



Emerging Issues in Development Planning Series

Strengthening capacities for integrated development planning, financing and reporting: lessons and challenges

July 2023

Macroeconomics and Governance Division
Development Planning Section



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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Integrated planning and reporting toolkit	2
3.	Understanding emerging issues in development planning: methodology	3
4.	Discussion of findings	4
4.1	National development plans demonstrate closer alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals than with the goals of Agenda 2023	4
4.2	Closer alignment at the goal level than at the target and indicator levels	6
4.3	National development plans often not based on sound results frameworks ...	8
4.4	Weak institutional mechanisms to track national development plans	9
4.5	Supporting the ex-ante alignment of national development plans with other agendas.....	11
4.6	Challenges in aligning the national development plan structure with global and regional agendas	12
4.7	Disconnect between financial programs and planning programs	14
5.	Conclusions and policy recommendations	15
5.1.	Alignment of national development plans with continental and global commitments.....	15
5.2.	Bias in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and lack of disaggregated alignment scores.....	15
5.3.	Alignment of national development plans with financing frameworks	15
5.4.	Towards SMART performance monitoring	16
5.5.	Leveraging digital technologies for planning.....	16
	Sources	18

1. Introduction

National development plans serve as blueprints for the achievement by Governments of desired development outcomes ideally based on the needs and priorities of citizens. The planning process is, however, occurring in an increasingly complex development landscape characterized by rapid technological innovations, extreme weather events and shocks such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The rising debt vulnerabilities and fiscal imbalances brought on by these multiple crises have thrown more households into poverty, derailed progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and put into sharp focus the importance of greater prudence in fiscal spending and the need to scale up development financing and align it more closely with national development priorities.

With a growing number of African countries reeling from the prolonged effects of the crises, the capacity of planning entities to design and implement integrated planning systems and strategies for inclusive growth and debt sustainability is imperative. Current planning approaches tend to be fragmented along sectoral and institutional lines, thereby undermining synergies, fuelling duplication of effort and the sub-optimal use of scarce resources.

Integrated development planning frameworks that reflect countries' national, regional and global commitments are aligned with financial frameworks, appropriately identify catalytic and transformational interventions, and are continually tracked and evaluated are vital for responding to emerging crises and shocks and ensuring value for money in the use of national resources.

Supported by digital technology, integrated planning can enhance the responsiveness of planning frameworks to shocks by seamlessly linking the various components of the planning process in a single platform. Digital technology strengthens the planning process in critical areas such as data analytics, diagnostics of results frameworks and the automated tracking and alignment of development priorities with international commitments and financing frameworks. These capabilities are particularly important as the number of international commitments continues to grow, financing needs expand and the data requirements to track performance escalate.

Inspired by the need to enhance the responsiveness of planning frameworks to the demands of a rapidly evolving development landscape, in 2017 the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) developed a web-based planning tool, known as the “integrated planning and reporting toolkit”. The present paper analyses critical issues, challenges and opportunities in development planning that emerged during the roll-out of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit in 28 planning entities in Africa. Drawing on these experiences, the paper offers recommendations and suggests policy perspectives to enhance planning outcomes in Africa. The analysis is informed by desk research, survey data, observations and informal discussions with development planning experts encountered during the roll-out process.

Section 2 introduces the integrated planning and reporting toolkit and discusses its potential contribution to strengthening digital planning. Drawing on the results of a survey, section 3 highlights the challenges and lessons learned in development planning drawing from country experiences in implementing the toolkit. The paper concludes with recommendations on improving integrated development planning, financing and reporting.

2. Integrated planning and reporting toolkit

The integrated planning and reporting toolkit is a web-based software application that equips planners with the capacity to digitize their planning frameworks to support integrated planning functions such as alignment with global and continental agendas, integration with financing frameworks, diagnostics of results frameworks and seamless tracking and reporting on plan performance. Specifically, the toolkit leverages digital technology to: enhance precision in the alignment of international commitments with national plans; link budgets to development priorities; identify gaps in the results framework of national development plans; and generate performance tracking dashboards.

A distinguishing feature of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit is that it enables the alignment of multiple priorities. Unlike other tools that focus exclusively on alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, it also facilitates alignment of national development plans with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. This alignment is done at the goal, target and indicator levels. Work is also under way to integrate the Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries into the integrated planning and reporting tool. This is particularly useful, since the continent accounts for 33 countries (72 per cent) of the world's 46 least developed countries.

The toolkit also assists policymakers in understanding the relationship between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063. This process of horizontal alignment is achieved by mapping the 2030 Agenda to Agenda 2063 to identify synergies between the two agendas and minimize duplication in the integration of both agendas in national development plans.

Beyond alignment and tracking, the integrated planning and reporting toolkit facilitates the identification of potential gaps in the planning process. Specifically, the toolkit provides a diagnostic of a country's results framework, which, among other features, reveals whether the framework has goals without targets, whether the framework has targets without indicators, and whether all the indicators in the framework have baselines. This information is vital for strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacities and frameworks.

The integrated planning and reporting toolkit also generates reports and visual dashboards that can inform voluntary national reviews and facilitate simultaneous national reporting on performance against the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Lastly, the introduction in 2022 of a financing module in the integrated planning and reporting toolkit has made it possible for policymakers to explore the links between financing and development priorities. This is vital in a context where fiscal constraints and debt vulnerabilities are rising.

