Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Ministry of Economy

Afghanistan SDGs Targets Prioritization Guideline 2019

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is designed to support national policy and reporting through an evidence-based framework of targets and indicators. It is critical for the SDGs implementing countries to build an evidence base plan of action. The SDGs targets has an integrated nature which means that progress towards one target has direct and indirect impacts on other targets. To support national implementation a range of tools and approaches are suggested by experts to be carried out in the process of decision making.

The SDGs which cover social, economic and environment aspects of sustainable development, is far more integrated, comprehensive and multifaceted than the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Countries are expected to implement the SDGs nationally and are expected to set their own annual targets values and priorities.

Taking into account the limitation of resources in countries around the world, it is suggested that countries prioritize the SDGs according their circumstances which varies in different countries. Considering the broadness and complex nature of the SDGs, the concept of prioritization is seen as inevitable in the process of implementation.

The fact that SDG targets and goals interact with each other in different ways makes the implementation of the SDGs complicated. Understanding the nature of interactions requires science and evidence based research. Multiple approaches have been suggested for systematically identifying the interactions between SDGs targets and the relation between the sustainable development and policy issues.

For countries like Afghanistan which are at the beginning of the SDGs implementation an evidence based for action is essential. The SDGs is a complex and broad agenda and a healthy prioritization is a key action in the initial stages of implementation.

This paper presents a guideline for prioritization of the SDGs. The guideline is derived from a range of literatures and methodologies previously developed by experts and research and development organizations. The practical approach demonstrated here is intuitively simple and can be easily applied in the context of Afghanistan. The framework of the three criteria assessment applied in this guideline is a practical tool that could support the process of SDGs prioritization in the country.

Prioritization of the SDGs

Looking at the Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations, we can easily see the broadness and extensiveness of the agenda. Countries around the world are not able to consider all the SDGs targets equally in their process of national planning and policy making.

What do we mean by Prioritization?

Prioritization means recognizing areas which we lag furthest behind and gathering resources, awareness and policy actions to foster rapid progress towards those areas. The SDGs are developed as an integrated set of targets and indicators, which are interdependent and complementary. Therefore, prioritization does not mean choosing one goal at the expense of another. If we look at Afghanistan's social, economic and environmental situation, we could easily find out the areas we are lagging behind and the areas which need attention.

Prioritization could also be done on the basis of identifying an area which needs immediate, short or medium term interventions as an entry point to the greater transformation towards sustainable development. For example, currently the capital of Afghanistan and few other major cities are at risk of water scarcity and is expected to be at high risk of drought and water shortages in the coming few years. Hence, the government may decide to focus on sustainable water resource management as one of the immediate goals.

Why do we need to prioritize?

Countries at the United Nations Assembly while developing Millennium Developing Goals (MDGs) had a vision of "at least this much we need to offer every human being". With 8 goals and only 19 targets the MDGs were clearly prioritized with measurable specific goals. The UN reacted to the narrowness of the MDGs. Therefore, the successor to the MDGs were developed through years of meetings, consultations, online inputs, stakeholder forum and door to door surveys which resulted to an indiscriminate list of objectives.

Countries around the world are quite different from each other in many terms. The global goals being designed for the whole world could not possibly be implemented in the same way in every country and region. With limited resources, no government can finance the implementation of all SDGs.

The cost of providing everything to all people could be extremely high. The cost of achieving all the 169 targets has been estimated at $45 trillion[1]. But even if we could accumulate that much money, without a clearer direction and focused objectives a major part of the fund in terms of international aid, international development will be spent inefficiently and eventually, wasted.

The strong opinion is that the holistic development we are seeking to achieve by 2030, will be very difficult without prioritization of the 17 ambitious SDGs. And no matter how specialized the implementing agencies and goals are, without the concept of prioritization the implementation will be very disordered and confusing[2].

[1] Jeff Leitner & Tomicah Tillemann, (2017).

