



2020 Voluntary National Reviews – a snapshot of trends in SDG reporting



Partners for Review





Partners for Review

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Abbreviations

COVID-19	CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019
CSO	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION
DRR	DISASTER RISK REDUCTION
EU	EUROPEAN UNION
FSM	FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA
GIZ	DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT
GSDR	GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT
LNOB	LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND
LRG	LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT
M&E	MONITORING & EVALUATION
NDP	NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN
P4R	PARTNERS FOR REVIEW
PPP	PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP
SAI	SUPREME AUDIT INSTITUTION
SDG	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL
UN	UNITED NATIONS
VNR	VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW

Executive Summary

The Partners for Review (P4R) comparative analysis of the 2020 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) identifies similarities, differences, progress and emerging trends in reviews the UN Member States submitted to the 2020 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF), convened under the theme 'Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development'. This year, 47 countries submitted a VNR report, 20 for the second time and one country for the third time. As the 2020 review processes were interrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak, the analysis was expanded to include a chapter on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the usual analyses of national Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) institutional structures; SDG mainstreaming and policy coherence; stakeholder engagement; statistics and data and a section on repeated VNR reporting.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the 2020 follow-up and review process, causing countries to cancel, delay or replace critical elements of their respective VNR processes. Consultations, events and traditional workshop settings were particularly affected by lockdown and social-distancing measures. Although these were, for the most part, replaced by virtual and digital events, this had an impact on the planning of the VNR preparations in many countries. In some cases, virtual VNR-related events led to a broadening of participation, however a digital divide also caused limitations to stakeholder engagement. Moreover, statistical activities were disrupted by the pandemic, potentially affecting the evidence base of some VNRs. COVID-19 has moreover added further concerns with respect to the progress of the SDGs. Many countries recognise there have been setbacks to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and have raised particular concerns over the adverse impact on the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development. However, while the pandemic is adding to concerns

about SDG progress, it also provides valuable lessons and opportunities. Countries have reiterated the relevance of the 2030 Agenda and stress the need to scale up progress in the wake of the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 and its complexities are multidimensional and demonstrate a need for integrated and systematic policy responses within and across countries. Only a holistic and systemic approach – as encompassed by the 2030 Agenda – can build the adaptive capacity needed to respond to the immediate and long-term effects of COVID-19. It is therefore critical to maintain the momentum on progress towards the SDGs. As a central element of the follow-up and review of the SDGs, the VNRs are instrumental in supporting the systemic change required to achieve sustainable development and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and progress that has been lost.

NATIONAL SDG INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

VNR reporting reveals that SDG institutional structures and mechanisms have matured and advanced in a number of countries. This may be due to the number of VNR countries that have returned and built on institutional structures established in the context of the first VNR. Countries reporting for the first time have benefited from the body of experience that has been built up globally since the early VNRs in 2016. Most institutional structures and mechanisms are aligned with the 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approaches and aim to promote a coherent VNR and SDG implementation process, engaging a wide range of government entities as well as non-governmental stakeholder groups, including civil society organisations (CSOs), the private sector and the scientific community. Coordination, however, remains a challenge. The broad participation of line ministries emphasises horizontal coordination, however, although local and regional governments (LRGs) are included in a number of institutional frameworks, further strengthening of multilevel governance structures is required to improve vertical coherence.

The growing role of parliament and supreme audit institutions (SAIs), particularly in performing SDG-related oversight and assessments, reflects a recognition of the value of accountability and scrutiny to the national SDG implementation and review efforts. The establishment of monitoring & evaluation (M&E) structures and routine reporting has expanded when compared to previous reporting years. Emerging trends include the creation of platforms that help strengthen the institutionalisation of SDG M&E and stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, more and more individual stakeholder groups are reporting on SDG progress. The integration of these reporting efforts into SDG M&E mechanisms can contribute to a more holistic approach to monitoring and reviewing the SDGs.

SDG MAINSTREAMING AND POLICY COHERENCE

Progress on mainstreaming the SDGs is of utmost importance, particularly as action to meet the goals is not yet advancing at the scale required. With only a 10-year timeline left, the need to accelerate the mainstreaming of the SDGs was reflected in some VNR reports, especially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A mix of approaches is used to mainstream the SDGs. While some initiatives aspire to achieve a coherent implementation, for instance by mainstreaming the SDGs into National Development Plans (NDPs), many sustainable development contributions are still reported in the context of sector-based strategies, plans and measures. Although these strategies make important contributions to the SDGs, any analysis of how these interrelate, including their trade-offs, is still limited. To accelerate progress on SDG mainstreaming, multidimensional, systemic and integrated approaches must be stepped up at all levels of government.

Progress on SDG localisation is advancing with some countries making headway in mainstreaming the SDGs at local level. COVID-19 has further uncovered the importance of SDG localisation, as LRGs are often on the frontline of responding to the pandemic. Continued efforts to scale up SDG localisation are therefore more critical than ever.

The pandemic has similarly added urgency to the implementation of the principle of 'Leaving no one behind' (LNOB). Rising inequalities and the pandemic's severe impact on specific groups call for a people-centred, inclusive and human rights-based approach that underscores the relevance of the principle of LNOB. While the importance of the principle is recognised, and a range of activities have been reported among the 2020 VNR countries, more systematic multisector approaches are needed to ensure no one is left behind.

Reporting on legal and budgetary aspects indicates a need for more methodical approaches that can support integrated SDG mainstreaming. Systematic SDG budgeting and specific financing for the SDGs from non-government sources can help broaden the means of implementation, pave the way for increased private-sector engagement and foster innovative financing solutions.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The 'whole-of-society' approach is practised widely by the 2020 VNR countries, with most countries engaging stakeholders in various VNR-related processes. Although non-governmental stakeholders participate in many of the institutional SDG structures, the most common form of stakeholder engagement takes place through consultations, workshops, meetings and dialogue. Among stakeholder groups, such as civil society, the private sector and academia, CSOs are the dominant group. Private-sector contributions are made by involving representatives in many of the institutional structures, mainly through consultations, meetings and in the implementation of the SDGs. The scientific community is similarly engaged in a number of capacities; including by providing research, advice and data, or as participants in consultations, workshops and conferences. Increasingly, SDG reports are provided by individual stakeholder groups; for instance, civil society shadow or spotlight reports, private-sector progress reports or Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews. As these reports are often prepared alongside the VNR process, they can contribute and serve as an important source of feedback, information and data for the official re-

view processes. How best to incorporate this feedback in the VNR process is still open to debate.

While multistakeholder engagement is practised to some degree, the reporting indicates that many stakeholder groups are engaged in silos. To boost multistakeholder participation, stakeholder engagement strategies and plans can help facilitate meaningful and consistent involvement. Furthermore, institutionalising multistakeholder engagement can support systemic alignment and the scale-up of multistakeholder approaches and collaboration. Creating spaces and platforms can support coalitions and strengthen the multistakeholder partnerships needed to bring about the large-scale systemic change required to achieve sustainable development. Multistakeholder and partnership collaboration are not only critical to the follow-up and review, and to the implementation of the SDGs, but also to ensure the means of implementation.

A wide range of activities help to communicate and raise awareness of the VNR process and the SDGs. Increasingly, social media is used by engaging influencers as a way of reaching the general public. Only a few long-term strategic communication efforts feature among the 2020 VNR countries. As a result of COVID-19, online tools, national digital platforms or 'SDG knowledge hubs' have been of significant value in helping to disseminate information, organise and broaden stakeholder collaboration and participation, and ensure citizen engagement. In addition, long-term stakeholder engagement, communication strategies and plans are needed to support meaningful and consistent stakeholder participation and increase knowledge on the SDGs.

STATISTICS AND DATA

SDG monitoring and review frameworks still suffer from a number of challenges. While countries have reported many efforts to strengthen statistics and data, many also outline a need to build capacity, standardise methodologies and enhance the coordination and management of data. Gaps in data and the lack of data availability are still considerable barriers and call for stepping up efforts to improve evidence-based SDG implementation and follow-up.

COVID-19 has added a further need to overcome these barriers in order better to understand, manage and mitigate the pandemic's multiple impacts. Furthermore, the availability of disaggregated data continues to pose a challenge, affecting compliance with the principle of LNOB. Some initiatives have been implemented to localise SDG monitoring efforts, however further investment is needed to establish local SDG monitoring frameworks, identify existing and new local indicators and facilitate local data collection. In addition to supporting the evaluation and review of national SDG progress, these efforts are needed to enable evidence-based subnational SDG prioritisation and ensure that no one and no territory is left behind. Moreover, reporting indicates that progress in supplementing and broadening official statistics is still limited. The application of alternative data and increased international support for statistical capacity building are needed to enhance data availability and the associated challenges.

REPEATED VNR COUNTRIES

Five years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, an increasing number of countries reported for the second or third time. Analysis of the progress made from one VNR to the next indicates that reporting typically increases from one reporting period to the next. More content is provided in the second or third reports, which are usually longer. Most SDG institutional structures and mechanisms remain the same and many countries with repeated VNRs highlight follow-up actions. In most cases, this reflects developments in the respective review processes as a result of the previous VNR. Although some reports highlight aspects that were improved and lessons learned, greater continuity between the reports can enable 'cyclical consideration' and a structured analysis of progress.

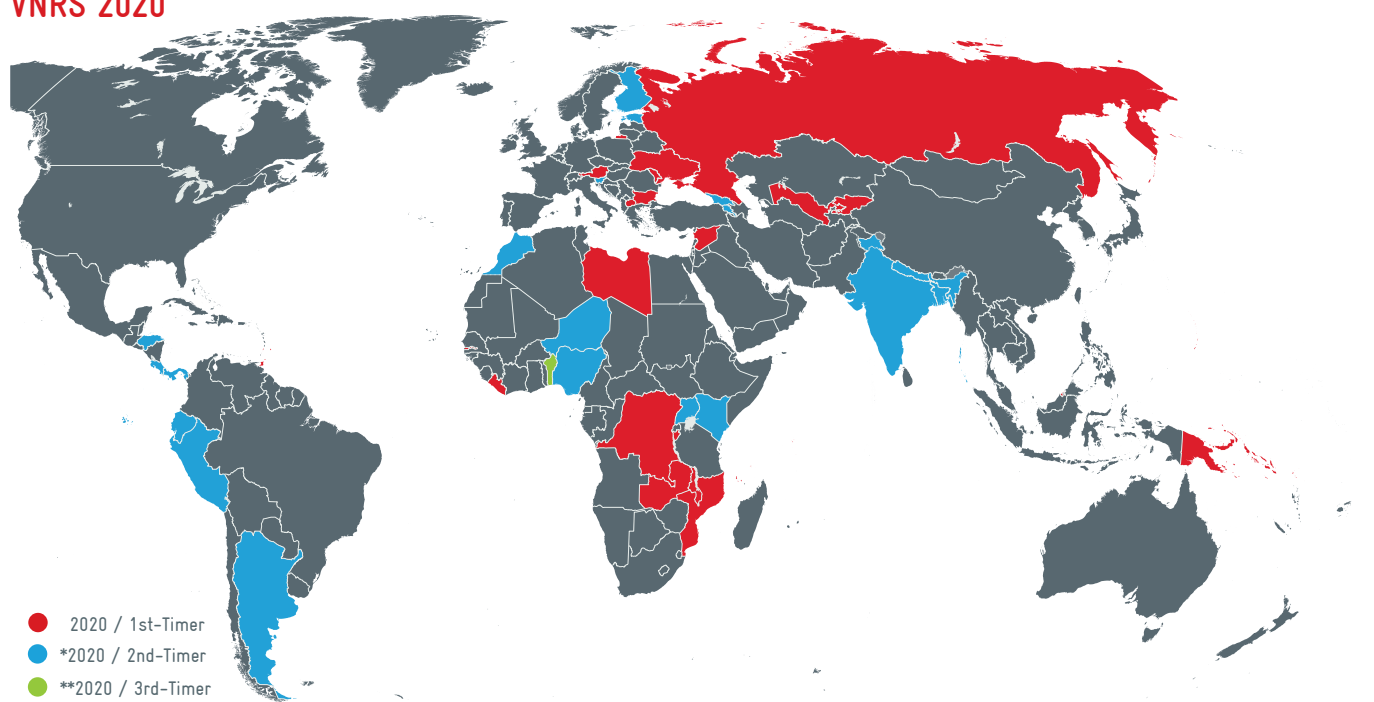
As a central element of the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review mechanism, the VNRs are instrumental in supporting the systemic change required to achieve the SDGs. Some countries have started periodic review processes independent from VNR processes. These types of systematic reporting practices can lead to concrete benefits, such as

improving the quality of the reports, adding continuity and maintaining momentum between VNRs, as well as strengthening stakeholder engagement. In response to the 2030 Agenda's core principle of enhancing participatory, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches, engaging other reporting mechanisms can provide a means of strengthening the inclusion of stakeholder perspectives in the follow-up and review process. Structured approaches from one VNR to the next and integrating other reporting efforts e.g. spotlight reports, Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews or private-sector

progress reports can contribute to a more holistic picture of SDG implementation and thereby better support the transformation required to achieve sustainable development.

