

Research Article

A ladder of deconstructing five priorities for the UN sustainable development goals in policy implementation.

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Abstract

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global commitment to address pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. However, the effective implementation of these goals often encounters significant hurdles, necessitating a systematic approach to policy formulation and execution. This paper presents a framework, termed the “Ladder of Deconstructing Five Priorities,” aimed at enhancing the efficacy of SDG implementation. The ladder comprises five critical priorities: stakeholder engagement, data-driven decision-making, capacity building, policy coherence, and monitoring and evaluation. Firstly, stakeholder engagement emphasizes the necessity of inclusive participation from diverse groups, ensuring that policies are reflective of the needs and aspirations of all segments of society. Secondly, data-driven decision-making underscores the importance of robust data collection and analysis to inform policies, enabling targeted interventions that address specific challenges. Thirdly, capacity building focuses on empowering local institutions and communities, equipping them with the skills and resources necessary for effective governance and sustainable practices. The fourth priority, policy coherence, advocates for the alignment of diverse policies across sectors to avoid conflicting objectives and maximize synergies. Finally, monitoring and evaluation are essential for assessing progress, facilitating accountability, and enabling adaptive learning throughout the implementation process.

By employing this ladder framework, the paper elucidates the interconnections among these priorities, illustrating how addressing them in a cohesive manner can enhance the overall effectiveness of SDG initiatives. Case studies from various countries are analysed and thirty-eight articles were selected for qualitative analyses from 2006 – 2025, to demonstrate practical applications of the framework and highlight successful strategies. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on sustainable development by providing actionable insights that can guide policymakers in overcoming implementation challenges, thus fostering a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

Key Words: Climate, Development, Economics, Engagement, Goals, Priorities, Social, Sustainable

Introduction

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework to address global social, economic, and environmental challenges by 2030 [1]. Adopted in 2015, these 17 interconnected goals aim to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Espey, Walecik, and Kuhner (2015) note that prioritizing the SDGs has led to progress in

areas like social equity and environmental sustainability [2]. However, Gottret and Schieber (2006) highlight significant challenges in implementation, often hindered by inadequate policy frameworks, insufficient stakeholder engagement, and lack of coherence across sectors [3,4]. To address these complexities, a structured approach is needed to translate the SDGs into actionable policies [5]. This paper presents the

"Ladder of Deconstructing Five Priorities" as a strategic guide for enhancing SDG implementation. The ladder comprises five critical priorities: stakeholder engagement, data-driven decision-making, capacity building, policy coherence, and monitoring and evaluation [6]. These priorities are interrelated, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to policy development [7]. However, existing stakeholders may resist changes in priorities, leading to social tensions if specific concerns are overlooked [8]. Gottret and Schieber (2006) stress that stakeholder engagement is essential for policy success, ensuring diverse voices, especially from marginalized communities, are included in decision-making [3]. Data-driven decision-making emphasizes robust data collection to inform policies tailored to local needs [4]. Capacity building focuses on empowering local institutions with the necessary skills and resources [5]. Policy coherence advocates for alignment across different policy areas to maximize synergies, although it can be disrupted by changes in government [8]. Monitoring and evaluation are vital for assessing progress and ensuring accountability [6]. Without adequate funding, essential priorities may remain under-resourced, leading to competition between priorities and undermining overall goals [7]. This paper aims to elucidate how addressing these five priorities cohesively can enhance the effectiveness of SDG initiatives. Through case studies and practical examples, the study offers actionable insights for policymakers, contributing to sustainable development and fostering a more equitable future for all.

Problem Statement

Real World Problem

Many African countries face challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) due to a lack of financial resources needed for effective implementation. Tans and Keeling (2011) note that insufficient funding restricts investments in infrastructure, education, and health services, impacting United Nations priorities [1]. Disparities in wealth, gender, and access to services hinder progress for marginalized groups, perpetuating cycles of poverty [6].

