Public Administration and Sustainable Development Goals: The Russian Context

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Abstract

The sustainable development concept is becoming increasingly important for public administration. This provision is reflected in the conceptual documents of the United Nations. From the point of view of public administration and policy practice, we can single out the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period 2016–2030, which are formulated in the United Nations document "Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (2015). They not only reflect the ideology of sustainable development and system of social, economic, and environmental priorities in a balanced way, but also stand out in terms of practical public administration, instrumentality, and quantitative assessments. The 17 SDGs are formulated in the form of recommendations of a global nature, with each government setting its own national objectives, guided by global wishes, but taking into account national conditions. Each government decides how to ensure that these global objectives are taken into account in the form of recommendations in public administration, planning processes, measures and strategies. Currently, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Norway can serve as examples of advanced adaptation of the SDGs in their public administration.

To abandon a raw export-based model and switch to a new development paradigm of the Russian economy, it is necessary to include the concept of sustainability in the public administration and strategic documents that underpin the country's long-term development. Any strategy, concept, or program involves a set of clearly identified goals and objectives reflected in quantitative targets, which enables public administration, monitoring and management of the progress towards SDGs in the medium and long run.

In this context, the experience of adapting UN SDGs can be used for Russia. In 2018, the Russian Government encharges the Russian Statistical Agency to adapt SDGs for public administration. It is expected that such list of indicators will be ready at the end of 2019. The author consider that based on the Russian official statistics, key sustainable development indicators that reflect the public administration aspects of sustainability can be identified for Russia. The author suggests the system of 14 such key indicators which are new in Russia. However, this list can be significantly expanded and adapted to the medium and long-term goals and objectives, as well as adjusted to the forward-looking nature of the documents. In this case, the choice of methodology is important. The author also offers the new Integrated Sustainability Index (ISU) for Russia. The development of the ISU and the design approach are similar to those applied for highly aggregated indices that are currently used worldwide to reflect the main aspects of sustainability but take into account the Russian specifics. The proposed index integrates basic economic, social, and environmental indicators for Russia and can be used for practical public administration purposes.

Keywords:

Sustainable Development Goals, public administration, key sustainable development indicators, integra indicators

Points for Practitioners

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From the point of view of policy practice, we can single out the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period 2016–2030, which are formulated in the "Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". They not only reflect the ideology of sustainable development and system of social, economic, and environmental priorities in a balanced way, but also stand out in terms of practical public administration, instrumentality, and quantitative assessments. Based on the Russian official statistics, key sustainable development indicators that reflect the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability can be identified for Russia. The author suggests system of 14 such key indicators and new Integrated Sustainability Index for Russia.

1. Introduction

Long-term goals of global development in the 21st century are presented in the conceptual documents of the United Nations (UN). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2016–2030 were approved by all countries at the UN conference in 2015 (UN, «Transformation of Our World», 2015). In 2015, the UN adopted a program to combat climate change and its impacts beyond 2020, setting out greenhouse gas emissions and temperature change targets (UN, Conference of the Parties, 2015)). A strategy for the future of mankind based on the concept of sustainable development and the transition to a green economy was approved in 2012 (UN Conference, 2012). Russia has officially supported these development priorities and considered the related documents to be important in the long term.

They not only reflect the ideology of sustainable development and system of social, economic, and environmental priorities in a balanced way, but also stand out in terms of practical public administration, instrumentality, and quantitative assessments. The 17 SDGs are formulated in the form of recommendations of a global nature, with each government setting its own national objectives, guided by global wishes, but taking into account national conditions. Each government decides how to ensure that these global objectives are taken into account in the form of recommendations in public administration, planning processes, measures and strategies. Currently, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Norway can serve as examples of advanced adaptation of the SDGs in their public administration.

An analysis of the UN SDGs and the possibility of adapting them to the Russian context as part of the public administration, long-term policy-making has exposed certain differences in the interpretation of the sustainable development concept worldwide and in Russia. In Russia, this term is used in the present strategies and programs primarily in the context of sustainable economic growth, whereas globally sustainable development is understood as a more fundamental process associated with balanced economic, social, and environmental development. The latter interpretation was recorded in the documents issued by various international organizations and the development strategies of all developed countries following the adoption of Agenda 21 at the UN conference in 1992 (UN, 1993), which recognized the limits of sustainable development at the expense of economic growth.

