



CASE STUDY

## Japan - Voluntary National Review (VNR)

### Background Information

As a developed nation with relatively high incomes, Japan's path through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was significantly different from that of developing nations. During the years of the MDGs, the country was a significant Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) contributor. With the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Japan recommitted its support for developing nations. On December 22, 2016, the day the Prime Minister's Office approved Japan's guidelines for implementing the SDGs, the country also announced significant support for related efforts beyond its borders.

Japan submitted its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) report to the 2017 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the United Nations.

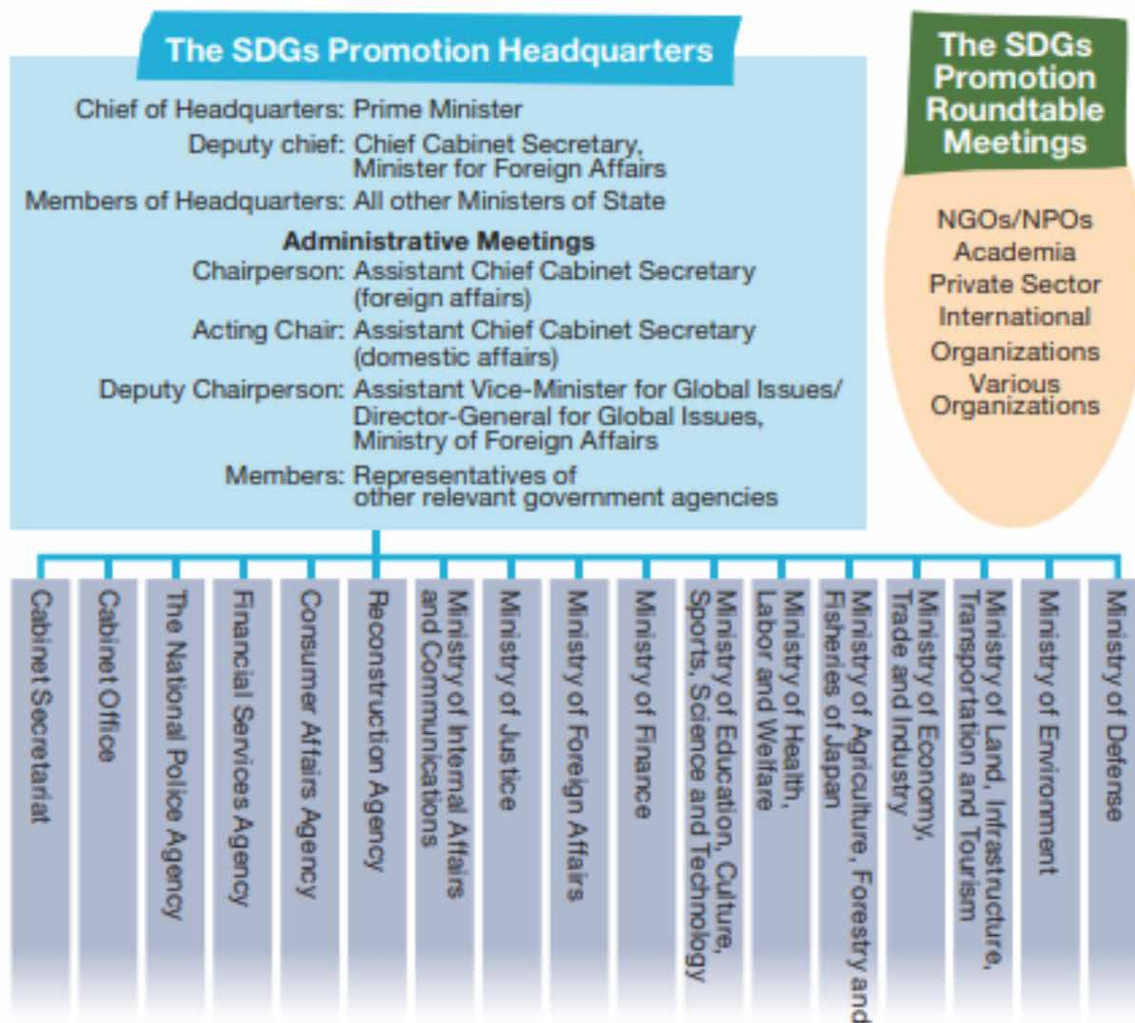
### Approach, Delivery, & Challenges

The Government of Japan launched the SDGs Promotion Headquarters on May 20, 2016. The group, led by the country's Prime Minister and comprising all the country's ministers, would lead Japan's SDG efforts. It was initiated to foster collaboration between the ministries and government agencies responsible for the goals.

The SDGs Promotion Headquarters began meeting in September 2016. That group meets regularly to address strategic concerns around the country's commitments to the goals, while also working to build awareness and support. They oversee both the execution of programs and the country's high-level reporting work, including the Voluntary National Review (VNR) that was presented to the UN's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2017.



## The SDGs Promotion Headquarters



Japan's SDGs Promotion Headquarters <sup>1</sup>

Japan's VNR was pulled together through a consultative process in which the SDGs Promotion Headquarters engaged with relevant governmental agencies. The Round Table group met in May 2017 to discuss localization efforts for the SDGs, to help ensure the goals were being pushed out to all corners of the country, as well as to prepare for the VNR presentation at the 2017 HLPF. The SDG Round Table Meetings provided an opportunity to bring together government representatives, along with members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profit organizations (NPOs), academia, the private sector, and additional international organizations to plan the reporting process and develop findings.

