

Environmental Data, Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals

The Case Study of Burkina Faso



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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A healthy environment is a precondition for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. To be able to meet environmental objectives, Governments need accurate and reliable environmental data.

With funding from the United Nations Development Account, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) partnered with the Governments of Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia and Guyana to monitor, in a coherent and integrated manner, implementation of the environmental dimension¹ of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In Burkina Faso, UNEP worked with various government entities to build capacity in relation to environmental data and accounting at the national and local levels and to enhance environmental aspects of national sustainable development policies.

1. Context

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, charts a new path for ensuring a balance between humanity and the planet. Achievement of the highly interconnected Sustainable Development Goals is integral to the correct functioning of the biosphere, which is vital for people's livelihoods and well-being and therefore resilience.

with other commitments; they also need to be able to translate this understanding into concrete measures to realize environmental objectives in an integrated manner.

To achieve this, access to accurate information, cross-sectoral collaboration, coordination within and across institutions and more inclusive mechanisms are all necessary. This case study shows how the generation and use of environmental data has been strengthened in Burkina Faso using the particular skills and experience of UNEP.

Countries need to be well equipped to understand the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals and their links

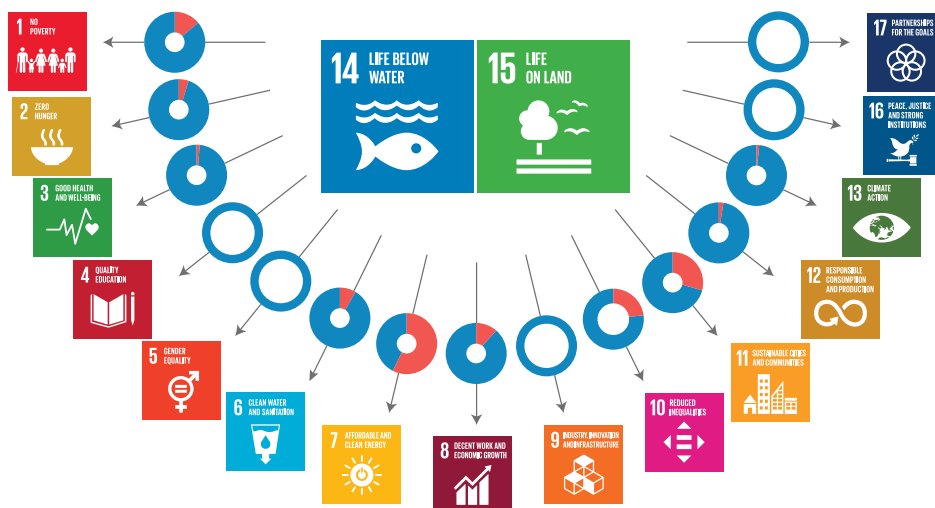


Figure 1. Environment as the Basis of the Sustainable Development Goals

The illustration above shows how the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 14 (Life below water) and 15 (Life on land) affects the achievement of the other Sustainable Development Goals in terms of co-benefits (blue) and trade-offs (red). It is based on information from 65 global assessments (United Nations reports and international scientific assessments) and 112 scientific articles, published since 2015, that make explicit reference to the Sustainable Development Goals. Where the rings are thin, this indicates either gaps in knowledge or a weaker link.

Source: A. Obrecht and others, "Achieving the SGDs with Biodiversity", Swiss Academies Factsheets, vol. 16, No. 1, 2021

¹ There is no precise definition of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals, and there are different views on what the environmental dimension of development should include. The most common approach is to take the 93 environment-related indicators of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as presented by UNEP to the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme at its subcommittee meeting on 20 September 2018.

Overall Project Objectives

- To enhance the technical capacities of national focal points, in relevant institutions in fields such as development, finance, agriculture, fisheries, and the environment, to contribute to implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a coordinated, integrated and evidence-based manner.
- To enhance the technical capacities of national statistical and data-collection institutions regularly to produce comprehensive environmental data sets that integrate information related to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to implementation of multilateral environmental agreements.
- To share lessons learned and the knowledge acquired by the countries participating in the project with a wider set of countries through interregional and intraregional networking and collaboration, thereby creating the basis of a case study of South-South cooperation on the use of integrated approaches for coherent policy planning and implementation.

