ONE HAPPY ISLAND WORKING TOWARDS ONE HAPPY PLANET

LESSONS LEARNED BY THE SDG COMMISSION OF ARUBA:
INITIAL PHASE OF INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR LOCALIZING THE SDGs

CONTRIBUTING TO THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
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The National SDG Aruba Commission
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SYNOPSIS

This case study describes how Aruba’s SDG Commission has set up the institutional arrangements for the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and its corresponding Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an early implementer. The paper describes the reasons why Aruba volunteered to commit to implementing the Agenda, as well as the steps the SDG Commission has taken in the journey towards implementing SDGs as a small island developing state (SIDS). The challenges Aruba’s SDG Commission has overcome include navigating the early stages of SDG implementation considering the poor data-literacy and weak national statistical systems on the island. This case study further identifies the progress the local community has made in the process, as well as the initial results, impact and main stakeholders and their contributions. The Court of Audit Report has indicated that the Ministry of Education, Science and Sustainable Development has a strong commitment towards the realization of the SDGs. The Ministry’s plans are directly related to SDG 4 (quality of education) where they are currently developing the National Education Plan (NOP) 2018-2030, aligning it with the corresponding SDG 4 targets. Furthermore, the Ministry plans to organize seminars and conferences to stimulate and foster knowledge on this subject. The Ministry of Regional Planning, Infrastructure and Environment in its “Nature Policy Plan 2018-2021” makes a link of its action points to the SDGs.

The case study is based on official documents and interviews with selected national government representatives involved in these processes. Finally, the case study touches upon financing of the SDGs, how to scale up the process, the most important lessons learned by Aruba as an early implementer and their advice for other SIDS looking to commit to the 2030 Agenda and SDG implementation.
The UN General Assembly ratified the Resolution A/RES/70/1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on September 25th 2015. This agenda is a transformative plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, also seeking to strengthen peace and partnership. Since then, Aruba has committed to being an early implementer of the SDGs and to share lessons with other Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

From the beginning, Aruba demonstrated strong commitment to become involved with the UN’s 2030 Agenda and the SDGs because of the universality of the Agenda which aligned well with the government’s vision of working towards a more sustainable Aruba, with a specific focus on renewable energy. This was demonstrated during the UN General Assembly in 2015 when Aruba presented a booklet on the island’s sustainable solutions, to show how it was already aligned with many of the goals.

In addition to its own efforts, Aruba is part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands which as a UN member-state signed the “voluntary commitment” to work towards the 2030 Agenda.

**Setting the foundation as an early implementer**

In August 2015 after the UN General Assembly, an SDG team was formed. The head of the team was the special advisor on international affairs at the Ministry of General Affairs, joined by various policy officers and interns. The team immediately started strategizing on how to tackle the 2030 Agenda and implementing SDGs. As an early implementer, very little information was available at the time and the SDG team sought resources online to gain insight for navigating this process.

Once the SDG team was formed, it internally aligned the SDGs with the national budget, to raise awareness among the political leadership. In addition, the SDG team wrote a proposal for what an SDG Commission should be and approached key stakeholders in the Economic Affairs department (due to their governmental role in development planning) and individuals in the Central Bureau of Statistics (given the importance of data in SDG implementation). The inclusion of such key stakeholders strengthened the team to drive the implementation process.
Establishment of the SDG Commission

On January 12th of 2017, the SDG Commission was established by ministerial decree. As stated in official documentation, the SDG Commission provides strategic direction and advice on the implementation of the SDGs and serves as an internal coordinating mechanism for SDG implementation within the government of Aruba. In addition to its role as coordinator and provider of strategic direction, the Commission is responsible for building awareness, multi-stakeholder partnerships and for tailoring SDGs to the local context.

Because SDGs are interconnected and require an integrated approach, the SDG Commission spurs government departments to avoid working in silos as it promotes more coherence, which is essential to successful SDG implementation.

The SDG Commission is also tasked with reporting to several institutions at both the local and international levels due to the voluntary commitment the Aruba Government made with the UN and other partners. The ministerial decree included as well the establishment of an Indicators Working Group (IWG) for this purpose. The external SDG reporting framework for Aruba, illustrates the reporting mechanisms on three levels: national, regional and global (see figure 1).

