
Monitoring and Evaluation of Sustainable Development Goals: A Methodological Framework for Research on the Case of Georgia

Nana Akhalaia

Associate Professor, Georgian Technical University

Candidate of Economic Sciences,

Academic Doctor of Economics

n.akhalaia@gtu.ge

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9372-0562>

Nato Makhatadze

Associate Professor, Georgian Technical University

Academic Doctor of Social Sciences

nato.makhatadze@gtu.ge

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0873-1591>

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Abstract

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a cornerstone of contemporary Georgian politics and national development strategy. This article examines the methodological framework for monitoring and evaluating the SDGs within the Georgian context, specifically addressing data availability, indicator precision, and quantitative selection processes. Furthermore, it analyzes the implementation of SDGs at the national level, focusing on the specific indicators and data collection methods employed. The findings suggest that methodological diversity enhances both assessment accuracy and the quality of strategic decision-making. Finally, the article proposes a comprehensive strategy integrating key principles, methods, and tools to facilitate effective SDG assessment at both national and regional levels, providing a clearer roadmap for evaluating policy achievements.

Keywords: Sustainable development, monitoring, evaluation, research methods, SDGs.

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ნანა ახალაია

საქართველოს ტექნიკური უნივერსიტეტის ასოცირებული პროფესორი
ეკონომიკურ მეცნიერებათა კანდიდატი
ეკონომიკის აკადემიური დოქტორი
n.akhalaia@gtu.ge
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9372-0562>

ნატო მახათაძე

საქართველოს ტექნიკური უნივერსიტეტის ასოცირებული პროფესორი
სოციალურ მეცნიერებათა აკადემიური დოქტორი
nato.makhatadze@gtu.ge
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0873-1591>

აბსტრაქტი

მდგრადი განვითარების მიზნების (SDGs) მიღწევა თანამედროვე ქართული პოლიტიკისა და ეროვნული განვითარების სტრატეგიის ქვაკუთხედაა. წინამდებარე სტატია მიმოიხილავს მდგრადი განვითარების მიზნების მონიტორინგისა და შეფასების მეთოდოლოგიურ ჩარჩოს ქართულ კონტექსტში; კერძოდ, მასში განხილულია მონაცემთა ხელმისაწვდომობა, ინდიკატორთა სიზუსტე და რაოდენობრივი შერჩევის პროცესები.

გარდა ამისა, ნაშრომი აანალიზებს მდგრადი განვითარების მიზნების იმპლემენტაციას ეროვნულ დონეზე, ფოკუსირებულია კონკრეტულ ინდიკატორებსა და მონაცემთა შეგროვების მეთოდებზე. კვლევის შედეგები მიუთითებს, რომ მეთოდოლოგიური მრავალფეროვნება აუმჯობესებს როგორც შეფასების სიზუსტეს, ისე სტრატეგიული გადაწყვეტილებების მიღების ხარისხს. დასასრულს, სტატია გვთავაზობს ყოვლისმომცველ სტრატეგიას — ძირითადი პრინციპების, მეთოდებისა და ინსტრუმენტების ინტეგრირებით — რაც ხელს შეუწყობს მდგრადი განვითარების მიზნების ეფექტურ შეფასებას როგორც ეროვნულ, ისე რეგიონულ დონეზე და შექმნის უფრო ნათელ საგზაო რუკას პოლიტიკის მიღწევების შესაფასებლად.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: მდგრადი განვითარება, მონიტორინგი, შეფასება, კვლევის მეთოდები, მდგრადი განვითარების მიზნები (SDGs).

Introduction

The concept of sustainable development has emerged as the definitive pillar of modern policy, necessitating a critical balance between economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. Etymologically, the term "**sustainability**" derives from the Latin *sustinere*, meaning to "hold up" or "support," reflecting a system's capacity to endure over time. "**Research**" originates from the Old French *recercher*, signifying a thorough investigation or a "searching again," while "**Methods**" stems from the Greek *methodos*, referring to a systematic procedure or way of proceeding. Linguistically, "**sustainability research methods**" integrates these concepts into structured procedures focused on the long-term resilience of complex global systems.