Implication of the Challenge

Gottret and Schieber (2006) state that inadequate governance and limited institutional capacity result in inefficiencies and corruption in struggling institutions. Additionally, a lack of reliable data complicates the assessment of SDG progress due to ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems [3,7]. Espey et al. (2017) highlight that environmental challenges, including climate change and pollution, threaten sustainable development and require coordinated global action. Political unrest and conflict divert resources away from SDG initiatives, complicating informed decision-making [4]. Dobbs et al. (2013) mention that economic fluctuations impact funding and resources for sustainable development, leading to reduced investments. Economic downturns hinder African states from implementing the SDGs due to external pressures from developed nations [5,8]. Swanson and Bhadwal (2009) observe that policymakers often prioritize immediate results over long-term sustainability, undermining efforts to address systemic issues. Rapid urbanization and population growth strain resources and infrastructure, complicating the provision of essential services [7,3]. Cultural norms and vested interests create resistance to necessary policy changes, requiring significant effort to overcome entrenched behaviors [6].

Study Motivation

This study aims to contribute to sustainable development discourse by providing a roadmap to overcome implementation challenges and foster a more equitable future.

Objectives for this Paper

- To develop strategies for inclusive stakeholder engagement, ensuring diverse perspectives are integrated into SDG policy-making.
- To establish frameworks for robust data collection that inform policy decisions, enabling targeted interventions.
- To identify and implement capacity-building programs that empower local institutions and communities with necessary skills for SDG initiatives.
- To create mechanisms that promote alignment and coherence among policies, ensuring synergistic efforts toward SDGs.

Research Aim

This work aspires to enhance understanding of navigating the complex landscape of sustainable development, ensuring progress toward equitable and enduring SDGs [9].

Study Rationale

This systematic qualitative methodology provides a framework for analyzing literature on household data mobilization and SDG integration. Through careful data collection and analysis, the study aims to yield insights for future research and practice, enhancing effective strategies for sustainable development.

Key Metrics for SDGs

Poverty Reduction (SDG 1)

Many African countries have high poverty rates, complicating policy implementation [10]. Measuring poverty varies widely, leading to inconsistencies in public understanding [3]. Informal economies struggle to adapt to economic changes [11].

Zero Hunger (SDG 2)

Undernourishment in Africa is exacerbated by conflict and drought, affecting child health [12]. Tracking nutrition and food security is resource-intensive, complicating policy implementation [10,13].

Health and Well-Being (SDG 3)

Maternal mortality and communicable diseases remain critical issues in Africa. Access to healthcare varies, complicating effective tracking [3,11].

Quality Education (SDG 4)

While literacy rates show improvement, cultural norms impact data collection, particularly regarding gender [5,14].

Gender Equality (SDG 5)

Progress in women's leadership roles is evident, yet challenges remain in measuring educational quality and addressing the gender pay gap [3,12].

Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6)

African governments are improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation, but effective data collection is needed [3,10].

Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7)

Increased access to electricity is notable, but greenhouse gas tracking remains challenging due to inconsistent data [11,13].

Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)

Efforts to reduce unemployment are gaining traction, although evaluating partnerships remains complex [3,12].

Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9)

African countries are shifting towards managing small-scale industries, but tracking innovation metrics is challenging [5,10].

Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)

Income inequality persists, with urban migration increasing slum populations [3]. Measuring inequality requires a multi-dimensional approach [12].

Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)

Urban populations in Africa are increasing, with access to services improving.

Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12)

Efforts to improve material consumption metrics and recycling rates are underway [10].

Climate Action (SDG 13)

Low greenhouse gas emissions in rural areas contrast with urban investment, complicating biodiversity metrics [3,8].

Life Below Water (SDG 14)

Development of fish farming is a priority, but water services require a collective approach for effective management [10,12].

Life on Land (SDG 15)

Urban migration is diminishing forest land, complicating ecosystem protection efforts [3].

Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)

High unemployment correlates with rising homicide rates, complicating policy implementation [3,8].

Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17)

Local ownership of business ventures is rising, but oversimplifying goals can lead to ineffective policies [3,10].

Research Objective 3: Identify and implement capacity-building programs that empower local institutions and communities to effectively implement SDG initiatives.