2. Methodology

The Sustainable Development Goals are the successor to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were effective in 2000–2015. The MDGs were officially recognized globally and nationally by many countries. From a methodological and practical viewpoint, the MDG system oriented towards the solution of social, environmental, and economic problems was pragmatic and easy to use. All UN member states committed to achieving these goals and the related targets by 2015. Generally, important progress has been made by mankind towards MDGs (UN, «Millennium Development Goals» 2015).

Similar to the MDG approach, the SDG system relies methodologically on a set of goals, tasks, and indicators and has a three-tier configuration. Seventeen goals of this system encompass three pillars of sustainable development, i.e., social, economic, and environmental dimensions, as well as institutional aspects. The SDGs take into account various system and structural barriers to sustainable development (inequality, poverty, ecological problems, structural institutional gaps, etc.). They also consider ways to overcome these barriers and ensure further progress. Unlike the MDGs, which were primarily focused on developing countries, the SDGs are designed for all countries in the world with certain variations (UN, «Transformation of Our World», 2015). Therefore, these goals provide an important step forward in securing a sustainable future for the globalized world.

Within the framework of the general concept of the SDGs, an opportunity arises in the transition to a sustainable socio-ecological-economic development of the country to build vertical ties, to coordinate the national, regional and local level of the public administration. Most of the SDGs are synergetic and complementary. Hence, the combined solution of several goals contributes to the achievement of other goals.

A key condition for the successful implementation of the SDGs is their incorporation into the public administration, national policies, strategies and plans. When promoting the "Agenda 2030" in the national context, three courses of action are possible: (1) Audit of existing strategies and plans at national, regional and local levels and comparison with global SDGs and objectives to identify inconsistencies and opportunities for change; (2) Defining their own national goals, guided by global goals, but taking into account national conditions and defining attainable objectives; (3) Developing strategies and plans based on the SDGs. Adaptation of the international regulatory framework and creation of tools to support activities at the national level.

Adaptation of the UN SDGs in the Russian context of the public administration is appropriate at the regulatory and program levels. The scientific, methodological, informational, financial support of the adaptation of the SDGs is important.

3. Problems of SDGs adaptation for Russia

The federal law of June 28, 2014 N 172-FZ "On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation", which determines the achievement of strategic goals and the solution of the priority tasks of state policy in the field of socio-economic development, is a legal and regulatory framework for the public administration, the development of long-term documents and national security. Strategic planning documents developed within the framework of goal setting at the federal level include the Strategy for the Socio-Economic Development of the Russian Federation, the Strategy for National Security of the Russian Federation, the Strategy for the Scientific and Technological Development of the Russian Federation. It appears that this list can be supplemented by the Sustainable Development Strategy of Russia with the Sustainable Development Goals of Russia until 2030. This Strategy can be developed and integrated into the strategic planning system in the Russian Federation, which corresponds to the need for balanced socio-ecological and economic development, and international obligations of the country. Strategic planning documents developed within the framework of goal-setting according to the sectoral and territorial principles at the federal level, it is also advisable to supplement the SDGs that are interlinked at the sectoral and territorial levels. This will contribute to the implementation of the Strategy for the Spatial Development of the Russian Federation and the Strategy for the Social and Economic Development of Macroregions as provided for in the Law on Strategic Planning.

The SDGs can also be useful for implementation in the state programs of the Russian Federation. These programs are developed by federal executive bodies to achieve the priorities and goals of social, economic and environmental development and to ensure the national security of the Russian Federation. The list of state programs

was approved by the order of the Government of the Russian Federation of November 11, 2010 No. 1950-r. This list provides 45 state programs. Approved and implemented 41 state programs (40 state programs approved by the Government, 1 state program by the President of Russia). Four state programs are under development.

