



CASE STUDY **Afghanistan** **Voluntary National Review (VNR)**

Background Information

Following decades of conflict, Afghanistan adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2004, nearly five years after they were launched, in looking to deliver the rights to dignity, freedom, equality, a basic standard of living, and freedom from hunger and violence to all its people. Afghanistan achieved modest levels of success in the MDGs, but its leaders believe that experience put it on a positive course for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

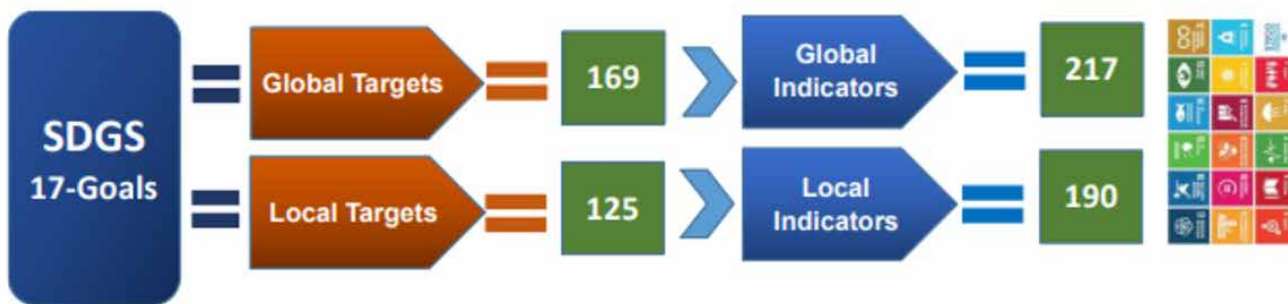
The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the UN's 2017 High-level Political Forum (HLPF). The report highlights the country's nationalization process for the SDGs, including discussion of the targets and indicators, as well as the specific circumstances and context to Afghanistan's SDG efforts.

Approach, Delivery, & Challenges

On October 7, 2015, the Cabinet of Afghanistan assigned the Ministry of Economy (MoEc) to lead SDG coordination, implementation, and reporting. The MoEc then created the SDGs Secretariat, under the Directorate of Policy and Result-Based Monitoring, to be the central organization leading those efforts.

The preparation of Afghanistan's VNR was led by the country's SDG Secretariat. Starting in 2015, the SDGs Secretariat began working to raise awareness of the VNR, both at the national and local levels, to help build stakeholder engagement, and to encourage input from members of local governments in the process. This was achieved via an in-depth series of stakeholder consultations, which had an important, and positive impact on local budgeting efforts for the SDGs. Local government units are, in fact, expected to be the connective tissue between the central government and their communities, while also engaging groups like civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, and academia.

In preparing for the SDGs, Afghanistan's leaders began to integrate the SDGs into the country's national and local budget planning processes with the goal of ensuring an accountable, effective, and transparent process. The work of nationalizing the SDGs begun with a series of discussions, conferences, seminars, meetings, and workshops in which a broad range of stakeholders was invited to review the global commitments with the aim of crafting a realistic plan. The outcome of that process was a reshaping of the global goals into hundred twenty five national targets and hundred ninety national indicators that fit the local circumstances.



Afghanistan's localized roadmap.¹

In Afghanistan, the SDGs have been broken out from seventeen goals into eight socio-economic sectors. This was done to help align responsibilities with the appropriate government ministries. Those ministries have, in turn, been asked to coordinate efforts with the other ministries involved with targets that roll up to the goals for which they are responsible. The ministries have also been asked to account for their assigned SDGs in their budgets.

17 Goals of SDGs

| National Sectors | National Targets | National Indicators |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Security Sector | 11 Targets | 13 indicators |
| Education Sector | 14 Targets | 30 indicators |
| Health Sector | 12 Targets | 21 indicators |
| Governance Sector | 2 Targets | 5 indicators |
| Infrastructure Sector | 29 Targets | 34 indicators |
| Social Protection Sector | 18 Targets | 29 indicators |
| Agriculture and Rural Dev. Sector | 20 Targets | 20 indicators |
| Economic Sector | 28 Targets | 37 indicators |
| Total Number | 125 Targets | 190 indicators |

Afghanistan's mapping of the 17 SDGs and their targets and indicators into 8 socioeconomic sectors.²

Benefits & Lessons Learned

Agencies throughout Afghanistan's government helped improve the report's consistency and validate its logical and factual accuracy. It is believed that the awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement work helped foster this outcome. Consistent reinforcement of the messages conveying the importance of the goals, shared ownership of the outcomes, and the alignment of the goals with the country's development agenda also played an important role.