The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** provide the internationally recognized framework required to unify these diverse objectives. Within this framework, research methods serve as the vital bridge between human activity and the natural environment, facilitating the evidence-based decision-making necessary for global progress.

For Georgia, a transition economy navigating regional disparities, demographic shifts, and environmental pressures, the monitoring and assessment of sustainable development is of paramount importance. In this context, the strategic selection of methodologies is the primary determinant of whether national assessments are merely bureaucratic exercises or reliable, practically applicable tools for change.

The purpose of this article is threefold:

- To examine modern methodological approaches to SDG monitoring;
- To propose a research framework specifically tailored to the Georgian socio-economic context;
- To identify practical tools and indicators for an effective and inclusive national assessment.

Research Methodological Framework

To fully grasp the significance of sustainability research, one must first appreciate its multifaceted nature. Sustainability transcends mere environmental protection; it is an integrated concept encompassing social equity, economic viability, and ecological integrity. Consequently, research in this field is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing from environmental science, sociology, economics, engineering, and policy studies. These methodologies provide the empirical evidence required to evaluate the impact of human agency and develop strategies for a balanced, sustainable world.

Typology of Research Approaches

Sustainability research methods employ a diverse array of approaches, each offering unique strengths and applications for policy assessment:

Quantitative Research: This approach includes statistical data analysis, indicator-based assessments, and time-series modeling. It involves the use of numerical data to measure and analyze sustainable development indicators. In the Georgian context, the primary data sources are:

- National Entities: The National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) and the National Environmental Agency.
- International Databases: The UNDP, World Bank, and the UN SDG Global Database.
- National Reporting: Georgian Environmental Reports and research from international academic institutions.
- *Note:* Indicators are selected based on rigorous self-assessment and effectiveness criteria, reflecting the three main pillars of sustainable development.

Qualitative Research: This method emphasizes an in-depth understanding of experiences, perspectives, and meanings through non-numerical data. By utilizing interviews, focus groups, and case studies, researchers can achieve a rich interpretation of the social and cultural aspects of sustainable development that quantitative metrics might overlook.

Mixed Methods Research: Considered the modern standard for monitoring and assessing sustainable development, this approach strategically integrates both quantitative and

qualitative data. It provides a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of complex research questions, bridging the gap between numerical trends and human experience.

Theoretical Foundations: Beyond Metrics - Structure, Power, and Human Agency

Sociological Theoretical Foundations for SDG Assessment: Structure, Power, and Social Capabilities

The monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is far more than a technocratic exercise; it is a socio-structural phenomenon deeply intertwined with the distribution of power, institutional legitimacy, and mechanisms of resource access. Sociological analysis allows us to understand how "development" is constructed, measured, and interpreted as a social construct. To provide a rigorous academic basis for this study, the implementation of SDGs in Georgia is examined within three primary sociological frameworks:

1. Structural Functionalism: Seeking Equilibrium and Integration

From the perspective of structural functionalism, society is viewed as a complex system of interconnected institutions whose stability depends on a functional equilibrium²⁸⁷. In this light, the SDGs act as a global "normative compass" or mechanism designed to harmonize international standards with local stability and ensure the reproduction of social order. For Georgia, achieving these goals is not just about meeting targets, but about ensuring that every part of the social system functions in a way that promotes collective well-being. However, this functional balance is frequently disrupted by regional inequalities and demographic transformations, which hinder comprehensive social integration.

2. Conflict Theory: Power Dynamics and Statistical Visibility

Conflict theory, rooted in the work of Karl Marx, posits that social development is inextricably linked to the distribution of resources and existing power structures²⁸⁸. SDG indicators, therefore, are not merely neutral metrics of progress but are often reflections of

²⁸⁷ Parsons, Talcott. 1951. *The Social System*. New York: Free Press.

https://archive.org/details/socialsystem0000pars_o6s6

²⁸⁸ . Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1959. *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Class_and_Class_Conflict_in_Industrial_S/K0-5AAAAIAAJ

specific political priorities. This perspective necessitates a critical inquiry into the "politics of knowledge":

- Whose interests does the current indicator framework primarily serve?
- Which social groups remain "**statistically invisible**" within national data (e.g., those in remote mountain villages or informal labor sectors)? By demanding that we look beyond national averages, this lens humanizes the assessment process and identifies those who might be left behind by current political and economic priorities.