![Figure 1: SDG external reporting framework for Aruba](image)

ARA: Supreme Audit Institution of Aruba
IPKO: Inter-Parliamentary Kingdom Conference
ECLAC: The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Soon after, contact was established with the UN to assist Aruba through the ‘United Nations Sustainable Development Planning Mission’, which took place in 2017. Aruba was one of the first 10 countries in the world to receive support for SDG implementation with the help of the ‘Mainstream, Accelerate, and provide Policy Support’ (MAPS) Framework of the United Nations, which is carried out in order to create a Roadmap for SDG implementation.
CHALLENGES

As an early implementer, the SDG Commission has faced many challenges that fall within three spheres: challenges within the SDG Commission, challenges within the public sector, and challenges within the local community. Achieving the SDGs is the responsibility of every sector of society and thus also non-governmental actors, such as civil society, the private sector, academia, the media, all together forming the local community.

Challenges within the SDG Commission

- **Building a cohesive team:** individuals from multiple government departments and fields of knowledge have come together to work as a collective SDG Commission. However, like is the case for many SIDS, civil servants have multiple responsibilities and are not always able to dedicate the required time for the commission to fulfill its mandate optimally. The work at the SDG Commission is extra to their primary work at their respective departments. Conflicts in terms of scheduling and methods of approach to certain tasks is also an issue when struggling to work as a team. Therefore, cultivating a strong sense of partnership and cohesion within the commission at the beginning is a challenge.

- **Fostering accountability and transparency:** While a multi-disciplinary team is essential to an integrated approach recommended by the MAPS team, having many individuals from various departments working together as the SDG Commission poses some challenges. It can lead to miscommunication, hindering transparency, limit effective collaboration and slowdown the completion of the tasks at hand. Designating responsibilities and cultivating accountability within the team is a challenge when these internal processes are not established at the beginning.

Challenges within the public sector

- **Not all government departments are involved in SDG implementation:** there is still a lack of concrete commitment to SDG implementation across various ministries and departments.

- **Government bodies work individually--not collectively:** Because the government of Aruba is still accustomed to working in silos, they do not yet have the processes in place to share progress made with other departments and to achieve policy coherence for efficient SDG implementation.
• **Balancing long-term vs. short-term objectives:** It is a challenge to implement SDGs which are long-term goals to be achieved by 2030 and require long-term budgets when the political cycle in Aruba is short-term with one-year budgets.

• **Capacity-building:** the public sector still lacks the local capacity to fulfill important tasks for SDG implementation, e.g. data literacy, evidence-based policymaking, being mindful of policy impacts both short-term and long-term, and possessing a sustainable development-centered mindset. The lack of local capacity still slows down the process and compromises efficient SDG implementation.

**Challenges within the local community**

• **Creating awareness:** There is still a lack of awareness of the existence and importance of SDGs within the local community. Awareness is important to achieve buy-in by the local community.

• **Lack of motivation, engagement and ownership:** private sector and civil society do not yet see how SDGs can benefit them, and they tend to view SDG implementation as a task for the government.
In order to initiate SDG implementation in Aruba, the SDG Commission, based on advice from the MAPS team, identified several steps that were necessary to take in order to create an effective foundation with which to continue the implementation process and progress towards the 2030 Agenda (see figure 2 the SDG Commission’s implementation timeline).

Figure 2: The SDG Commission’s implementation timeline - A MAPS Based Approach
Step 1: Conducting the Rapid Integration Assessment, 2017

Introducing the Rapid Integration Assessment:
In preparation for the ‘United Nations Sustainable Development Planning Mission’, which took place in 2017, the Rapid Integration Assessment (RIA) was conducted for Aruba with assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The RIA is a tool developed by UNDP to assist countries in their assessment of preparedness for the implementation of the SDGs. This assessment constitutes the first step in building a country roadmap or action plan and reviewing national planning documents to:

- Determine the relevance of the SDGs to the country context, both at national and subnational levels.
- Provide an indicative summary of the level of alignment between plans/strategies (at national and sub-national level as required) for the implementation of SDGs.
- Identify the interconnectedness between SDG targets and sectorial areas of coordination.
- Identify sufficiency of data sources for the systematic monitoring of progress toward the SDGs.