Overall, the analysis of the 2020 VNRs points to a need for more action and transformative progress on the SDGs, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VNRs are an important engine for creating more momentum for countries to accelerate SDG progress, especially if followed up with strong post-VNR processes.

VNRS 2020



Argentina*
Armenia*
Austria
Bangladesh*
Barbados
Benin**
Brunei Darussalam
Bulgaria
Burundi
Comoros
Costa Rica*
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Ecuador*
Estonia*
Finland*
Georgia*
Honduras*
India*
Kenya*
Kyrgyz Republic
Liberia
Libya
Malawi
Micronesia
Morocco*

Mozambique
Nepal*
Niger*
Nigeria*
North Macedonia
Panama*
Papua New Guinea
Peru*
Republic of Moldova
Russian Federation
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Samoa*

Seychelles
Slovenia*
Solomon Islands
Syrian Arab Republic
The Gambia
Trinidad and Tobago
Uganda*
Ukraine
Uzbekistan
Zambia

1.0 INTRODUCTION

After the SDGs were adopted in 2015, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly agreed on the framework for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.¹ The follow-up and review process is largely based on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which are carried out by countries to track progress on their SDG implementation (see Box 1.1). Governments are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews, drawing on contributions from civil society, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders. The VNRs are presented at the annual High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) alongside the global SDG progress report prepared by the UN. Since the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, 143 countries have reported a total of 205 VNRs to the HLPF. In 2016, 22 countries submitted a VNR to the HLPF, while there were 43 reporting countries in 2017, 46 countries in 2018 and 47 countries in 2019. At the 2020 HLPF convened under the theme 'Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development', 47 countries carried out VNRs of their implementation of the Agenda. In addition to the reviews at the HLPF, a growing number of countries started conducting regular national SDG reviews, e.g. annually or biannually. Moreover, stakeholders are increasingly conducting reviews, e.g. Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews, by local and regional governments (LRGs) and cities, as well as carrying out civil society shadow and spotlight reports.

1.1 Partners for Review

Partners for Review (P4R) was launched in 2016 on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) as a multistakeholder network to support the follow-up and review process. The P4R network consists of government

representatives and other stakeholders engaged in the VNR process, e.g. from civil society, the private sector and academia. In the context of the 'follow-up and review' of the 2030 Agenda and the preparations leading up to the HLPF, P4R enables a regular exchange on experiences and lessons learned in the VNR process. P4R facilitates dialogue on new and emerging issues related to the national monitoring and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through transnational dialogue, peer learning, biannual conferences, diverse virtual formats and analytical work.

1.2 The present report: a snapshot of trends in SDG reporting

The comparative analysis of 2020 VNR reports was developed by a senior sustainable development consultant on behalf of, and in close cooperation with, the P4R Secretariat. The analysis aims to identify trends, commonalities, differences as well as emerging issues reported by the 2020 VNR countries. The scope of the 2020 comparative VNR analysis has broadened compared to last year, among other reasons, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It therefore includes a section on how the pandemic affected the VNR processes as well as its potential impact on the progress of the SDGs. As such, the comparative analysis focuses on the following six areas:

1. the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. national SDG institutional structures;
3. SDG mainstreaming and policy coherence;
4. stakeholder engagement;
5. statistics and data;
6. countries submitting repeat VNRs.

¹ UN Resolution 70/A/684: Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level. UN General Assembly, 2016, New York.

The P4R comparative VNR analysis also includes reflections on the principles and key features of the 2030 Agenda such as the ‘whole-of-government’ and ‘whole-of-society’ approaches; the principle of ‘Leaving no one behind’; inclusive and participatory approaches; policy coherence; multistakeholder approaches and partnerships as well as aspects related to the monitoring, review and evaluation of the implementation of the SDGs.

All the information in the analysis is based on the content presented in the 2020 VNR reports, which were publicly available at the time of preparing the comparative report.² References to countries and examples featured are for illustrative purposes only and do not express any judgement, evaluation or political views. The report specifies, where possible, which countries reported on specific initiatives. However, due to the quantity of information provided in the VNRs, and the lack of availability of some reports at the time of the analysis, there is no guarantee that the examples highlighted reflect all the information reported. The percentages indicated in the analysis are therefore approximate.

Overall, the analysis and reflections intend to benefit further critical deliberations and research on the SDG follow-up and review process.

BOX 1.1: THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) form a fundamental part of the ‘follow-up and review’ framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda encourages countries to ‘conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven’ and states that reviews are ‘state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.’ A set of common reporting guidelines and a handbook to prepare the VNRs provided by the UN Department of Social Affairs (UNDESA) seek to support countries in conducting VNRs in line with the guiding principles on the follow-up and review process at all levels. Central to the reviews are the core principles of the 2030 Agenda, such as universality, ‘Leaving no one behind’, integration, inclusiveness and ownership. The VNRs allow countries to plan appropriate policies, structures and processes and to revise or introduce new national development plans for achieving the SDGs.

² The reports of Barbados and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines were not publicly available at the time of preparing the report and some countries uploaded a new version of their VNRs after the HLPF. Furthermore, the reports of Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic were only available in Arabic. For these reasons, these reports and newer versions of reports could not be included in the comparative analysis. The VNR reports in Russian were analysed using translation software. Uzbekistan and Costa Rica’s reports were published in the original language as well as in English. However, the English version of these two reports was not available at the time of the analysis.

2.0 GENERAL FEATURES – THE 2020 VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

FORTY-SEVEN COUNTRIES CARRIED OUT A VNR IN 2020, INCLUDING 16 AFRICAN, 11 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES, 11 EUROPEAN AND 9 LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES. TWENTY-SIX COUNTRIES CONDUCTED A VNR FOR THE FIRST TIME, 20 FOR THE SECOND TIME AND ONE COUNTRY FOR THE THIRD TIME (BOX 2.1 AND MAP ON P.8).

2.1 Languages used

While countries may submit their VNR reports in all of the six official UN languages,³ most VNR reports were written in English (30), followed by French (6), Spanish (6), Russian (3) and Arabic (2). Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Costa Rica also submitted an English translation of the VNR reports in addition to their original reports written in Russian and Spanish respectively.

2.2 Volume and coverage

All of the 47 VNR countries, apart from two, submitted a report⁴ and executive summaries are available for most of the reports. The reports vary significantly in volume, ranging from 32 to 247 pages. Most countries reported on all the SDGs (Box 2.2). No specific thematic goals were prioritised at the HLPF, which was convened this year under the theme 'Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development'.

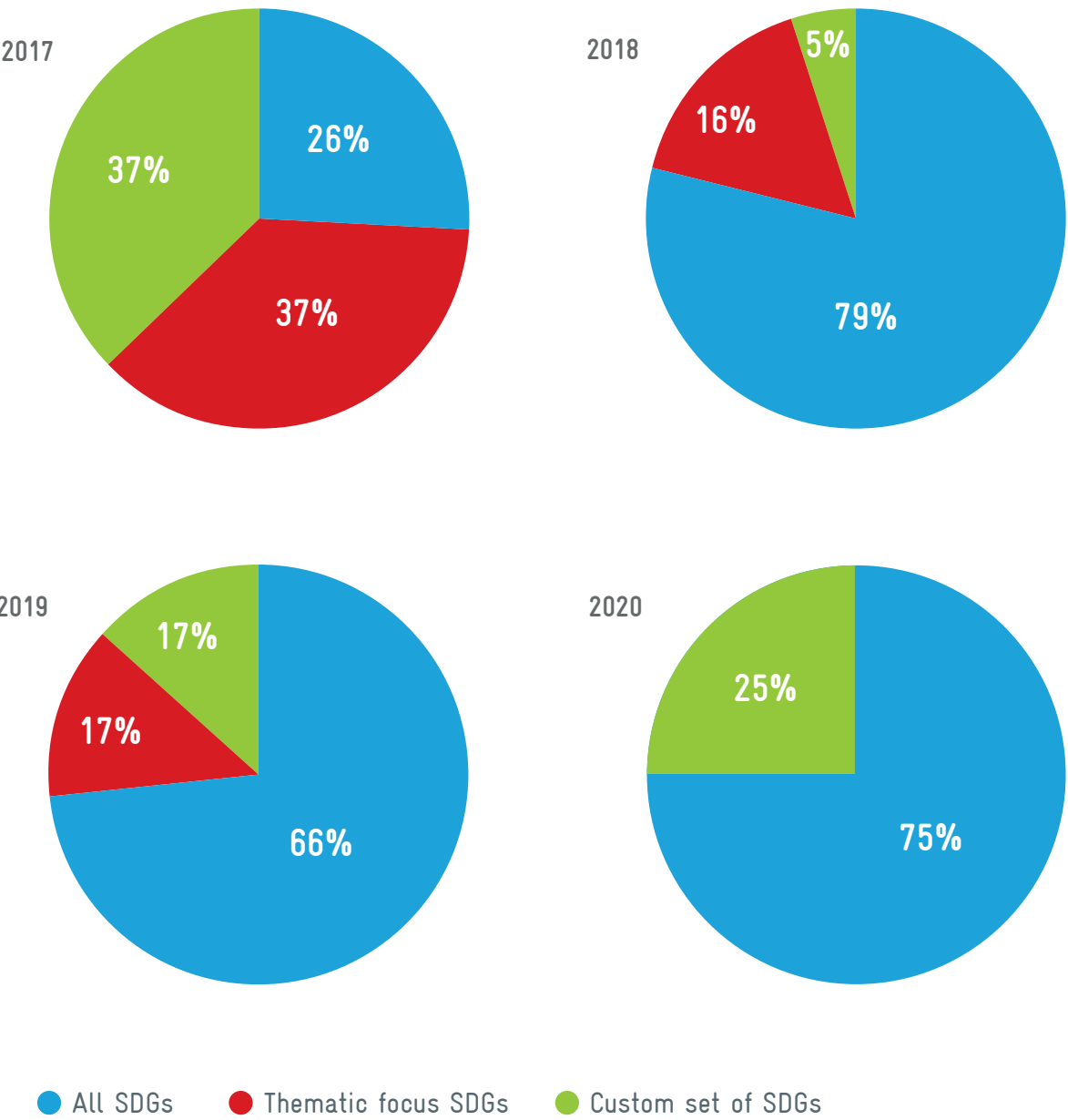
BOX 2.1: THE 2020 VNR COUNTRIES

First time:	Austria, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of the Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Mozambique, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Syrian Arab Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Zambia.
Second time:	Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Honduras, India, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Samoa, Slovenia and Uganda.
Third time:	Benin

³ Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

⁴ The VNR reports of Barbados and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines were not available at the time of drafting this analysis.

BOX 2.2: COVERAGE OF THE SDGS 2017-2020



Source: Own calculation

2.3 Reference to the voluntary common reporting guidelines

The UN voluntary common reporting guidelines were prepared by the UN Secretary-General in 2015⁵ and updated in 2017 and 2019.⁶ They provide a framework for common elements in reports that countries can apply in terms of the guiding principles, the structure and content of the report, as well as presentations at the HLPF. While the common reporting guidelines support customising the VNR process, countries are encouraged to report voluntarily according to the suggested structure. Whereas eight 2020 VNR reports (Bangladesh, Benin, Ecuador, The Gambia, India, Kenya, Panama, Uganda) are fully aligned with the structure suggested in the guidelines, most countries applied the guidelines with some adjustments or additions.⁷ A few countries applied a different structure to the guidelines (Austria, Brunei Darussalam, Peru, Uzbekistan). An increasing number of countries provide in-depth descriptions of the VNR approach, timelines and process, featuring overviews or graphical illustrations of the process. Finland's VNR process (Box 2.3) included a number of significant steps to facilitate multistakeholder dialogue as well as external assessments by means of a peer dialogue with Mozambique and Switzerland who were asked to review the draft report and the preparatory process. Both countries' external reviews and recommendations were considered when finalising the VNR and included in the report.⁸ In addition, a peer-learning session was organised between the National Commissions on Sustainable Development of Finland and Estonia.⁹

2.4 Annexes

Approximately 50% of the reports included a statistical annex,¹⁰ an increase compared to previous reporting cycles. In addition to statistical and indicator information, other annexes included feedback on the impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation (Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burundi, Morocco) and information on stakeholder engagement and consultations. Examples of the latter consist of overviews of projects and contributions per population group or stakeholder (Costa Rica, Ecuador, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Trinidad & Tobago); consultation guidelines (Solomon Islands); a questionnaire (Malawi) and results of consultations with civil society or other stakeholder groups (Morocco, North Macedonia, Peru, Ukraine).

