Sustainable Development Goals and the Guatemalan Government’s strategies to make and measure progress towards them

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# Introduction

Guatemala presented many challenges in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, which concluded in 2015, and authorities attribute it to the lack of a development framework that could serve as a platform to guide the improvement of indicators related to the targets. Government institutions responded inertially to the challenges posed in a business-as-usual manner and 75% of the explicit targets were not met (Secretaría de Planificación y Programación [SEGEPLAN], 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals that replace the MDG agenda are more ambitious, and countries are called to mobilize efforts to “end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind” (United Nations, 2015). For the SDG agenda, Guatemala is in a different situation than fifteen years before, with an approved National Development Plan for the period ending in 2032 (Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural [CONADUR], 2014). After committing to the SDGs, the Government of Guatemala (GoG), through its Council of Urban and Rural Development, mandated a prioritization of SDGs and alignment with the National Development Plan, which is currently under way. The Council has also mandated the creation of a statistical mechanism that allows for the monitoring of the SDGs, something that had many difficulties during implementation of MDGs. In this way, it is expected that budgets and government actions will better align with the goals. Extended CGE approaches can better inform about the outcomes of the pursuit of various strategic actions for the attainment of SDGs.

# SDGs in the context of Guatemala

The timing of the consultation and socialization processes of the SDGs carried out by the United Nations in Guatemala from 2012 onwards coincided with the participative processes surrounding the National Development Plan (NDP). Because the UN supported both initiatives, many of the consultations were held together. As a result, both development agendas are in line with each other in approximately 90% of the topics that they cover (Sistema de Consejos de Desarrollo [SISCODE] & SEGEPLAN, n.d.). The NDP is an instrument created by the GoG’s constitutionally-created Council of Urban and Rural Development (CONADUR), with technical assistance from the Planning Secretariat (SEGEPLAN). It establishes challenges and priorities for Guatemala during the period 2014-2032. Its objective is to:

...reach sustainable human development through more opportunities and the betterment of human capabilities, within a framework of liberties that allows individuals to live a long and healthy life, have access to education and proper living standards, as well as take part in their community and in those decisions that affect their existence. (CONADUR, 2014)

The NDP is divided in 5 components that cover i) urban and rural differentiation of priorities; ii) welfare and human well-being; iii) more equally distributed wealth for all; iv) sustainability of natural resources; and v) the State as guarantor of human rights and driver of development. It has 36 priorities, 122 results, 80 goals, and 730 directives that are to be monitored. (CONADUR, 2014). Among other stakeholders, vulnerable groups represented in the Council of Urban and Rural Development are cooperatives; labor unions; the Garífuna people; the Mayan peoples; the Xinca people; farmers; women; micro, small and medium businesses; as well as children and adolescents.

Notwithstanding that both SDGs and the NDP have similarities, CONADUR agreed that SDGs were too ambitious given available resources. It also concluded that it was necessary to prioritize relevant elements from the SDG agenda to Guatemala’s concerns and align them to the national framework of priorities if the country was to move forward in attaining the goals. This was done between May and September of 2016 through a strategy that covered 5 aspects: socialization of the contents of the SDG agenda; prioritization of goals according to national concerns (a mixture of the NDP goals, remaining Millennium Development Goals, and others); consultations with stakeholder groups representatives to CONADUR; validation within the Council; socialization of the results with civil society (SEGEPLAN, 2016).

The Council approved the prioritization of the SDG agenda as representing "the will and consensus of all actors of the Guatemalan society that participated [in any of the five aspects of the prioritization strategy]". A key result of was that through resolution 15-2016 (CONADUR, 2016), the Council mandated SEGEPLAN to develop an implementation strategy and, more importantly, it ordered the National Institute of Statistics to provide the necessary information with the level of disaggregation required by the indicators established in the prioritization of the SDGs. This also included statistical mechanisms to ensure that every indicator is tracked, that coordination mechanisms between agencies exist to generate the information, and that a detailed work plan with responsible units is in place 15 days after the approved resolution so that it could be presented to the Council in the first ordinary session of 2017 (CONADUR, 2016).

# Special challenges

The final report of accomplishments of the Millenium Development Goals for Guatemala (SEGEPLAN, 2015) showed that, although there were some good results regarding the reduction of child mortality and global malnutrition, an increase in adult literacy, gender parity in secondary and tertiary education, as well as access to communication, most goals were not met. Chronic malnutrition persisted, gender parity in elementary education stagnated, and maternal mortality continued with advances far from the established goals. This was also the case in access to reproductive health, access to skilled attendance during child birth, as well as access to improved water sources and sanitation conditions.