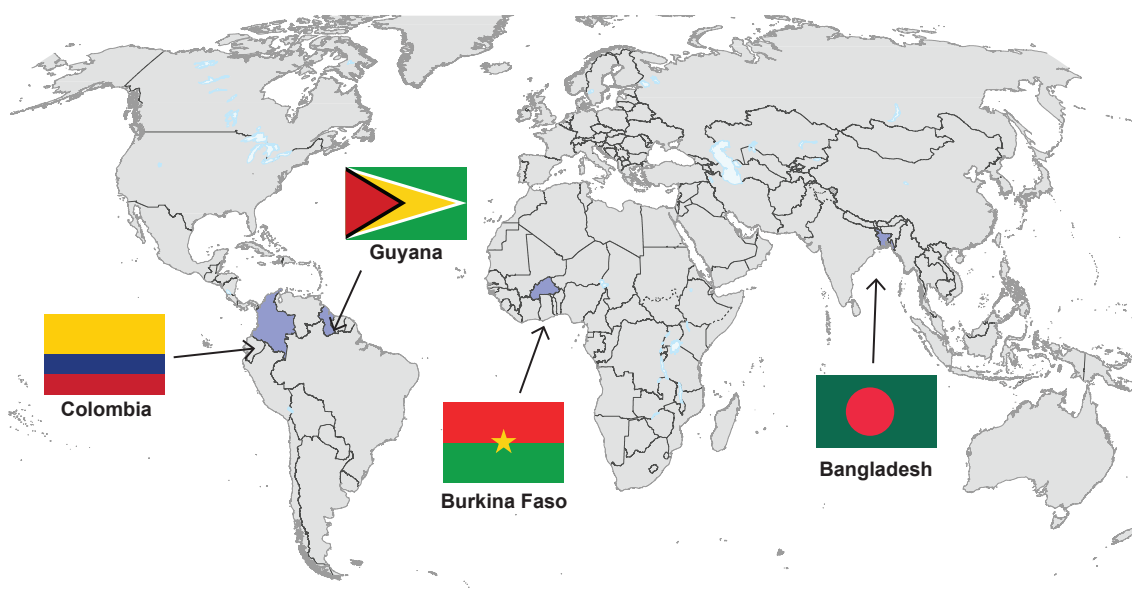


Figure 2. Participating Countries

Under the present project entitled, “Towards coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals” (United Nations Development Account project 1819Q), UNEP worked with the Governments of four countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia and Guyana.

2. Case Study – Burkina Faso

Sustainable development policies have a long tradition in Burkina Faso. Already in 1991, Burkina Faso adopted a national action plan for the environment, which was revised after the adoption of Agenda 21 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. Many other national policies related to sustainable development have been produced in the past 30 years. As follow-up to the United Nations

Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, Burkina Faso adopted, in 2013, the National Policy for Sustainable Development in Burkina Faso and, in 2014, a related law, No. 008-2014/AN, guiding sustainable development in the country.