Other annexes consist of an overview of the legislation adopted (Costa Rica); timelines of the VNR process (The Gambia, Malawi); a matrix on the implementation status per SDG, including challenges (The Gambia); an approved budget (Honduras); the main messages to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (Honduras); a report on violence against children (Kenya); infographics for selected SDGs (Moldova); an overview of the incorporation of the SDGs into the 2016–2035 National Development Strategy (Solomon Islands); a summary of the strengths and weaknesses per SDG (Uzbekistan); reports from stakeholders, e.g. CSOs (Kenya) and feedback from the UN Resident Coordinator (Samoa).

5 Annex to Secretary-General's Report on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level, A/70/684.

6 Paragraph 9 of resolution 70/299 of 29 July 2016.

7 Argentina, Bulgaria, Burundi, Comoros, DR Congo, Estonia, Finland, FSM, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Moldova, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Ukraine, Zambia.

8 Finland, 'Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, pp. 17–19.

9 Finland, 'Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 16.

10 In some cases, the statistical annexes were listed in the table of contents but not attached to the report.

BOX 2.3: ILLUSTRATION OF VNR PROCESS – FINLAND¹¹



3.0 THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK HAS PROFOUND SHORT, MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA. WHILE EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THE SDGS WERE ALREADY DEEMED INSUFFICIENT AT THE SDG SUMMIT IN 2019, THE PANDEMIC HAS ADDED FURTHER CONCERN OVER THE PROGRESS OF THE SDGS. IT HAS INCREASED POVERTY, HUNGER AND INEQUALITY AND CONSIDERABLY SLOWED DOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH. WHILE THERE ARE MULTIPLE SCENARIOS AS TO HOW THE PANDEMIC PLAYS OUT IN THE LONG-TERM, IT HAS BEEN ARGUED THAT HAD MORE PROGRESS BEEN MADE ON THE 2030 AGENDA, COUNTRIES WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE RESILIENT AND BETTER PREPARED TO RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES POSED BY COVID-19. THIS MAKES THE PRIORITISATION AND ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS EVEN MORE URGENT AND NECESSARY.

3.1 Impact on the VNR process

The outbreak of COVID-19 at the end of 2019 disrupted preparations for 2020 VNR processes in almost all of the reporting countries. Nearly all countries reported on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, COVID-19-related aspects were addressed in additional chapters¹² or in an annex (Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burundi, Morocco). The areas most affected by the pandemic were VNR-related preparatory processes and planned activities, triggering cancellations, postponements, delays and modifications (Comoros, Costa Rica, Honduras, Samoa). Many countries applied innovative solutions using virtual tools and mechanisms to replace previous plans.

Consultations,¹³ direct stakeholder engagement processes (FSM, Niger, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia) and VNR preparatory meetings and conferences (Benin, Liberia, Malawi, Niger) were particularly affected. In some cases, they were cancelled (Liberia, Solomon Islands, Ukraine) or stakeholder engagement was scaled down (Zambia), whereas in others, IT platforms were established (Costa Rica, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda) or events were replaced by online discussions, virtual consultations and dialogue (Benin, Bangladesh, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Moldova, Nepal, Panama, Uganda) or phone calls (Seychelles). To include regions and stakeholders without online access, Comoros carried out sight visits by experts while respecting social-distancing measures.¹⁴

¹² Armenia, Benin, Comoros, Costa Rica, FSM, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Moldova, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Russia, Seychelles, Slovenia, Trinidad & Tobago.

¹³ Armenia, Bangladesh, DR Congo, The Gambia, Liberia, Moldova, Nepal, Niger, Panama, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda.

¹⁴ Présidence de l'Union de Comores, 'Rapport National Volontaire de l'Union de Comores au Forum Politique de Haut Niveau Sur le Développement Durable', 2020, p. 12.

In addition to consultations and workshops, the outbreak affected the final review and validation of the VNR review in a number of countries (Burundi, The Gambia, Honduras, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Ukraine, Zambia) and in others was replaced by virtual validation sessions (The Gambia, Kenya, Ukraine, Zambia).

Information (Costa Rica) and data collection (DR Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Samoa) were also affected, in some cases due to the interviewers' mobility (DR Congo). They were replaced with phone interviews (Kenya, Morocco). Morocco conducted phone interviews with households and surveyed companies to collect data on the impact of COVID-19. Detailed results are included in an annex to the VNR report.¹⁵

Other VNR-related impacts of the pandemic include postponement of awareness-raising activities (Seychelles), limited online access (Uganda) and decreased capacity (Benin).

3.2 Overall effect of COVID-19 and its impact on SDG progress

COVID-19's long-term impact on achieving the SDGs is strongly recognised. Many countries have provided details on the potential impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs in general¹⁶ and/or on specific goals.¹⁷ Some countries have highlighted measures taken in response to the crisis (Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Zambia).

Concerns are raised over the setback to SDG progress and the fact that the pandemic has undermined ongoing implementation efforts (Bulgaria, Finland, The Gambia, Georgia, Nepal, Nigeria, Honduras, Solomon Islands, Uzbekistan, Zambia) as well as government programmes (Finland) and progress towards the NDPs (The Gambia, Zambia). Countries highlight how the pandemic is adding new challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and highlight the adverse impact on specific dimensions of sustainable development or sectors,¹⁸ emphasising consequences that are predominantly economic¹⁹ and in some cases environmental (Comoros, Seychelles), thus compounding the fragile economic situation (Peru) and producing an adverse effect on business and small and medium enterprises (SME) (Brunei Darussalam). Brunei Darussalam highlights efforts to help mitigate these effects and support the operational viability of the business community, for example, through government financial support, exemption of custom and excise duties, and adjustments to rental charges, by establishing e-platforms to support the online marketing and sales of goods.²⁰

A number of countries raise COVID-19's impact on the social dimension of sustainable development²¹ and vulnerable groups (Bangladesh, Benin, Georgia, India, Peru, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago), underscoring the relevance of the principle of LNOB (Georgia, India), the impact on poverty (Honduras, Peru) and the effect on children (Mozambique).

Some countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Georgia) have expressed a commitment to the 2030 Agenda as a roadmap to recovery and building back better, including a need to step up efforts in this regard. Peru highlights short-, medium- and long-term scenarios for a post-COVID-19 future.²² Some countries call for the strengthening of specific measures, such as increased resource mobilisation and partnerships (Nepal), harnessing the power of technology and digitalisation (Uganda), conducting an analysis of the social impact of the crisis (Honduras) and strengthening disaster risk management (Georgia).

15 Royaume du Maroc, 'Examen National Volontaire de la Mise en Oeuvre des Objectifs de Developpement Durable', 2020, p. 14-15.

16 Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, DR Congo, Finland, The Gambia, Honduras, India, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Slovenia, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

17 Bangladesh, Bulgaria, DR Congo, Honduras, India, Mozambique, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Samoa, Slovenia, Trinidad & Tobago, Ukraine.

18 Bulgaria, Brunei Darussalam, Comoros, Costa Rica, Finland, Georgia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Peru, Samoa, Seychelles.

19 Argentina, Austria, Comoros, Costa Rica, Georgia, Honduras, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Zambia.

20 Brunei Darussalam, 'Voluntary National Review Report of Brunei Darussalam', 2020, p. 56.

21 Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, The Gambia, Georgia, Honduras, India, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Seychelles, Solomon Islands.

22 Perú, 'Informe Nacional: Perú a mayo 2020. La Protección de la Vida en la Emergencia y Después', 2020, pp. 114-121.

While many adverse impacts are highlighted, some countries highlight opportunities and valuable lessons that come with COVID-19 (Uganda, Zambia). Zambia highlights the opportunities for digital transformation triggered by government measures, including the expansion of e-governance, the implementation of virtual platforms and incentives that come with upgrading information and communication technology for service delivery or improving national preparedness for disease outbreaks.²³ Uganda calls attention to the opportunity to scale up localisation efforts as well as enabling a resilient private sector as a result of COVID-19. Other countries call for global solidarity in the wake of the pandemic (Nepal, Uganda).

3.3 Reflections

The 2020 follow-up and review process was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, causing countries to cancel, delay or replace critical elements of their respective review processes. Consultations, events and traditional workshop settings were particularly affected by lockdown and social-distancing measures. Although these were for the most part replaced by virtual and digital events, they affected the implementation of the VNR process in many countries.

The pandemic has required flexibility and highlighted the importance of technology and digital solutions. Virtual VNR-related events led in some cases to a broadening of stakeholder engagement; however, in others they limited stakeholder engagement or statistical activities, potentially affecting the evidence base of some VNRs.

COVID-19 has added further concerns over the progress on the SDGs. It has impacted societies in multiple ways, causing increased poverty, growing

inequality and has considerably slowed down economic growth. Setbacks to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are recognised by many of the 2020 VNR countries. Particular concern has been expressed about its adverse impact on the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development.

While the pandemic is adding new concerns over SDG progress, it also comes with valuable lessons and opportunities. The effects of the pandemic highlight the significance of the 2030 Agenda in a number of ways. COVID-19's impacts and complexities are multidimensional and demonstrate the need for integrated and systematic policy responses within and across countries. Only a holistic and systemic approach – as encompassed by the 2030 Agenda – can build the adaptive capacity needed to respond to the pandemic's immediate and long-term effects. It is therefore critical to keep the momentum going on the SDG progress that countries have already made.

Post-pandemic recovery efforts provide an opportunity to build back better. Aligning the COVID-19 response with the SDGs provides a window of opportunity to accelerate progress in the next decade. The 2030 Agenda's follow-up and review framework can help enable the systemic approaches needed to ensure post-recovery efforts are guided by the SDGs.

²³ Republic of Zambia, 'Zambia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2020', 2020, p. 45.

4.0 National SDG institutional structures

THE IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW OF THE 2030 AGENDA RELY TO A GREAT DEGREE ON THE COUNTRIES' INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH THESE FOSTER COHERENT MAINSTREAMING OF THE SDGS. FIVE YEARS INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA, MANY INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES HAVE ALREADY BEEN ESTABLISHED AMONG THE 2020 REPORTING COUNTRIES.

In line with previous reporting years, most countries apply a 'whole-of-government' approach to facilitate engagement in the VNR process by the relevant entities from across and at all levels of government. The approach varies from country to country resulting in diverse types of institutional architectures, national coordination approaches and review mechanisms. Nevertheless many mechanisms engage representatives from all levels of government as well as other stakeholders, such as parliament and SAIs. The engagement of major stakeholder groups e.g. civil society, the private sector and the scientific communities was facilitated in one way or another.

4.1 SDG institutional arrangements

The institutional frameworks subject to the VNR preparation and SDG implementation and monitoring vary significantly from country to country. In around 60% of the 2020 VNR countries,²⁴ SDG councils, commissions, (steering) committees, taskforces or interministerial working groups lead efforts on the VNR or other SDG-related activities. These bodies are headed by or integrated into the Office of the Prime Minister (Bulgaria, Finland, India, Nepal, Uganda), the Ministry of Planning,²⁵ the Ministry of Economy/Finance (The Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, North Macedonia), or the Ministry of Development and Social Policies (Argentina and

Panama). In many cases, the mechanisms consist of a two-tiered structure, including a steering committee and a technical entity (Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, Costa Rica and Malawi). In some cases, these bodies are co-chaired by several ministries or government entities (Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique, Seychelles, Uzbekistan) e.g. in Mozambique, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the National Institute of Statistics co-lead the SDG National Reference Group.²⁶

In countries where apparently no mechanism was established, VNR and SDG responsibilities often fall under the mandate of different ministries, such as ministries for national planning (Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Zambia), economic planning (Seychelles), development (Slovenia), the Government Office (Estonia), the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Agriculture (Ukraine) or the strategic or analytical centres of the government (Peru, Russia).

New institutional structures were predominantly established by countries that reported for the first time in 2020. As many countries reported for the second or third time, most applied existing institutional structures to manage VNR and SDG efforts, building on the structures established in the context of the first VNR process. Among these countries, some institutional adjustments, such as broadening stakeholder engagement or new mandates, were carried out as the result of reforms or other changes; for example an upgrade in the legislation or a change of mandate (Finland, Georgia).

²⁴ Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burundi, Comoros, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Estonia, FSM, The Gambia, Honduras, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, North Macedonia, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda.

²⁵ Benin, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Ecuador, Georgia, Kenya, Niger, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago.