Aligning National Planning Documents:
The first course of action towards localizing the 2030 Agenda and developing an SDG profile for Aruba, is to review the level of alignment of the national planning documents and the SDGs. This is done through comparing SDG targets to the targets of the national planning documents.

From 36 national planning documents, the RIA team’s assessment found an 82% alignment with the SDG targets. Such a high alignment rate further proves the government’s political will and commitment to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

However, the SDG Pillar with the most gaps in alignment was in the Planet category, which consists of sustainable environment targets which the Aruban government could consider working towards with more urgency.

Step 2: Conducting the MAPS Mission, 2017

Introducing the MAPS Mission:
Following the RIA, the SDG Commission hosted a ‘United Nations Sustainable Development Planning Mission’ from 15 – 18th of May 2017, wherein a team of experts from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) conducted a MAPS mission based on the ‘Mainstream, Accelerate, and provide Policy Support’ (MAPS) Framework (see figure 3). The purpose of the mission was to strengthen partnership development, accountability, and data collection and analysis in order to mainstream, accelerate, and provide policy support for SDG implementation. The SDG Commission convened a meeting for more than 150 national stakeholders to discuss the SDGs implementation with the six-member UNDP MAPS team\(^2\).

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\(^3\) [http://www.2030agenda.undp.org/content/2030agenda/en/home/more/MAPS.html](http://www.2030agenda.undp.org/content/2030agenda/en/home/more/MAPS.html)
Achievements of the MAPS Mission:
The MAPS mission included the coordination of thematic public group sessions, wherein the community’s opinions were taken into consideration in the development of a comprehensive roadmap for policy implementation. As a result, the UNDP MAPS team created a comprehensive report of these private and group sessions, highlighting the priority areas for support in implementing SDGs in Aruba.

In anticipation of the UNDP MAPS team visit, the SDG Commission gathered data from various governmental and non-governmental departments and organizations. This data collection was conducted in order to create a baseline assessment for the SDGs, and to assist in the development of a customized Roadmap to SDG implementation on Aruba to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Hosting the ‘UN SDG Planning Mission’ on the island, greatly helped increase public awareness at the national level of the government’s determination to implement SDGs on the island. In turn, this public awareness increased public appeal for the SDGs.

Step 3: Creating the Aruba SDG Roadmap, 2017

Introducing the Roadmap:
Aruba is one of the first 10 countries to have received a MAPS mission to develop a roadmap coordinated by UNDP and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for SDG implementation. The SDG Commission chose to adopt a participatory approach whereby government, civil society and the private sector collaboratively developed the roadmap guided by the UN MAPS team.4 This document serves as a guide for implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. More specifically, this Roadmap provides direction to support Aruba’s implementation of the SDGs at the national level. It is developed according to guiding principles stipulated by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), and tailored specifically to the national context.

The draft Roadmap came into existence through supportive research done by both the UNDP and ECLAC as well as research by the SDG Commission taking into consideration already existing policy documents, and participatory sessions held with government departments, NGOs and the private sector.

4 http://www.sustainablesids.org/knowledgebase/the-aruba-sdg-roadmap
Since the initiation and development of the Roadmap, and in accordance with the MAPS methodology, the SDG Commission has been aware that prioritization is essential as not all 17 SDGs can be effectively implemented simultaneously.

**Identifying Accelerators:**

Following the MAPS methodology developed by the UNDG, a series of catalytic measures (in other words, ‘accelerators’) were identified, and given priority in order to accelerate the progress of Aruba’s specific goals and targets, while also taking into account the “integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda, the specific national context and the need to improve the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, to guarantee balanced development” (SDG Roadmap, 2018). Such catalytic measures refer to areas that when addressed, can instantly incorporate multiple development priorities, possess a multiplier effect on the SDGs” (SDG Roadmap, 2018).