The Round Table group also sought public opinion via dialogues with a broad range of stakeholders. Through those discussions, the group developed the SDG Implementation Guiding Principles, adopted in December 2016 and that detail Japan's strategy for addressing the major challenges within the 2030 Agenda. The guide set the vision for Japan's work on the SDGs, dividing the goals up into eight Priority Areas to help build awareness and support for the goals: (1) Empowerment of All People; (2) Achievement of Good Health and Longevity; (3) Creating Growth Market, Revitalization of Rural Areas, and Promoting Technological Innovation; (4) Sustainable and Resilient Land Use, Promoting Quality Infrastructure; (5) Energy Conservation, Renewable Energy, Climate Change Countermeasures, and Sound Material-Cycle Society; (6) Conservation of Environment, including Biodiversity, Forests and Oceans; (7) Achieving Peaceful, Safe and Secure Societies; and (8) Strengthening the Means and Frameworks of the Implementation of the SDGs.

<sup>1</sup> "Japan's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals," SDGs Promotion Headquarters, July 2017, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16445.Japan.pdf>.



Japan's Guiding Principles document also lists one-hundred forty measures that are being planned to help achieve the goals, along with the relevant indicators they are expected to impact. Each of those measures includes a description of the goal, an indicator to be measured to track progress, and the government agency that is responsible for driving that effort.

## ***SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles***

*8 Priority Areas with 140 concrete measures*



*SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles* <sup>2</sup>

Japan's leaders brought together relevant stakeholders to collaborate on the VNR and reviews for the report were conducted with the support of diverse stakeholders. These included local governments, NGOs, NPOs, academia, the private sector, international organizations, parliamentarians, scientists, and cooperatives. The Ministry of the Environment's (MOE) stakeholder meetings are a good example of this approach. That group raises awareness of the SDGs by highlighting unique practices that have been developed by its members. It brought together around six hundred participants to the three events it has held in the past two years. These meetings help develop bonds between the various stakeholders that are collaborating on the SDGs, which benefited the VNR process.

CSOs also played an important part in the creation of the VNR as they provide diverse viewpoints that helped ensure the report was not one-sided. This was done through a collaboration between the SDGs Promotion Secretariat and Japan's Civil Society Network. The series of meetings held between these groups aimed to improve cooperation as they fostered a more comprehensive VNR report.