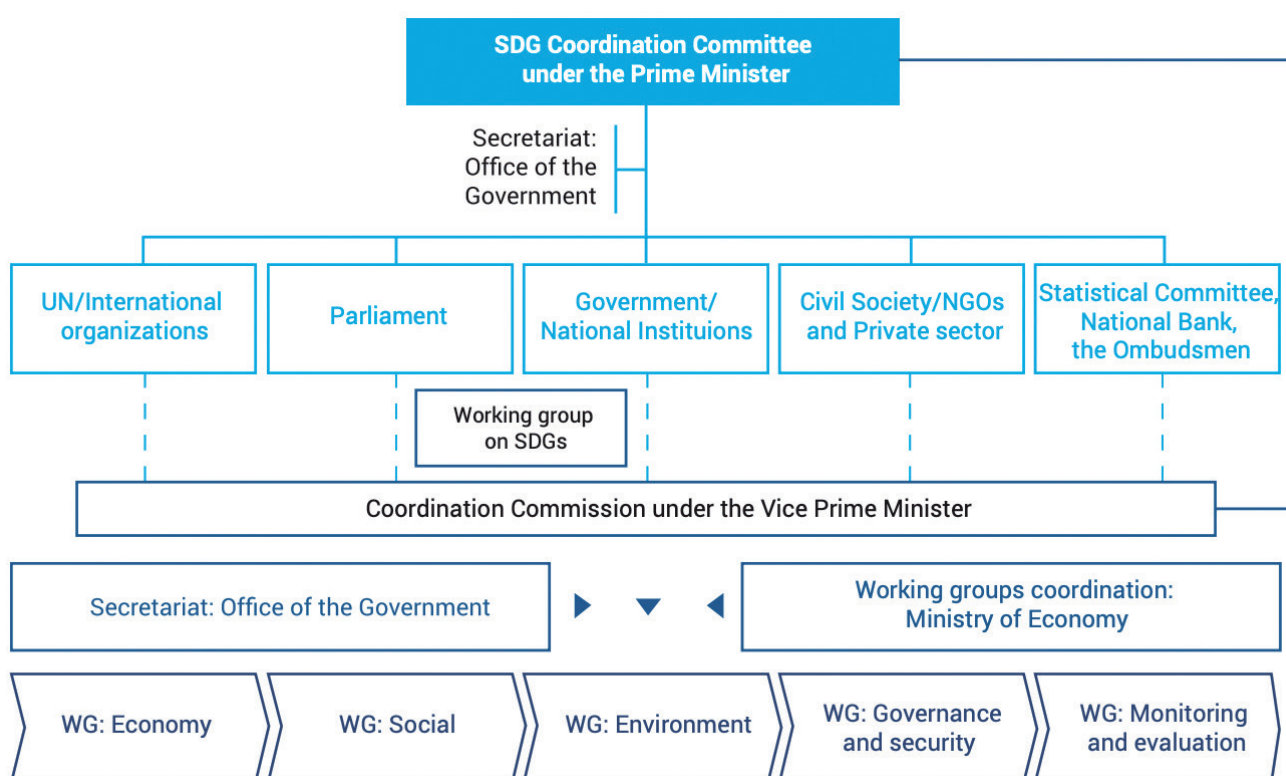
²⁶ Republic of Mozambique, 'Report – Voluntary National Review of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 28.

A number of countries report that specific teams were set up to draft or coordinate the VNR.²⁷ In The Gambia, the temporary VNR coordination committee was transformed into a technical SDG coordination mechanism. To carry out the VNR, Austria established an 'editorial group' that was co-chaired by the Federal Chancellery and the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs and included the ministries with primary responsibility for the three dimensions of sustainable development. The editorial group coordinated discussions among 'editorial committees' consisting of representatives from the federal ministries, federal provinces, subnational governments, social partners, business sector, academia and civil society.²⁸

4.2 Whole-of-government approach

Most reports set out the SDG institutional architecture and coordination efforts that foster horizontal and vertical coherence of the VNR and SDG implementation. In many cases, the institutional frameworks are aligned with a 'whole-of-government' and a 'whole-of-society' approach to facilitate a coherent mainstreaming process. Many countries describe or feature an organigram of the framework or mechanisms illustrating the composition as well as which entities participate (Box 4.1).

BOX 4.1: SDG INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE IN KYRGYZSTAN²⁹



²⁷ Austria, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, The Gambia, Liberia, Panama, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Zambia.

²⁸ Austrian Federal Chancellery, 'Austria and the 2030 Agenda. Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 13.

²⁹ Kyrgyz Republic, 'Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic', 2020, p. 23.

Horizontal coordination across the government is in some cases facilitated by the appointment of focal points in line ministries (Slovenia, Zambia) or by mandating ministries responsible for certain goals (Bangladesh). While many reports feature lists of key line ministries and government agencies, a particularly strong role is assigned to national statistical services.³⁰ Even though not all countries specify how vertical coordination is managed, several countries apply multilevel government approaches. In these instances, clear links to the subnational level³¹ and the engagement of LRGs are ensured. Coordination is still highlighted as a challenge,³² e.g. due to low institutional capacity (Malawi). Some countries (Benin, Bulgaria, FSM, The Gambia, Samoa, Zambia) state that reinforcing the SDG institutional mechanism and strengthening coordination might be the next step.

Often the institutional frameworks and mechanisms reflect a multistakeholder approach.³³ The 2020 VNR countries feature the participation of various stakeholder groups, including parliament and SAs, civil society,³⁴ young people (Benin, Estonia, The Gambia, Niger, Seychelles, Uganda), women (Benin, The Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger), persons with disabilities (Benin, Niger, Nigeria), the private sector,³⁵ the scientific community³⁶ and think tanks (Kenya, India). Representatives from the national bank (Brunei Darussalam, Kyrgyzstan, Russia), human rights offices (Armenia, Morocco, Samoa), the chamber of commerce (Bangladesh), trade unions (Armenia, Benin, Estonia) and the media (Moldova) also feature as participants in the institutional SDG frameworks.

In a significant number of countries, representatives from the UN system,³⁷ development partners (The Gambia, Georgia, Malawi, Mozambique, Kyrgyzstan, Panama, Samoa, Solomon Islands) and international financial institutions (Comoros, Malawi)

play a key role in the institutional framework and mechanisms.

4.2.1 LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Similar to the previous reporting year, LRGs are represented as a stakeholder in around 33% of the SDG institutional frameworks and mechanisms. In some cases, associations represent local governments in the national mechanism or are in charge of leading SDG localisation efforts (Austria, Honduras, Mozambique, Nepal), or SDG focal points are appointed at the subnational level (Austria, FSM, Nigeria). In some countries, subnational coordinating bodies, councils or committees (Liberia, Malawi, Morocco, Papua New Guinea) contribute to localisation efforts, such as consultations, awareness raising and mainstreaming the SDGs into local plans.

There are plans to strengthen the role of local governments in the institutional SDG frameworks (The Gambia, Kenya, Papua New Guinea). In The Gambia, for instance, subnational technical advisory committees are established to provide a platform for developing Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews.³⁸ In Papua New Guinea a 'Provincial Local Level Government Services Monitoring Authority' was established to coordinate service delivery and coordination issues at national and subnational level.³⁹ In Kenya, a framework was developed to institutionalise performance management among LRGs with the aim of eliminating a 'silo-based' approach and mainstreaming the SDGs across all planning levels.⁴⁰

Some countries underscore the need to introduce participation of LRGs and scale up the capacities of LRGs as a next step (Mozambique, Morocco, Zambia). A few countries highlight the inclusion of LRGs as a challenge (Papua New Guinea, Mozambique).

30 Argentina, Bulgaria, Burundi, Estonia, The Gambia, Georgia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Uzbekistan.

31 Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, Costa Rica, Finland, FSM, India, Kenya, Malawi, Moldova, Mozambique, Niger, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Uganda.

32 Benin, Bulgaria, FSM, The Gambia, Georgia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Samoa, Ukraine, Zambia.

33 Not all reports specify the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders in the SDG institutional structures.

34 Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, Comoros, DR Congo, Estonia, The Gambia, Georgia, Honduras, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Moldova, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Ukraine, Zambia.

35 Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, DR Congo, Estonia, The Gambia, Georgia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Moldova, Nepal, Nigeria, Panama, Seychelles, Uganda, Zambia.

36 Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, Estonia, The Gambia, Georgia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Nigeria, Panama, Seychelles, Slovenia, Uganda, Ukraine, Zambia.

37 Armenia, Bangladesh, Burundi, Comoros, The Gambia, Georgia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Ukraine, Zambia.

38 The Gambia, 'Voluntary National Review, June 2020. A report on the progress of implementation of SDGs', 2020, p. 30.

39 Papua New Guinea, 'Papua New Guinea's Voluntary National Review 2020 – Progress of Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 21.

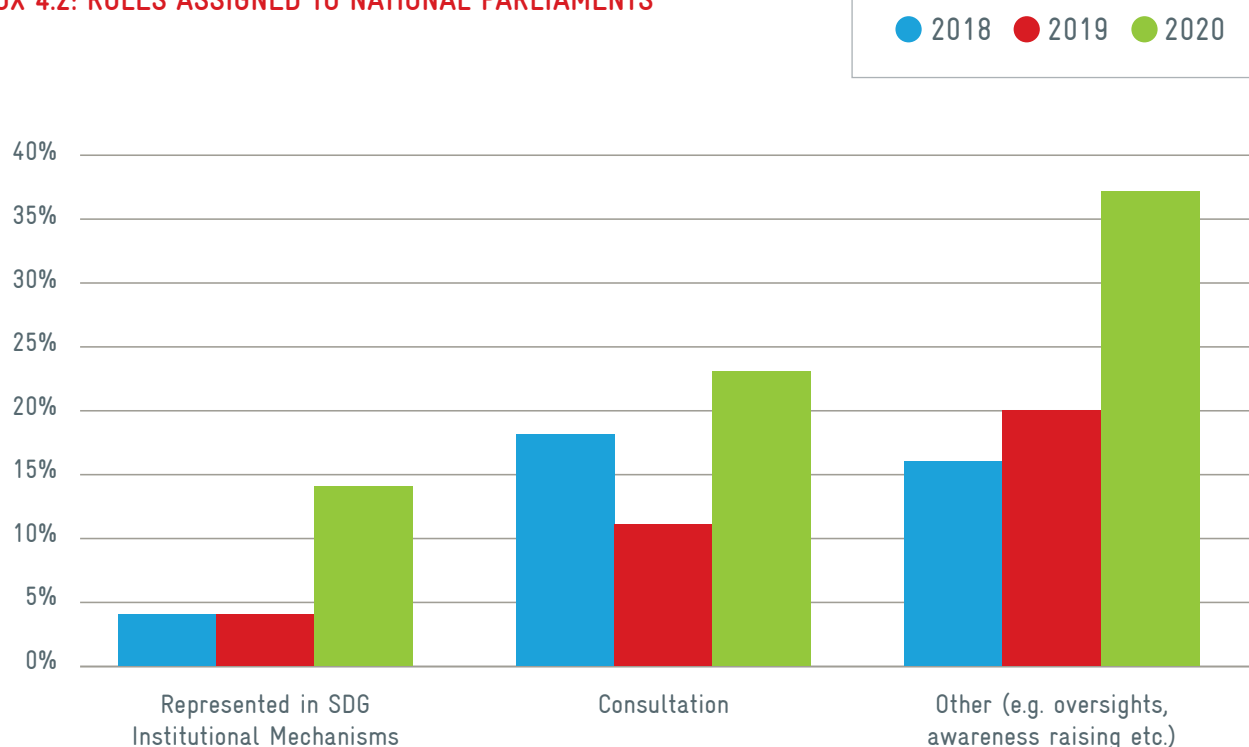
40 Republic of Kenya, 'Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 3.

4.2.2 PARLIAMENT

Parliament plays an increasingly prominent role in the VNR process and SDG efforts, reflecting a growing recognition of the need to ensure accountability in VNR and SDG implementation efforts. Oversight practices are gaining importance. A growing number of countries report on the role of parliament compared to previous years (Box 4.2) and increasingly, parliament is included in the SDG institutional framework or mechanism (Benin, Costa Rica, The Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mozambique, Russia). In addition to participation in the institutional SDG frameworks, parliament plays a range of roles, including an advisory (Bangladesh) as well as an oversight role (Argentina, Finland, Georgia, India, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Zambia). In some parliaments, SDG oversight is mandated to a specific committee or working group responsible for SDG-related matters (Argentina, Finland, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Zambia). For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, a parliamentary working group was created to monitor the enforcement of SDG-related legislation.