Results and Discussion

Effectiveness of Prioritizing UN Sustainable Development Goals in Policy Implementation

Prioritizing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is vital for achieving sustainable outcomes across social, economic, and environmental areas [15]. Key dimensions of this effectiveness include:

Holistic Approach

Integrating SDGs into policy allows governments to tackle interconnected challenges, maximizing resources and impact [8,16]. This fosters collaboration among stakeholders, enriching

policy relevance [15,17].

Focused Resource Allocation

Prioritizing SDGs directs financial and human resources toward urgent needs, improving efficiency and support for measurable results [15,18]. While this approach has benefits, challenges remain for successful implementation [3].

Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement

Emphasizing SDGs promotes inclusive participation from diverse stakeholders, fostering ownership and accountability [18,19]. This leads to culturally relevant solutions and enhances resilience and accountability [15].

Improved Data-Driven Decision-Making

Prioritizing SDGs emphasizes the importance of data collection and analysis, enabling targeted interventions based on evidence [16,20]. Robust data supports informed decision-making that addresses specific local challenges [8].

Capacity Building and Resilience

Focusing on SDGs encourages investment in capacity building, empowering local institutions and enhancing resilience to challenges like climate change [17,18]. This fosters collaboration and accountability across sectors [3].

Monitoring and Accountability

Prioritizing SDGs necessitates strong monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and enhance accountability [15]. However, many countries lack the necessary infrastructure for effective data management [15].

Long-Term Vision

Prioritizing the SDGs fosters a long-term perspective in policy planning, encouraging sustainable investments that benefit future generations [16,18]. Establishing clear success metrics enhances public trust and engagement [8,20].

Research Objective 4: Create mechanisms to promote alignment and coherence among policies and sectors, ensuring synergistic efforts toward achieving the SDGs.

Collaborative Theory

Collaborative theory emphasizes cooperation among individuals and organizations to achieve shared goals (Jonker & Meehan, 2008). It is particularly relevant for addressing complex problems requiring diverse stakeholder engagement [15]. Key components include:

- **Policy Making:** Collaborative theory informs participatory processes, enhancing transparency and ensuring policies meet community needs [8,20].
- **Business and Organizational Management:** Collaborative approaches foster teamwork and innovation, enabling cross-functional teams to solve complex problems effectively ([17,18].
- **Research and Innovation:** Collaborative theory promotes interdisciplinary efforts in scientific research, leading to innovative solutions for global challenges [12,15].

Discussing Prioritizing UN Sustainable Development Goals in Policy Implementation Prioritizing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is crucial for sustainable

development and addressing global challenges. This discussion highlights the rationale, benefits, and challenges of prioritizing SDGs in policymaking.

Rationale for Prioritization

- **Global Commitment:** The SDGs provide a framework for addressing issues like poverty and climate change. Governments must align their policies with these goals to fulfill international commitments [17,21]. However, the broad scope of SDGs can lead to fragmentation and ineffective policy implementation [3].
- **Interconnectedness of Goals:** The SDGs are interlinked; progress in one area can positively impact others, such as education enhancing gender equality and economic growth [22]. Policymakers face challenges due to financial limitations and bureaucratic inertia [20].
- **Increased Partnerships:** Multi-stakeholder partnerships foster innovative solutions and greater participation from marginalized communities [17,21]. However, lack of reliable data can complicate progress assessment [22].
- **Targeted Interventions:** Policymakers are better at addressing specific needs, leading to effective resource allocation [23,24]. However, political unrest can derail SDG efforts in unstable regions [10].
- **Poverty Reduction:** Countries aligning with SDGs have made progress in reducing poverty through targeted programs (Arthurton et al., 2007). However, cultural norms can hinder necessary policy changes [10].
- **Climate Action Initiatives:** Countries prioritizing climate action have implemented policies to reduce emissions and promote renewable energy [18]. Challenges include avoiding common pitfalls like insufficient stakeholder engagement [20].