Based on the MAPS mission, UNDP has aided in the development and identification of accelerators for Aruba, which fit within their national goals, targets and island context. After the MAPS mission additional stakeholder sessions were held to refine the draft document (which had less accelerators) resulting from the mission. Based on the data gathered by UNDP and the feedback from stakeholders, nine accelerators were proposed for Aruba (see figure 4):

![Figure 4: The nine accelerators for Aruba’s SDG Roadmap](image-url)
**Financing the SDG Commission:**

The SDG Roadmap also addresses the financing of the SDG Commission’s agenda for Aruba, and determines that several measures should be considered, such as generating revenues, re-aligning expenditures such as introducing a ‘smart sustainability tax’, avoiding the need for future expenditure, considering self-sustaining expenditures and investments to become a self-sustaining entity, more effective and efficient delivery of financial resources, and creating an ownership mentality.

**Data-monitoring:**

The SDG Roadmap emphasizes the importance of data, and an efficient national statistical system. Unfortunately, Aruba continues to face challenges related to data monitoring, specifically: data culture, data-sharing, coordination, statistical capacity, gender-desegregated statistics and funding. Ultimately, the Aruban government should consider establishing an open data portal for increased efficiency.

**Advocacy and Awareness:**

A detailed communication and advocacy strategy is essential for awareness-raising efforts of the SDGs. Given the consultations with key stakeholders in Aruba, it has become clear that the following actions must be taken to raise widespread awareness and encourage public participation in the 2030 Agenda: public awareness campaigns; engage well-known figures; engage with the public; build critical understanding of the SDGs among the youth; collaboration with the private sector; engage civil society organizations; and raise cross-departmental awareness of the 2030 Agenda within government.

Tools which can be used for advocacy and awareness-raising include: social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter); traditional media (e.g. TV, radio, and print); blogs and podcasts; webinars and webcasts; and brochures, newsletters, and knowledge products.

Since February 2017 the SDG Commission has launched accounts on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and has launched an Instagram account since 2018.
Step 4: Reporting alongside the Kingdom of the Netherlands at the UN High-Level Political Forum, 2017

Aruba’s SDG Commission reported as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development in July 2017. This included the participation of Aruba in the Voluntary National Review (VNR), in which it provided detailed information on the progress made and lessons learned as an individual country and by the Kingdom as a whole. Furthermore, Aruba presented its first report at the HLPF as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and is expected to do so again in 2021.

Step 5: Re-established SDG Commission with broader constellation, 2018

Following national elections in 2017, the government of Aruba changed. Yet, with strong lobbying and strategic efforts by members of the SDG Commission, the Commission was reinstalled by ministerial decree on January 18th 2018, transcending the changes in government. Its continued existence and expansion demonstrates a confirmation of the strong commitment of the government of Aruba to the 2030 Agenda and SDG implementation. The Commission was expanded to include some government ministers based on recommendations by the United Nations MAPS team to strengthen it (see figure 5).
As of January 18th, 2018 per ministerial decree, the official SDG Commission consists of the following members or their appointed representatives: Prime-Minister of Aruba; The Minister of Finance, Economic Affairs and Culture; Minister of Education, Science and Sustainable Development; special advisor on multilateral affairs to the Prime-Minister as the chair-person of the Commission; director of the Department of Economic Affairs, Planning and Research from the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry; head of the Department of Economic Policy, Planning and Research from the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry; director of the Department of Nature and Environment; director of the Department of Social Affairs; and director of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

Figure 5: The Institutional Framework of Aruba's SDG Commission, initiated in April 2018.
The SDG Commission is directly under the purview of the Prime-Minister, the Minister of Finance, Economic Affairs and Culture, and the Minister of Education, Science and Sustainable Development. The Commission is comprised of advisors to the three ministries, directors of corresponding governmental departments, and the special advisor on multilateral affairs to the Prime-Minister appointed by the government as acting chair of the National SDG Aruba Commission. Directors of the most relevant government departments per SDG pillar were also included in the Commission, to ensure cross sectoral reach and stronger policy coherence.

As the Commission evolves and advances SDG implementation on the island, more members of various governmental departments have been added, as well as working groups within the Commission that are tasked with fulfilling specific tasks of the Commission.

So far, the SDG Commission has created an Indicators Working Group (IWG) and Expert Working Groups (EXWG). The establishment of an Awareness Raising Group (AWG) is on the horizon further into 2019.