A number of countries consulted parliament (Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Moldova, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Uganda) or engaged parliament in SDG prioritisation processes (Comoros). Furthermore, parliament is highlighted in the context of SDG implementation efforts (Austria, Bulgaria, India), VNR- and SDG-related workshops and awareness-raising efforts (Kenya, Morocco, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Zambia) or partnership collaboration (Ecuador, Kenya). For instance, Ecuador's National Assembly has designed a methodology for the 'Open Parliament Action Plan with Civil Society', which aims to strengthen collaboration and enhance transparency, citizen engagement as well as access to information, ethics and integrity.⁴¹ In Kenya, the 'Kenya Parliamentary Caucus on SDGs and Business' was formed in 2017 to promote sustainable development and socially responsive business through legislation, resource mobilisation, oversight and partnerships. The caucus consists of eight parliamentary committees and staff from constituencies on SDG-related topics

BOX 4.2: ROLES ASSIGNED TO NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS



Source: Own calculation

41 Secretaría Técnica Planifica Ecuador, 'Examen Nacional Voluntario', 2020, p. 20.

and advocated for the SDGs and SDG localisation. An 'SDG Open Day' was held in 2019, which launched its 2019–2023 strategic plan.⁴²

4.2.3 SUPREME AUDIT INSTITUTIONS

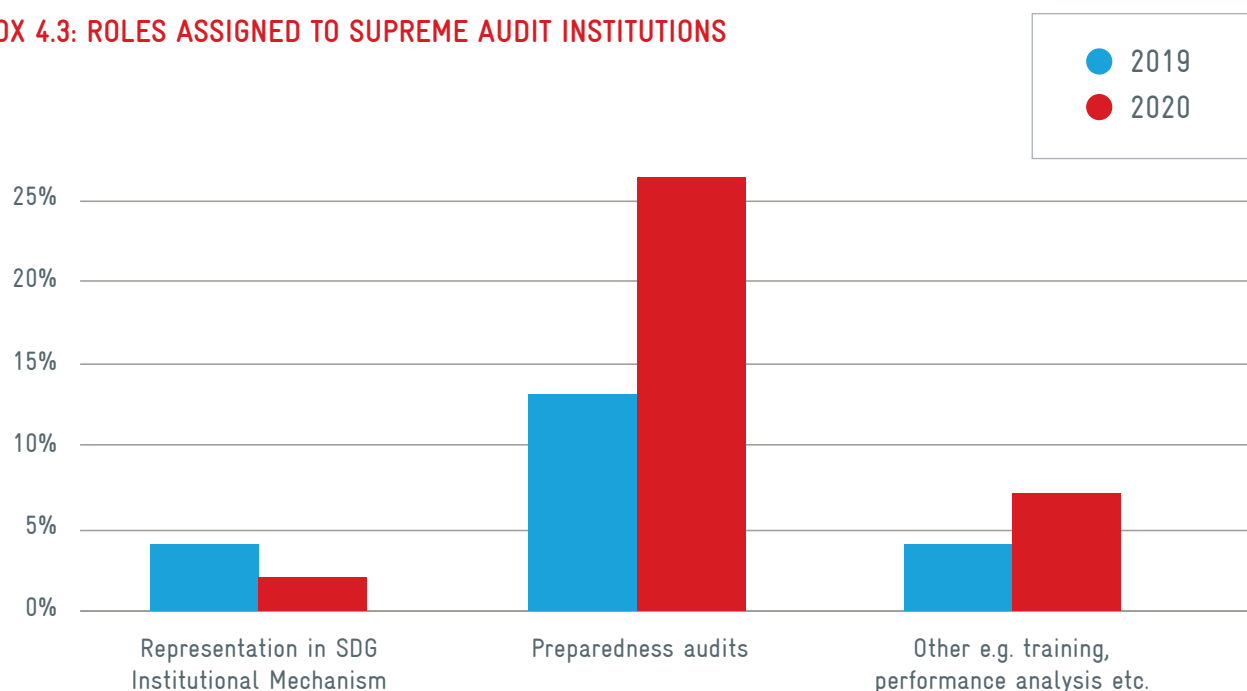
Around 30% of the 2020 VNR countries report on engaging SAIs in the VNR process or SDG implementation efforts (Box 4.3). Despite their growing role, SAIs are only included in the institutional SDG framework (Samoa) or consultations (Bangladesh) to a very limited extent. In most cases, SAIs performed audits or assessments to evaluate the government's level of preparedness to implement the SDGs.⁴³ In some cases, the audit covered subnational levels (FSM, Kenya) and examined integration and coherence (Kenya).

Although most audits and assessments concern all SDGs, Seychelles carried out a goal-specific audit, which assessed the coastal and marine environment according to SDG 14 (Life below water).

With support from the African Organisation of English-speaking Supreme Audit Institutions (AFROSAI-E) and GIZ, the audit identified gaps that exist in coastal management, highlighted gaps in implementation and recommended the establishment of the Seychelles Coastal Management Plan.⁴⁴

Some countries report on institutional reforms or recommendations to involve SAIs in the context of the national SDG-related efforts (Argentina, Morocco, Niger, Seychelles). Others report on specific capacity-building training to mainstream the SDGs in the mandates of the SAI (Argentina). Argentina's Institutional Plan 2018–2022 of the 'Auditoría General de la Nación' reflects its commitment to the 2030 Agenda. One of its strategic objectives is 'to contribute to the implementation, compliance and control of the targets of the SDGs' and provides a minimum number of audits to be carried out to address the SDGs. The plan also foresees the establishment of a database to record key observations. Furthermore, staff training is available as well as

BOX 4.3: ROLES ASSIGNED TO SUPREME AUDIT INSTITUTIONS



Source: Own calculation

⁴² Republic of Kenya, 'Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 13.

⁴³ Costa Rica, FSM, Georgia, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Zambia.

⁴⁴ Republic of Seychelles, 'Voluntary National Review 2020', 2020, p. 94.

a website: 'SDG-General Audit Office of Argentina – Transparency to ensure no one is left behind', which features SDG activities and information.⁴⁵

The growing role of SAls is reported, among others, by Finland, where there has been regular dialogue and information sharing on the SDGs between the government, Parliament and the National Audit Office since 2016. Finland's first government action plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda in 2017 identified national audits as part of the official four-year M&E cycle. The National Audit Office published an audit report in 2019 and increased the allocation of resources on performance work around the 2030 Agenda. The office is developing a model for integrating the SDGs as a part of all external auditing.⁴⁶

4.3 Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Some progress is reported on establishing M&E structures, reporting practices and frameworks. Around 35% of the reporting countries indicate that there is a separate unit in charge of the M&E of progress on the SDGs.⁴⁷ While these are specific mechanisms established for the sole purpose of monitoring and evaluating the SDGs, in some countries, M&E is integrated into existing structures (India, Liberia, Mozambique, Moldova, Nepal, Slovenia, Ukraine) or performed by the institutional SDG mechanisms (Armenia, Brunei Darussalam, DR Congo, The Gambia, Papua New Guinea). In a few countries, M&E of the SDGs has been allocated to specific ministries (Comoros, FSM, Slovenia) or to other entities (Nigeria, Georgia), including parliament, SAI and CSOs (Georgia).

Compared to 2019, there has been a slight increase in routine reporting – sometimes independently from the VNR process – with a number of countries highlighting the production of annual or biannual SDG progress reports or periodic stocktaking (Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, Estonia, India, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda). For instance, monitoring of the SDGs has been institutionalised in Kenya by preparing biennial progress reports in addition to the VNRs.⁴⁸ In some cases, platforms or national forums are established to support the national follow-up and review. In Argentina, the 'Monitoring Platform for the Agenda 2030', is a joint multistakeholder framework that seeks to disseminate the SDGs, support the monitoring process and foster localisation. In some cases, subnational monitoring frameworks are developed.⁴⁹ Subnational monitoring and stocktaking is also reported by India, where high-level committees at the state level meet periodically to oversee progress on the SDGs.⁵⁰ In Bangladesh, a 'National Conference on SDG Implementation Review' is organised biannually, gathering representatives from the government and multiple stakeholder groups to share plans, lessons learned and next steps.⁵¹ A number of specific (electronic) reporting platforms have been or are being established to foster multi-stakeholder engagement.⁵²

Some countries (Argentina, Costa Rica, Finland, Niger, Samoa) highlight specific – sometimes results-based – follow-up and review strategies, plans or roadmaps. Whereas these are distinct SDG strategic monitoring plans, a number of national SDG M&E strategic efforts are integrated into the development plan, vision or strategy (Bulgaria, FSM, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia) or linked to sector plans (Samoa).

45 Government of Argentina, 'Segundo Informe Voluntario Nacional Argentina 2020', 2020, p. 55.

46 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 23.

47 Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Burundi, Estonia, Finland, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Morocco, Niger, Uganda, Zambia.

48 Republic of Kenya, 'Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 4.

49 Government of Argentina, 'Segundo Informe Voluntario Nacional Argentina 2020', 2020, p. 57.

50 Government of India, 'India VNR 2020 – Decade of Action, Taking the SDGs from Global to Local', 2020, p. 21.

51 Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 'Voluntary National Review 2020 – Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development', 2020, p. 28.

52 Argentina, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, FSM, The Gambia, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Uganda.

Some countries have reported that M&E is a challenge due, for example, to weak institutional capacity (Benin, Comoros, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Samoa, Seychelles) or a lack of coordination of M&E across sectors and goals (Papua New Guinea). Whereas a number of countries have announced plans to strengthen M&E structures,⁵³ some highlight that the VNR process itself has in some cases triggered the strengthening of M&E efforts (Samoa, Ukraine). For instance, in Samoa, a 'National Indicators Matrix for the SDGs' was prepared during the VNR process. The matrix was developed by multiple stakeholders, including the statistical services, various sector representatives, the Ministry of Finance and the SDG Taskforce with the support of the UN System.⁵⁴

4.4 Reflections

VNR reporting on the national planning, coordination and review mechanisms reveals that institutional mechanisms have matured and advanced in a number of countries. This may be due to the number of countries carrying out second and third VNRs that built on institutional structures established in the context of the first or second VNR.

Most institutional frameworks and mechanisms are aligned with the 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approaches and aim to promote a coherent VNR and SDG implementation process, engaging government entities as well as major stakeholder groups, including CSOs, the private sector and the scientific community. However, coordination is still a challenge. Whereas there are

reports of horizontal coordination and representation of cross-sectoral government entities, vertical coherence and the participation of LRGs in the institutional councils, commissions, etc. remains a work in progress. Similarly, how best to feed Voluntary Local and Subnational Review results into the VNR process is still open to debate. Strengthened multilevel governance is needed to accelerate the SDG implementation in the next decade.

A significant increase is reported in parliamentary engagement and, to some degree, SAIs. To ensure neutrality, some SAIs deliberately do not participate in the VNR process but audit the process afterwards. For this reason, their participation in the SDG mechanisms may be marginal. Overall, their reported contributions in terms of oversight and assessment reflect a growing recognition of the need to ensure greater accountability and scrutiny to the national SDG implementation and review efforts.

The establishment of M&E structures and routine reporting has expanded compared to previous reporting years. Emerging trends include establishing platforms that help to institutionalise SDG M&E and engage stakeholders. Efforts and steps to continue investing in M&E include the strengthening of multistakeholder M&E, standardised procedures on the national review and follow-up, as well as furthering and developing local M&E structures. Furthermore, as more and more stakeholder groups are reporting on SDG progress, integrating these reporting efforts into SDG M&E mechanisms should be considered e.g. incorporating and aligning spotlight reports, Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews or other SDG reporting.

⁵³ Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Honduras, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Seychelles, Slovenia, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Ukraine.

⁵⁴ Government of Samoa, 'Samoa's Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, pp. 20–21.

5.0 SDG mainstreaming and policy coherence

THE 2030 AGENDA IS INTENDED TO INITIATE A FUNDAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE BY BUILDING ON THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSALITY, INTEGRATION AND THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. TRANSLATING THE 2030 AGENDA INTO NATIONAL AND SUBNATIONAL REALITIES REQUIRES APPROACHES THAT CONSIDER THE INTERLINKED NATURE OF THE SDGS ACROSS SECTORS AND ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY. ENSURING COHERENT MAINSTREAMING OF THE SDGS THROUGH INTEGRATED APPROACHES IS CRITICAL TO FAST TRACK THE PROGRESS OF THE GOALS IN THE NEXT DECADE, ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF THE SETBACKS CAUSED BY COVID-19. THE 2020 VNRS DEMONSTRATE HOW COUNTRIES APPROACH THE MAINSTREAMING OF THE SDGS INTO NATIONAL AND LOCAL REALITIES IN VARIOUS WAYS. APPROACHES RANGE FROM ADDRESSING THE INDIVIDUAL GOALS TO ENSURING POLICY COHERENCE, SDG LOCALISATION, SDG-RELATED LEGAL AND BUDGETING MEASURES, AND ADHERING TO THE PRINCIPLE OF 'LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND'.