1 "Voluntary National Review at the High-level Political Forum SDGs' Progress Report Afghanistan," *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*, July 2017, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16277Afghanistan.pdf>.

2 "Voluntary National Review at the High-I-Level Political Forum SDGs' Progress Report Afghanistan," *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*, July 2017, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16277Afghanistan.pdf>.



Afghanistan put forth five principles as the key lessons the country had learned in developing its VNR. These include:

- 1. Political will** - Having the appropriate support, not only from the top, but throughout government and relevant stakeholders is a necessary condition for success.
- 2. Leaving no one behind** - The numerous events Afghanistan held in working to build awareness and stakeholder engagement for the VNR process also fostered better outcomes.
- 3. Building stronger partnerships** - This facilitates the sharing of knowledge, expertise, technology, and funding to help optimize efforts both towards the VNR and towards the SDGs themselves. With that in mind, Afghanistan has created the National Coordination Commission (NCC) to help foster the necessary collaboration between the government and groups like CSOs and private sector actors, alongside development agencies and other international partners. The SDGs Secretariat will support the commission, as will technical working groups that deal with specific concerns, like data collection, disaggregation, verification, analysis, and dissemination.
- 4. Setting national targets** - To fulfill the global goals, each country must map the targets and indicators to their local context to ensure proper targets are set. This, in turn, gave them a destination to aim for. Afghanistan provided an example of this as it mapped the SDGs across eight sectors to align them with the ministries that would be ultimately responsible for the individual goals. Doing so drew clear lines of responsibility for the achievement of the goals, as well as for the VNR reporting efforts.
- 5. Challenges and the way ahead** - The report acknowledged the need of capacity building, as well as shortcomings along the lines of data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Because of this, and to facilitate data disaggregation, the decision was made to build a comprehensive database with all the country's SDGs-related data. The report also admitted the potential difficulties with maintaining the political will to continue pursuing the goals, given Afghanistan's security, social, and economic challenges.

Opportunities & Next Steps

Given its recent history, Afghanistan faced significant headwinds as it began its efforts on the goals. Nonetheless, it has managed to organize the work ahead to fulfill the country's commitments to the 2030 Agenda, and it has made some progress. Reforms are ongoing as both capacity and modern institutions are being built. Afghanistan is working towards a whole-of-government policy and whole-of-state strategy to help foster the enabling environment for the realization of the global goals. Completion of that work will pave the way for a concerted effort on the country's commitments to the SDGs.

As Afghanistan unveiled its VNR report, Transparency International, a global organization that works with governments, businesses, and citizens to end the abuse of power, released a "shadow report" that took a close look at the corruption-related targets under SDG 16. Their report looked closely at efforts to reduce illicit financial and arms flows (SDG target 16.4), as well as those to reduce corruption and bribery (target 16.5) and ensuring public access to information (target 16.10). The report outlines the negative impacts corruption has on development via poor service provision and insecurity. It also highlights the progress Afghanistan has made towards these targets, including anti-money laundering efforts and the creation of institutions that are working to drive out corruption. Transparency International also called out problems in these areas, like the limited inclusion of civil society in anti-corruption legislation.

Afghanistan's leaders have committed to dealing with the country's remaining corruption-related challenges and several measures have been planned to be implemented by 2019. These include:

- Implementing the national anti-corruption action plan and legal framework;
- Passing laws criminalizing corruption in line with the UN Convention Against Corruption;



- Expanding public disclosure of asset declarations to cover law enforcement, customs, and tax administration;
- Reinforcing the use of electronic payments and e-procurement to line ministries;
- Strengthening the Supreme Audit Office; and
- Updating Afghanistan's Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) rating

The SDGs Secretariat is an agency that focuses on leading Afghanistan's implementation efforts beyond the VNRs. The country's leaders believe partnerships are the key to the SDGs. Going forward, Afghanistan's government wants to strengthen its ties with states, organizations, and civil society to foster the ties and support needed to deliver on the goals.

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