Conclusion

Improved data systems have led to better monitoring and evaluation of SDG progress, fostering public trust (Philip et al., 2011). However, challenges remain in managing organizations effectively and ensuring accurate data collection [3].

Research Methodology

This methodology outlines a qualitative approach to analyze literature on SDGs, data mobilization, and institutional frameworks [25].

Research Design: The study explores the role of household data in advancing SDGs through a systematic qualitative approach [1].

Selection of Articles: A selection of key articles was analyzed, including works by Alkire & Samman (2014) and Arthurton et al. (2007). Case studies from various countries are analysed and thirty-eight articles were selected for qualitative analyses from 2007 – 2025 [10,21].

Data Collection: Data was gathered through a systematic review focusing on key themes related to data mobilization and institutional frameworks [26].

The process included:

- **Comprehensive Reading:** Each article was reviewed, noting significant concepts, findings, and methodologies.
- **Development of Research Objectives:** Objectives were formulated based on recurring themes in the literature, focusing

on household data in policymaking and SDG target integration.

- **Content Analysis:** A systematic qualitative content analysis was performed, involving several steps:
- **Coding:** Key themes were identified and summarized under each objective, focusing on data mobilization, SDG integration, and institutional mapping.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Summarized data was organized into broader categories to highlight diverse perspectives and recurring themes.
- **Control of Variables:** Potential biases and contextual factors were managed to enhance the validity of findings.

Substantiation

To ensure reliability, the analysis methods were tested for consistency [26]. Peer debriefing sessions were held to validate insights and interpretations collaboratively.

Reporting

Findings were compiled into a structured report outlining key themes, insights, and implications from the qualitative analysis.

Results (Findings) of prioritising UN SDGs in policy implementation

Prioritizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in policy implementation has yielded several significant results, showcasing both improvements in governance and measurable outcomes across various sectors. The following outlines key results observed from this prioritization:

Lack of Clear Vision

In most African states the leadership lacks clear vision on how to implement the SDGs affects the setting up of the priorities (Jonker, & Meehan, 2008). The unclear objectives fail to articulate a clear vision for the change can lead to confusion and misalignment among employees. In addition, the inconsistent messaging from leadership creates uncertainty and resistance, from the local communities who believe, they are entitled to destroy the environment for farming [27].

Ignoring Stakeholder Engagement

In some African countries, the political leaders are of the view the stakeholders are influenced by the opposition parties who continues to frustrate them government to implement the policies [20]. Laframboise, & Loko, (2012) state that the use of Top-Down Approach continues to create obsession among the political leaders in implementing changes without involving employees can lead to pushback and lack of buy-in [28]. The One-Way communication prevents valuable input from communities and public employees to implement the policies in most African countries [18].

Insufficient Communication

Arthurton, et al. (2007) states that due to the pressures African governments face from the electorate, they leaders have a tendency of providing infrequent updates about the implementation of the policies in different institutions [21]. They fail provide regular updates can leave employees feeling uninformed and anxious about the change taken by the public officials to set up the priorities [20]. In addition, the political leaders tend to neglect feedback from the stakeholders' raising concerns and foster resentment and hinder cooperation [17].

Underestimating Resistance

Most African leaders are good at using violence to justify their hang on power, they often ignore emotional responses are troublesome and a waste of time, which destroys the countries' reputation [18]. Reeves, & Milledge, (2015) state that they are good at dismissing the emotional impact of change can lead to increased resistance and disengagement in different African countries [24]. This overlooks the organisational culture, resulting in a clash between new initiatives and existing values [27].

Inadequate Training and Support

Most African states are of the view that public servants are well trained from different institutions, neglecting skill development as a waste of both financial and human resources [20]. Philip, et al., (2011) state that they believe that not providing necessary training let the government to keep the public employees to serve the public sector and adapt to new processes or technologies [23]. The insufficient support resources hinder employees' ability to adjust effectively when implementing the SDGs in different countries [28].