**Indicators Working Group (IWG):** Created by ministerial decree on January 12th 2017, this group is the data branch of the SDG Commission. Their role is to collect and translate local data for base-lining and monitoring purposes. Core members of the IWG include representatives of several government departments, the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry, and the Central Bureau of Statistics.

**Expert Working Group (EXWG):** Initiated by ministerial decree on June 20th 2018, this group has the responsibility to specify and prioritize policies, activities and initiatives with their specific resource plan (budget), time-line and leading agency (agencies) in order to accelerate progress across the nine catalytic areas identified in the Roadmap for SDG Implementation in Aruba.

**Awareness Working Group (AWG):** This group has the responsibility to focus on awareness-raising within the community; this entails developing a communication and advocacy strategy, and encouraging public participation in the 2030 Agenda.

Additionally the aspired institutional framework incorporates advisory boards as well as a SDG secretariat and incubation space which will be dedicated personnel with the ability to prioritize tasks relating to the SDG implementation.

The institutional framework developed, and its expansion aims to foster policy-coherence, creating and sharing of knowledge across all ministries.
Step 6: ECLAC Mission in Aruba, 2018

As part of the MAPS process, in January 2018, a team from ECLAC visited Aruba for a mission, titled: ‘Planning for the Implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean’.

The main objective of this mission was to offer Aruba the technical assistance to strengthen its capacity to incorporate the SDGs in the local planning, management and monitoring processes in accordance with national priorities. This mission emphasized the development of a National Statistical System (NSS) to produce essential data on multiple SDG indicators. The ECLAC Mission prompted increased awareness and discussion regarding the methods used to organize and share data on the island. It urged Aruba to create an easy-to-use national data-sharing platform for all to share, access and use.

ECLAC emphasized how such a platform is of key importance, and could drastically increase overall SDG implementation, progress and monitoring. The Aruban Bureau of Statistics is now collaborating with ECLAC and the Statistical Department of the Netherlands.

Step 7: Conducting the Baseline Measurement Report, 2018

The SDG Commission and the SDG Indicators Working Group (IWG) decided to produce a Baseline Measurement report that was finalized in June 2018. This report aimed to provide indicators for Aruba, assess the current data availability for monitoring and to ease the implementation process.

However, the report confirmed that most data for various indicators was not yet available, highlighting the current challenges to collect and provide data in Aruba. The report further confirmed the many challenges regarding data gaps, scattered data and the lack of statistical capacity and weak NSS on the island (see figure 6). Unfortunately, this issue greatly hinders effective SDG implementation in many ways and must be addressed.

http://www.sustainablesids.org/knowledgebase/the-aruba-sdg-baseline-measurement-report-2018
In August of 2018 the Accelerators was adopted by the Council of Ministers. This step was crucial for institutionalizing the accelerators with the aim of creating ministerial wide ownership of the long-term SDG Agenda and prioritization for efficient resource allocation.

The SDG Commission, which includes the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry whom is tasked with national planning, decided to develop the National Strategic Plan (NSP) based on the SDGs. This enabled the SDG Commission to promote greater awareness and prioritization of SDGs across the public sector. The EXWGAs supported the development of the NSP which is planned to be completed in 2019.

**Step 8: Institutionalizing the Accelerators, 2018**

In August of 2018 the Accelerators was adopted by the Council of Ministers. This step was crucial for institutionalizing the accelerators with the aim of creating ministerial wide ownership of the long-term SDG Agenda and prioritization for efficient resource allocation.

**Step 9: Merging the National Strategic Plan with the SDGs, 2018**

The SDG Commission, which includes the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry whom is tasked with national planning, decided to develop the National Strategic Plan (NSP) based on the SDGs. This enabled the SDG Commission to promote greater awareness and prioritization of SDGs across the public sector. The EXWGAs supported the development of the NSP which is planned to be completed in 2019.
Step 10: Engaging in wider collaboration with key government institutions, 2018 - present

Since its initiation, Aruba’s SDG Commission has significantly expanded its collaboration with key stakeholders for SDG implementation; established official working groups assigned with essential roles for the implementation process and collaborated with an increasing number of key governmental institutions. These include the Parliament, the Court of Audit, and the Department of Finance.