To date, a total of 28 countries and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have been exposed to the integrated planning and reporting toolkit either through formal training measures or workshops spearheaded by the Development Planning Section of ECA. These countries are: Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

3. Understanding emerging issues in development planning: methodology

In the process of supporting integrated planning approaches with the use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, ECA has gained detailed insights into several planning-related challenges and issues in Africa. The information providing these insights derives from three sources. The first is the process of observation and informal conversations with persons being trained in the use of the toolkit since 2020, when its web-based version was developed.

The second source is the structured survey questionnaire seeking feedback on development planning challenges and solutions, the use and impact of the toolkit, and recommendations on how ECA could improve its support for its members.¹ The questionnaire was sent to the 13 members of ECA whose nationals had received training on and were using the web-based version of the tool. One country was unable to respond to the questionnaire because it has yet to adopt an updated national development plan and was therefore unable to make full use of the tool. In other cases, the questionnaire was completed on behalf of the country by a single respondent, while other countries provided multiple responses. In total, 15 females and 16 males from nine countries participated in the survey, which was administered during the period February–March 2023. The table below shows the countries and number of respondents.

Table 1: Survey respondents

Countries	Number of respondents
Benin	5
Botswana	2
Cameroon	2
Comoros	1
Côte d’Ivoire	1
Ghana	12
Malawi	5
Seychelles	1
Zambia	2
Total	31

Lastly, the assessment was informed by data derived from the various modules of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit itself, including a dashboard display showing the results framework of countries’ national development plans, referred to as the “results framework diagnostic dashboard”, the performance monitoring module, the financial dashboard, and the reports which measure the alignment of national development plans with the Sustainable Development Goals, on the one hand, and the goals of Agenda 2063, on the other.

¹ The survey, entitled “Evaluation of training outcomes and assessment of uptake of IPRT in the Member States”, was prepared by the Development Planning Section of the ECA Macroeconomics and Governance Division. The questionnaire circulated to members is available on the Google docs online platform, at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe-zdO56d1YA8IyMdgaZY54QwF22OfS5YsrBjLj8E8CVaiNw/viewform>.

4. Discussion of findings

4.1. National development plans demonstrate closer alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals than with the goals of Agenda 2063

The national development plans of African States tend to be more closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals than with the goals of Agenda 2063. Out of 12 cases reviewed in the integrated planning and reporting toolkit,² all the plans except those of Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Zambia were more closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals than with Agenda 2063 (see table 2 and figure 1 below). Possible explanations for the weaker alignment with Agenda 2063 could be that certain aspirations and goals in Agenda 2063 apply at a continental level. For example, Goal 9: “Continental financial and monetary Institutions are established and functional”, is not a country-specific goal and has no country-specific targets or indicators.

Table 2: Alignment of national development plans of analysed countries and SADC with the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063

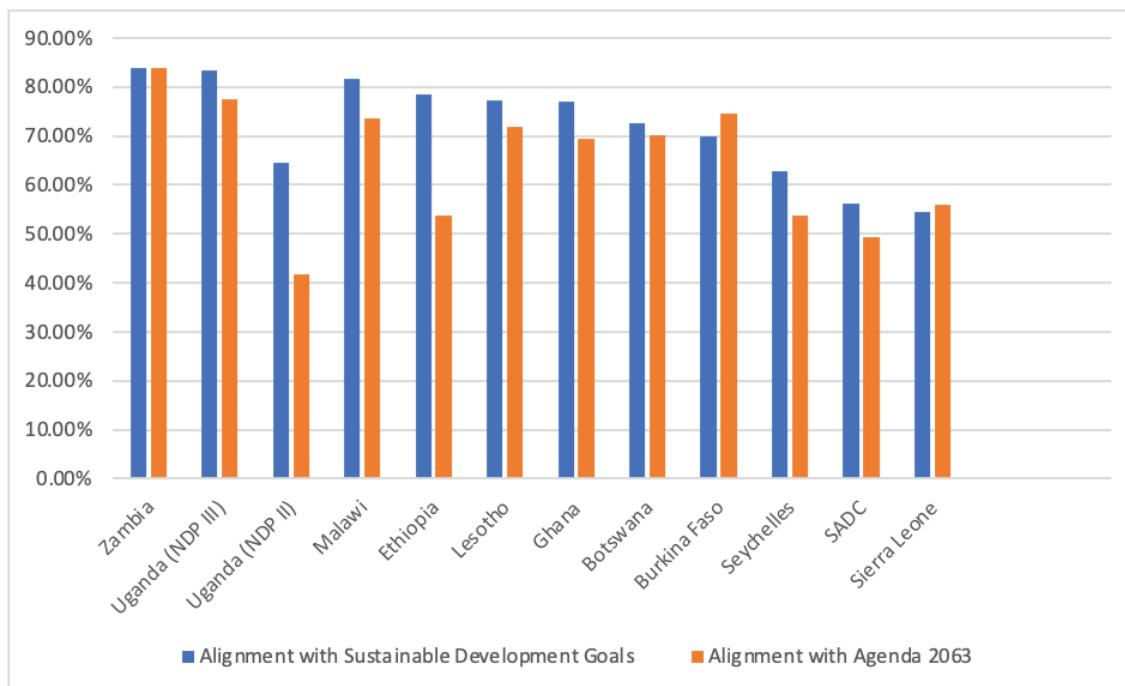
Country	Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals	Alignment with Agenda 2063
Botswana	72.51%	70.03%
Burkina Faso	69.9%	74.52%
Ethiopia	78.38%	53.79%
Ghana	76.99%	69.45%
Lesotho	77.24%	71.83%
Malawi	81.62%	73.6%
Seychelles	62.68%	53.68%
Sierra Leone	54.53%	56.03%
Uganda (NDP II)	64.52%	41.77%
Uganda (NDP III)	83.41%	77.57%
Zambia	83.9%	83.98%
SADC	56.15%	49.38%

Note: NDP, national development plan.