Creating awareness among of the SDGs among the Japanese people remains a core effort and Japan's leaders are committed to ensure all Japanese people understand the importance of the SDGs. For instance, during the Global Festival Japan, held in October 2016, which used the SDGs as its theme, the Japanese Government, along with multiple international organizations, and NGOs shared their work towards the 2030 Agenda with 100,000 festival goers.

Awareness is also being raised by other actors. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), for instance, is an organization that promotes international cooperation and development providing hands-on exhibits and educational sessions on the SDGs to students and the public. The UN Information Centre (UNIC) and Sophia University collaborated on another awareness raising campaign in 2016, that featured a student photo contest. The winner of that contest received a prize from Japan's Foreign Minister. Moreover, the Yoshimoto Corporation, a creative agency whose talent is influential with Japanese youth, ran an

<sup>2</sup> "Japan's Voluntary National Review - Minister's Opening Remarks," Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, July 2017, [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25461Japan\\_VNR\\_PPT165288Final65289Ministers\\_Opening\\_Remarks.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25461Japan_VNR_PPT165288Final65289Ministers_Opening_Remarks.pdf).



event at the 9th International Okinawa Movie Festival in April 2017 with an SDGs theme. Japanese media organizations are also taking part. The Asahi and Nikkei newspapers have, respectively, published articles on the SDGs and the contributions made by firms, and Nikkei also ran a symposium to help build support for the goals.

## Benefits & Lessons Learned

As a global technological leader, Japan has worked to systematically integrate tech into its SDG efforts. This is a natural fit as data collection and analysis is a key component of the goals. An important example of this is the country's Data Integration and Analysis System (DIAS), which collects, archives, integrates, and analyzes enormous data sets. The system converts the data information to help society deal with major environmental issues and managing risks around natural disasters.

As Japan works on the SDGs, its leaders are eager to share what they are learning. The Japan Innovation Network (JIN) is tasked with this. It launched the SDGs Holistic Innovation Platform (SHIP) with the support of the UN Development Programme (UNDP). SHIP is a platform for open innovation which aims to use the SDGs as a vehicle for innovation. The goal of the platform is to apply technical expertise to help solve global problems. It is working to bring together both domestic and foreign stakeholders to gather information on challenges and collaborate on opportunities for beneficial innovation.

While preparing for the goals, its leaders uncovered four structural challenges they face in looking to protect the country against natural disasters: (1) land masses that are susceptible to earthquakes and severe weather like hurricanes, (2) non-resilient infrastructure, (3) local economies that have been negatively impacted by population decrease in financial terms, and (4) the damaging effects of rising international economic competition. Japan's leaders are therefore focusing on infrastructure projects that are resilient and embrace the three dimensions of sustainability.

## Opportunities & Next Steps

One of the primary efforts going forward is to build greater consciousness on the goals, as this is needed to build public support. Besides, the government is also working to raise awareness through the private sector. To do so, they are working to share best practices by (1) introducing a related SDGs web platform, (2) encouraging firms to promote relevant work with the SDGs logos, and (3) initiating the Japan SDGs Award as a path to recognize private firms and other organizations that help mainstream the SDGs.

In looking to go beyond awareness, Japan is also promoting the work of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), a program run by the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which advances education around the SDGs via settings like schools, homes, offices, and community spaces.

A 2016 report from the Bertelsmann Foundation of Germany and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) noted multiple opportunities for improving the country's performance on the SDGs. The report called out indicators related to Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 7 (renewable energy), Goal 13 (climate change), Goal 14 (life below water), Goal 15 (life on land), and Goal 17 (partnerships for the goals). Japan's leaders are already addressing many of the issues pointed out in the report, but it also offers them additional opportunities to make progress towards the goals and on delivering on the Implementation Guiding Principles. In 2019, they will test their performance with a review of its outcomes, and the results of that study will be published to ensure transparency. They will also continue to work directly with UN agencies and report progress on the country's SDG indicators. But the country's primary focus is on making Japan's commitments to the goals become a reality.



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## Case study author

Chris Oestereich

## Researcher

Kah Wei Yoong