5.1 SDG progress summaries

In the context of the 2020 HLPF thematic focus 'Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development', approximately 75% of the VNR countries reported on all the SDGs. In addition to the 17 goals, Estonia added Goal 18 'Viability of the Estonian Cultural Space', which aims to ensure the preservation of the Estonian nation, language and culture as an important priority of the Estonian sustainable development strategy 'Sustainable Estonia 21'.⁵⁵ A number of countries reported on a select number of goals (Burundi, Georgia, Honduras, Moldova, Nigeria, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia). For some landlocked countries, SDG 14 (Life below water) was considered not to be relevant (Kyrgyzstan, Zambia), however, Nepal argued that SDG 14 and the ecosystems of the oceans and seas are

interlinked and interdependent with the Himalayan and larger global ecosystem.⁵⁶

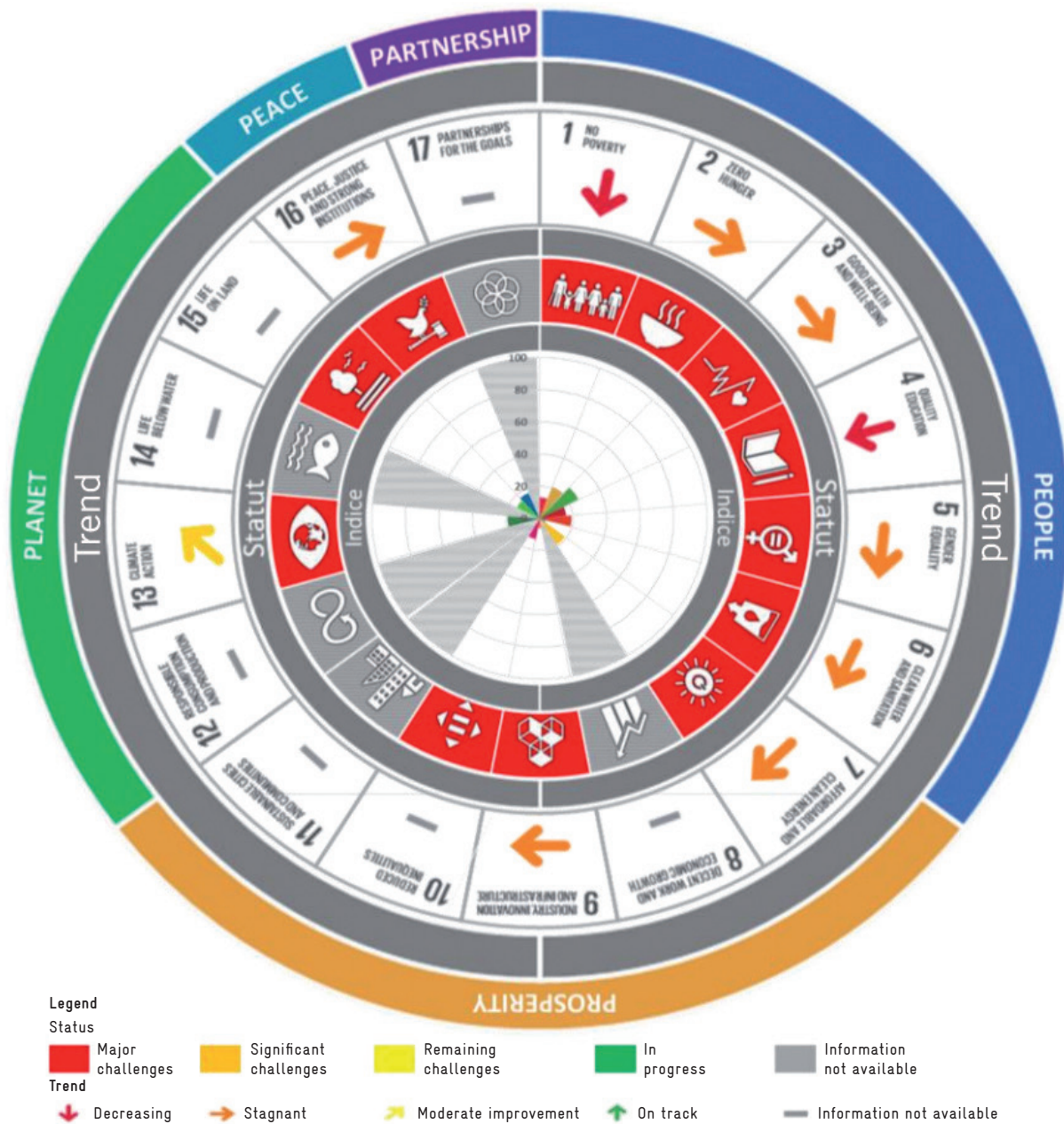
Most countries include references to self-assessment, however to different degrees. More than half of the countries include detailed overviews of progress on each SDG, in some cases at the target level in the form of tables, diagrams, indexes or snapshots. Finland has undertaken to commission an independent evaluation of the implementation of the SDGs every four years. A first evaluation was published in 2019 ahead of the government programme's preparations and the 2020 VNR. The evaluation will be conducted again in 2022-2023.⁵⁷ Benin's VNR report features a diagram indicating the state of play and trends for each SDG (Box 5.1).

⁵⁵ Republic of Estonia, 'Review of the Implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda in Estonia', 2020, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Nepal, 'National Review of Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 51.

⁵⁷ Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, pp. 100-101.

BOX 5.1: STATUS OF BENIN'S PROGRESS ON THE SDGS⁵⁸



(unofficial translation from the French original)

Some reports highlight the ranking based on external assessments, for instance according to the SDG index of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)⁵⁹ (Mozambique, Uganda).

5.2 Mainstreaming the SDGs and strengthening policy coherence

Mainstreaming the SDGs into policies, plans and strategies is a complex process that is subject to various national realities and circumstances. As no one size fits all, many types of approaches are reported including priority setting, the application of integrated approaches as well as mainstreaming the SDGs into sector and planning strategies, plans and processes.

5.2.1 PRIORITY SETTING

In most countries, the SDGs and related targets were reflected in national priorities.⁶⁰ In many cases, these are translated into key focus areas or pillars. For instance, Liberia defined four priority pillars of the 'Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development' (PAPD): i) 'Power to the People-To empower citizens with the tools to gain control of their lives through more equitable provision of opportunities in education, health, youth development and social protection' (women and vulnerable people with special needs); ii) 'The Economy and Jobs-Economic stability and job creation through effective resource mobilization and prudent management of economic inclusion'; iii) 'Sustaining the Peace-Promoting a cohesive society for sustainable development'; iv) 'Governance and Transparency-An inclusive and accountable public sector for shared prosperity and sustainable development'. The PAPD was developed through a participatory process including at local level.⁶¹

The National Development Strategy (NDS), vision or plan provided the framework for setting priorities in a number of countries (Armenia, FSM, Malawi, Panama, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia). For instance, the Seychelles' NDS 2019-2023 anchored the SDGs into six priority areas: i) Good governance, ii) People at the centre of development, iii) Social cohesion, iv) Innovative economy, v) Economic transformation, vi) Environment sustainability and resilience.⁶²

A number of countries specify processes that were applied to identify priorities, for instance through surveys (Brunei Darussalam, Mozambique), as a result of a campaign (DR Congo), or through participatory processes or workshops (Armenia, Burundi, Comoros, The Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique).

5.2.2 SDG INTERLINKAGES

Understanding and identifying the synergies and trade-offs between SDGs are a prerequisite for fostering coherent implementation of the SDGs. Countries have taken various measures to take into account the interlinkages between the SDGs. As highlighted in the previous chapter, many of the SDG institutional frameworks and mechanisms are designed to enable cross-cutting collaboration and SDG actions.

In the context of SDG mainstreaming, many countries recognise the importance of interlinkages⁶³ and some reports include elaborate feedback on the cross-cutting nature of the 2030 Agenda (Bulgaria, Finland, FSM, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago). Specific efforts include in-depth analyses and assessments (Bulgaria, Georgia, Mozambique) – including Rapid Integrated Assessments (RIA)⁶⁴ (DR Congo), mapping of trade-off policies (Kyrgyzstan) and multisectoral consultations (Mozambique). Finland has established several procedures for identifying synergies and trade-offs at the ministerial level, but high-

59 Sustainable Development Solutions Network's (SDSN) Africa SDG Index and Dashboards Report ranks 52 African countries based on 97 indicators. The dashboards help monitor progress and provide an overview of country as well as regional performance on the SDGs. The report focuses on the efforts that African governments are taking to incorporate the SDGs into their national strategies, budgets, public engagements and coordination between branches of government.

60 Armenia, Austria, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, Comoros, DR Congo, Estonia, Finland, FSM, The Gambia, Georgia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Moldova, Mozambique, Niger, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Uzbekistan.

61 Liberia, 'Voluntary National Review on the Implementation Status of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 19.

62 Republic of Seychelles, 'Voluntary National Review 2020', 2020, p. 12.

63 Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Estonia, Honduras, India, Liberia, Moldova, Nepal, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia.

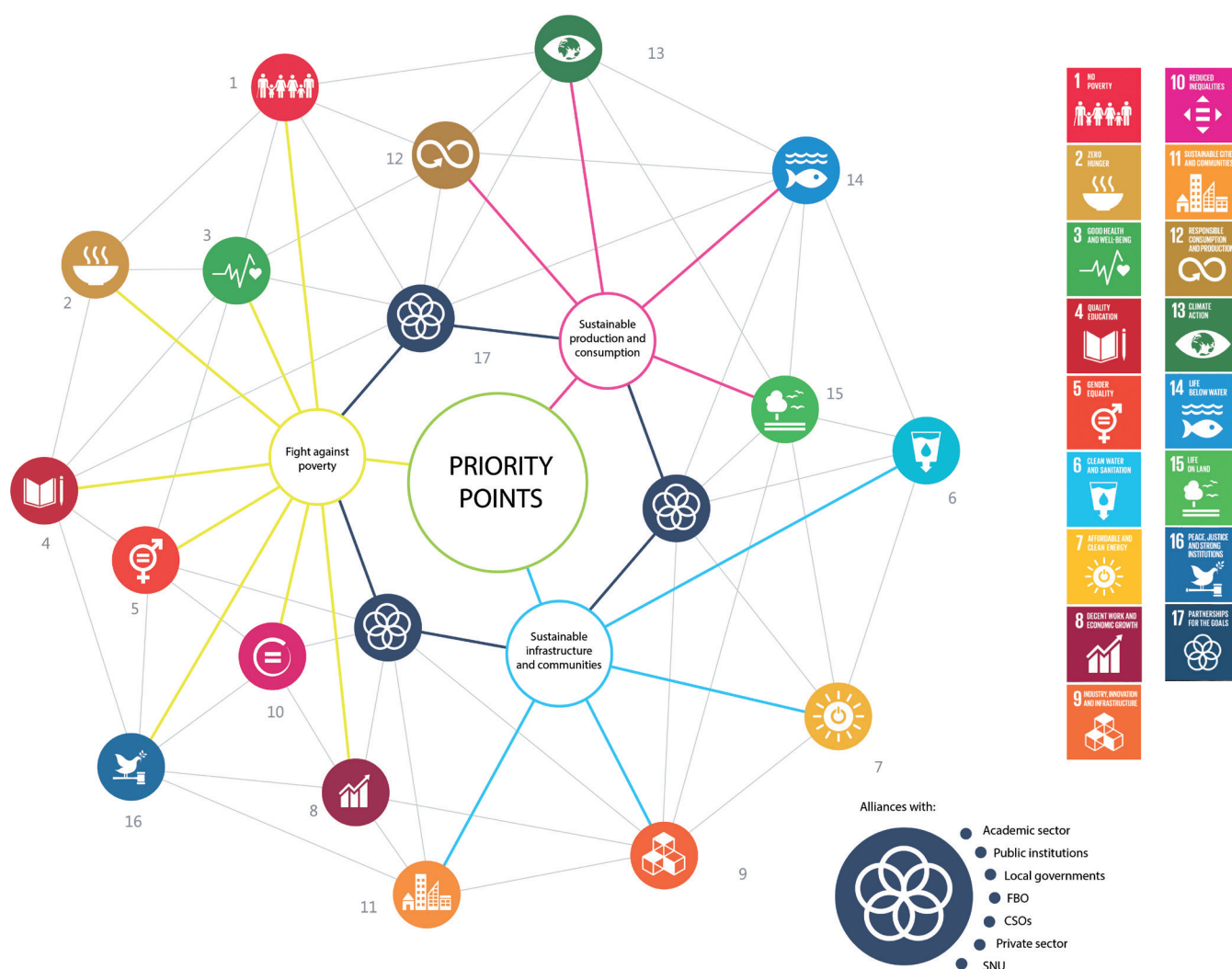
64 The UNDP Rapid Integrated Assessment tool aims to support countries in mainstreaming the SDGs into national and subnational planning by supporting the assessment of countries' readiness for SDG implementation.

lights that trade-offs are often difficult to reconcile as they entail politically sensitive issues and ideological differences.⁶⁵

Some countries highlight the mainstreaming of the SDGs through structuring efforts based on five thematic clusters: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership (Niger, North Macedonia). Others feature specific cross-cutting topics, such as climate change, gender and LNOB (Austria). Costa

Rica developed a comprehensive model based on three SDG mainstreaming entry points: i) combating poverty, ii) sustainable production and consumption and iii) sustainable infrastructure and communities. These entry points use a fundamental approach to foster exchange and synergies between SDGs and collaboration between stakeholders. Box 5.2 illustrates the relations between the SDGs through the lens of the three entry points.

