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## Sustainability Assessment for Planning Development Interventions Within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals

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### Abstract

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations have internalised a set of features for future development which are to circumvent known shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals and set binding rules also for the industrialised countries. Particularly influential for the shaping of the underlying principle of SDGs was the concept of “planetary boundaries”; a scientific normative compass envisaging a human development process which does not transgress the point of no return in terms of the Earth’s life support systems. Integral to the idea of coupled “natural-social” systems, is the concept of inter- and transdisciplinarity; i.e. that solutions to complex problems and preceding research must be based on integrative efforts of traditionally separate disciplinary areas and with full participation of stakeholders.

While this broad approach to sustainable development has largely been accepted by the international community, accountability remains left to national governments. Hence, there has been significant criticism that this type of diversity will allow room for much obscurity and strategic “cherry-picking” when designing policy interventions, ultimately resulting in suboptimal outcomes in terms of interdisciplinary and integrative approaches.

Given the lack of internationally set accountability mechanisms with regard to the SDGs, we are proposing an *ex ante* impact assessment method to be used. It could be used to evaluate projects prior to their setup and funding approval along the lines of SDGs rather than the nationally readapted goals that are derived by the individual governments.

As a case study, we apply this *ex ante* assessment methodology to an ongoing international transdisciplinary research effort, aiming at improving rural and urban livelihoods in Kenya by developing the sector of indigenous vegetables. Systematically evaluating the project activities against the 169 SDG targets using a relevancy scoring system provides a reproducible and simple but comprehensive overview of the areas where significant SDG contributions are to be expected and where less so.

**Keywords:** *Ex ante* assessment, Kenya, SDGs