

Brief Review of the County Development Planning Framework

During the 2017/18 fiscal year, County Governments (CGs) dedicated significant effort to produce and approve their second five-year County Integrated Development Plans (CIDP), and AHADI set out to distil experiences and lessons learned as inputs for conversations to further strengthen CGs' development planning capacity. For this purpose, AHADI organised a series of round-table discussions and workshops with stakeholders and practitioners to collectively reflect on the recent development planning process. While we celebrate the great strides and improvements in the process counties followed as well as in the quality of the resulting plans when compared to the first generation CIDPs, we recognise that continued efforts are needed to support this vital process.

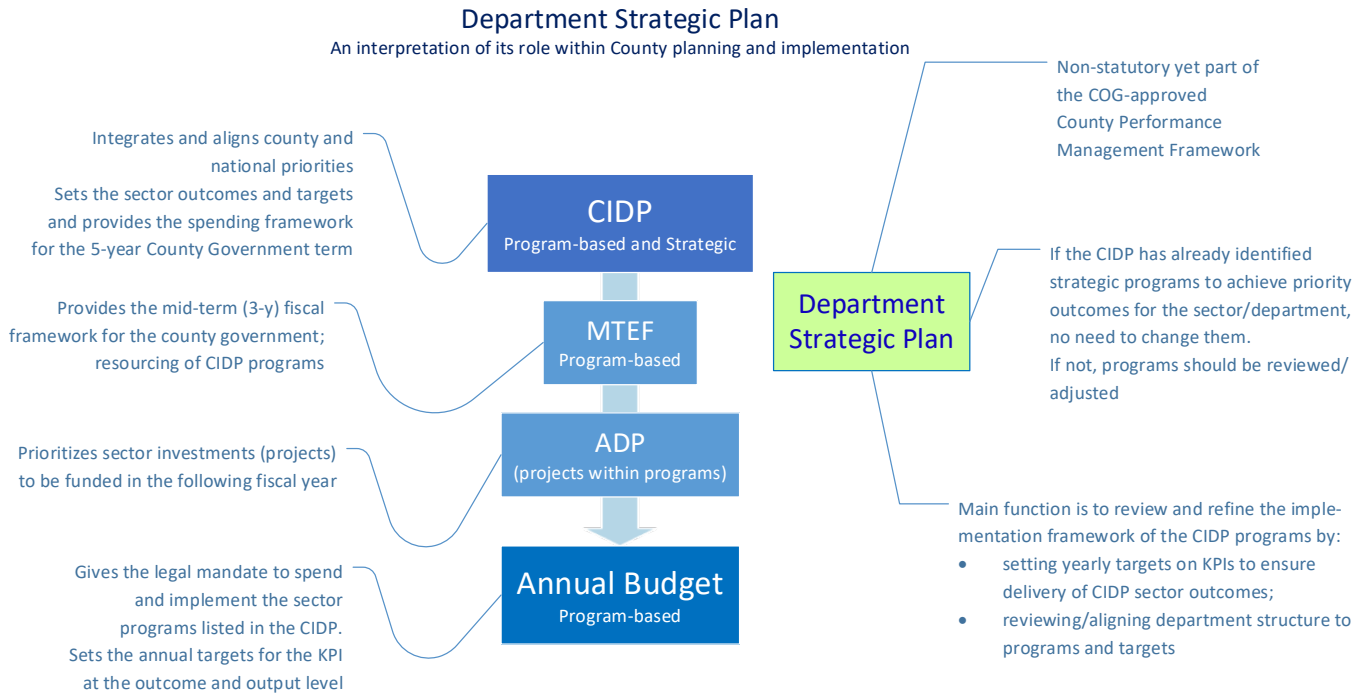
This brief aims at highlighting the main policy issues and proposals that emerged from these rich discussions. ; they are organized around (a) the policy and legislative framework; (b) the transition between governments; and (c) capacity building, support and links to national planning. Those interested in delving further into the topic can refer to a separate detailed technical document.