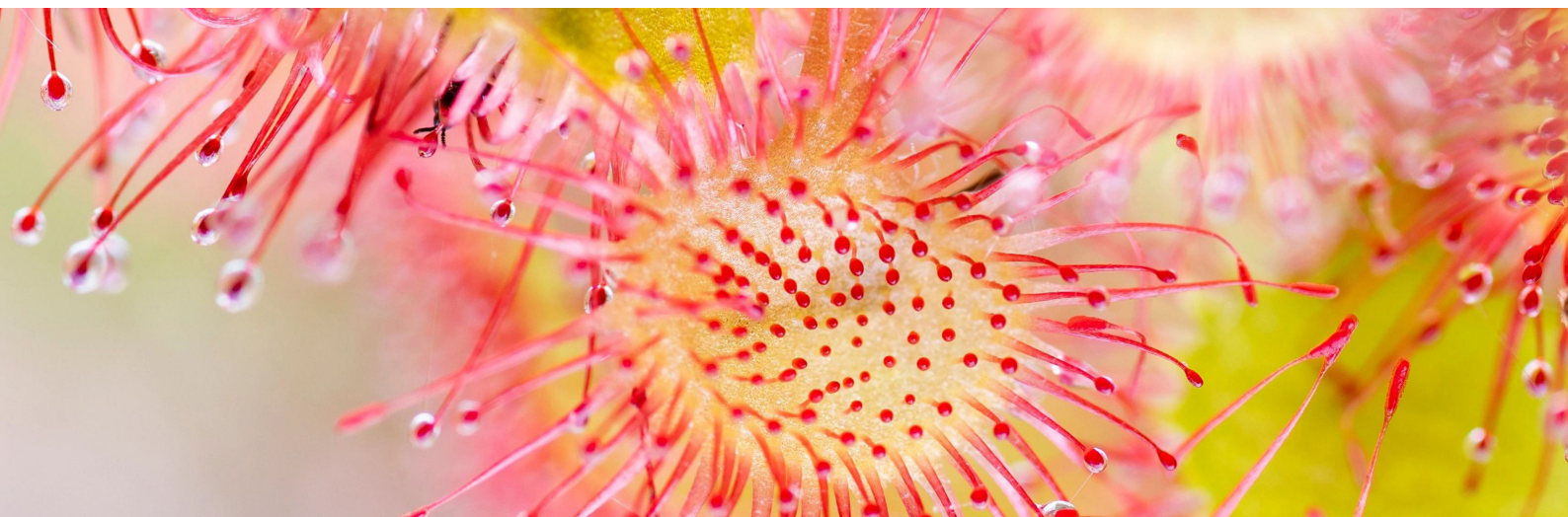
The objectives of the law on sustainable development are to create a unified national reference framework to ensure coherence of

action through appropriate legal, policy and institutional reforms and to guarantee economic efficiency, environmental sustainability and social equity in all development activities. The law also sets out general principles and definitions, including in relation to environmental sustainability, which it describes as the capacity of the biophysical environment to provide, in a sustainable manner and without degradation, a healthy living environment and the full range of ecosystem goods and services necessary for the social and economic well-being of people and other living species. The law guarantees a right of access to government data and participation in decision-making related to sustainable development and provides for the creation of a fund for future generations, although this has yet to be established.

The law sets out the national bodies and institutions to advance sustainable development, notably providing for the creation of a National Council for Sustainable Development. The mandate of the Council is to oversee the promotion of sustainable development and its consideration in laws and regulations, development programmes and projects, plans, policies and strategies and in the activities of non-State actors. The law also establishes a General Commission under the responsibility of the Prime Minister to monitor and verify whether the aforementioned is being achieved. The secretariat of the National Council for Sustainable Development is hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change.

Following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, Burkina Faso finalized its National Plan for Economic and Social Development 2016–2020 (PNDES-I), which aimed to promote sustainable development. As part of that process, Burkina Faso prioritized 89 of the 169 targets under the Sustainable Development Goals, considering 42 to be “accelerators” that would have the greatest impact on achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the country. Nevertheless, only 3 of the 33 goals in the National Plan and a dozen of the indicators chosen are truly environment-related.

The lessons learned during the present project and the institutional capacity built have made it possible for the Ministry of Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change to advocate for more indicators and for indicators that are more pertinent to environmental sustainability for the second National Plan for Economic and Social Development 2021–2025 (PNDES-II). In addition, Burkina Faso has developed an environmental management information system, with the National Observatory for the Environment and Sustainable Development at its core. The main purpose of the Observatory is to support the National Council for Sustainable Development in coordinating and facilitating the collection and storage of data and ensuring their availability. The Observatory hosts a data-exchange tool that is part of the National Environmental Information Management Programme.