In other areas, stagnation and even setbacks were observed, such as in general and extreme poverty, labor productivity, elementary education coverage rates, and women access to employment and representation in Congress. Other indicators that behaved similarly were the percentage of children under 23 months vaccinated against measles, the proportion of HIV infected patients with access to treatment, the rate of children under 5 years that sleep under mosquito nets impregnated with insecticide, area under forest cover, protected areas, and the share of the population living in slums (SEGEPLAN, 2015).

Of 24 indicators that had an explicit goal for 2015, only 25% met said goal. There were also 42 indicators that did not have an explicit goal and were categorized by their evolution, where 55% were positive, 29% negative, and 9% stagnated. Perhaps the most alarming result due to its ramifications in all areas of development was the increase of extreme poverty from 13.3% of the population in 2011 to 23.4% in 2014, after showing a steady decrease from an original 18.1% in 1989. The target is off by 14.3 percentage points in extreme poverty and by 27.9 percentage points in general poverty.

The coverage of environmental aspects in the final report of accomplishments of the Millenium Development Goals for Guatemala (SEGEPLAN, 2015) is limited to 5 indicators of which two show a negative trend. The share of surface area covered by forests decreased from 38.1% in 2001 to 33.7% in 2012, while emitted tons of CO2 per capita went from 0.84 in 1990 to 0.99 in 2005. The use of water went from 15.29 of total availability in 2001 to 20.6 in 2010. Finally, the consumption of substances that deplete the ozone layer saw important reductions (SEGEPLAN, 2015).

One aspect that deserves attention is the fact that, for the MDGs, Guatemala set a goal of reaching an 81.5% of the population with access to improved water sources and, although this indicator grew from 63.0% in the base year (1990) to 78.7% in 2006, by 2011 it had receded to 75.3% leaving a 6.2% gap. In the case of access to improved sanitation, the indicator moved from 32% in 1990 to 56% in 2011. With a goal of 66%, the gap is even wider; 10% for this indicator (Government of Guatemala [GoG], n.d.).

Access to improved water and sanitation has been linked to better productivity and economic growth. Kiendrebeogo (2012) showed that “the increased access rate to drinking water is conducive to agricultural productivity due to increased intrinsic productivity of individuals and additional gain in time for agricultural production” and through a sample of 27 African countries has found positive results towards the hypothesis that access to clean water improves agricultural productivity, with an added reinforcement under the presence of better sanitation systems. Estimates show that an increase of one point of percentage of the access rate to drinking water in rural areas leads to increased productivity of the agricultural workforce of about 0.025% to 0.116%. No productivity increases were observed in the urban population (but only agricultural work was evaluated, which is affected by the fact that most agricultural work is carried out by the rural population).

The World Health Organization shows that improved water supply and sanitation facilities and better hygiene behaviour will radically reduce population illness. Improved water supply can reduce diarrhea morbidity by up to 25% if severe outcomes are included. Improved sanitation reduces diarrhea morbidity by 32%. Additional improvements to drinking water quality at home can lead to a reduction of diarrhea episodes of up to 39% with a concurrent improvement in productivity (Unicef & WHO, 2008).

The GoG has established in its Water and Sanitation National Policy the objective of

Contributing to the betterment of quality of life conditions, individual and social welfare of the inhabitants of the Republic of Guatemala, as part of human development, through the improvement of sustainable public administration of potable water services and sanitation, as well as good hygiene practices and water management for human consumption (GoG, n.d.)

# Strategies

The GoG recognizes that its lackluster performance in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals is closely related to the fact that there were no underlying development frameworks and monitoring systems to which the goals could adhere. Thus, many government institutions that were working on the very issues related to the Goals, operated inertially, behaving in a business-as-usual manner, without a specific link between the government budget, yearly work plans, and the attainment of these targets (SEGEPLAN, 2015). For that reason, the Council's 15-2016 resolution (CONADUR, 2016), mandated the development of an integral implementation strategy by the Planning Secretariat, which should define roles, competences, and attributions of government institutions, alliances between the Government, civil society, the private sector, and international cooperation agencies, as well as monitoring mechanisms.

This strategy is currently under development, and should be presented during the first meeting of the Council in 2017. However, it will be informed by the priorities of the NDP (see above) and the Administration’s General Policy 2016-2020, which focuses on

* reduction of corruption and modernization of government agencies;
* food security, comprehensive health coverage, and quality of education;
* support for micro, small and medium businesses in tourism, housing, and better working conditions;
* general safety and security;
* water conservation, integral solid waste management, improvement of resilience to climate change, conservation of protected areas, and more participation of renewables in energy matrix.

These actions have clear requirements for public spending and thus government revenues must improve. Officials are interested in contrasting the effects of pursuing each of these priorities individually and haphazardly, on the one hand, and holistically, on the other (K. Gramajo, personal communication, January, 2017).