Source: ECA, “Integrated planning and reporting toolkit”, 2023. Available at iprt.uneca.org.

² Uganda has used the integrated planning and reporting toolkit for both its second and third national development plans (NDP II and NDP III).

Figure I : Alignment of national development plans of analysed countries and SADC with the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063



Source: ECA, “Integrated planning and reporting toolkit”, 2023. Available at iprt.uneca.org.

Another possible explanation is that certain aspirations and goals of Agenda 2063 do not pertain to all members of ECA. For example, target 1.25: “All settlements in small island States are linked by frequent, efficient, and effective (where appropriate) land, air, and sea rapid transit systems by 2020” and its accompanying indicators are specific to small island States. Again, target 4.19: “Ecofriendly coastal tourism increased by 20 per cent by 2020 with at least 10 per cent of the public revenues from it going to finance development programmes of the communities” and its accompanying indicator also pertain to coastal regions and exclude landlocked countries. Target 8.6: “Volume of trade with African island States is increased by at least 10 per cent”, and its accompanying indicator also pertain specifically to island States.

A third possible explanation is that awareness of Agenda 2063 is less extensive than that of Agenda 2030, and increased investment must be made to foster such awareness, as was achieved for Agenda 2030 across national and local level stakeholders. There are signs that the integrated planning and reporting toolkit is heightening awareness of Agenda 2063, and also of the relationship between Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. Survey results show that some 60 per cent of respondents believed that the toolkit had a significant impact on their understanding and awareness of Agenda 2063 (see table 3 below), and also on their ability to integrate the toolkit into their national development plans.

Table 3: Impacts of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit on aspects of the development planning process

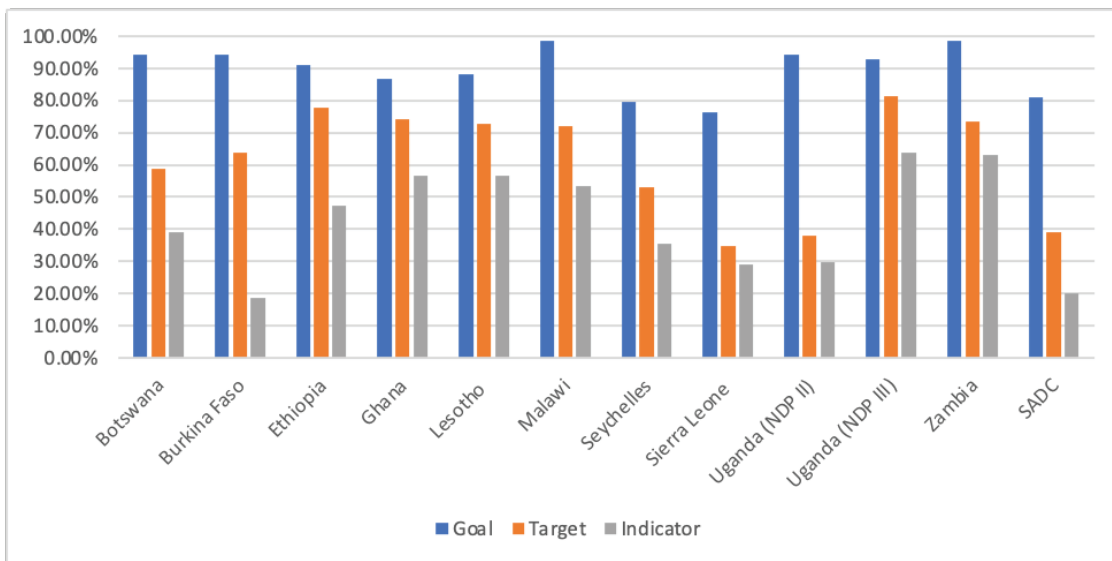
Aspects of development planning process	Level of impacts				
	No impact	Weak impact	Moderate impact	Strong impact	Very strong impact
Your understanding and awareness of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	40.0%	26.7%
Your understanding and awareness of Agenda 2063	0.0%	3.4%	34.5%	41.4%	20.7%
Your understanding of the relationship between the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063	0.0%	3.3%	33.3%	43.3%	20.0%
Your ability to Integrate Agenda 2030 into your national development plan	0.0%	6.7%	33.3%	40.0%	20.0%
Your ability to Integrate Agenda 2063 into your national development plan	0.0%	3.3%	33.3%	43.3%	20.0%

4.2. Closer alignment at the goal level than at the target and indicator levels

Countries tend to have a consistently closer alignment at the goal level than at the target and indicator levels. The integrated planning and reporting toolkit shows alignment at three levels – of goals, targets and Indicators – and provides an overall alignment score. Specifically, it will show how countries are aligned with the 17 goals, 169 targets and 244 indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals and 20 goals, 174 targets and 257 indicators of Agenda 2063.³ This finding could be indicative of the fact that countries use proxy indicators in the absence of data for certain indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals and of Agenda 2063. The figure below shows the alignment of select countries’ national development plans at the goal, target and indicator levels with the Sustainable Development Goals.

³ Different weights are given to goals (50 per cent), targets (30 per cent) and indicators (20 per cent), with the overall alignment showing the sum of these three weightings.