Europe, UK, Yorkshire Moors, Round-leaved sundew on a peatland bog. © UNEP/Stephanie Foote

3. Environmental Data in Burkina Faso



In Burkina Faso, the generation of statistical data is decentralized and takes place across government ministries. The national statistics system has been inscribed in law since 2007.² Law No. 012-2007/AN also promotes coordination between producers and users of official data. The application of the law is overseen by the National Statistics Council. The secretariat function of the Council is performed by the National Institute of Statistics and Demography. Each government ministry has its own statistical department, and the National Statistics Council collates the data required for reporting on implementation of the National Plan for Economic and Social Development, the National Policy for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals and multilateral environmental agreements. For each reporting process, however, each entity has to compile the data itself from its various sources, including from subnational entities. The reports therefore comprise underlying data sets that vary in completeness and quality and can be difficult to aggregate and compare.

The challenges faced by Burkina Faso in relation to environmental data can be enumerated as follows:

Resources. The timeliness of data delivery is affected by unpredictable and insufficient funding and limited capacities in certain governmental entities at the national and subnational levels. A shortage or lack of tools and methodologies for collecting, compiling and sharing reliable data impedes informed decision-making and/or reporting on the environmental aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Linkages between global indicators and national data collection. A global performance indicator framework has been developed for the National Plan for Economic and Social Development and contains 172 indicators. Analysis of the capacity of national institutions to produce the necessary statistics was conducted. It showed that data could be collected for only 36 per cent of the 172 indicators. The analysis did, however, indicate strengths in the way that the country collects data: there is a law that provides

the basic principles, the National Institute of Statistics and Demography is a strong coordinating body and the data is collected in a decentralized way by the ministries that have the technical competencies.



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Generation of environmental data. The National Statistics Council plays mainly a coordinating role. It produces an annual national statistics plan and a periodic statistics master plan for the country. The most recent statistics master plan for the period 2016–2020 states that the production of environmental statistics is still erratic and that some activities, such as environmental accounting, cannot be carried out. This shows the importance and the relevance of the present project.

Coordination and the potential for synergies. The decentralized nature of the data system means that constant coordination and management is required. Some coordination tools are lacking, such as timetables, including an overall timetable for the production and publication of statistical data. The further development of statistics capacities is needed in some priority areas. The 2019 voluntary national review of the country's implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identifies the environment as one such sector.

² Burkina Faso also ratified the African Charter on Statistics in 2013 (African Union, *African Charter on Statistics*, 2009).

4. UNEP Action to Improve Environmental Data and Policy Coherence in Burkina Faso

UNEP has a global mandate to monitor the environment and is the custodian of 25 environment-related indicators of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The mandate of UNEP includes the promotion of policy coherence and the coherence of efforts to meet the environment-related targets of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, notably through subprogramme 4 of the UNEP programme of work on environmental governance and subprogramme 7 on the environment under review.

Under the present project, work in Burkina Faso started with a project inception workshop on 2 and 3 May 2019, at which the national authorities defined priorities and agreed on a road map for the execution of the project. The inception workshop also involved the testing of a UNEP-developed methodology for measuring progress in relation to indicator 17.14.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (the number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development) and media outreach activities, such as press releases, interviews and broadcasts on local radio stations. The indicator methodology was developed to assess policy coherence at the national level and is based on a scoring system. It aims to identify not only missing mechanisms, but also ways of strengthening existing mechanisms.

The project implementation phase was informed by analysis of the system of environmental statistics and focused on training workshops at the national and subnational levels that aimed to identify the best ways of improving environmental data at the national level. Producers and users of data attended the workshops, which addressed, for example, methodologies for environmental accounting and policy coherence. National and local policymakers were present at most of workshops, which helped raise their awareness of environmental issues and the Sustainable Development Goals. One of the workshops trained the national committee in charge of multilateral environmental agreements in the integration of environmental issues into public policy. Furthermore, three national/subregional workshops considered the integration of the provisions and targets of the

Sustainable Development Goals and multilateral environmental agreements into local planning documents in the Northern and Central Regions of the country.