Additionally, the strategy must consider the most pressing challenges from the MDGs that the country was unable to improve, such as:

* Poverty.
* Chronic malnutrition.
* Coverage of primary schooling and conclusion rates.
* Literacy of persons between 15 and 24.
* Gender parity between males and females in primary education.
* Vaccination against measles.
* Maternal mortality.
* Access to treatment for HIV patients.
* Water and sanitation.
* Environmental sustainability.

In terms of water and sanitation, the Government of Guatemala has set a goal for 2017 of providing access to potable water and sanitation to an additional two million urban and three million rural inhabitants. In the medium term, it intends to reach 95% of potable water coverage and 90% basic sanitation by 2025. The challenge it faces is that, while the water and sanitation policy is overseen by the Ministry of Health, the implementation of new potable water and sanitation projects falls in the hands of a disperse number of institutional actors, among which there are INFOM, local and municipal governments, and association of municipalities. In this case, prospective funding is not centralized, and each project can be funded by the central government, municipal governments, public-private partnerships, and international cooperation efforts, among others. In the results-oriented budget for 2017, the Ministry of Health only assigns Q10.6 million (about $1.3 million) to the monitoring and chlorination of water sources as a specific result.

# Indicators derived from the environmental accounts

The SDG agenda is much more comprehensive in its coverage of environmental aspects. An input to the prioritization strategy between SDGs and the NDP was an exercise developed with support from the WAVES initiative of The World Bank that established a correspondence between environmental indicators from the NDP and information provided by the System of Environmental Accounts of Guatemala (Escobedo, 2016). Although there are still limitations in the level of disaggregation and coverage of much of the information present in SEEA, Escobedo (2016) determined that several indicators could help evaluate and monitor the environmental goals of the NDP:

* Forest cover in percentages.
* Volume of water uses and returns by economic activities (ISIC) and households.
* Water use intensity (m3 per unit of value added).
* Water used by households per capita.
* Solid waste by economic activities and households.
* Percentage of agricultural output under irrigation (with caveats).
* Productivity of water use (unit of value added by m3 of water).
* Forest cover in protected areas (with caveats, not available in final SEEA tables but present in underlying information).
* Water availability by watershed (with caveats, not available in final SEEA tables but present in underlying information).
* Percentage of agricultural land under irrigation.
* Value added by non-timber forest products.
* Rate of deforestation inside and outside protected areas.
* Rate of reforestation inside and outside protected areas.
* Percentage of non-controlled timber extraction.
* Forest land subject to forest fires.
* Total environmental expenditure.
* Final demand of fuelwood.
* Hectares destined for fuelwood production.]
* Emitted tons of CO2 per capita.
* Emissions by economic activity.
* Percentage structure of energy sources for households and its evolution.
* Percentage of energy from hydroelectric plants (with caveats).
* Percentage structure of use of energy sources.
* Percentage of fossil fuels in country energy mix.
* Percentage of mangrove forest cover, deforestation and reforestation (with caveats).

During the prioritization of SDGs and alignment with the NDP (CONADUR, 2016), several indicators were established for monitoring environmental goals, many of which do not yet exist or exist at levels of disaggregation not suitable for that purpose. This is expected to change with the newly mandated duties of the National Institute of Statistics (CONADUR, 2016). Several of these indicators are already available in SEEA, or could be with a few adjustments. Here we include the ones suitable for those goals prioritized by Guatemala that can be derived from SEEA Guatemala[[1]](#footnote-1).

Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

* Share of water returns treated.
* Share of water bodies of good quality (not available in current Guatemalan SEEA, but possible if water quality accounts implemented).
* Change in efficiency of water use.
* Share of available fresh water abstracted (water stress indicator).
* Share of environmental expenditure directed at water management.

Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

* Share of urban waste collected by the treatment industry (with caveats, as it requires disaggregation by populated center).

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

* Material use (volume) per capita and by unit of GDP.
* Volume of reutilized, recycled and repurposed materials (with caveats, not fully disaggregated by indicated categories and only at national level).
* Dangerous waste per capita and share of dangerous wastes treated by appropriate industrial activity (with caveats, can improve in later iterations of SEEA Guatemala).

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources

* Share of coastal areas under protection.
* Environmental expenditure destined for marine education (with caveats, it is part of environmental expenditure, but not disaggregated as such).

Goal 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

* Forest area as a share of total land.
* Change in area of various ecosystems.
* Change in area of ecosystems that are important for biodiversity.
* Natural forest land under management, incentives, and others (not currently reported as part of SEEA, but available in underlying information).
* Forest plantations under management, incentives, and others.
* Mixed agri-forest land under management, incentives, and others.
* Share of degraded land as a percentage of total area.
* Deforestation rate in mountains (currently unavailable, but possible).
* Share of environmental expenditure destined for biological diversity (with caveats).

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1. Note that the SDGs can include more environmental topics that are not prioritized by Guatemala or there can be environmental topics whose indicators are not present in SEEA, such as Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (United Nations, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)