Collaboration with the Parliament:
The SDG Commission and the Parliament have stepped up their collaboration. This is demonstrated through increased communication and addressing the supporting and monitoring role of the Parliament in the SDG implementation process. Furthermore, the Parliament of Aruba has installed a parliamentary SDG committee. Such developments demonstrate the increase in cross-departmental organizations working towards a common goal.

Collaboration with the Court of Audit:
The Court of Audit engaged with the SDG Commission through conducting a review on the preparedness for implementation of SDGs in Aruba. This extensive review assessed the preliminary steps taken by the government for the realization and monitoring of the SDGs, while also identifying the weaknesses so far, and giving advice on how to further advance this process.

Collaboration with the Department of Finance:
The SDG Commission has engaged with the Department of Finance to mainstream the SDGs within the budget cycle and discuss the official inclusion of SDG implementation in the national government budget. The Director of the Department of Finance recently joined the SDG Commission, and this helps the process of budgeting for the future. Ultimately, linking the SDGs to the budget with a programmatic approach aims to foster transparent monitoring and evidenced-based policymaking.

Additionally, the Commission has met with the Council of Advice Aruba, the Council of Ministers and Social Economic Council in order to explain the crucial role that they play to guarantee effective local implementation of the SDGs.

Furthermore, there have been instances of international collaboration including the presentation the SDG Commission made at the Inter-Parliamentary Kingdom Conference (IPKO). This resulted in the decision by IPKO to install committees to continue the discussion on SDGs between parliamentarians.

INITIAL RESULTS, IMPACTS AND BENEFICIARIES

Learning how to effectively navigate the process of SDG implementation, has been challenging but progress has been made for the cause of SDG implementation on the island. Two of the most important results yet in achieving the SDGs involve two ministries:

1) In its report, the Court of Audit indicated that the Ministry of Education, Science and Sustainable Development has a strong commitment towards the realization of SDGs. The Ministry’s plans are directly related to SDG 4 (quality of education) where they are currently developing the National Education Plan (NOP) 2018-2030, aligning it with corresponding SDG 4 targets. Furthermore, the Ministry is planning to organize seminars and conferences to stimulate and foster knowledge on this subject.

2) The Nature Policy Plan 2018-2021 of the Ministry of Regional Planning, Infrastructure and Environment makes a link of its action points to the SDGs.

Instances of progress and milestones are observed within all the three spheres; within the SDG Commission, within the wider public sector as well as the local community.

For the SDG Commission, with their role to give strategic direction and coordinate the implementation process, milestones that stand out are:

- The official creation of the SDG Commission as a central coordinating body within government for SDG implementation
- Establishing an institutional framework
- The UNDP MAPS mission visit in Aruba
- The ECLAC’s visit to Aruba
- The establishment of the Indicators Working Group (IWG)
- The reinstatement of the SDG Commission following national elections and the change of government
- The production of the Baseline Measurement report, elucidating what the baseline is for Aruba in order to start measuring and monitoring sustainable development more efficiently.

In terms of progress within the public sector:

- More awareness of SDGs across government departments
- The National Strategic Plan (NSP) aligned with the SDGs
- More key government stakeholder collaboration and working with a common vision, e.g. establishing collaboration with the Parliament, Council of Ministers and Department of Finance.

In terms of progress within the local community:

- Growing awareness of SDGs through stakeholder sessions
- Increase in academia and NGO’s giving importance to SDGs
- Engaging the community through online platforms and social media efforts

Despite the challenges outlined, the cumulative efforts of the SDG Commission so far, have succeeded in planting a seed to shift the mindset of the Aruban community as a whole in favor of the SDGs.

At the University of Aruba we are aware of the UN SDG framework and the SDG Commission instituted by the Government of Aruba. The meaning of these developments for the University of Aruba is that our own developmental and sustainability efforts can be better aligned to the efforts of other actors and agents in our community. The UN SDG framework offers a standardized and globally applied logic that creates the opportunity for synergy in purpose and harmony in action. Since the introduction of the UN SDG framework and the inception of the SDG Commission in Aruba, dialogue, discussions and debate about sustainable development and the efforts for commonly sustained action have increased significantly.