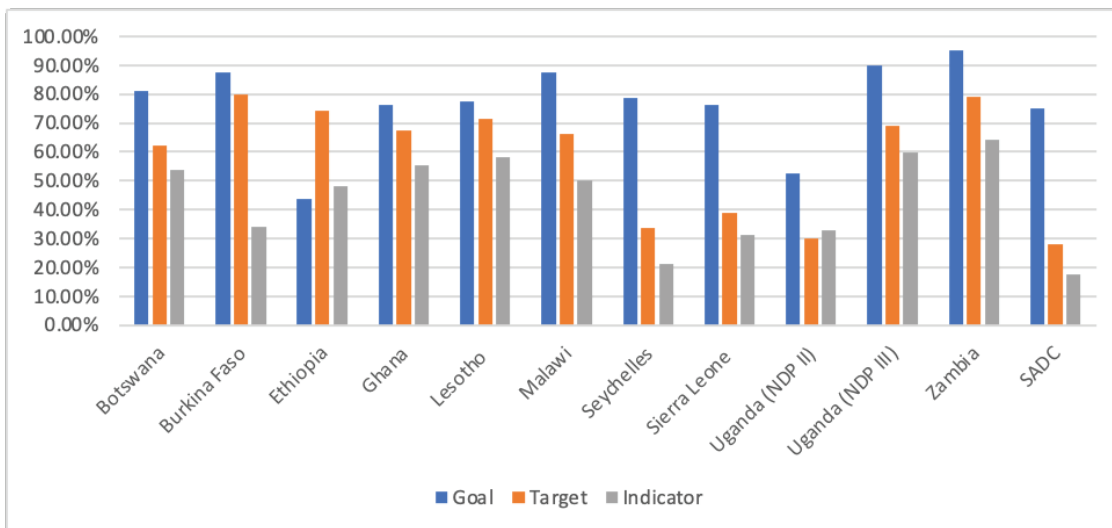
Figure II: Alignment of national development plans with the Sustainable Development Goals at goal, target and indicator levels for analysed countries and SADC



Source: ECA, “Integrated planning and reporting toolkit”, 2023. Available at iprt.uneca.org.

The same pattern may also be observed with the alignment of national development plans with Agenda 2063, as shown in the figure below.

Figure III: Alignment of national development plans with Agenda 2063 at goal, target and indicator levels for analysed countries and SADC



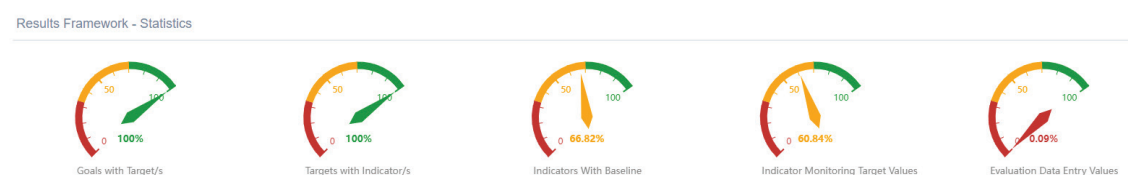
Source ECA, “Integrated planning and reporting toolkit”, 2023. Available at iprt.uneca.org.

4.3. National development plans often not based on sound results frameworks

A recurrent issue that emerged during the engagement with African States was the existence of gaps in the results framework of their national development plans. For instance, several indicators of most national development plans lack baselines. In some instances, targets were not specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART), while indicators lacked data and, hence, could not be systematically monitored. These absences lead to a situation where monitoring and evaluation reports are not based on the national development plan, thereby rendering the plan irrelevant. In the absence of specific quantitative data, performance reporting is forced to rely on desk research, interviews, focus group discussions and other qualitative methods often unrelated to the indicators in the national development plan.

Based on the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, an analysis of the results framework of Lesotho (National Strategic Development Plan II, 2018/19–2022/23) demonstrated that, while there was a 100 per cent alignment of goals with targets and of targets with indicators, only 66.82 per cent of indicators had baselines and 60.84 per cent of indicators had monitoring targets. Again, although the Lesotho plan had been implemented for a few years, fewer than 1 per cent of the relevant data were available for evaluation purposes. As a result, dedicated follow-through is needed to address the data gaps and ensure effective tracking of the national development plan.

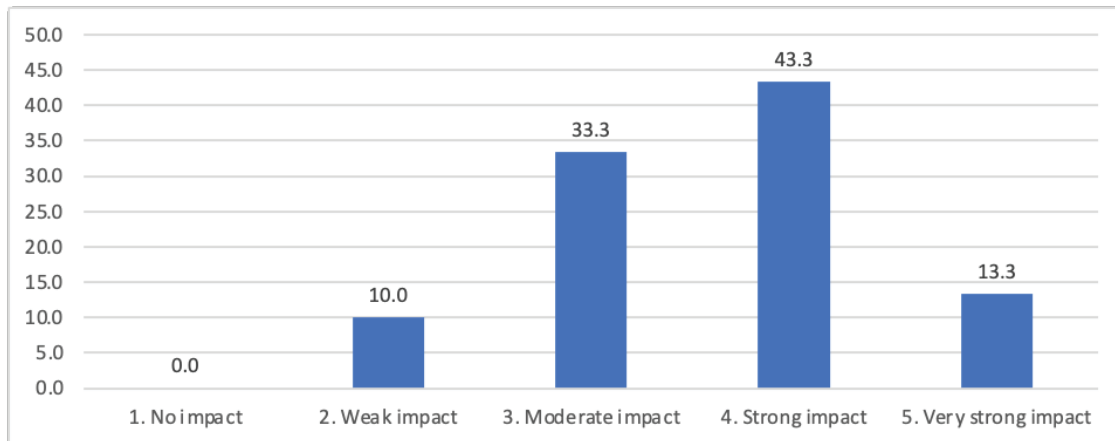
Figure IV: Lesotho results framework statistics



Source: ECA, “Integrated planning and reporting toolkit”, 2023. Available at iprt.uneca.org.

