

Report on the WG SDG KSDI activities

To start with, I would like to say a couple of words about the reason why we developed a document called «*WG Philosophy and Principles*» and why we actually need it.

The topic of SAI contribution to the implementation of SDGs is a very comprehensive one. It includes matters of applying new auditing approaches, methodology maturity, using new technologies to work with data, proactive analysis, interaction with stakeholders, necessary limitations to ensure SAI independence and a lot of related questions.

The main goals and activities of the WG had been set in its ToR, nevertheless, we understood that the Group needed a document that would define its philosophy and the specific role that it should play in the diversity of INTOSAI projects connected with the 2030 Agenda. We certainly do not want to overlap with other INTOSAI bodies and, at the same time, seek to add as much value as possible for SAIs.

We defined 2 important principles of the Agenda for Sustainable Development: the interlinkages of SDGs and the long-term approach that stands behind their implementation. Therefore, we decided that it would be beneficial for the WG to focus on audit aspects that would promote these principles.

We have developed the two priority directions for our Groups' work as follows:

- **analyzing the interlinkages and cross-impact of SDGs, specific targets and key indicators**
- **developing approaches to future-oriented recommendations as programs aimed at SDGs implementation should have a long-term strategic perspective**

Why did we choose these specific aspects?

First, it is important not only to audit the very implementation of SDGs, but also analyze the interlinkages between specific Goals. The Goals are just an instrument for measuring sustainable development. The pandemic made it clear that

the world is not really on the way to the implementation of any Goal, include those that can be called the “basic ones”, SDG 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere” and SDG 2 “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”. The world regions witness not only a lack of progress, but a roll back on many SDGs. I am talking, for example, about the availability of clean water and decent work. Inequality expands in many countries, while the implementation of climate-related goals, articulated in both SDG 13 and the Paris agreements doesn't seem to be possible at the moment.

What we are focusing on is the synergies and trade-offs between different SDGs. There is the inconsistency of economic growth with climatic changes issues. Reducing poverty and hunger inevitably leads to increasing consumption and ecological pressure, responsible consumption and bigger efficiency can decrease the number of workplaces etc. These issues are still left behind in the processes of practical SDG implementation in public governance.

The integration of SDGs in public governance now faces several interlinked challenges.

The confusion around SDGs as an instrument and sustainable development as a principle. The comprehensive and universal nature of the 2030 Agenda means that almost any activities supporting economic and social development leads to the implementation of SDGs. Meanwhile, the principle of sustainability laid down in the 2030 Agenda, focuses not on the need of achieving *specific* Goals, but the importance of balancing efforts to implement *all* SDGs from all three blocks, the economic, social and ecologic ones. It also emphasizes the distribution of public policies' outcomes between different social groups, generations, including those yet to come, and the balance between human and natural systems.

The absence of motivation in governance and weak inter-agency coordination. High-level motivation mechanisms meant to support the integration of the 2030 Agenda can rarely be found in public governance practice. So it is the

situation with efficient interagency mechanisms to ensure coordination when integrating the Agenda. A high-level public recognition of national responsibility for integrating the 2030 Agenda should be formulated in INTOSAI language.

Focus on demonstrating results. When the public administration bodies report on its work on integrating and implementing SDGs, they usually tend to limit themselves with demonstrating only success stories. That means there's no exchange of experience as to resolving sustainable development issues, no urge for social, governance and other technologies that could solve the specific problems that are relevant for each country.

The language of SDGs should be integrated at all levels of public administration, including the oversight bodies. This is necessary for adequate and systemic reporting on challenges for sustainable development in each country.

As for the commitment to the principles that were laid down the 2030 Agenda (the distribution of development benefits between social groups, generations, the humanity and the ecological systems), it should only be formulated at the highest level of public administration. However, to make that possible we should switch to another language, the sustainable development one, a new system of values. In that case we could have real social and economic effects.

We should nudge the public administration to such decisions. Secondly, it is important to keep in mind that programs supporting the implementation of SDGs should not be limited to policy cycles and recommendations should be future-oriented when conducting audits. That means particular attention should be paid to applying strategic approaches to auditing.

To ensure the relevance of the WG activities we also developed 4 principles:

- Practical Applicability
- Continuity
- Openness and Inclusiveness
- Project Management approach

We mean by **practical applicability** that the WG will be focused on the development of practical documents such as recommendations for the application of guidance, including ISAM. We also highlight the importance of an active engagement of experts and main stakeholders, including auditees, in the WG's activities.

This principle also implies that SAIs can greatly benefit from sharing experiences on the application of ISAM, conducting consultations or joint audits on the SDGs with other SAIs that have successful SDG audit experience.

Continuity means a regular reporting about our activities. The publication of our best practices will help to draw more attention to the topic of SDG audit among INTOSAI community and to emphasize its relevance and importance. The motto "Publish or Perish" should become a driver of our work.

Openness and inclusiveness is one of the most important principles of our Group. We consider the involvement of INTOSAI responsible committees and working groups in the development of approaches, methods and criteria for auditing SDGs to be an important task for our WG. We have already proved the commitment to this principle when developing this documents, as we have discussed it with representatives of the INTOSAI Secretariat and the INTOSAI Development Initiative. I would like to thank once again Monika and Archana for their contribution. We also welcome the participation of new WG members that represent INTOSAI regional organizations, previously not involved in the Group's activities. The bigger the involvement of regional organizations is, the greater would be the diversity and effectiveness of our WG.