- Glenn Thodé, Rector University of Aruba
STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

The entire Aruban community is the main beneficiary from the SDG implementation on the island. Meanwhile, there have been several actors that have made notable contributions to the SDG Commission and its objective of SDG implementation.

These contributions are categorized below in terms of general institutional support and categories to elicit specific contributions on financial advice, collaboration on activities for local community SDG awareness-raising and data provision.

Key stakeholders that have collaborated with, or assisted the SDG Commission for the purpose of advancing SDG implementation have been:

- Court of Audit – institutional support;
- Council of Advice Aruba – institutional support;
- Social Economic Council – institutional support;
- Department of Finance – institutional support and financial advice;
- Department of Legislation and Legal Affairs – institutional support;
- Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) – institutional support and data provision;
- Departments comprising the Indicators Working Group (IWG) – institutional support and data provision;
- Council of Ministers – institutional support;
- Parliament – institutional support;
- United Nations Development Group (UNDG) – institutional support
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – institutional support and awareness raising;
- United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) – institutional support and awareness raising;
- Kingdom of the Netherlands – institutional support;
- Inter-Parliamentary Kingdom Conference (IPKO) – institutional support;

General institutional support refers to activities that would support skill upgrading, procedural improvements and organizational strengthening of the SDG Commission for its objective of SDG implementation.

Core members of the IWG include representatives of several government departments, the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry, and the Central Bureau of Statistics.
- Aruba Centre of Excellence for the Sustainable Development of SIDS – awareness-raising;
- University of Aruba – awareness-raising;
- Chamber of Commerce – awareness-raising;

Such collaborations and partnerships have been established in order to strengthen institutional capacity, work processes and accountability within the SDG Commission itself, and within the public sector in relation to SDG implementation in Aruba.

Aside from these key institutions mentioned, and perhaps the most crucial, contribution to the SDGs was and is continuously demonstrated by the wider local community stakeholders (e.g. the private sector and differing NGOs) either through direct collaboration with the SDG Commission, or through their participation in the National Strategic Plan (NSP). These stakeholders have participated in the creation of the NSP through government-organized feedback-sessions. These sessions stimulate awareness and initiative, while creating a coherent and localized plan to tackle SDG implementation.
HOW TO FINANCE

So far, the lack of financial resources is a challenge for Aruba’s SDG implementation. Currently, the SDG Commission is not accounted for in the national government budget. All members of the SDG Commission are employees of various government departments. This strengthens the integrated approach to SDG implementation but poses the challenge of competing priorities of the Commission and other ministries.

Although the SDG Commission does not have its own budget, it has been able to push forward relevant projects and campaigns through collaboration with departments and organizations that possess their own funds and can also benefit from such projects.

Additionally, in order to fill the gap of domestic finance, Aruba received support from international organizations such as UNDP and ECLAC. This underscores the need for outreach and multi-stakeholder partnerships to overcome financial constraints.

Advice for other SIDS seeking to finance local SDG implementation:

- Work through your regional UN office, and research which possibilities are available for your country to acquire funding.
- Match your national government budget to the SDGs in order to identify gaps, prioritize goals and allocate funds more efficiently.
- Research domestic and international partners and identify opportunities to acquire development funding.
SCALING UP

Scaling up SDG implementation on Aruba can be possible; however, several additional dedicated resources would be beneficial for this to happen.

The implementation process could benefit if the SDG Commission were to work more strategically across the public sector and to directly employ staff who are able to carry out more activities and to dedicate time for the provision of advisory services to the government and other partners. However, this is not currently possible because the SDG Commission does not yet have a government budget. Lastly, it is important that the entire government feels a sense of ownership of the SDGs, and demonstrates commitment to realizing these goals. Leaving the task of implementation solely to a few government departments is insufficient in building a strong foundation for SDG implementation, and it could hinder the scaling up process.

Other SIDS that seek to scale-up their SDG implementation process should consider to:

- Employ civil servants to support a coordinating entity in a position to prioritize SDG implementation.
- Identify local priorities as Aruba did when they identified “Accelerators” through the UN MAPS framework.
- Be strategic in decision-making; consider short-term as well as long-term goals and impact; assess how this will move the implementation process forward.
- Involve the entire local government in SDG implementation.