BOX 5.2: ENTRY POINTS AND LINKAGES BETWEEN THE SDGs – COSTA RICA⁶⁶



⁶⁵ Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 55.

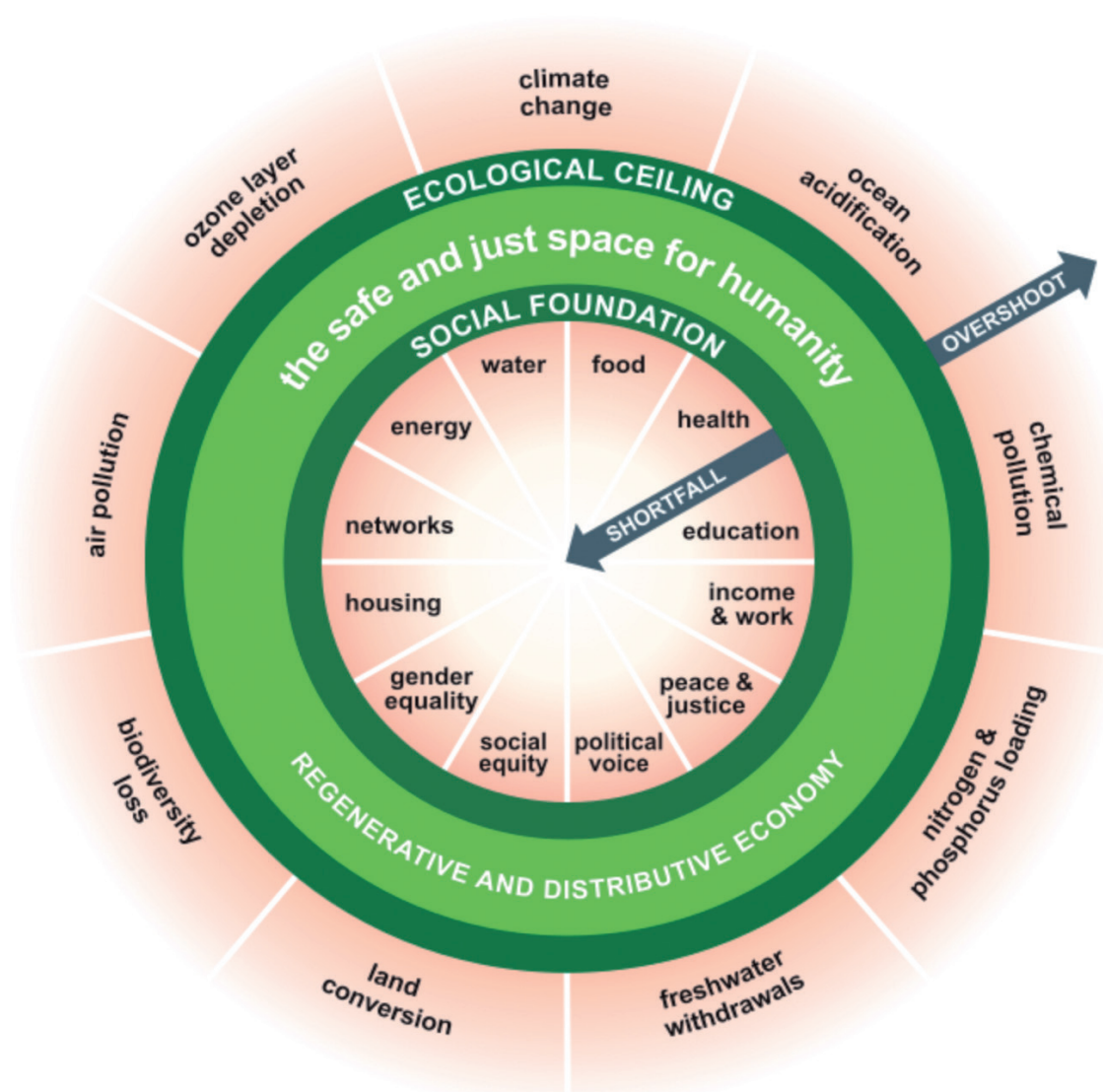
⁶⁶ Source: Costa Rica, 'II Voluntary National Review: Sustainable Development Goals Costa Rica 2020', 2020, p.18.

Specific tools are applied to support an integrated approach to SDG mainstreaming (DR Congo, Finland, Nigeria, Morocco, Uganda). In addition to the above-mentioned RIA, the Integrated Sustainable Development Goals Model (iSDG)⁶⁷ tool is applied (Nigeria, Uganda). The model is a policy simulation tool designed to help policy makers and stakeholders understand the interconnections between the SDGs. Furthermore, 'Doughnut Economics'⁶⁸ (Box 5.3) is highlighted (Finland) to help grasp the multi-

dimensional and interlinked nature of the SDGs.⁶⁹ Morocco's National Strategy for Sustainable Development includes a 'General Equilibrium Model', which makes it possible to analyse the coherence of public policies.⁷⁰

For a number of countries, applying an integrated approach to SDG mainstreaming and ensuring policy coherence is the next step.⁷¹ For instance, Benin indicates plans to establish a scoring system to

BOX 5.3: DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS⁷²



67 The Integrated Sustainable Development Goals Model (iSDG) of the Millennium Institute.

68 'Doughnut Economics' was developed by Kate Raworth and offers a vision of what it means for humanity to thrive in the 21st century. It is a visual framework for sustainable development combining the concept of planetary boundaries with the complementary one of social boundaries.

69 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 72.

70 Royaume du Maroc, 'Examen National Volontaire de la Mise en Oeuvre des Objectifs de Développement Durable', 2020, p. 11.

71 Benin, DR Congo, Ecuador, Finland, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Morocco, Trinidad & Tobago, Ukraine, Zambia.

72 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doughnut_\(economic_model\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doughnut_(economic_model))

evaluate the alignment of SDG implementation efforts at multiple levels of government.⁷³ DR Congo also mentions establishing a comprehensive coordination framework that covers all action undertaken to implement and monitor the SDGs.

5.2.3 SECTOR-SPECIFIC POLICIES, PLANS AND STRATEGIES

Whereas most of the reports highlight sectoral plans, policies and strategies of relevance to achieving the SDGs, only some countries have adopted specific national strategies for sustainable development and the SDGs (Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Niger, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea). Finland's national strategy entitled 'The Finland we want by 2050 – Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development' was adopted before the 2030 Agenda. The strategy was redrafted in 2016 by updating the key priorities in line with the SDGs.⁷⁴

In some cases, thorough reviews of existing measures are carried out. For instance in Georgia, existing strategies, action plans, the legislation and the national budget were reviewed against the SDGs. As a final step, a 'complexity analysis' was carried out to assess the degree to which achieving the SDG target in one area supported others. Finally, consultations contributed to developing and adopting the 'National Document on the Implementation of the SDGs'. In addition, the Georgian Parliament adopted a 'Strategy supporting the monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs in 2019'.⁷⁵

The countries highlight a broad mix of newly adopted sector-specific strategies and plans. In some cases these are mapped against the SDGs (Box 5.4). The 2020 VNRs feature significant reporting on environmentally related measures. Climate change efforts are highlighted,⁷⁷ including the status of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)⁷⁸ as well as the National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)

BOX 5.4: SECTORAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR ALIGNMENT WITH THE SDGS - BULGARIA⁷⁶



73 République du Bénin, 'Contribution nationale volontaire à la mise en oeuvre des ODD au Forum Politique de Haut Niveau', 2020, p. 51.

74 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 59.

75 Georgia, 'Voluntary National Review', 2020, pp. 6-14.

76 Bulgaria, 'Voluntary National Review – Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 21.

77 Argentina, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Costa Rica, Comoros, The Gambia, Finland, FSM, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, North Macedonia, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Ukraine.

78 Argentina, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Costa Rica, The Gambia, FSM, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Niger, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Ukraine.

adopted.⁷⁹ They also cover biodiversity (Argentina, Benin, Comoros, The Gambia, FSM, Mozambique, North Macedonia); green-growth strategies (India, Kyrgyzstan); aquaculture, oceans and fisheries (Burundi, Comoros, Estonia, The Gambia, India, Samoa, Solomon Islands); agriculture (Argentina, Armenia, Burundi, Estonia, The Gambia, Liberia, Morocco, Nepal); rural development (Malawi, Slovenia, Solomon Islands) and waste management (Kenya, Liberia, North Macedonia, Samoa, Solomon Islands), including strategic efforts to reduce food waste (Argentina, Slovenia). A number of countries highlight national Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies in response to the Sendai Framework for DRR (Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, India, Liberia, Morocco, Niger, Peru) as well as water strategies (Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, DR Congo, Nepal, Panama). In Austria, the Environment Agency has developed scientifically based 'SDG checks', which include a 'fitness check' and an in-depth ex ante SDG impact assessment for major strategies, measures and action plans in the making. The measures are defined under the SDG Action Plan 2019+ umbrella, which explains the internal processes and procedures for mainstreaming the SDGs in the areas of climate change, the environment, energy mobility, innovation and technology.⁸⁰

Some countries feature plans and strategic efforts to strengthen social protection and social security (Benin, DR Congo, The Gambia, Mozambique), as well as health (Burundi, Estonia, FSM, Mozambique, Nepal, Samoa, Slovenia, Uganda, Ukraine), education (Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Estonia, FSM, Mozambique, Nepal, Ukraine) and employment (Uganda). Other countries highlight strategies on protecting human rights (Argentina, Armenia, India, Panama) and promoting business and human rights (India, Panama).

A significant number of countries have adopted strategies and plans on gender,⁸¹ including gender-based violence (Argentina, Papua New Guinea) and action plans on women, peace and security

(Bulgaria, Moldova). As for other population groups, apart from strategies on youth (Austria, North Macedonia, Uganda, Ukraine) and persons with disabilities (Trinidad & Tobago), only one country reported on measures addressing older persons (Uganda).

Many strategic efforts in the energy sector are reported,⁸² including steps taken to scale up clean and renewable energy (Costa Rica, Georgia, Papua New Guinea). Strategies on industrial policy (Armenia, Burundi, DR Congo), transportation (Argentina, Brunei Darussalam, The Gambia) and tourism are also highlighted (Armenia, Austria, Ukraine).

Finally, a number of reports featured new strategies for developing statistics (Benin, FSM, The Gambia, India, Liberia, Moldova, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands).

5.2.4 MAINSTREAMING THE SDGS INTO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

In line with the 2019 VNR reporting, countries increasingly mainstream the SDGs into National Development Plans (NDPs). Around 30% of the 2020 VNR countries align the respective NDPs⁸³ and strategic frameworks⁸⁴ with the 2030 Agenda. Finland and North Macedonia state that the SDGs are mainstreamed into government work programmes.

To illustrate the mainstreaming of the SDGs and their alignment with NDP strategic priorities, The Gambia's report features an overview of the NDPs' national development priorities and the SDGs (Box 5.5). In addition to the SDGs, some countries highlight the mainstreaming of the SDGs into NDPs alongside other international agendas and frameworks (The Gambia, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago). For example, The Gambia's NDP mainstreams a number of international frameworks, including the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for DRR and the Istanbul Programme of Action.⁸⁵

79 Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burundi, Estonia, The Gambia, India, Liberia, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands.

80 Austrian Federal Chancellery, 'Austria and the 2030 Agenda. Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 17.

81 Armenia, DR Congo, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Mozambique, Moldova, Nepal, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Ukraine.

82 Armenia, The Gambia, Liberia, Moldova, Niger, North Macedonia, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Slovenia, Ukraine.