All state programs are grouped into five program blocks:

1) Program block "New quality of life",

2) Program block “Innovative development and modernization of the economy”,

3) Program block "Ensuring national security",

4) Program block "Balanced regional development",

5) Program block "Effective state".

An overwhelming number of programs were created in 2011-2012, when crisis phenomena were not so noticeable, and the deadline for their implementation was calculated until 2020. Thus, in the conditions of a new crisis reality and the exhausted growth model, in the coming years it is necessary to develop new state programs, in which the concept of sustainable development and the SDGs can serve as important elements of the ideology of development, medium-term and long-term planning.

The author analyzed the compliance of the SDGs with the development goals of Russia. The country’s social and economic strategy until 2020 (hereinafter, Strategy-2020) (Mau V., Kuz’minov Ya., 2013) generally encompasses all three dimensions of sustainable development. However, several SDGs that are primarily focused on the environment are not reflected in Strategy-2020. For example, SDGs 12–15 are not reflected in the areas of activity outlined in Strategy-2020 (Table 1). Therefore, it is important to somehow include the maximum possible number of SDGs and the related targets and indicators in long-term documents designed to steering Russia’s development. In particular, in the context of the national strategic development design in Strategy 2030, it is appropriate to align the SDGs, priorities, and the target areas of the country’s long-term development and harmonize the respective indicators for SDG and the Strategy of Russia.

Table 1. Strategy 2020 of Russia and SDGs*

Strategy-2020 Priorities, areas, and tasks	Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
New model of economic growth								X									
New social policy. Human capital development	X	X		X													
Vocational education				X													
New primary and secondary education																	
Reduction in inequality and poverty alleviation	X				X					X							
Health policy			X														
State housing policy			X														
Territorial cohesion									X	X	X						
Development of heat and electric power									X		X						
Information cohesion							X										
Development of social institutions										X						X	
International status of Russia																X	
																	X

* Compiled by author based on Mau V., Kuz’minov Ya., 2013.

New perspectives for adapting the SDGs for public administration are linked to Russia's mid-term national projects until 2024. In accordance with national goals, national priority projects are defined, which are reflected in Presidential Decree No. 204 of May 7, 2018 "On the national goals and strategic objectives of the development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2024" (Decree of President of the Russian Federation 2018). There is a direct or indirect coincidence of the goals of such projects and the priorities of the SDGs. As an obvious match, select:

• SDG 3 “Health and well-being” corresponds to national projects in the field of demography and health;

• SDG 4 “Quality Education” - a project in education;

• SDG 11 “Sustainable cities and towns” - housing project and urban environment;

• SDG 14 “Conservation of marine ecosystems” and SDG 15 “Preservation of terrestrial ecosystems” - an ecology project;

• SDG 9 “Industrialization, Innovation and Infrastructure” and SDG 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth” - projects: safe and high-quality roads; labor productivity and employment support; the science; digital economy; small and medium entrepreneurship and support for individual entrepreneurial initiative, etc.

It should also be emphasized that the development of the state program of the Russian Federation “Scientific and Technological Development of the Russian Federation” coincides in time with the adaptation process of the SDGs, therefore, it is possible to interconnect individual technological directions and events with the goals and objectives of the “Agenda 2030”.

At the same time, in some of the existing and developed program documents, the use of the system ideology of the SDGs is not used. Thus, the development of the “Energy Strategy of Russia for the period until 2035” coincides in time with the process of adaptation of the SDGs. The presented draft Energy Strategy weakly links the problems of climate change and the innovative development of the fuel and energy complex as a whole. There is no link between energy innovation and sustainable development of cities and towns, economic growth of the country, increased productivity in the economy, efficient use of resources, and innovative modernization of industry. Also in program documents, Goal 11 “Cities” is poorly represented, since urban development is carried out at the local level, decentralized and does not have a common scientific innovation and institutional base. In this regard, it seems appropriate to create a common concept of sustainable development of cities and towns with a single scientific and innovative component, embedding the SDGs 11 into it.

4. Basic and integrated indicators for SDGs

The final stage of SDG development consists of designing indicators applied to measuring and verifying the initial goals and tasks. These indicators can be grouped into three (economic, environmental, and social) sets that reflect the progress of each country and the whole world towards the SDGs.