Training sessions in the use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit have been invaluable in highlighting and making government officials think actively about these gaps in their results frameworks. Survey results show that most (56.6 per cent) participants found that the toolkit training significantly enhanced their ability to clearly define goals, targets and indicators.

Figure V : Ability to clearly define goals, targets and indicators for national development plans



Source: Authors' compilation, based on the survey results.

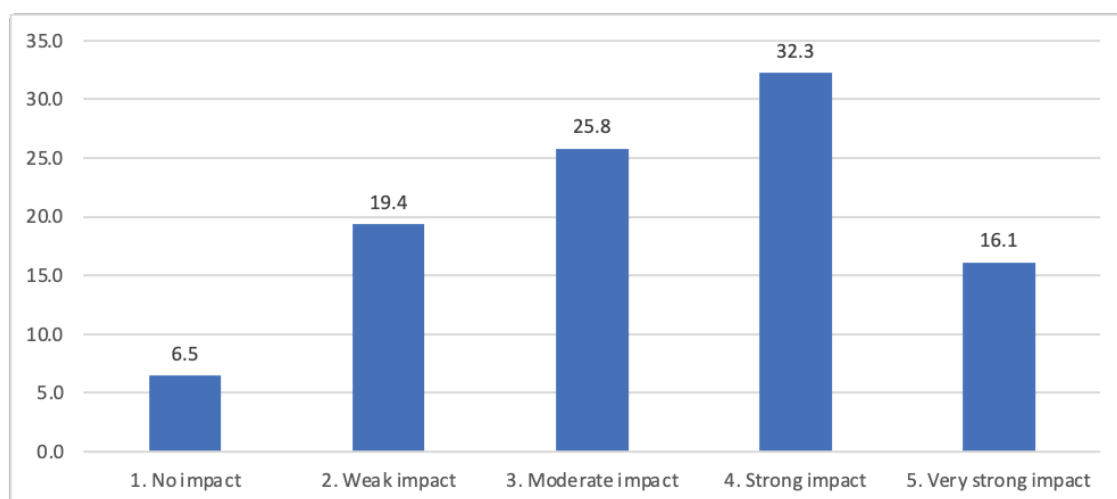
Improving the quality of results frameworks and improvements in the alignment process will greatly enhance the quality of the voluntary national reviews submitted by countries. Alignment information generated by the integrated planning and reporting toolkit was used to support the 2022 voluntary national review of Malawi. At the 2023 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, Zambia also requested support from ECA in use of the toolkit to enhance its reporting under the voluntary national review.

4.4. Weak institutional mechanisms to track national development plans

Weak tracking of national development plans is another significant issue among African States. A country might develop a well-crafted national development plan, with targets and indicators, but not put in place the institutional mechanisms to monitor these indicators. As a consequence of this failing and the resulting weak national statistical systems, the ability of States to design effective indicator frameworks and compile performance monitoring data is limited. Targets and indicators are proposed without much thought as to who is responsible for these data; when and how the data are to be gathered; to whom and when the data should be submitted; and what resources should be used to submit it.

Survey results show that the effectiveness of development planning processes was adversely affected by the inadequacy or unreliable quality of the required data.

Figure VI: Impact of inadequate or unreliable data for planning



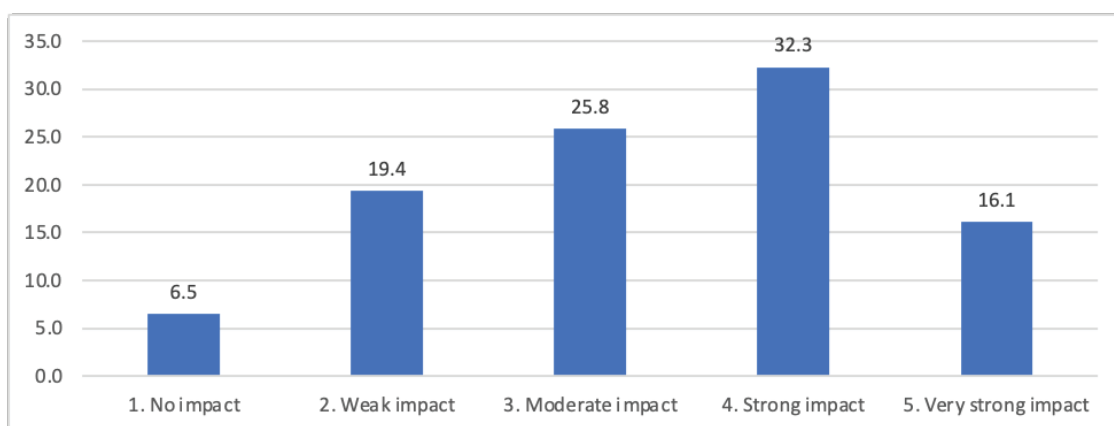
Source: Authors' compilation, based on the survey results.

In some countries, the responsibility for data gathering and entry is dispersed, and there is no central mechanism for coordination and harmonization. To respond to this challenge, Botswana has developed data management guidelines to strengthen the country's data management system. Nevertheless, some of the ministries remain outside the system, as they have yet to sign the necessary agreements with Statistics Botswana. Uganda has a strong department in charge of monitoring and evaluation, which recently developed an integrated monitoring and evaluation system for tracking its national development plan, which the various entities responsible for gathering data can use to upload their data. Despite the significant effort being put into awareness-raising and encouraging data entry, the process remains slow, however.