3. The Capability Approach: Cultivating Real Freedoms

The most humanizing framework is the Capability Approach, pioneered by Amartya Sen and further expanded by Martha Nussbaum. This theory shifts the focus from the mere existence of resources to the "**real freedoms**" people possess. Sen ²⁸⁹argues that a person's well-being should be measured not by what they have, but by what they are actually able to do and be. Nussbaum ²⁹⁰identifies fundamental capabilities, including health, education, and political participation, as essential for human dignity. For Georgia, this mandates that monitoring move beyond the mere availability of resources to evaluate the actual agency of citizens in utilizing those resources.

Scientific Novelty

The scientific novelty of this study lies in the development of an **integrated, multidimensional framework for monitoring and evaluating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which transcends traditional statistical reporting by synthesizing mixed research methods with core sociological paradigms (Structural Functionalism, Conflict Theory, and the Capability Approach). For the first time within the Georgian context, the implementation of the SDGs is analyzed through the lens of "**Normative Isomorphism**," providing a unique perspective on how global standards are translated into national policies. This approach allows for a deeper assessment of the social effectiveness of these

²⁸⁹ Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

<https://archive.org/details/developmentasfre0000sena>

²⁹⁰ Nussbaum, Martha C. 2011. *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Creating_Capabilities/87L7X7N3YnUC

goals, moving beyond numerical data to uncover the impact of institutional trust, power dynamics, and structural inequalities on regional development.

The Interplay of Theory and Practice: A Multidimensional Approach to SDG Assessment

The transition from theoretical commitment to the practical realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a robust analytical foundation. In Georgia, this process is not merely a technical alignment with international benchmarks; it is a profound societal transformation that necessitates a sophisticated research methodology. To move beyond the surface of statistical averages, we must first establish the theoretical and methodological parameters that allow us to capture the lived reality of development. At the heart of our analysis is the concept of **Normative Isomorphism**. For a transitional democracy like Georgia, the adoption of the SDGs often serves a dual purpose: it acts as a catalyst for internal reform while simultaneously signaling the state's commitment to global values. However, the risk of "decoupling", where formal policies exist only on paper, is a constant challenge. Therefore, our research framework is designed to detect the gap between institutional appearance and practical impact.

Monitoring and Evaluation of sustainable development is not a static task but a multidimensional research process. By combining quantitative metrics with qualitative insights, M&E frameworks aim to measure progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), assess the effectiveness of national policies, and support evidence-based decision-making.

Global policy frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, do more than set targets; they actively shape the methodologies used by researchers. Aligning Georgian research with these global standards promotes a more targeted and impactful research agenda.

In practice, these methods are essential for moving from theoretical discussions to practical implementation. They provide the tools necessary to assess the current state of sustainability challenges, monitor progress, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. Such an approach ensures that Georgian sustainability initiatives are grounded in solid evidence, promoting accountability and adaptive management in the face of shifting

environmental and societal dynamics. Ultimately, the effectiveness of SDG monitoring depends on the synergy of these methods, ensuring an objective and practically applicable assessment of national progress.

Social Structure, Inequality, and Institutional Trust in the SDG Framework

Monitoring and evaluating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is more than a technical or statistical exercise; it requires a rigorous analysis of social structures, power distributions, and institutional relationships. From a sociological perspective, SDG achievement depends not only on formal policy implementation but also on the social conditions that dictate individual capabilities, resource access, and civic participation.