[2] Samanta, Sayan (2016)

Countries must mobilize funds to finance specific development area from its national budget. Governments can also create incentives to redirect private sector and NGOs investments by taxes, regulations and subsidies.

How to Prioritize SDGs

There has been a range of research and assessments done by multiple experts on SDGs prioritization, and multiple tools and approaches are recommended by these experts. Applying and combining these different approaches to support decision making, is a key challenge.

A series of methods and tools suggested by experts includes: benchmarking, indicator-based assessments, target mapping and system analysis techniques[3]. Putting together these tools and approaches and using them in a combined manner is the key to a better decision making and prioritization of the SDGs in the country. As the initial step, the government leading agencies on SDGs indicators have nationalized the targets and indicators to national circumstances. Now, keeping in mind the limited financial, institutional and capacity resources, there is a need for an effective approach to reduce the complexity of the SDGs by prioritizing a manageable set of targets that is achievable in the context of Afghanistan. However, the government entities should not select those targets and values that are easy to achieve and fail to deliver on the full potential of the SDGs.

Multi Criteria Analysis

The approach presented in this guideline is derived from a mix of recent publications and guidelines to support the initial stages of implementation of the SDGs by different development and research organizations[4]

Based on the literature from different authors and articles a multi criteria analysis (MCA) framework is selected to be adopted as the relevant guideline for the prioritization of the SDGs in Afghanistan.

Criteria 1: Level of Urgency baseline assessment and benchmarking

The Sustainable Development Goals indicator framework is usually promoted as a useful element which supports the implementation through monitoring and reporting[5].

Evaluating the level of urgency on particular targets and indicators is carried by the baseline assessment and benchmarking. Baseline assessment shows the status of each target and explains where historic trends are unfavorable and where progress is falling behind global levels.

[3] See International Council for Science, 2017; Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2015; United Nations Development Group, 2017

[4] World Bank Group, International Council for Science, 2017; Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2015 United Nations Development Group, 2017

[5] See Allen et al. (2017)

Data for almost all the A-SDGs indicators exist and the targets and indicators are nationalized in the context of Afghanistan. The assessment is carried in two phases: first, an analysis of favorability of historic trends is carried out which shows if the indicator is improving or worsening. Second, a comparison of current baseline values is assessed against the global benchmarks. We can set the global average or the region average as the benchmarks. The two factors can then provide an assessment and score for the level of urgency for each of the A-SDG targets. The categories and scores for baseline assessment and benchmarking is shown in the table below. The level of urgency of targets are divided into 5 categories with score of 5 representing the most urgent and 1 the least.

Table 1: Categories and scores for assessing the Level of Urgency of targets

Category and Score	Rule Apply
5 Most Urgent	Baseline worse than benchmark + Unfavourable Trend
4	Baseline worse than benchmark but no Trend available
3	Mixed assessment: favourable (benchmark/trend) + unfavorable (benchmark/ trend)
2	Baseline better than benchmark but no Trend available
1	Baseline better than benchmark and favourable Trend

Criteria 2: Interlinkages between targets (Systemic Impact)

Through this criterion the targets with stronger systemic impact across the selected targets are analyzed. In this step the interlinkages between the nationalized A-SDG targets are assessed. SDGs are an integrated set of goals and targets, thus progress on one target has direct and indirect impact on other targets.

Two methods have been adopted in the SDGs literature by development organization and research institutes. (1) semi-quantitative cross-impact matrix assessment[6], (2) network analysis using several metrics[7]

1. Semi-quantitative cross-impact matrix assessment:

This assessment divides the interactions between targets into seven possible types. The approach allocates scores for targets between (+3) and (-3), from the most positive (+3) to the most negative (-3). Positive scores represent synergies between targets and negative scores show tradeoffs.

[6] See International Council for Science, (2017); Nilsson et al., (2016); Weitz et al., (2017)
[7] See Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, (2017); Le Blanc, (2015); United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, (2016); Weitz et al., (2017).