Notwithstanding these data challenges, some countries still deploy a large number of indicators in their results framework. At the time of its training session in the use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, the results framework of the third Ugandan national development plan, NDP III, comprised over 4,000 indicators, but fewer than 1,000 had performance data. In these instances, performance tracking is compromised and national development plans are often not fully implemented or tracked.

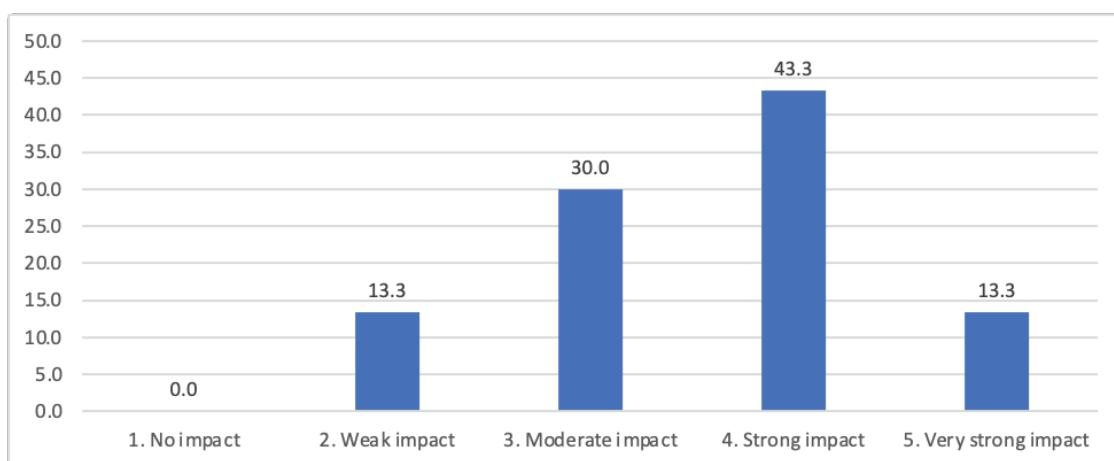
Where African States are concerned, survey results confirm that inadequate monitoring and evaluation capabilities are exacerbating their weaknesses in the results framework, with adverse impacts on their development planning processes. Training in the use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, however, has enhanced their ability to track and monitor the performance of their national development plans (figure V).

Figure VII: Inadequate monitoring and evaluation capabilities



Source: Authors' compilation, based on the survey results.

Figure VIII: Impact of training in use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit on ability to track and monitor national development plans



Source: Authors' compilation, based on the survey results.

4.5. Supporting the ex-ante alignment of national development plans with other agendas

African States underscored the need for guidance on how to integrate international commitments during the design stage of their national development plans. The integrated planning and reporting toolkit currently evaluates the alignment of national development plans with both agendas after the plans have been designed. Interactions with African States have revealed, however, that countries need support in effectively integrating other plans into their national development plans at the time when the latter are being developed. The United Nations national voluntary and local voluntary reviews, under which countries review their fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals, assist this process by demonstrating where there are gaps in performance against the Sustainable Development Goal, with a view to encouraging key actions in pursuit of the Goals to be included in subsequent national development plans. During the toolkit training in Lesotho, this issue was raised and a draft alignment template was presented to guide the integration of the Sustainable

Development Goals and Agenda 2063 in national development plans during the design stage. There is, however, scope for further refinements to the template to strengthen this aspect of the alignment process.

4.6. Challenges in aligning the national development plan structure with global and regional agendas

Aligning global and continental agendas with national planning frameworks requires all three frameworks to share a common structure. In practice, however, this is never the case. On the one hand, global and regional agendas, such as the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, have very different structures. For its part, the 2030 Agenda is structured into dimensions, goals, targets and indicators, while Agenda 2063 is structured into aspirations, goals, targets and indicators. Similarly, the structure of national development plans vary from country to country.

The Lesotho National Strategic Development Plan II, for example, consists of key priority areas, outcomes and indicators. The eighth national development plan of Zambia comprises strategic development areas, development outcomes and strategies, programme outputs, indicators and targets. As a result, identifying which component of the plan maps to the goals, targets or indicators of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 can be a daunting task. Making inappropriate choices can have adverse impacts on the alignment index.

For Lesotho, it was agreed, after a process of collective engagement involving government participants and ECA trainers, that the key priority areas of the National Strategic Development Plan II would be treated as goals; the plan's outcomes would be matched to targets; and the indicators under the outcomes would be matched to indicators (table 4).

Table 4 : Mapping the results framework of the Lesotho National Strategic Development Plan II and the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063