Central to this framework is the Capability Approach, pioneered by Amartya Sen and Martha²⁹¹ Nussbaum. This theory shifts the focus from the mere existence of resources to the "real opportunities" individuals have to realize their potential. In the Georgian context, a multidimensional analysis reveals critical inequalities manifested through:

- Regional Imbalances: Significant disparities between urban centers (Tbilisi) and rural peripheries²⁹².
- Labor Market Segmentation: High rates of informal employment and structural gaps in the workforce²⁹³.
- Demographic Shifts: Challenges posed by an aging population and changing age structures²⁹⁴.

To analyze these strata, researchers must utilize disaggregated data from the World Bank's Poverty and Inequality Database, the ILO's Labor Statistics, and UN Women's Gender Data

²⁹¹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/capability-approach/#:~:text=By%20focusing%20on%20what%20people,the%20capability%20approach%20recognizes%20the>

²⁹² <https://pmcg-i.com/regional-disparities-in-georgia-surveyed-in-regional-development-project/>

²⁹³ [https://www.ilo.org/publications/recent-trends-informal-employment-georgia#:~:text=The%20persistence%20of%20high%20informality,combination%20of%20\(i\)%20macroeconomic%20factors](https://www.ilo.org/publications/recent-trends-informal-employment-georgia#:~:text=The%20persistence%20of%20high%20informality,combination%20of%20(i)%20macroeconomic%20factors)

²⁹⁴ <https://btuai.ge/en/demographic-shifts-in-georgia-aging-population-declining-birth-rates-and-growing-challenges-for-the-healthcare-system/#:~:text=Demographic%20Shifts%20in%20Georgia%3A%20Aging,the%20Healthcare%20System%20%2D%20BTU%20AI>

Platform. These sources allow SDG indicators to be viewed through the lens of social stratification rather than simple national averages.

Institutional Trust and Governance

The success of sustainable development is inextricably linked to institutional trust and governance quality. Policies are only effective if supported by public trust, citizen engagement, and robust accountability mechanisms. Tools such as the World Governance Indicators and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index are essential for evaluating the normative environment.

In Georgia, the SDG assessment must move toward evaluating the quality of social equity and social capital. Sociologically, sustainable development represents a social contract between the state and its citizens. Success depends on the fair distribution of resources and institutional transparency.

Expanded Methodological Requirements

To provide a deeper social understanding, the Georgian SDG monitoring framework should be expanded to include:

1. Capability and Agency Assessment: Measuring real freedom of choice.
2. Structural Inequality Analysis: Identifying systemic barriers to progress.
3. Institutional Research: Tracking trust and governance quality.
4. Critical Data Interpretation: Questioning how and why data is produced.
5. Social Impact Evaluation: Assessing the lived reality of policy outcomes.

Social Capital and Institutional Trust

The successful implementation of sustainable development is significantly dependent on the depth and quality of a nation's social capital. As the American political scientist and sociologist Robert D. Putnam famously argued, the effectiveness of institutions is not just a matter of design, but is inextricably linked to the levels of public trust and the vibrancy of civic engagement. In this sense, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be viewed as mere economic targets; they are, in fact, a function of social relations.

In the Georgian context, this means that the technical success of a policy is often secondary to the environment in which it is executed. To evaluate the health of this environment, we must look toward indicators such as Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index and the World Governance Indicators. These metrics allow us to measure the normative and institutional foundations of the state, revealing how much faith citizens place in their governance structures. Ultimately, sustainable development in Georgia requires more than just efficient administration; it requires a revitalized social contract where transparency and accountability foster the trust necessary for collective progress.

Institutional Theory and Normative Isomorphism²⁹⁵

According to Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell), organizations and states frequently replicate global norms as a strategy to secure international legitimacy. From this perspective, the national adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Georgia can be characterized as a process of normative isomorphism, a phenomenon where a state adopts global standards to maintain its standing and credibility within the international system. This demonstrates that the implementation of the SDGs in Georgia fulfills two simultaneous roles: it addresses a genuine need for internal development and serves as a vital mechanism for external legitimacy.

