

Localising the SDGs through National Development Plans: The Case of The Bahamas

The Bahamas is in the process of transformation – deep, meaningful, impactful transformation.

As a country, we have enjoyed significant economic and social success. GDP per capita remains high at over \$22,000; our human development index stands at 0.79.

Yet, there were many areas where we, as a country, were not performing as well as we would like. We had noticed troubling social trends related to youth. Indeed, unemployment among young people was as high as 30% in the last few years. Youth who were not in employment or in school contributed to increasing crime levels. We saw that poverty was on the increase in the country. In our last survey, there were over 43,000 persons living in poverty (graphic with poverty and poverty line).

Key industries were not producing enough growth and expansion to drive job growth. Foreign direct investment, although plentiful, was not as productive as it could be to drive innovation.

We were seeing wide gaps in educational performance between boys and girls and between those in private schools and those in public school. Many young people were unequipped for employment, including the soft skills needed to keep employment.

The population had high levels of unwellness, particularly with respect to non-communicable diseases. Infrastructure around our family islands – roads, docks, schools, bridges were in need of repair.

The management of solid waste posed a challenge for our country

And our public institutions needed strengthening in terms of improving accountability, transparency and effectiveness.

In short, there was a lot to be done.

We were also very aware that climate change was increasingly real for The Bahamas. In two years, we have suffered the ravages of two deadly hurricanes with a combined cost of over \$100 million.

The Government looked towards the Inter-American Bank for assistance in a transformation process. In 2014, through a technical cooperation grant of the Inter-American Development Bank to strengthen the Office of the Prime Minister the process of transformation began.

Recognizing the great potential of this project, the Government of The Bahamas expanded the remit of the project to a full National Development Plan with significant financial investment by the Government of The Bahamas.

It was recognized early on that for this plan to succeed, it needed to be inclusive. And so, the Secretariat was asked to ensure that everyone felt included. We worked to ensure that the opposition political parties had a voice; that citizens and residents of all ages were included in the discussion.

We paid special attention to the youth, including significant partnership with the University of The Bahamas.

The Bahamas is a chain of islands, stretching from Abaco in the north to Inagua in the South (graphic of island). We therefore had to be inclusive and so the National Development Plan Secretariat commenced its work with fact finding missions to the various islands. We had the honour of understanding the magnificence of our country: From the fishing capital in Spanish Wells to the salt capital in Inagua. We saw the beauty of the Exumas and Eleuthera and the agriculture potential of Andros.

There was also a need to ensure that we were inclusive of groups that had been marginalized: persons with disabilities and religious minorities, for example.

We learned so much during this process and we were grateful for the experience.

After continued consultation with the people of The Bahamas, the National Development Plan Secretariat came up with 15 goals. These are:

1. Modern, Open and Accountable Service Oriented Government
2. Well Governed Public institutions and Engaged Citizens to Strengthen Our Democracy
3. law abiding society
4. The administration of justice will be made more efficient, methodical, fair and effective
5. modern, sustainable & universally accessible health care system that is wellness focused and delivers continuously improving outcomes
6. best in class, comprehensive and effective education system
7. nation free of poverty and discrimination
8. land administration system which is efficient and fair
9. an effective interconnected transportation system
10. modern infrastructure built to grow the economy to withstand the effects of climate change and rising sea levels

11. natural environment that supports the long-term sustainable development of the Bahamian economy and way of life for generations
12. healthy macro-economic environment that supports growth and stability
13. competitive business environment for economic success that supports business development, innovation, wealth creation, entrepreneurship and job growth
14. diversified and resilient economy that provides opportunities for the expansion of both existing and new industries
15. fair, flexible and effective labour regime
16. Culture shall be recognised as a driver and enabler for the sustainable development of The Bahamas

At the same time that the National Development Plan Secretariat was working through the NDP process, we were keenly aware of another, global and complimentary process underway. This of course was the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As we began to formulate our draft National Development Plan and review the issues, we saw that the complementarity between the NDP and the SDGs were more and more complete. Indeed, there was a strong mapping of the National Development Plan's 15 goals and the SDGs 17 Goals.

