or risks, taking into account interest and power or influence?
			
			If there is no MSP:
			7) Does an MSP offer opportunities to better (e.g. more systemically or sustainably) address the (complex) challenge(s) that your programme focuses on? Have you identified valuable partners and forms of collaboration?
			
			If yes, or if an MSP already exists:
			8) Have you identified an added value of your participation in the MSP, and reflected on your optimal role in the MSP?

Planning & implementation (e.g. theory of change, risk analysis, results framework, …)	For targeted approach:
	1) Do you explain how your choice of target groups and the planning of activities is informed by the LNOB analysis?
	2) Does your theory of change (ToC) clearly outline how your intervention expects to contribute to (sustained) positive change for the target groups?
	3) Have you reflected on whether design and implementation reinforce existing exclusion mechanisms, or disadvantage vulnerable people within and/or beyond your target groups?
	4) Have you tailored remedial action, either by yourself, your partners, or other actors, to address/mitigate any negative or exclusion effects (e.g. in the risk analysis)?
		1) Have you identified important positive and negative interlinkages between your intervention area and other goals or targets?
		2) Have you taken important (positive and negative) interlinkages into account in the design and implementation of your theory of change (e.g. in objectives, strategies, risk analysis, indicators)?
		   c) What co-benefits can you leverage?
		   d) What trade-offs should you avoid/mitigate?
			1) Does your risk analysis consider potential obstacles or issues that the MSP or its members might create (e.g. conflicts of interest for private sector actors, inefficient use of resources, …)?
			2) Have you reflected on strategies or remedial action to deal with such risks (possibly only internally)?
			3) Are local actors (beyond institutional actors and including marginalised groups) involved in an active and meaningful way when relevant?
			4) Can all partners participate in decision-making when they want to? Do they have a voice?

	Leaving no one behind (LNOB)	Interconnectedness & Indivisibility (Interlinkages)	Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)
	For mainstreaming approach: 1) Does your theory of change outline how your intervention expects to indirectly benefit (important) left behind groups? 2) Does your risk analysis include reflections on whether design and implementation might exclude (important) left behind groups from (the benefits of) the intervention within and/or beyond target groups? 3) Have you adapted strategies or identified remedial action, either by yourself, your partners, or other actors, to address/mitigate any exclusion effects? For both: Are (important) left behind groups that might be affected by the intervention involved in planning & implementation in an active and meaningful way?		

	Leaving no one behind (LNOB)	**Interconnectedness & Indivisibility (Interlinkages)**	**Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)**
Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)	For targeted and mainstreaming approach: 1) Do you analyse who benefitted (positive change), who lost (negative change), and who may have been excluded from the intervention within the target groups? 2) Does the MEL plan provide sufficient space for learning about important mechanisms and dynamics of exclusion and vulnerability, and to follow up on risks? For targeted approach: 3) Does the MEL plan provide sufficient information about change at the level of the target groups and the (in)direct contribution of the programme towards those changes? 4) Are there explicit mechanisms for participation of the target groups in MEL? For mainstreaming approach: 1) Does the MEL plan include systematic reflections on the implications of the intervention for any left behind groups who (according to the ToC) may benefit indirectly? (e.g. through existing secondary data sources without you having to collect data on groups that are not direct target groups) 2) Does the MEL plan include systematic reflections about potential negative effects and remedial action for left behind groups (e.g. as identified through the risk analysis)?	1) Have you reflected on the extent to which the intervention leveraged pre-identified co-benefits and mitigated pre-identified trade-offs? Was a good balance struck? 2) Have you reflected on unexpected co-benefits and trade-offs, or limiting / reinforcing interlinkages? 3) Does your MEL plan provide sufficient space for learning about important interlinkages (co-benefits and trade-offs) and to follow up on risks?	4) Have the different partners reflected on whether the MSP adds value (do the benefits exceed the costs?) and whether its positive impact can be improved (e.g. via new partners, other collaboration forms, contribution of the partnership to specific outcomes) 5) Have you adjusted partnerships based on lessons learned? 6) Are partners involved in MEL when relevant, including local actors and marginalised groups?

	Leaving no one behind (LNOB)	Interconnectedness & Indivisibility (Interlinkages)	Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)

Overarching	1) Have you started with a solid analysis of the system in which you are working?
	
	     a. What are the important issues/challenges in the country/region/intervention area and to what SDGs are they linked? Which SDGs are going in the right direction, which ones are lagging behind or deteriorating?
	
	     b. What are the specific challenges that you seek to address, and what (transformative or complex) change is needed to address these?
	
	     c. How do these challenges fit in the system?
	
	         i. Who and what is part of this challenge (problem) and the change that you seek to contribute to (solution) ?
	
	         ii. What are the relationships between the relevant actors?
	
	     d. What can be your organisation's distinctive contribution to a solution?
	
	     e. What are the entry points for your organisation? Are there several entry points or leverage points that you can act on (for instance through partnerships) in a more integrated approach?
	
	 2) Does your (planned) intervention reflect the priorities of the target groups?
	