Policy and Legislative Framework: While the overall framework is laid out in ample detail in the County Governments Act (CGA, 2012), some grey areas remain and would need to be further clarified. For example, the CGA and the Public Finance Management Act, 2012; don't formalize the link between the CIDPs and the Annual Development Plans (ADPs) with the needed level of detail.

The basic nature of the CIDP is probably the most fundamental policy question: is it a "whole-of-County" plan or a plan supposed to guide the County Government spending – more corporate in nature for the CG as an institution? The answer is probably a mix of the two, but there are different views on it and an open discussion and agreement on the nature and purpose of county development planning would improve the effectiveness of this very important CG function. There is a sense that the multiple planning requirements (CIDP, ADP, Sector Plans, Spatial Plan, Cities and Urban Area Plans, Department Strategic Plans) might cause overlaps and planning fatigue. Considerations should be made to provide for linkages, hierarchy and interdependency of all these. For example, if an urban area plan is primarily a spatial plan, could it be covered under the County Spatial Plan? If the urban plan is more of an integrated development plan what is the overlap with the CIDP? What is the purpose of a 10-year sector plan and a separate 5-year sector strategic plan as required by the Council of Governors (COG) County Performance Management Framework (CPMF), could the later be the 5-year revision of the former that is already mandated by the CGA (See diagram below)? Having a single document would certainly simplify things.

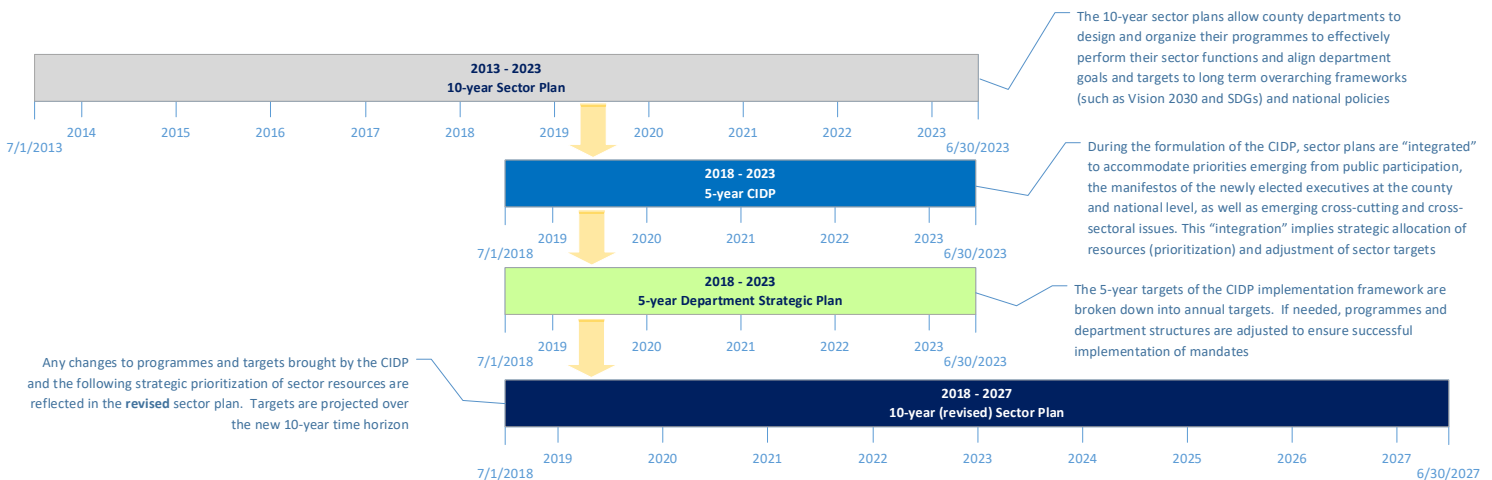
Clarity is also needed on the definition of "sector" at the county level. Should there be a single sector plan for a county department or separate plans for each "sub-sector"? For example, would the Department of Education and ICT produce one or two sector plans? What about sectors (or issues) that involve multiple department and or even neighboring counties – say rangeland management or water? Counties would greatly benefit from further discussion, clarity and guidance.