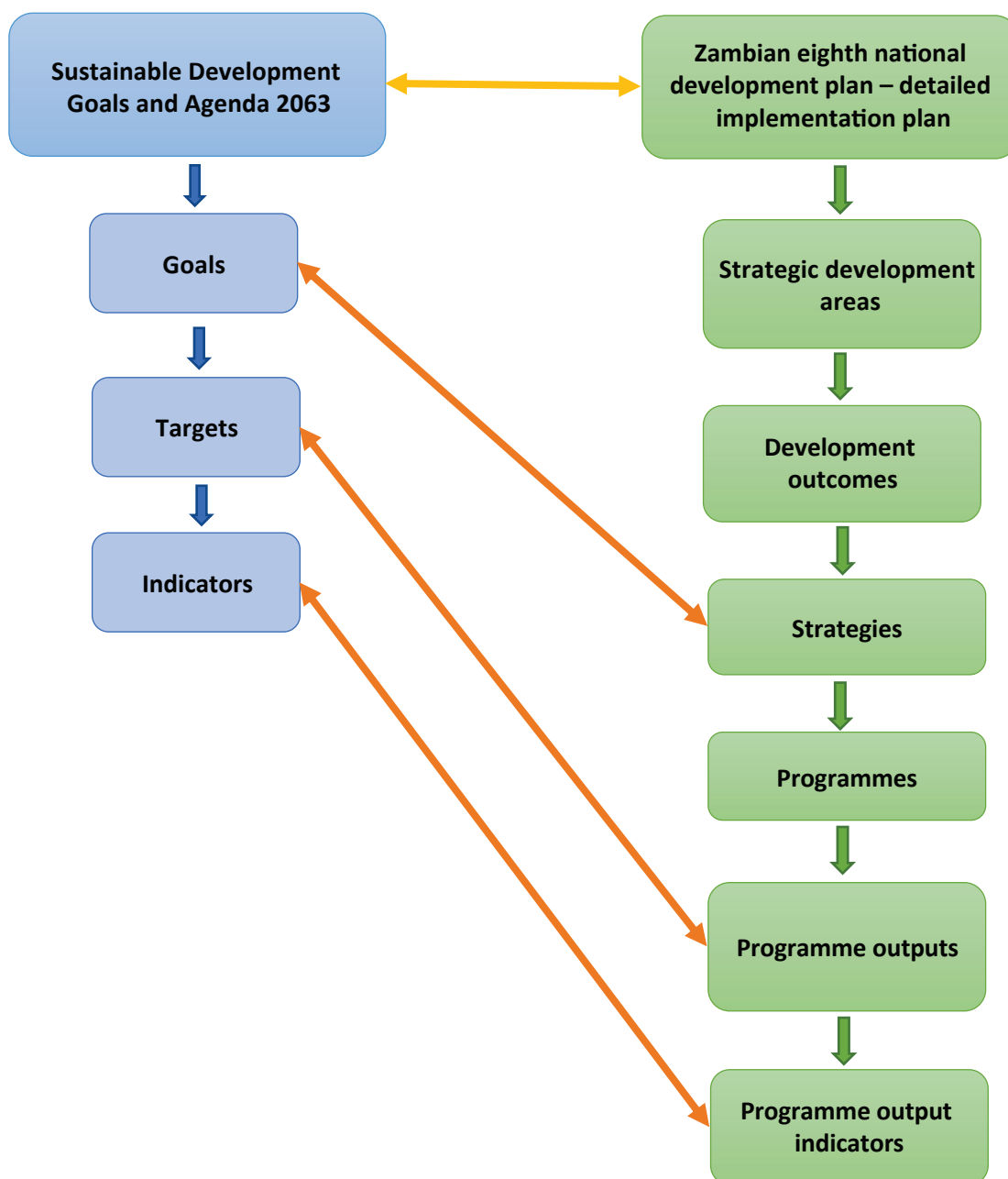
Lesotho National Strategic Development Plan II	Matching element of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063
Key priority area	Goal
Outcomes	Target
Outcome indicators	Indicator

Where the Zambian results framework is concerned, the collective agreement was to map the strategies, programme outputs and output indicators of the results framework to the goals, targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063, respectively (see table 5 and figure VI).

Table 5: Mapping the results framework of the Zambian eighth national development plan to the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063

Zambian eighth national development plan	Matching element of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063
Strategy	Goal
Programme output	Target
Output indicator	Indicator

Figure IX: Mapping the results framework of the Zambian eighth national development plan to the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063



Source: ECA, “Integrated planning and reporting toolkit”, 2023. Available at iprt.uneca.org.

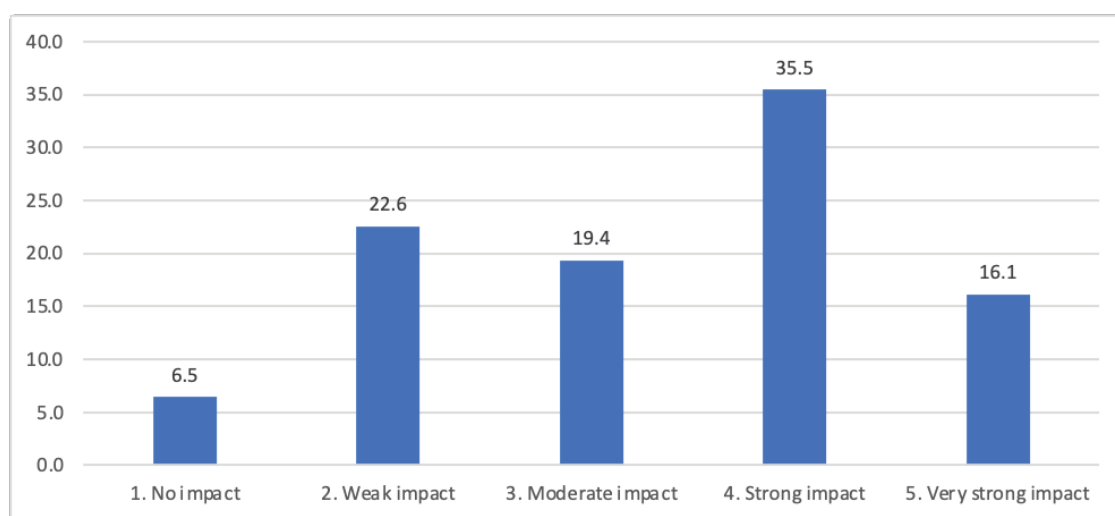
Work by ECA to align global and regional agendas with the national development plan, at the goal, target and indicator level, is aimed at enabling its members not only to commit themselves to these agendas but also to implement them. The differences in structure among national development plans and between global agendas and national plans necessitate the design of guidelines for aligning national planning frameworks with global agendas. This will be critical in harmonizing the alignment process.