Table 2: Seven Types of Interactions between SDG targets

Interaction Level	Meaning
+3 Indivisible	Progress on one target automatically delivers progress on another
+2 Reinforcing	Progress on one target makes it easier to make progress on another
+1 Enabling	Progress on one target creates conditions that enable progress on another
0 Consisting	There is no significant link between two targets' progress
-1 Constraining	Progress on one target constrains the options for how to deliver on another
-2 Counteracting	Progress on one target makes it more difficult to make progress on another
-3 Cancelling	Progress on one target automatically leads to a negative impact on another

Scores for the interaction between the SDG targets can be identified in a cross-impact matrix in Excel with targets as headings along all rows and columns. Scoring was guided by the question: "If progress is made on target x (rows), how does this impact progress on target y (columns)[8]. The table below, shows the colors depicting the scores for interactions between SDGs targets.

Table 3: Scores and colors for seven types of interactions between SDG targets

Score	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
Color							

Table 4: Cross impact matrix of 14 SDG targets and their interactions in Afghanistan.

	Target Description	1.2	1.3	2.3	3.1	4.1	5.5	6.6	7.2	8.5	10.1	12.5	13.1	16.6	17.11	sum
1.2	Poverty Reduction															7
1.3	Social Protection															12
2.3	Agriculture productivity															7
3.1	Maternal Mortality															5
4.1	Access to Education															16

[8] See Nilsson et al. (2016); Weitz et al. (2017)

5.5	Women participation															15
6.6	Water related ecosystem															5
7.2	Renewable Energy															6
8.5	Decent work and Emp															12
10.1	Reduce income inequality															8
12.5	Waste management															5
13.1	Climate change adaptation															5
16.6	Effective institutions															16
17.11	Exports of Dev countries															8
sum		19	11	12	16	11	11	3	-1	10	15	3	7	3	2	

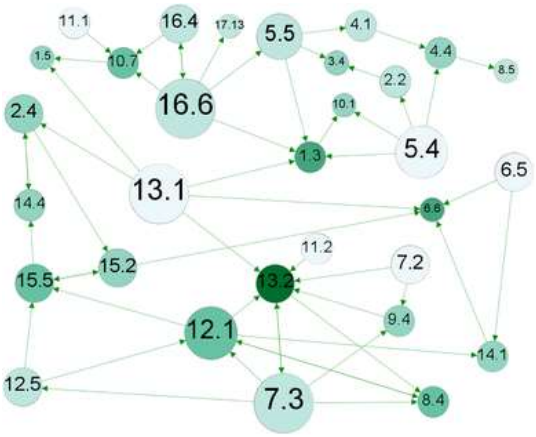
Table 4 shows the scores of interactions between 14 targets in context of Afghanistan. the scoring is done by the question: "If progress is made on target x (rows), what will be its influence on target y (columns)"? The scoring is subject to the understanding and opinion of author of this guideline and may differ if done by others. It is shown here, to give the reader an overview of how the cross impact matrix works.

The colors show whether the interactions are positive negative or neutral and the degree of influence on the seven-point scale. The rows show the net influence of a target on all other targets and the columns shows that how much a target is influenced by all other targets. A high row sum means that a target has a large net influence on all other targets and is a synergetic one which makes the realization of other targets easy. The net influence of targets and degree of influence from other targets is provided by the summing up of rows and columns, but it does not present enough information to guide priority-setting of the SDGs and where attention should be given.

2. Network analysis of interlinkages between SDG targets

The network analysis of the cross-impact matrix provides a more complete information on the interlinkages between targets. It does not only show that targets are linked but includes the direction of links and also the strength of the influence and how they are signed (i.e. links can be negative, positive or neutral).

Figure 1: Network analysis of positive interactions between SDG targets[9].



As an example of the network analysis, the sub-network of indivisible (+3) interactions are illustrated in figure 1. The size of the nodes represents the degree of influence (out-degree) with bigger nodes showing more influential nodes. Colors show the degree of being influenced by other nodes with darker colors representing the nodes more influenced by other nodes. The arrows denote the direction of the influence with darker colors show the strength of the influence.