Aruba is open to collaborate and share knowledge and experience with other SIDS.
LESSONS LEARNED
BY AN EARLY IMPLEMENTER

As an early implementer of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, Aruba’s SDG Commission has gained insight and knowledge regarding the initial implementation process which is an important contribution to South-South cooperation to share knowledge and experience among SIDS in the same phase.

In the experience of Aruba’s SDG Commission, the following are the lessons learned from establishing institutional arrangements to implement the SDGs:

• **Must be flexible (in all senses of the word):** the entire community must be open to change and shift their mindset, work-ethic and attitude. Such flexibility is key to treating sustainable development as a priority.

• **Must have a strong coordinating mechanism within the government:** without an appointed coordinating mechanism within the government to manage SDG implementation and give strategic direction, navigating this process would be immensely challenging.

• **Policy-coherence and an integrative approach is necessary:** SDG implementation requires a collaborative or whole-of-government approach.

• **Must have a clear mandate:** without an official mandate, the processes, tasks, accountability and responsibilities of the SDG Commission would be open to individual interpretation, which immensely obstructs progress.

• **Must follow a multi-stakeholder approach:** the SDG Commission has learned that this process does not work if the public sector, private sector and civil society are not engaged and open to changing their way of thinking and working collaboratively.

• **SDG implementation is a process of innovation, that stimulates good governance practices among other things:** throughout this experience, the government will have to change the way it works. Furthermore, its strengths and weaknesses have been exposed as well as the loose ends within the public sector, that may now be ameliorated.

• **It’s ideal to have dedicated personnel** with the ability to prioritize tasks relating to the SDG implementation, to stimulate momentum and progress. The SDG institutional framework has identified a secretariat and incubation space to play this role.

• **Stimulate data sharing and literacy:** the SDG Commission is hindered by the lack of data sharing and data-literacy. The lack of coherent, wide-spread data available greatly challenges evidence-based policy making, which is the backbone of SDG implementation.
• **The importance of partnership-building and cooperation:** if there is no partnership and cooperation among the entire Aruban community to implement SDGs, a successful and complete implementation is impossible.

• **The importance of localizing a global SDG framework:** identification of accelerators for prioritization is important given limited resources, as well as developing localized indicators for your specific developmental context. Scaling up SDG implementation on Aruba can be possible; however, several additional dedicated resources would be beneficial for this to happen.

Additionally, and important to emphasize, are the more intangible aspects that can be referred to as the soft capabilities within the coordinating mechanism. The following words of wisdom from the SDG Commission members is shared on how to prepare as a public servant in the initial phase of SDG implementation:

- Be open to collaboration and establishing partnerships
- Be transparent in your work, share progress with other relevant partners
- Practice respectful and open communication
- Recognize the importance of team-building activities
- Reflect and evaluate on your progress as a team, in order to adjust where is necessary
- Become acquainted with terminologies relevant to the SDG framework to avoid miscommunications among colleagues
- Be open to innovation within government this SDG implementation process may bring, and be willing to adapt your mindset accordingly
- Be patient and accept that this is a long-term process, with long-term rewards
Photo: The National Aruba SDG Commission together with Mr. Magdy Martinez and Ms. Sharifa Ali-Abdullahi of the UNDP at Parliament in 2018

Photo: Community Youth engagement on SDGs awareness raising

Photo: Ms. Mari-Lou Figaroa from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Aruba presenting the Aruba Baseline Measurement Report 2018
RESOURCES

UNDP Rapid Integrated Assessment Aruba 2017:  

The Kingdom of the Netherlands Report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals 2017:  
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16109Netherlands.pdf

The Aruba SDG Roadmap 2017:  
http://www.sustainablesids.org/knowledgebase/the-aruba-sdg-roadmap

The Aruba Baseline Measurement Report 2018:  

Court of Audit – Review on the preparedness for implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Aruba 2018:  

MAPS Framework:  
http://www.2030agenda.undp.org/content/2030agenda/en/home/more/MAPS.html

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