4.7. Disconnect between financial programs and planning programs

The Development Planning Section of ECA developed the financing module of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit to assist members in linking their budgets to their development priorities and strengthening their results frameworks. The financing module of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit links budgets to the national development plan by mapping the financial programmes of the budget to the targets of the plan. Links between the national budget and the Sustainable Development Goals are also assessed by mapping financial programmes to the Sustainable Development Goal targets. These updates mean that policymakers can now develop national financing dashboards and map financing frameworks to planned targets that are aligned with one or both of the development agendas.

During the roll-out of the financial module, it was observed that the national development plans of States are not coordinated with their national budgets. This is because national budgets fund financial programmes which often do not match the programme priorities of national development plans. As a result, budgetary allocations may not necessarily fund the national development plan. The disconnect between the programmes funded by the budget and the programmes identified in national development plans is a critical gap in the implementation of national development plans. Indeed, the majority (51.6 per cent) of survey respondents noted that the disconnect between plans and budgets had a strong to very strong impact on their development planning processes.

Figure X: Issues affecting the development planning process: disconnect between the plans and the budget



Source: Authors' compilation, based on the survey results.

5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

The engagement of ECA with African States through the integrated planning and reporting toolkit has highlighted critical development planning issues that undermine the effectiveness of planning outcomes and hence require urgent attention. The present section summarizes the issue and proposes policy recommendations.

5.1. Alignment of national development plans with continental and global commitments

The structure of national development plans does not always match the structure of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. As a result, the process of alignment is more complex than envisaged and requires focused discussions with ECA members. Furthermore, ECA members need guidance in aligning the national development plans to the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 during the design stage. To this end, the United Nations system should develop guidelines to ensure a harmonized approach to alignment.

5.2. Bias in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and lack of disaggregated alignment scores

National development plans tend to be more closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals than with Agenda 2063 and alignment scores tend to be lower at the target and indicator levels than at the goal level. The training sessions in use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit are changing this configuration, however, by providing quantitative alignment scores at the goal, target and indicator levels. ECA members should leverage digital technologies such as the integrated planning and reporting toolkit to generate alignment scores at the goal, target and indicator levels. Disaggregated alignment scores generated by the toolkit will provide countries with a baseline for future improvements in their alignment scores against the two agendas.

5.3. Alignment of national development plans with financing frameworks

The alignment of national development plans with the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 will facilitate the alignment of budgets to both agendas. As a rule, budgets are aligned with financial programmes, however, and the latter tend to be different from the programmes of a national development plan.

First, development partners should support countries in restructuring their financial programmes, with a view to aligning them with the thematic focus of national development plans. The financial module of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit offers a starting point that can be leveraged by ECA members.

Second, development partners should encourage countries to adopt medium-term expenditure frameworks so as to align the financing cycle more closely with the planning cycle. This is advisable because, unlike annual budgets, which are annual, medium-term expenditure frameworks have a multi-year focus.

Third, development partners should encourage States to leverage their integrated national financing framework to ensure that their financial resources are optimally harnessed for the implementation of their development programmes. Integrated national financing frameworks facilitate awareness of the financing landscape, deepen the connections across financing sources and foster greater collaboration between public and private stakeholders.

5.4. Towards SMART performance monitoring

The engagement with members of ECA has revealed that support is needed in the design of robust results frameworks that are informed by SMART indicators and consider the data system of the country. Despite substantial investments in the planning process, only a fraction of the national development plans of countries trained in the integrated planning and reporting toolkit are being tracked with performance data, owing either to the lack of data or to the lack of access to available data. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems enable planners to assess whether the targets set are being achieved and whether strategic adjustments need to be made. Monitoring and evaluation makes the national development plan visible, by providing the tools to communicate progress (or lack thereof) in its implementation. Monitoring and evaluation is also critical for potential donors to be able to assess the viability of projects. The process also serves as a mechanism to hold members of ECA accountable for the implementation of their national development plans.

Accordingly, to this end, development partners should, first of all, support countries in improving access to available data, including through institutional strengthening and coordination for data collection, storage, and dissemination.

Second, development partners must prioritize the strengthening of capacity in results-based management and monitoring and evaluation, at the same time as supporting planning processes. Within ECA this would involve collaboration between the Macroeconomics and Governance Division of ECA and the African Centre for Statistics in relation to the availability of country-level data.

At the same time, ECA should explore options for deploying the “Every Policy is Connected” (known as “EPIc”) tool of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) in support its African members. The EPIc tool facilitates policy-data dialogue with the aim of identifying policy priorities and data.

5.5. Leveraging digital technologies for planning

Digitizing national development plans strengthens the capacities of planners to align their plans with budgets and global commitments. It also strengthens capacities to develop SMART results frameworks, which in turn ensures more effective tracking of national development plans.

In this context, working in collaboration with development partners, the United Nations system should make use of digital technology in the planning process. Advancements in artificial intelligence provide potential opportunities for improved planning and these should be further explored.

ECA should also strengthen support for its members in the design of robust results frameworks that are informed by SMART indicators and adapted to the country's data system. One critical component of such support could be the use of digital planning tools, such as the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, to undertake a diagnostic of countries' results frameworks, to identify gaps and take corrective action.

Looking ahead, the quality of development planning in Africa will be enhanced by digitally powered approaches that integrate all relevant components of the planning process in delivering its results.

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