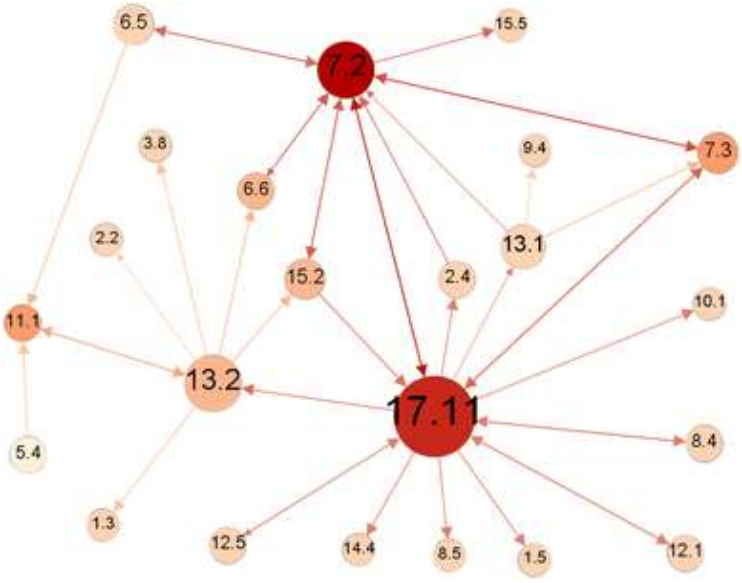
The above sub-network shows the sum of positive influences leaving the composition of negative links from the cross-impact matrix. Targets 7.3 (energy efficiency), 16.6 (effective institutions) and 13.1 (Climate change adaptation) are targets with strongest positive influence on other targets. Targets 5.5 (women's participation) and 5.4 (unpaid domestic work) are also among the most influential targets. The sub-network shows that targets 13.2 (climate change policy/planning) and 6.6 (water-related ecosystems) are the most influenced targets with 6 and 4 strong positive incoming links respectively, followed by targets 1.3, 15.5, 10.7, and 8.4.

The above network analysis of indivisible links suggests that investing in targets with stronger positive influence (i.e. targets 13.1, 7.3, 16.6, 5.5 and 5.4) will have a spillover impact on other targets and produce additional progress. The analysis also shows that progress in targets 13.2, 6.6 and 1.3 is most likely to be automatic with progress on other targets and areas.

The sub-network of negative interactions is shown in Fig. 5 (in which both constraining (–1) and counteracting (–2) links are shown.

Figure 2: Network analysis of negative interactions between SDG targets[10].

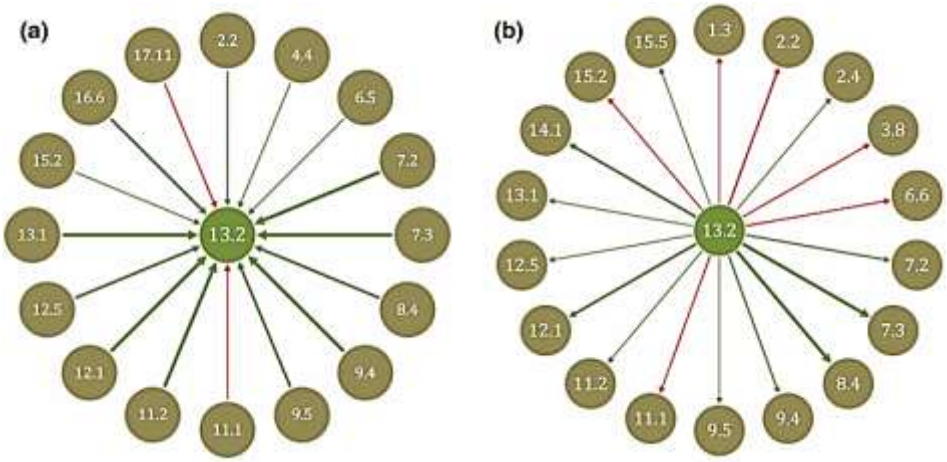
[9] The network analysis shows the interactions between targets in context of Sweden.
[10] The network shows the interaction between targets in context of Sweden.