Complementing this is the field of Data Sociology and "Indicator Politics." It is essential to recognize that data is not a neutral reflection of the world; rather, indicators actively construct social reality by defining what is recognized as a "problem." An analysis of indicator-based policy reveals how complex social challenges are translated into numerical values, which in turn dictate political and budgetary priorities. While the UN Statistics Division provides a universal framework, its successful localization requires a critical adaptation to the specific social nuances of the Georgian context.

Ultimately, a sociological assessment of the SDGs must be viewed through an integrated theoretical framework. This includes the analysis of structural inequalities, the distribution

²⁹⁵ Isomorphism, in sociology and institutional theory, refers to the process by which organizations or states adopt similar trends, structures, or practices in response to external pressures, demands for legitimacy, or best practices.

of power and resources, and the evaluation of human capabilities and agency. Furthermore, it must account for institutional trust, social capital, and a critical interpretation of the policies governing data production. By adopting this multidimensional approach, Georgia can ensure that the assessment of its progress occurs not only at a statistical level but at a profound social level, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable development path. The final theoretical position of this study posits that a sociological assessment of the SDGs must transcend mere statistical reporting. Instead, it should be viewed as a multidimensional inquiry that begins with a deep analysis of structural inequalities and a rigorous study of the distribution of power and resources. By examining who holds the means to influence policy and who remains "statistically invisible," we move closer to understanding the true social landscape of development.

Furthermore, this framework requires an assessment of opportunities and agency, focusing on whether individuals have the real freedom to utilize available resources to improve their lives. This is inextricably linked to the indicators of institutional trust and social capital; without a foundation of public trust and transparent governance, even the most well-funded sustainability initiatives risk failure. Finally, a critical analysis of data policy is essential to understand how social problems are "translated" into numbers and how those numbers, in turn, shape national priorities.

Such an integrated theoretical framework ensures that the assessment of the SDGs in Georgia occurs not only at a statistical level but at a profound social level. It shifts the focus from global metrics to local realities, ensuring that the path toward sustainability is both inclusive and equitable for all segments of Georgian society.

National implementation practices, indicators and data collection methods of SDGs based on the example of Georgia

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Georgia began after 2015 and is based on the principle of integrating international commitments with national policies. National contextualization of the SDGs has been implemented in state development strategies, including "Georgia 2030", sectoral policies, and medium-term action plans. Implementation is coordinated by the government administration and

relevant ministries, with each agency assigned responsibility for the implementation of specific Goals and Targets. An important role is played by the National Statistical Service of Georgia (GeoStat), which ensures statistical monitoring of SDGs indicators and data harmonization with the UN framework.

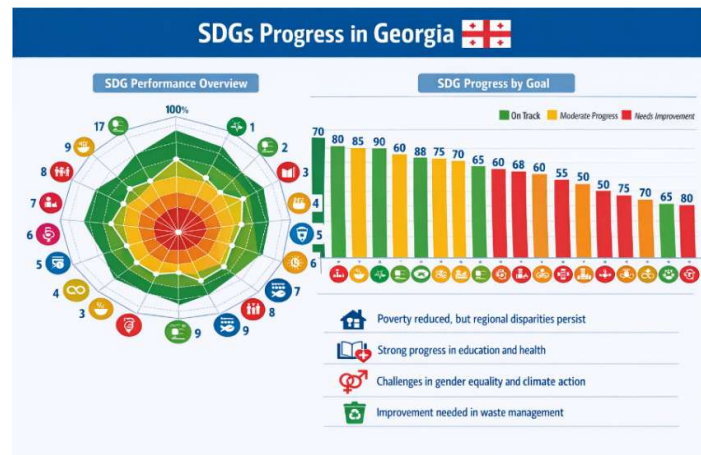
Georgia regularly prepares Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which are the main tool for assessing progress on the SDGs and provide international accountability. SDGs monitoring in Georgia is based on the Global Indicator Framework defined by the UN, which is adapted to the country's statistical and institutional capacities.