Although the scope of each workshop was not exactly the same, most of them covered the following issues:

- Application or use of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting Central Framework and the sustainable development analysis grid, a tool developed by the International Organization of La Francophonie.
- Analysis and integration of environmental issues into public policy through application of the toolkit of the International Union for Conservation of Nature for planning, monitoring and evaluation of the capacity to adapt to climate change. Such an approach permitted the identification of linkages between climate change and biodiversity, knowledge of which is essential for implementation of the current National Plan for Economic and Social Development and the formulation of the subsequent plan.
- Efforts to address the lack of tools and methodologies for collecting, compiling and sharing reliable data for informed decision-making and reporting on the environmental aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The introduction, by UNEP, of its methodology for measuring progress in relation to indicator 17.14.1. The methodology was developed to assess policy coherence at the national level and is based on a scoring system. It aims to identify not only missing mechanisms, but also ways of strengthening existing mechanisms.

Other training sessions were held on the use of cartographic applications and the geospatial mapping of selected targets of the Sustainable Development Goals and, for officials from the National Council for Sustainable Development and the General Directorate of the Economy and Planning of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance, on the ex-ante evaluation of projects and on risk analysis, including environmental risks. This activity was considered a strategic activity in the country as it makes the work of the Ministry more environment-focused.

Burkina Faso has been severely affected by the coronavirus disease pandemic. In response to a request by the Government, UNEP and the United Nations country team are undertaking a diagnostic study of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic on implementation of the National Plan for Economic and Social Development, including to inform the development and implementation of the next such National Plan for 2021–2025.



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5. Results



The success of the present project is in large part due to the extensive network that the UNEP Regional Office for Africa had already cultivated in the country, combined with staff familiarity with the country and the region. From the beginning of the project, the coordinator paid attention to building country ownership and to ensuring that the specific needs of the country were met. Project activities were tailored to

those requirements at an inception workshop. The project built on recent developments in the country, such as the decision to prioritize the Sustainable Development Goals in national planning. Through a series of targeted workshops, the project management team received regular feedback from the beneficiaries of the project. The project was accompanied by media outreach that was facilitated by the

planning of such outreach at an early stage. Many workshops were designed to be of interest and relevance both at higher political levels and among technical experts. The project was able to add value in areas where most other development partners were not active.

The approach chosen for the project in Burkina Faso shows how a project can, at the same time, address both technical challenges and achieve greater visibility for an issue at the higher political level.

Achievements of the present project include:

- ❑ The timely development of the capacities of producers and users of environmental data, which in turn enabled them to increase the relevance of a study being undertaken on environmental fiscal reform for sustainable development and poverty reduction; to evaluate the sustainability of communal development plans; to use analytical tools; and to assess the sustainability of other planning documents, such as the National Plans for Economic and Social Development, including in relation to sectoral policies.
- ❑ Awareness-raising among elected policymakers at the local and national levels regarding the opportunities that can be created when international goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and those of multilateral environmental agreements, are reflected in local planning. This contributes directly to the achievement of the objectives of the National Plan for Economic and Social Development at the local level.
- ❑ The definition of indicators to evaluate implementation of the National Plan for Economic and Social Development. Among such indicators are the proportion of sectoral policies that integrate the environment and sustainable

development; the proportion of regional development plans that integrate the environment and sustainable development; and the proportion of municipal development plans that integrate the environment and sustainable development.

- ❑ The experience gained during the project, which can be used during implementation of the next phase of the National Plan for Economic and Social Development 2021–2025, for example to improve subnational capacities to integrate sustainable development, sustainability and climate change into regional and communal development plans, and during evaluation of the first phase of the National Plan to detect any possible inconsistencies and develop related guidelines in response.
- ❑ Efforts to address common challenges identified by government entities in the implementation of biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements. Project participants identified common themes, such as land degradation neutrality, climate-change adaptation and sustainability, and developed solutions for ensuring their inclusion in local development plans. The subnational workshops served to raise awareness of the potential for multilateral environmental agreements to shape local development plans.
- ❑ The testing and promotion of the UNEP-developed methodology for measuring progress in relation to indicator 17.14.1, the relevance of which was recognized by Burkina Faso. The methodology was tested on two occasions and its scoring system was considered useful. The policy coherence mechanisms that already exist in Burkina Faso resulted in a relatively high score for the country, but the potential for further improvement remains.