The selection of indicators was highly important for achieving the preceding MDGs. However, this task was not fully implemented because of the significant time lag associated with data collection and processing. The accumulation of data for three years and longer failed to support the real time management of the MDGs. Furthermore, the quality of data provided by national statistical systems and household polls was quite low. The collaboration between the involved international organizations and national statistical services was fair and insufficient to ensure the implementation of the MDGs.

Therefore, the achievement of the ambitious goals formulated for the SDGs requires proper investment in national statistical systems and household polls in order to satisfy the quantitative and qualitative requirements to datasets. In Russian statistics there is a large set of adequate Russian indicators for the SDGs (Russian Statistical Yearbook, 2017). The Russian Government encharges the Russian Statistical Agency to adapt SDGs for Russia, in particular for purposes of the public administration. The Russian statistical agency should complete work on the adaptation of the SDGs in Russia by the end of 2019.

At present, two major approaches to the design of sustainable development indicators are pursued world-wide: design of a system of indicators and aggregation of an integrated indicator (index). This work has intensified given the limited use of a GDP indicator to assess the sustainability of long-term socioeconomic processes (Stiglitz J., Sen A., and Fitoussi J.-P. 2009, United Nations (UN) 2005, The World Bank 2006). Developments in the 2000s in Russia illustrate this situation. The rapid growth of the country's GDP, stimulated by growing prices for energy resources and the depletion of natural capital, was followed by its sharp decline. Therefore, it appears more appropriate to use a set of indicators that better capture social and environmental effects in the medium term. At present, the UN Human Development Index and the Adjusted Net Savings of the World Bank represent more sustainable indicators applied worldwide (Bobylev S. 2010).

Given a significant number of indicators required for monitoring SDGs, experts often distinguish between basic and next-level indicators that reflect specific features of individual countries and groups of countries and offer alternatives for selection and use. Basic indicators must be valid for both developed and developing countries that are reliable and available for collection and processing on a yearly basis. They must also allow disaggregation by territory, income, age, gender, and other variables in order to ensure dynamic monitoring.

One type of SDG basic indicators was proposed in 2016 for calculating the Preliminary Sustainable Development Goal Index (Sachs J. D., Schmidt-Traub G., and Durand-Delacre D. 2016). A total of 38 indicators was identified as the most relevant and statistically available in most countries of the world and used to calculate the integral Index for 147 countries of 193 UN member states. Basic SDG indicators included the number of poor people, level of mortality, life expectancy at birth, cereal yields, welfare, literacy, etc. (table 2). A total of 147 countries were ranked by the SDG Index. The top five countries include Sweden, Den- mark, Norway, Finland, and Iceland. Congo, Chad, Niger, Haiti, and Sierra Leone were assigned the five lowest ranks. Russia was part of the top third of countries worldwide by this SDG indicator.

Table 2. Basic SDG indicators

SDG	Indicator	Area		
		green	yellow	red
2	Cereal yields (t/ha)	>2.5	1.5 <= value <= 2.5	<1.5
	Obesity, proportion of adult population	<10	10 <= value <=25	>25
3	Healthy life expectancy, years	>65	60 <= value <= 65	<60
	Number of health workers per 1000 population	>3	1 <= value <= 3	<1
	Subjective wellbeing (average points)	>6	5 <= value <= 6	<5
4	Expected duration of education, years	>15	12 <= value <= 15	<12
	Proportion of higher education graduates	>25	15 <= value <= 25	<15

	among 25–64 old population			
	International student evaluation program, average points	>493	400 <= value <= 493	<400
7	Renewables and nuclear energy, proportion of total energy consumption	>30	15 <= value <= 30	<15
8	Unemployment, proportion of total workforce	<5	5 <= value<=10	>10
	GDP growth fluctuation	>2	1 <= value <= 2	<1
9	Proportion of population covered by a mobile network per 100 population	>75	50 <= value <= 75	<50
	Proportion of population with access to the Internet	>80	50 <= value <= 80	<50
	Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP	>1.5	0.5 <= value <= 1.5	<0.5
10	Index Gini	<35	35 <= value <= 45	>45

Source: Sachs J. D., Schmidt-Traub G., and Durand-Delacre D. 2016.