The main categories of indicators are: social indicators (e.g., poverty rate, unemployment, access to education, gender equality); economic indicators (GDP per capita, labor productivity, innovation, contribution of tourism to the economy); environmental indicators (air quality, biodiversity, water resources, climate change); institutional and governance indicators (rule of law, effectiveness of public institutions, data transparency). In the case of Georgia, not all global indicators are fully available. Accordingly, the following are used: fully measurable indicators, partially measurable indicators, and nationally adapted indicators.

In the SDGs monitoring and evaluation process, Georgia uses mixed data collection methods, which ensure a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Administrative data (registers of ministries and agencies, social protection, education and health databases, environmental monitoring systems) Statistical surveys (population census, labor force survey, household income and expenditure survey, environmental statistical surveys) Geospatial and technological methods (satellite data (land use, forests, urbanization), GIS analysis to identify regional inequalities, remote sensing for climate indicators) Qualitative methods (analysis of policy documents, expert interviews, focus groups at the local level)

Challenges and limitations

- Incomplete availability of indicators at the regional level
- Low frequency of data updates
- Difficulties in institutional coordination
- Fragmentation of environmental data.



The presented graphical visualization depicts Georgia's progress towards the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The results show that achievements in the country are uneven and vary significantly across social, economic, and environmental goals. The goals with high progress are mainly related to social areas. Progress is particularly visible in the direction of quality education (SDG 4), where high participation and literacy levels indicate closeness to achieving the goal. The results achieved in the areas of health and well-being (SDG 3) and clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) are also positively assessed, reflecting the population's broad access to basic services.

In the zone of moderate progress are goals such as decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), and sustainable cities and human settlements (SDG 11). While progress is evident in these areas, challenges remain, particularly in terms of labor market structure, youth unemployment, and urban governance.

The goals with low progress mainly cover environmental and social equity aspects. Particular difficulties are observed in the areas of gender equality (SDG 5), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and combating climate change (SDG 13). This indicates the need to strengthen institutional mechanisms, policy enforcement, and public awareness.

The radar chart clearly shows that Georgia's development profile is more focused on social achievements, while environmental sustainability and inclusive development are relatively weak links. The bar chart highlights specific goals where strengthening targeted policies is critically important.

The graphical results confirm that reducing regional inequality, strengthening gender policies, and a systemic approach to climate and environmental challenges should be prioritized in Georgia's sustainable development agenda.

Conclusion

The role of research methods in the process of monitoring and evaluating sustainable development is crucial. The example of Georgia shows that the integrated use of quantitative and qualitative/qualitative methods increases the effectiveness of evaluation and the quality of policy planning. Sustainable development monitoring is progressing, although challenges remain, such as data fragmentation, insufficient localization of indicators, and weak institutional coordination. The systematic use of research methods contributes to the reduction of these problems and the adoption of evidence-based decisions.

It is advisable to improve data collection methods and strengthen regional studies for more effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals:

- Integrated data system: centralized data collection at all levels
- Indicator adaptation: adapting global SDGs indicators to the specifics of Georgia
- Mixed assessment methods: combining trend, comparative, and narrative analysis
- Regional specificities: differentiating data for mountainous regions, cities, and rural settlements
- Policy feedback: using monitoring results in practical policy decisions.

From a social perspective: In the Georgian context, particular importance is attached to reducing regional inequalities, regulating informal work, recognizing care work, and integrating young people and the elderly into economic and social life. Thus, the success of implementing the SDGs is determined not only by the rate of economic growth but also by the extent to which an inclusive social space is created, where each individual has the opportunity to fully participate in public life. Sustainable development, from a sociological perspective, is not only about achieving goals but also about institutionalizing social justice. Research is a fundamental foundation in this process. Without systematic, methodologically sound, and disaggregated data-based research, it is impossible to

accurately diagnose problems, identify structural causes, and formulate targeted policies. Without empirical analysis, development can only be based on formal indicators or superficial assessments, which cannot ensure sustainable and equitable outcomes.

This approach transforms the SDGs from a reporting tool to a mechanism for social transformation. It is research-based policy that creates the basis for real social change, which is especially important in conditions of transitional democracies and evolving social structures.

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