So we did that. We mapped the related SDG target to each of the goals and strategies of the National Development Plan.

For example, SDG 1 deals with the important global agenda of ending poverty. Poverty is a core priority in the National Development Plan under goal 7. To address the issue of poverty we address pro poor opportunities for specific vulnerable groups – single mothers, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, men with criminal records, workers in the informal sector, persons who have immigrated to The Bahamas. We understand that one of the key aspects of reducing poverty is breaking the cycle of poverty, therefore opportunities for youth to obtain a quality education, obtain skills for work and life skills which prevent violence are important. We recognize that we must have greater civic participation and community engagement in the efforts to reduce poverty. The National Development Plan contains recommendation for improved housing, water and sanitation and livable spaces in marginalized communities. We also recognize that we must increase the number of vulnerable persons with access to social protection programmes. We have to direct our programmes more effectively to screen for persons who require these services and educate the population on the services which are available. We must also ensure that our social protection funds are sustainable and that the social protection floors are strengthened within legislation and policies. Finally, we recognize that we must strengthen our data collection to reflect the multidimensional nature of poverty.

SDG 16 deals with promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This important goal is contained in 4 of the National Development Plan goals on governance. We address issues related to strengthening internal government decision making processes to better deliver results, strengthening the public service, improving transparency and accountability within government services and using ICT to better deliver services. We also realize that governance is broader than central government. Government must devolve and hence we have made recommendations for the strengthening of local government, of state owned enterprises, the use of business development zones and associations and other innovations to involve more citizens in governance. We also recognize that at the base of human existence in any place is peace and security. We have made recommendations on the spectrum of citizen security – to prevent youth at risk from traveling down paths that are unwarranted, to new enhanced training for our security forces, to rehabilitation programmes in the correctional facilities and support for those who leave those facilities. We know that our courts can be made more efficient through better case management and other mechanisms to support the independence of the judiciary.

SDG 13 is a call for global action on climate change and its effects. Small island states are fully cognizant of this threat. For many of us, the effects are real and present a danger to our very existence. Within the National Development Plan, goal 11 deals with the recommendations for climate change, natural disasters and resilience. As a country, we recognize that we must integrate disaster risk reductions into sustainable development policies and planning to build resistance to hazards. We must also sustainably management and use natural resources, while guarding against the negative impacts of humans on our environment, unsustainable practices and invasive species which undermine our terrestrial and marine ecosystems. These recommendations are critical for our very survival.

We prioritized 6 core areas: Effective governance, ensuring that we have the productive citizenry, a focus on citizen security and safety, a focus on community revitalization. We prioritized economic development through the strengthening of fundamentals and diversification and finally, ensuring a sustainable environment.

And so, the work on the National Development Plan of the country is near completion. Our next phase is implementation. This involves ensuring that we turn plans into projects and projects into results. To do this, we recognize that we require unique partnerships. Partnerships within government, between agencies. These need to work like they have never worked before to accomplish results. We need partnerships also between the private sector and government and between government and civil society. These are new partnerships in many cases, but necessary if we are to achieve results for our population.

In The Bahamas, we are seeing some results.

- VAT
- NHI
- Social Services Conditional Cash Transfer
- Andros Master Plan
- Sustainable Nassau Project

In the process of rolling out our National Development Plan we gained tremendous insights.

First, it was important to assess the realities of our country. Then design your recommendations and reforms to meet your needs and your development priorities. We then mapped these on to the SDGs and determined essential gaps.

Finally, we recognize that it is important to align the political discussions on development with the realities at home. The diplomatic arms and the technical arms must be in step together.

As we move towards the year 2040, and we ask the question, “Who are we?”,

- We are an educated people;
- We are an innovative people;
- We are a healthy people;
- We are a welcoming people;
- We are a creative people, using our talents in the arts, music and dance to better our lives and the world
- We are Bahamians

I thank you all for this opportunity to share with you, how we have localized the Sustainable Development Goals as a country.

Thank you.