Below is a proposed interpretation of the CPMF-mandated strategic plan as the 5-year revision of the sector plan prescribed in Article 47 of the CGA, 2012. This seeks to offer input to policy dialogue around the nature and purpose of sector planning at the county level towards a more streamlined, effective county planning framework.



Department Strategic Plan as the 5-year revision of the Sector Plan

A “single-plan”, streamlined flow and approach to strategic planning for County departments



Transition: The CIDP is one of the first major tasks for newly elected county executives and assemblies. As the first transition experienced since the establishment of County Governments, the 2017 transition allowed the identification of possible changes that would streamline the process and improve the effectiveness of the planning exercise and the final product. Below is a summary of a few key issues identified and proposals for their review.

- (a) Setting clear, meaningful deadlines that take into consideration the time needed for elections (including provisions allowing for contested results), nomination of executive members and chief officers, and inductions of new members. The deadline of 1 September for the Annual Development Plan is unrealistic, and the PFMA could introduce special provisions to bypass this deadline in election years as Executive Members and Chief Officers are not in office by such date. On the other end, there is no deadline for the approval of the CIDP, which should inform and guide the MTEF process of the newly elected government. Evidence indicates that in multiple instances the CIDP was approved after the ADP and even after the annual budget estimates. This is certainly less than optimal and somehow negates the role of the CIDP as the guiding space for public participation and strategic prioritization of public spending and service delivery. The CIDP should inform and guide the ADP and budget estimates not the reverse.
- (b) The content and structure of the CIDP could be revised to promote a more focused and strategic planning process that would result in a shorter document, one easier to share and validate with stakeholders. The situational analysis or county profile could be prepared as separate technical documents in advance by the exiting government as part of their final reporting mandates. Similarly, the review of the previous CIDP and planning period could be conducted prior to the elections by external, independent bodies to minimize political use of the review (for electioneering or to discredit previous leaders). Newly elected and appointed leaders would then focus their efforts on collecting inputs from the public and on the strategic prioritization of interventions and service delivery
- (c) The building blocks of the integrated planning exercise should be in place ahead of time. Sector plans, the County Spatial Plan, Cities and Urban Areas plans should be available to provide a solid planning framework for the CIDP integration. Many of these plans are still not ready and counties should ensure gaps are filled before the next elections.

Capacity Building, National Government Support and Links to National Planning: The Council of Governors (COG) with the State Department of Planning brought together national government agencies, county government representatives and stakeholders to review, update and improve the existing CIDP and ADP guidelines ahead of the elections. Unfortunately, delays at the national level in the MTP process (in good part linked to the repeat presidential election) affected the release of the guidelines, which were circulated only in draft form, and the planned capacity building support to counties was largely stalled as the national government planning processes absorbed most of the resources of the State Department of Planning. If the fiscal year for national and county governments are to remain fully synchronized (July 1st – June 30th) the planning and budgeting processes should be allowed run in parallel – with proper spaces for coordination and integration across government levels – with the adequate level of support and guidance for counties as mandated by the constitution.

Capacity building efforts and inductions should foster a common understanding and interpretation of development planning, service delivery and local development across both the County Executive and Assembly. While CG departments have made great progress in preparing programme and outcome-based CIDPs – in accordance with the spirit and letter of the legal framework – most if not all the attention and deliberations within the Executive Committee and the Assembly still revolve around the list of projects. If counties are to be held accountable for improving services and living conditions of their residents, policy discussions, as well as plans and budgets approvals need to centre more on the intended priority outcomes and quality of services rather than individual projects and it is essential to build a common understanding and appreciation within the county leadership through targeted capacity building.