Organizing the WG activities in line with the key principles of **project management** implies a clear definition of the main milestones, deadlines and responsible parties, as well as the development of roadmaps for individual tasks and projects. This would allow managing the group's activities in the most effective and efficient way. We will arrange the Group's meetings when we have intermediary results of our projects.

I would like to thank all of you for supporting the *WG Philosophy and Principles* developed by the Secretariat. We were very glad to see that all of the SAIs that replied to the questionnaire (we had 15 SAI responses) supported the document. It's safe to say then that we share a common vision as to our future activities and the results we want to achieve.

Now I'd like to go more in detail into the **responses to the questionnaire**.

As you might remember, in February and June the Secretariat sent out for you to fill in and comment 2 questionnaires. I'd like to thank all members for responses, new suggestions and a clear interest for our work. We have analyzed the responses and I'd like to comment on the results.

Despite a tangible influence of the pandemic on SAI activities, the responses to the first and second questionnaires demonstrate a similar vision of our future work and speak for the continuity, importance and long-term perspective of the goals and activities set by our WG.

The first questionnaire focused on understanding which SDG related topics are the most interesting for you, what should be dealt with first and foremost. The WG members defined the importance of suggested topics choosing 5 options from «not relevant» to «top priority».

We received responses from 16 SAIs and can draw the conclusion that the most important topics for the WG members turned out to be:

- Capacity building (knowledge, skills) for implementing and auditing SDGs: for SAIs;
- Developing a unified SDG audit knowledge sharing platform (requests, reports, recommendations);
- Guidelines and tools for collecting and analyzing data through SDG implementation audits;
- Quality of monitoring and reporting on SDG implementation;

- Recommendations on auditing SDG implementation: For every goal.

Judging from the diversity of responses, the fact that the same question in some cases received from 1 to 5 mark from different participants, I think that the remaining topics should not be entirely left behind. Defining priorities is a job that we will come back to from time to time. We will make such inquiries and revise the topics that would be relevant for our WG.

I would also like to note that the WG members suggested additional topics that touched upon the cooperation and coordination of activities with IDI, potential challenges and risks, auditing of sustainability reports produced by State Owned Enterprises and other aspects. These suggestions can also be incorporated into the WG plans. A bit later today we will have the opportunity to discuss the directions for our work and possible pilot projects for the next years to come.

The second questionnaire that was sent out in June took into consideration current conditions with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and covered some topics related to the WG concept.

We received 16 completed questionnaires, and I would like to talk a bit about the results.

The SDG topic remains relevant and high-priority for all SAIs.

Moreover, the responses regarding the practice of all-nation expert assessments of the 2030 Agenda implementation demonstrate the high priority of the SDG topic. SAI emphasized that strategic development programs were implemented with the 2030 Agenda and that independent assessments of SDG implementation were conducted in different countries.

It was important to define which members of the WG have already conducted SDG implementation audits to plan our future activities. We learned that 5 SAIs have completed Audits on Government Preparedness on SDG's Implementation, while 7

SAIs have gone through audits of specific SDGs implementation or audits corresponding with specific SDGs. We will have the opportunity in the future to share experience within the WG and discuss specific points related to this kind of audit with those SAIs that are currently at the planning stage.

I am confident this kind of job has great practical benefits. Let me share an example from my own experience. The Accounts Chamber of Russia created this year a specific SDG audit unit and conducted a preparedness audit. The review and draft guidance for auditing preparedness of IDI were very helpful for us at the planning stage. These documents helped us take into account many important aspects when developing the audit design. In addition, we were able to develop sound evaluation criteria and check with the best practices drawing on the available recommendations and the analysis of more than 40 SAIs' experience.

Having worked our way up through all necessary stages, we lived how important could be the analysis of best practices. That's why we didn't stop at publishing the audit report, we also prepared and made available to the public the Accounts Chamber Journal on the SDG topic. The issue contains the summary and the full text of the report, comments by auditees, experts and other stakeholders, and a review of research on SDGs. And that's not it. We have recently released the English version of the Journal with all the materials I've mentioned. We received comments from international organizations: Mr. Gurria, the OECD Secretary General Mr, Saldanha, Special Advisor to the UNAIDS, from foreign SAIs: Ms. Yli-Viikari, the Head of SAI Finland and Mr. Shack, the Head of SAI Peru, from Archana. I think we all did a great job, that's a good example of openness and cooperation and knowledge sharing. If we carry on working together so closely, I think we'll pave our way straight to new solutions that will make the difference. This is what really matters.

I think that the collection of such materials related to SDG audits should become one of the Group's projects and our contribution to the common job done by the INTOSAI to create the SDG audit information HUB and provide content for it.

We will have time to discuss that a bit later when we talk about our plans, possible pilot projects and expected outcomes of the WG activities in the next years to come.

I'd like to emphasize once more that we want our job to be organized in a way that would make it practically oriented and beneficial for the WG members and, at the same time, would NOT imply large additional commitments and overlap with other initiatives. The WG should become a help to our main activities and I would like to get to the discussion of our future plans from these starting points.

But before that I'd like to give the floor to the participants who would like to comment on the draft WG Philosophy and Principles and the results of the questionnaire I have shared with you.