Another tool for analyzing sustainable development is proposed by "The State of the World Dashboard," which was designed by a UN expert group (The UN Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group, 2014). This tool aims to combine accumulated and new data and to ensure open access to the information and visualization of SDG development, as well as to engage the scientific community, nonprofit organizations, and all UN divisions in the related work. The dashboard allows one to integrate various sources of information, including qualitative and quantitative data, as well as people's perceptions of certain phenomena and poll results.

The quantitative thresholds for indicator values are calculated based on expert assessments. Green, red, and yellow are used to mark the zones with positive, negative, and intermediate values, respectively. Thus, the three-color dashboard provides an illustrative description and highlights the most important areas of activity. For example, the achievement of Goal 7, i.e., "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all," is estimated to be positive if the share of renewables and nuclear energy accounts for more than 30% of the total energy consumption. Similarly, it is considered to be negative if this share is less than 15% of the total energy consumption.

In the context of a crisis, the economic and socio-economic goals and indicators have special importance for Russia (SDGs 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10). The thresholds for positive, negative, and intermediate values highlighted in green, red, and yellow, respectively, are calculated for each indicator (Table 3).

Table 3. SDG country dashboard*

Country	SDG2	SDG3	SDG4	SDG7	SDG8	SDG9	SDG10
Canada	***	***	***	**	**	***	***

Germany	***	***	***	*	**	***	***
Norway	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
United States	***	***	***	*	**	***	**
Russia	**	**	**	*	**	**	**

* Red area.
** Yellow area.
*** Green area.

Based on a range of indicator values that correspond to the goals provided in Table 4, we designed a social and economic SDGs dashboard for several countries. Using the World Bank data (The World Bank 2017), we created a comparative socioeconomic description of seven SDGs for five countries, including Russia (Table 4). Russia is placed in the intermediate (yellow) zone based on six SDGs (2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10) and in the negative (red) zone based on the indicator corresponding to Goal 7, which is associated with the share of renewables and nuclear energy in total energy consumption. Germany and the United States are part also of the red zone based on Goal 7. The most sustainable development can be observed in Norway, which is included in the green zone according to the country's values of all seven socioeconomic SDGs. Following the adoption of the SDG development agenda by the international community, it is necessary to upscale information and ensure availability of data for planning and monitoring purposes. Use of new technology leads to a fundamentally new volume of information, degree of data detail, and speed of data collection and transmission, which are characteristic of data revolution.

5. SDGs and indicators of sustainable development for Russia.

To abandon a commodity export-based model and switch to a new development paradigm of the Russian economy, it is necessary to include the concept of sustainability based on a balanced set of economic, social and environmental factors in the public administration, the strategic documents that underpin the country's long-term development. At least two strategic documents must be put in place in any form or modification, i.e., Strategy for Sustainable Development of Russia and the country's Sustainable Development Goals through 2030. Other countries in the world must also develop these documents, the former of which is in line with the UN resolutions as of 2002, while the latter is based on the UN resolutions as of 2015. I believe it is relevant to start with the definition of the sustainable development goals for Russia. Any strategy, concept, or program involves a set of clearly identified goals and objectives reflected in quantitative targets, which enables monitoring and management of the progress towards these goals in the medium and long run. In this context, the experience of adapting UN SDGs can be used for Russia.

Based on the Russian official statistics, basic sustainable development indicators that reflect the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability can be identified for Russia (Table 4). Only 14 such indicators have been selected. However, this list can be significantly expanded and adapted to the medium and long-term goals and objectives, as well as adjusted to the forward-looking nature of the document. In this case, the choice of methodology is important. Indicators are tied to the goals. A specific indicator can correspond to several goals depending on the focus of the goals (second column of Table 5). For example, energy efficiency can be an important indicator to ensure access to sustainable energy (SDG 7), promote economic growth (SDG 8), support sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12), and combat climate change (SDG 13).