Lessons learned under the project

Ownership of the project by partners was created early on, beginning with the inception workshop in March 2019. Questions of project sustainability were addressed at that workshop, which also served to clarify roles and expectations. It was

agreed that the project was considered to be a pilot and did not require an extensive project management set-up: a steering committee and a network of focal points among the various ministries concerned would suffice.

The Government of Burkina Faso was required to contribute in kind. Given the importance of outreach and communication, the involvement of the media helped to increase the visibility of the project and led to a high level of ownership at the national level.

A Touch of Gender

UNEP is committed to promoting gender equality in strengthening the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals in Burkina Faso and the region. The application of a gender lens in reviewing the recommendations in this case study recognizes the cross-cutting nature of SDG 5 and its relation to the environmental goals. Therefore, countries drawing examples

Activities and workshops focused on technical staff, but senior officials from government entities also participated, which helped to increase their awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and the environmental dimension thereof. The subnational workshops helped raise awareness among lower government levels and enhanced mutual understanding.

from this case study are encouraged to promote the progress of gender equality at various levels. UNEP through its [Medium Term Strategy](#) provides guidance on how to integrate gender related environmental elements in the Sustainable Development Goals through the integrated approach.



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6. Recommendations

- To ensure sustainable integration of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level, three types of intervention are needed in Burkina Faso: institutional capacity-building, national consultation on sustainable development and increased awareness of the issue among the decentralized authorities.

- ❑ Many participants in the project expressed the country's need for a large-scale project to build capacities at the national and subnational levels. Such a project could build on the strong legal and institutional basis in Burkina Faso for the collection of official data. Furthermore, it could:
 - Facilitate the definition of parameters for the coherent collection of high-quality data
 - Build the capacities of local government actors to generate not only high-quality data for aggregation at the national level, but also to context-specific data sets
 - Enhance the already well-established tools and databases in the country in order to improve the timeliness and relevance of data collection and data accessibility.

- ❑ The pool of regional trainers, created under another project in three pilot regions (East, Centre-West, Hauts-Bassins) to facilitate the decentralization process, could be extended to the whole country.
- ❑ Burkina Faso could consider participating in the early application of the data-reporting tool for multilateral environmental agreements "DaRT".³ DaRT provides parties to multilateral environmental agreements with a private and secure working space to organize, maintain and share information, data and knowledge across conventions and across reporting purposes.
- ❑ The inclusion of indicators and related data collection in local development plans would serve a dual purpose. It would support local authorities in including in their work the sustainable management of natural resources and would generate data for national reporting purposes.
- ❑ Government plans could emphasize a synergistic approach to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Goals and other internationally agreed targets provide opportunities to instigate a cross-cutting approach across ministries and sectors.
- ❑ Burkina Faso has recognized the importance of ex-ante assessments. Guidelines and tools for ex-ante assessments could be developed by UNEP and other international organizations to inform the design of projects so that they contribute to the greatest extent possible to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- ❑ The development of the sector policies for the implementation of the second national plan for economic and sustainable development 2021–2025 provides an opportunity to strengthen the environmental aspects of development policies and to foster an integrated approach to sustainable development. Links between environmental issues and poverty, disaster risk reduction and other security issues could be reflected more strongly in the national plan.⁴ Trade-offs should be avoided. For instance, the manufacture of export commodities and the industrialization of agriculture should be brought in line with environmental conservation efforts in order not to jeopardize livelihoods.
- ❑ Internationally developed tools such as the UNEP methodology for indicator 17.14.1 have been tested and applied in Burkina Faso in the context of the project. UNEP could evaluate the extent of the subsequent uptake of the tools and users' experience in applying them.

3 DaRT is being developed by UNEP with the support of the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and has been endorsed by the United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (InforMEA). It is available at <https://dart.informea.org/home>.

4 Axis 3 of the National Plan for Economic and Sustainable Development 2016–2020 includes the following strategic objectives: "3.1 To develop sustainably a productive and resilient sector for agriculture, forestry, livestock, wildlife and fishing that is more market-oriented and based on the principles of sustainable development"; and "3.5 To reverse the environmental degradation trend and sustainably to ensure the management of natural and environmental resources".

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