The above network graph shows an example of sub-network of constraining (-1) and counteracting (-2) interactions between the SDGs targets. The size of the nodes presents level of influence a target has on other targets and the color of the nodes shows the degree of being influenced by other targets, the darker the color of the node the greater the target is influenced by other targets. The arrows show the direction of the influence with darker shades representing higher strength of influence.

Figure shows target 17.11 (export from developing countries) stands out as being both highly negatively influenced by other targets and having a strong negative influence on other targets. Target 7.2 (renewable energy) shows the same pattern, but exerts less negative influence on other targets. Target 13.2 (climate change policy/planning) has as strong a negative influence on other targets as 7.2, but is less negatively influenced.

More investment should be done on targets with greater positive influences and attention can be directed to targets that have constraining or counteracting relationships with other targets, or those that overall receive little support from the network[11].

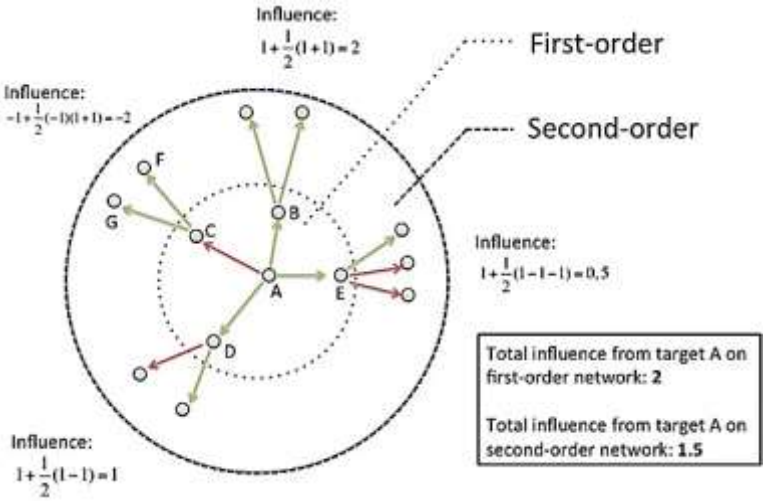


[11] Weitz, et al. (2018)

Another way to show the interaction between the targets are shown in the above figure. The above diagram takes into account the interaction between one selected target with its neighboring targets and does not show how the neighboring targets in turn interact with the selected targets. (a) shows the influence of other targets on target 13.2 with positive influences in green color and negative influences in red color the greater shades the greater the influence. (b) shows the influence of the target 13.2 on neighboring targets.

Understanding how influence ripples through the network is important in the process of the prioritization. Targets have influence over other targets which in turn has many and/or strong positive links, thus its systemic impact can be very noteworthy. If the other influenced target has few and/or weak positive connection, the positive impact fades away and decreases the systemic impact. Moreover, many other targets which has strong positive influence have a multiplier effect on the influencing target. Conversely, a strong positive impact on a target which in turn has much negative influence on other targets make the systemic impact negative, and has to be avoided.

It is obvious that prioritization of the targets will change if we consider the second-order effects. The calculation of the net influence is shown in the figure. The figure shows how a positive influence on the network changes after interacting with negative influencing targets. It shows how the net influence generated in the first-order changes when we take into account the interactions of the target in second-order.



The total influence (*I*) from target (*i*) on the second-order network is calculated as

Where

$$I_i^{Total} = I_i^{1st} + \frac{1}{2}\sum I^{2nd} = D_i^{Out} + \frac{1}{2}\sum_{j\neq i} I_{ij} D_j^{Out}$$

I i 1st is the influence of target *i* on its closest neighbours.

I 2nd is the influences from *i's* neighbour's on their neighbours weighted by a factor ½.

D i Out is the out-degree of target *i*.

I_{ij} is the strengths of link from target i to target j.

D_j^{Out} is the out-degree of target j.