Table 4 shows sustainable development indicators for the Integrated (aggregate) Sustainability Index (ISU), which was designed by the author and colleagues in 2011 (Bobylev S., Zubarevich N., Solovyeva S., Vlasov Yu.,

2012). The development of the ISU and the design approach are similar to those applied for highly aggregated indices that are currently used worldwide to reflect the main aspects of sustainability. The proposed index integrates basic economic, social, and environmental indicators. The ISU summarizes the indicator values, so as the contribution of each indicator is taken into account. The use of this index makes it possible to compare the economic growth and social and environmental factors, as well as to evaluate the outcomes of socioeconomic and environmental policies.

As shown by our calculations the ISU dynamics differs from the evolution of GDP over the last 15 years. The direct inclusion of social and environmental factors in the ISU assessment allows the GDP fluctuations to be smoothed. Nevertheless, given the recent growing turbulence of the crisis processes, the dynamics of the integral index is characterized by low growth and volatility.

Table 4. Sustainable development indicators for the Integrated Sustainability Index of the Russian Federation

Indicator	SDG
1. Proportion of investments in fixed assets compared to previous year	7, 8, 9, 12
2. Depreciation of fixed assets, %	7, 8, 9, 12
3. Energy efficiency, USD 2005 PPP/kg in oil equivalent	7, 8, 12, 13
4. Life expectancy, years	1, 2, 3, 6, 12
5. Proportion of unemployed compared to previous year	1, 8, 10
6. Proportion of inhabitants with an income below the subsistence level compared to previous years	1, 8, 10
7. Living area in square meter per person, apt. m per person.	11
8. Air pollution by stationary and mobile sources, mln tons	3, 7, 9, 11, 13
9. Release of contaminated wastewater into the water basin, bn. cu. m.	3, 6, 11, 12
10. Greenhouse gas emissions, mln tons of CO2, excluding land use and land use and forestry change	7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13

11. Accumulation of production and consumption waste, mln tons	3, 11, 12
12. Expenditure on research and development as a proportion of GDP	7, 8, 9, 12
13. Number of research and development staff per 1000 people	7, 8, 9, 12
14. Proportion of GDP compared to previous year	8, 12

Source: Russian Statistical Yearbook 2017; Rosgidromet 2014.

6. Conclusion

The 17 SDGs for the implementation of the "Agenda 2030" (2016-2030) were developed as a result of a lengthy international process. A key condition for the successful implementation of the SDGs is their incorporation into the public administration, national policies, strategies and plans. Now in the world there is a certain prioritization of these Goals.

It is necessary to include the concept of sustainability based on a balanced set of economic, social and environmental factors in the Russian public administration, the strategic documents that underpin the country's long-term development. At least two strategic documents must be put in place in any form or modification, i.e., Strategy for Sustainable Development of Russia and the country's Sustainable Development Goals through 2030.

To adapt the SDGs in the Russian context, it is important to proceed from national priorities and the aims of the public administration. With limited budgetary resources, it is proposed to focus efforts, first of all, on the most significant tasks for the country. As the analysis above showed, for most of the SDGs it is possible to align them with the country's general development strategy, projects and programs. Here you can mark Strategy 2020 of Russia and Russia's mid-term national projects until 2024. There is a direct or indirect coincidence of the goals of such projects and the priorities of the SDGs. At the same time, in some of the existing and developed program documents, the use of the system ideology of the SDGs is not used. Thus, the development of the "Energy Strategy of Russia for the period until 2035" coincides in time with the process of adaptation of the SDGs. The presented draft Energy Strategy weakly links the problems of some environmental and economic SDGs.

In 2018, the Russian Government encharges the Russian Statistical Agency to adapt SDGs for public administration. In Russian statistics there is a large set of adequate Russian indicators for the SDGs. The Russian statistical agency should complete work on the adaptation of the SDGs in Russia by the end of 2019.

The author suggests the system of 14 key sustainable development indicators that reflect the public administration aspects of sustainability for Russia and the new Integrated Sustainability Index for Russia. The proposed index integrates basic economic, social, and environmental indicators for Russia and can be used for practical public administration purposes.

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