Setting Unrealistic Timelines

Some African states please the international community by rushing to implement the SDGs, they make unnecessary changes leading to mistakes and overwhelm public employees [18]. Philip, et al., (2011) state that ignoring complexity in most African countries lead to underestimating the change process, which often result in unforeseen challenges, such as trying to implement changes too quickly [23]. This makes it difficult to establish clear metrics to evaluate progress can make it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the change [24].

Neglecting to Celebrate Success

Artherton, et al. (2007) states that most African countries overlook achievements by not recognizing and celebrating milestones can diminish morale and motivation among public employees [21]. The focus solely on problems to create a negative atmosphere and reduce enthusiasm for the change, when implementing the policies in different institutions [20]. Defining poverty is complex; different countries use varying poverty lines due to the development of informal economies and lack of comprehensive data on income levels make accurate measurement difficult [17].

Recommendations

Overcoming resistance to change in organizations requires a thoughtful and strategic approach [3,8,12,15,17,18,20,29].

Here are several effective strategies:

Clear Communication

Transparent messaging: The clearly articulate the reasons for the change, its benefits, and its impact on employees in identifying gaps and areas needing alignment with the SDGs for different organization. The ongoing updates keep stakeholders informed throughout the change process to reduce uncertainty and misinformation involving the diverse stakeholders, including government, civil society, and private sector. This prioritizes funding and resources for the most critical SDGs that reflects the importance of implementation of the policies through the equitable distribution of resources to underserved communities.

Involve Employees Early

Participatory Approach: The African government must engage employees in the change process from the outset, seeking their input and feedback, implement regular reporting mechanisms to track advancements. The African leaders must foster partnerships to enhance collaborative efforts when implementing the SDGs in different organisations to encourage community involvement in sustainability initiatives. The co-creation of partnership must allow teams to contribute to developing solutions, fostering a sense of ownership and investment in the change, involving employees, providing support, addressing emotional responses, highlighting successes.

Provide Training and Support

The most African countries must promote skills development to offer training programs to equip employees with the skills needed to adapt to new processes or technologies to understand the SDGs among the general public. The public employees must facilitate discussions to understand different perspectives and needs related to the SDGs. The African governments must ensure that support, resources, mentoring, coaching are available to help employees navigate the transition, forming change in different organizations.

Address Emotional Responses

The African leaders must develop empathy and understanding of the issues raised by the communities then acknowledge the emotional aspects of change and provide support to those who may be struggling. The public officials must create safe spaces for employees to express their concerns and feelings about the change in policy implementation by employing clear communication. They must demonstrate leadership commitment, and being patient, to change and foster a more adaptable workplace culture to effectively overcome resistance.

Highlight Quick Wins

The African leaders must provide early successes to showcase quick wins and positive outcomes from the change to build momentum and demonstrate its benefits. The culture of celebrating achievements in recognizing the milestones to reinforce commitment and motivation. They must be willing to adjust plans based on feedback and changing circumstances, showing that the organization values public employee inputs when implementing the policies.

Leadership Commitment

The African government need visible leadership to actively support and participate in the change process, demonstrating commitment and accountability for different institutions. The public officials are the role models the desired behaviours and attitudes, encouraging employees to embrace the change. The adaptability in long-term perspectives recognize that change takes time and that resistance may decrease as public employees adjust the SDGs implementation.

Create a Change Network

The African governments must create a system of changing public officials to champion the implementation of the SDGs in most African countries to develop educational programs that emphasize sustainable practices. Identify and empower change champions within the organization who advocate for the

change and influence their peers using independent institutions. This form diverse teams to address different aspects of the change, fostering collaboration and shared ownership, when implementing the policies in different institutions.

Conclusion

This ladder framework provides a structured approach to effectively implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals in policy-making, ensuring that each priority builds on the previous one for comprehensive action. The results demonstrate the potential of a coordinated, inclusive, and data-driven approach to address complex global challenges. However, ongoing efforts are necessary to overcome existing barriers and ensure that the momentum toward achieving the SDGs is sustained. The continued commitment to these goals will be crucial in achieving a more sustainable and equitable future for all [17,30-38].

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