The second-order network does give a better picture of systemic impact than the first order. But the argument is that how deep should we go into a network. Is it worthwhile to go through and analyze the third neighbor targets? However, that maybe, should keep in mind that we are dealing with a complicated network of targets with multiple links carrying weight and directions.

Criteria 3: assessing alignment of SDGs with existing strategies (policy gap)

In this step the coverage of SDG targets in national plans and policies are assessed to identify the policy gaps. Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) being the government's national strategic plan is the main policy we are going to assess along with the ten National Priority Programs (NPPs). For better understanding and assessment of the policy gap the degree of coverage of each target and indicator is categorized into three categories.

Table 5: Categories and scores for assessing the coverage of each SDG target

Category	Symbol	Score
Good Coverage	●	0
Partial Coverage	ʘ	1
Very Limited coverage	O	2

The table above shows the three categories and scores for assessing the alignment and coverage of the SDGs targets into the national plans and policies. each SDG target are either well covered, partially covered or not covered by the national plans and policies. the lower score (i.e. 0) means the target is well covered by the plans and policies and a higher score (i.e. 2) shows very limited or no coverage of the target by the policies and plans. The target with higher score means they are priority and should be taken care of.

Combining Scores of MCA

MCA combines the scores and findings of the three steps criterions of (1) level of urgency, (2) systemic impact and (3) policy gap and provides us with the overall scores for each SDG targets.

For calculation of the combined score of all the three criterions, we need to calculate the normalized score of each criterion. The normal score of each criteria is calculated as follow:

$$Sn = (St - \min(S)) / (\max(S) - \min(S))$$

Where:

Sn is the normalized score for a target for a particular criterion

St is the original assessment score for a target for a particular criterion

The three criterions assessed in the MCA can be given different weight. Different countries have given different weight to the mentioned criterions with most of the countries given higher weight to the urgency and lower weight to the policy gap.

The final score for each target could be calculated as follows:

$$SFinal = \{(Sc1 * Wc1) + (Sc2 * Wc2) + (Sc3 * Wc3)\} * 100$$

Where:

SFinal is the final score for each target

Sc1 is the normalized score for criteria 1

Wc1 is the weight for criteria 1

Table 6: Results from the multi-criteria assessment: final scores and rankings for SDG targets

	Criteria 1 Level of Urgency		**Criteria 2 Systemic Impact**		**Criteria 3 Policy Gap**		**Final Score (1-100)**		**Final Ranking**	
ASDG target	Normalized Score	weight	Score	Weight	Score	Weight	Total score (weighted)	Total score (unweighted)	Final Ranking (weighted)	Final Ranking (unweighted)
1.2	0.62	0.40	0.55	0.40	0.44	0.20	55.6	53.7		

Limitations

However, the approach presents challenges and limitations for example due to gap in data and inaccurate baseline data the prioritization of the targets could differ. Furthermore, considering the cross-impact and network analysis of systemic impact, taking into account the synergies and trade-offs along with first to second order interactions between the target in networks could be complicated for policy makers at implementing government agencies in Afghanistan. Finally, the lack of financial resources is felt in implementation of the current policies and plans, analyzing policy gaps and considering the ASDG targets which lag in

ANPDF and NPPs requires more funding and resources which is challenging for the constraint national budget to provide.

Box 1:

New America and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development set out to solve this problem. They surveyed 85 developmental economists, political scientists, and social scientists around the world, asking them to put a cleaned-up list of 117 targets in the right order.

Here are the first 10 steps, in order, for achieving the SDGs, per the experts: 1) promote the rule of law and access to justice; 2) eliminate the most extreme poverty; 3) ensure access to safe, effective, and affordable health care, medicine, and vaccines; 4) ensure women's right to economic opportunity, property ownership, and inheritance; 5) ensure government accountability and transparency; 6) ensure all children graduate from primary and secondary school; 7) end discrimination against women and girls; 8) expand access to safe drinking water; 9) promote social, economic, and political inclusion; and 10) end corruption and bribery

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