	 3) Have you included learning mechanisms to continuously improve your understanding of the system, and in particular of exclusion dynamics and important links within the system? (E.g. do you use monitoring not just for generating data and evidence, but also for learning and continuous active use of this information to inform decision-making? Do you document the dialogue, feedback, and inclusion process to use it for internal and external learning? Do you organise monitoring and reflection meetings, use action research, or set up leaning trajectories?)
	
	 4) Have you implemented or institutionalised flexibility and measures that allow for adaptive management? (E.g. do you organise regular monitoring to respond quickly and adjust the approach as necessary?)
	
	 5) Have you made explicit how you believe to be contributing to the SDGs (goals or targets) and/or its underlying principles in your theory of change?		

appendix 7 SDG proofing tool for instruction letters

The table below presents a number of key guiding questions that you can rely on to make the process of formulating the instruction letters more 'SDG proof'. It is not a prescriptive list of questions to answer or actions to take. Its aim rather is:

(1) To guide you in reflecting more systematically and explicitly on the extent to which you have integrated the SDG principles in the process;
(2) To help you find opportunities or entry points for a stronger integration of these principles.

The tool should thus **not be seen or used as an evaluation tool,** but as an overview of different ways forward for making the instruction letter process more SDG proof.

You can find **more explanation on the guiding questions and concepts** presented in this table, as well as an overview of available tools and supporting material (such as video summaries of the practical guide), in the executive summary included in Appendix 6. This executive summary is largely structured around frequently asked questions about the content of the SDG proofing tools, but **also functions as a roadmap or executive summary to the SDG Compass practical guide**. The SDG Compass practical guide offers more explanation and additional tools that can support you in getting to work with the table below.

Policy statement	**Key attention point: construct priorities as core problems (avoid prioritising solutions)**	
Preparation	**Draft instruction letter (embassies)**	**Advice from Enabel**
	Political and policy dialogue with partner country	
What?	Interlinkages & LNOB analysis for country context	Input and feedback from field on interlinkages and LNOB
Interlinkages (systems)	**Key guiding questions:** **Understanding SDGs (system) in country context** a) What are key sustainable development issues? What SDGs (targets)? b) How are the different SDGs or issues interlinked? c) What transformative or complex change is needed to address these issues? **Understanding partner country priorities** a) How are these priorities linked to SDGs (targets)? b) How are they interlinked? Key co-benefits/trade-offs? c) What are key interlinkages with other SDGs/targets? Key co-benefits/trade-offs? **Connecting to Belgian policy statement priorities** a) How are these priorities linked to SDGs (targets)? b) How are they interlinked? Key co-benefits/trade-offs? c) What are key interlinkages with other SDGs/targets? Key co-benefits/trade-offs? **How do Belgian and partner country priorities overlap with key issues?** Co-benefits and trade-offs to consider? Strategic SDGs (targets) that are linked to various priorities? ➢ Global/country-level interlinkages tools (GSDR 2019, JRC, IGES, SEI) ➢ System thinking and mapping tools	*Key attention point across interlinkages & LNOB:* **Include perspectives of (far) left behind groups** a) Interlinked or intersecting exclusion mechanisms? b) How do negative interlinkages affect these groups? c) What co-benefits can reach these groups? ➢ Consulting groups or their representatives directly ➢ Consulting Belgian/local NGAs who work with these groups ➢ M&E (participatory) and learning from past programmes

Policy statement	**_Key attention point_: construct priorities as core problems (avoid prioritising solutions)**	
Preparation	**Draft instruction letter (embassies)**	**Advice from Enabel**
	Political and policy dialogue with partner country	
What?	Interlinkages & LNOB analysis for country context	Input and feedback from field on interlinkages and LNOB
LNOB	*Key guiding questions:* **Understanding who is left behind in country context** a) Which groups are far (the farthest) left behind on what dimensions? b) Why are they left behind? What key exclusion mechanisms? ➤ LNOB guides, inequality & poverty datasets, human rights data, PEA, …	
MSPs (participation)	- Key input from Enabel (esp. on lessons learned and comparative advantages) - Dialogue with partner country government (esp. on context relevance) - Build on existing resources & expertise (importantly of partner country gov) - Broad consultations with other relevant actors when possible, importantly NGAs	- Build on existing resources & expertise (importantly of other development actors) - Broad consultations with other relevant actors when possible
	➤ SEI SDG Synergies approach: multi-stakeholder interlinkages analysis + facilitation of multi-stakeholder dialogue and cross-sector partnerships	
Instruction letter	**a) Summarize key findings from interlinkages and LNOB analysis in context analysis** **b) Formulate general objectives informed by interlinkages and LNOB analysis (and comparative advantages & lessons learned)** **c) Document important knowledge gaps – importantly when related to interlinkages and LNOB**	
Interlinkages & LNOB	*Key attention points and guiding questions:* - General objective or priority as nexus rather than one-dimensional objective? E.g. food-health-biodiversity-protection - Any 'strategic' SDGs (targets)? I.e. SDGs that are interlinked with several Belgian and/or partner priorities? - Any SDGs (targets) particularly important for (multiple) far left behind groups? - Any groups that are (far) left behind on several interlinked SDGs? - Any already vulnerable groups particularly affected by key negative interlinkages? - What don't we know and should we know about interlinkages or LNOB considerations?	