83 Benin, Burundi, Comoros, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Ecuador, The Gambia, Georgia, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Zambia.

84 Armenia, Estonia, FSM, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Peru, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Ukraine.

85 The Gambia, 'Voluntary National Review, June 2020. A report on the progress of implementation of SDGs', 2020, p. 10.

BOX 5.5: THE GAMBIA'S NDP PRIORITIES AND ALIGNMENT WITH THE SDGS⁸⁶**NDP PRIORITIES****SDGS**

Governance, Human Rights and Security Sector Reform					
Macroeconomic Stabilisation and Economic Management					
Modernised Agriculture, Agribusiness and Fisheries					
Human Capital Development (education, health & social protection)					
Infrastructure and Energy					
Tourism and Culture					
Private Sector Development and Trade					
Youth Development and Empowerment					
Strengthening Public Institutions					
Women's Empowerment					
Environment, natural resource management and climate change, and land use					
Diaspora in Development					
Information and Communication Technology					
Civil Society					
Date for Development					

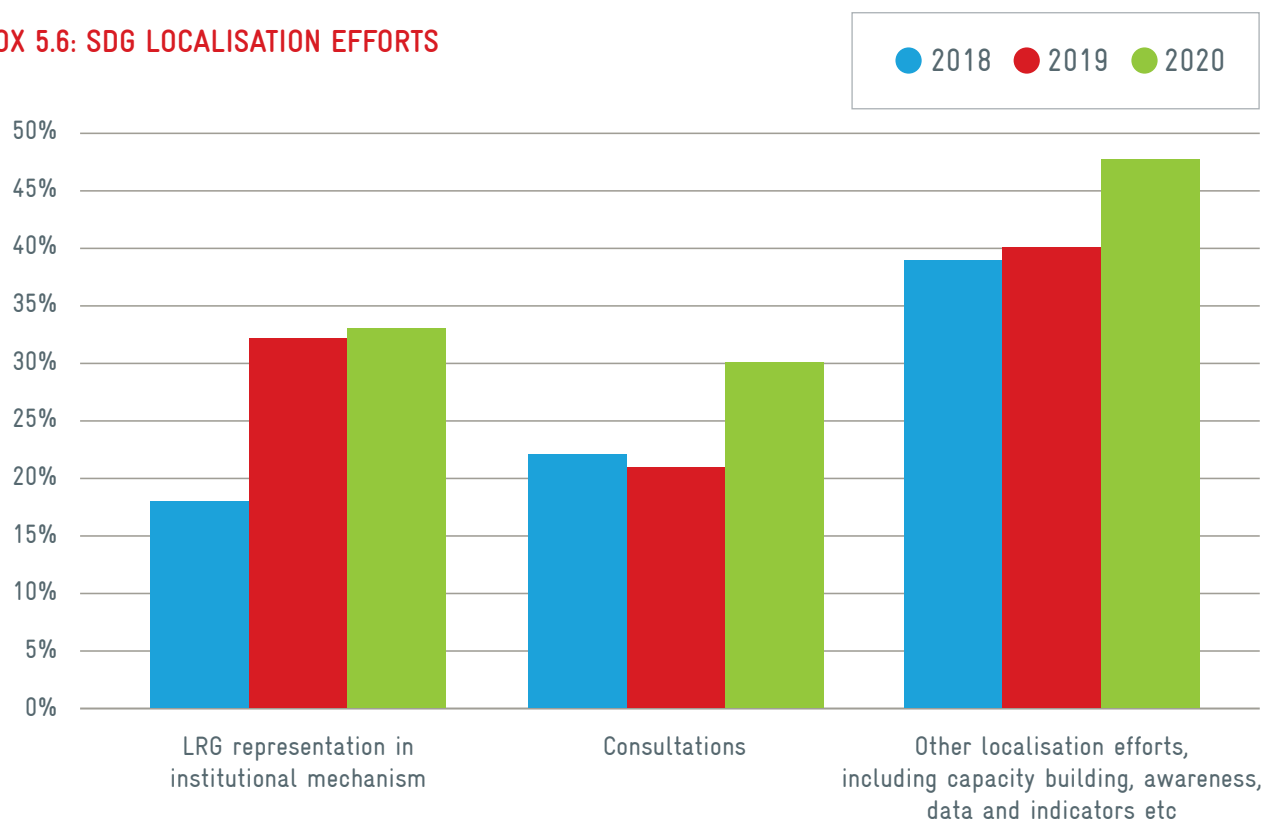
5.2.5 SDG LOCALISATION

The 2020 VNR countries report a growing focus on SDG localisation. Approximately 70% of the countries provide updates on localisation efforts and a number of reports feature a chapter on SDG localisation.⁸⁷ SDG localisation efforts take various forms such as establishing enabling environments, multilevel government collaboration and the inclusion of LRGs and local stakeholders. Nearly 30% of LRGs engage in the SDG institutional mechanisms (Box 5.6). In addition, approximately 50% of the 2020 VNR countries highlight LRG participation in consultations and workshops⁸⁸ or the launch and technical validation of the VNR (Niger, Nigeria). Other localisation efforts consist of on-site visits (Comoros), capacity building (Argentina, The Gambia, Kenya), mainstreaming the SDGs in local plans (DR Congo, Ecuador, Kenya, Nepal, Malawi, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea), awareness-raising activities (FSM, Honduras, Papua New Guinea), implementation and projects (Bulgar-

ia, Kyrgyzstan, Zambia), data collection (Kyrgyzstan, Papua New Guinea) and identifying local indicators (Papua New Guinea).

In some cases, national strategic efforts are created to enable localisation, such as an action plan to localise the SDGs (Georgia) or incorporating SDG localisation into the national strategy (Solomon Islands). In Ecuador, guidelines for updating 'Territorial Development and Planning Plans (PDOT)' link the 2030 Agenda to local development by emphasising the engagement of local stakeholders.⁸⁹ In a number of countries, LRG associations played a key role in VNR and SDG implementation efforts (Austria, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mozambique). In Costa Rica, the National Association of Municipalities of Costa Rica, the National Union of Local Governments (UNGL) and United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) developed an alliance with the aim

BOX 5.6: SDG LOCALISATION EFFORTS



Source: Own calculation

⁸⁷ Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Burundi, Finland, India, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea.

⁸⁸ Bangladesh, Benin, Bulgaria, Burundi, Estonia, FSM, The Gambia, Honduras, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Zambia.

⁸⁹ Secretaría Técnica Planifica Ecuador, 'Examen Nacional Voluntario', 2020, p. 31.

of facilitating SDG implementation in local government. As a result, a report was published on 'SDG localisation in local governments' that supports strategic localisation efforts to align planning and programming in Costa Rica.⁹⁰

An emerging trend is the development of Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews. Finland, Kenya and Uganda highlight Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews that were developed by specific LRGs, and The Gambia announced the establishment of a platform to develop Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews. Other SDG contributions that have

emerged at the local level are consultations (FSM, Slovenia, Uzbekistan) and the identification of local stakeholders (Slovenia).

A couple of countries are making headway to localise the SDGs through comprehensive approaches. For instance, India highlights 'The Indian approach to localising the SDGs', which is built on an enabling environment for local planning through greater fiscal decentralisation. The approach consists of various steps (Box 5.7), including training and guidelines to localise the SDGs, mainstreaming the SDGs into planning, awareness raising and con-

BOX 5.7: THE INDIAN APPROACH TO LOCALISING THE SDGS⁹¹



90 SD Secretariat Costa Rica, 'Second Voluntary National Review – Sustainable Development Goals Costa Rica', 2020, pp. 88–92.

91 Government of India, 'India VNR 2020 – Decade of Action, Taking the SDGs from Global to Local', 2020, p. 21.

sultations. In specific local contexts, institutional structures were created to support localisation efforts. As a result of the launch of the 'SDG India Index', structured SDG reviews were initiated in many states.⁹²

Argentina applies a comprehensive approach to support mainstreaming the SDGs at the provincial and municipal level, including by developing road maps and networks that support local planning (Box 5.8).

Benin is developing a consultation framework for LRGs. Benin's Directorate-General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs launched a 2030 Agenda competition on local projects that showcase the integration of the SDGs in local development actions (Box 5.9).

Continued efforts to localise the SDGs are listed as a key priority⁹³ e.g. finalising a framework and action plans for SDG localisation (Bangladesh), local plans (DR Congo, North Macedonia), decen-

BOX 5.8: SDG LOCALISATION IN ARGENTINA⁹⁴

A comprehensive approach to SDG localisation is practised in Argentina aimed at mainstreaming the SDGs at provincial and municipal level:

Roadmap for SDG localisation – provincial level

1. Signing of cooperation agreement between the national and provincial level to establish awareness raising, capacity building, technical assistance and to support the identification of local SDG targets.
2. Establishing a local focal point responsible for mainstreaming the SDGs.
3. Awareness-raising activities for LRGs and stakeholders.
4. Prioritisation and identification of links between the provincial strategic plan and the SDGs.
5. (Online) publication of provincial SDG progress reports.

Federal network of LRGs for the SDGs

- Established in 2018 to promote peer exchange between provincial governments.
- Establishment of an annual forum of the federal network in 2019.

Localisation at the municipal level

- In 2017, the 'Manual for the Local Adaptation of the SDGs' was published to provide methodological suggestions for incorporating the SDGs into municipal management and planning.

Roadmap for localisation – municipal level

1. Establishing a local team that will lead the process consisting of context analysis, identifying key actors and strategies and analysing institutional capacities.
2. Relating local management to the SDGs using a matrix to feature programmes, projects, targets, indicators, (gap) analysis and prioritisation of SDGs, identification of local targets, activities, challenges and budget allocation.
3. Monitoring.
4. Communication and dissemination to foster inclusion, participation, transparency and a public debate.

92 Government of India, 'India VNR 2020 – Decade of Action, Taking the SDGs from Global to Local', 2020, pp. 15–27.

93 Argentina, Bangladesh, DR Congo, The Gambia, India, Kenya, Nepal, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Zambia.

94 Source: Argentina, VNR 2020, p. 76–86.



tralisation (The Gambia), enhancing local capacities (Kenya, Nepal), incorporating LRGs in SDG-related decision-making processes (Honduras) and deepening the engagement with communities (Zambia).

5.2.6 INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION AND FRAMEWORKS

Nearly all countries make reference to international and regional cooperation and frameworks, with the majority emphasising the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for DRR. References to the hu-

man rights frameworks and various UN conventions are highlighted, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Finland highlights the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁹⁶ The SAMOA Pathway, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Istanbul Programme of Action feature in a number of reports (Box 5.10).

BOX 5.10: REFERENCES TO INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND CONVENTIONS RANKED BY MOST REFERENCED

Framework	2020 VNR Country
Paris Agreement	Argentina, Austria, Brunei Darussalam, Comoros, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia
Sendai Framework on DRR	Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, FSM, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Nepal, North Macedonia, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	Argentina, FSM, Liberia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Ukraine
Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA)	Comoros, DR Congo, Estonia, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Samoa
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Argentina, Comoros, DR Congo, FSM, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago
United Nations Human Rights Mechanism and the Universal Periodic Review	Argentina, Bulgaria, Mozambique, Niger, Papua New Guinea
SAMOA Pathway	Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Austria, FSM, India, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda
UN Convention on the Law of the Sea	Brunei Darussalam, Ecuador, Estonia, Papua New Guinea, Trinidad & Tobago
Istanbul Programme of Action	Malawi, Moldova, Samoa

96 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 89.

Most countries make reference to international co-operation – particularly in the context of the UN – including the Regional Economic Commissions or support from UN agencies. Furthermore, there are references to initiatives and collaboration in the context of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Argentina, Costa Rica, Ukraine) and the World Bank (Georgia, Nepal).

Many countries highlight promoting sustainable development through regional cooperation. In this context, a number of African countries reference aligning their sustainable development priorities with the African Union Agenda 2063 (Benin, Burundi, The Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Seychelles, Zambia) as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Liberia, Mozambique, Uganda).

A number of countries underscore collaboration on sustainable development in the context of the European Union (EU),⁹⁷ including the EU Council Working Group for the 2030 Agenda (Slovenia). Furthermore, countries highlight SDG integration into the EU's economic coordination instruments (Estonia), specific frameworks on regional cooperation (Bulgaria, Ukraine), EU4Climate (Armenia), the European Green Deal (Slovenia) and the promotion of sustainable farming through the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (Estonia, Slovenia).

Asian and Pacific countries mainly reference regional collaboration on sustainable development in the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Nepal), the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) (Brunei Darussalam), Ministerial Conferences on Environment and Development (Bangladesh), the Eurasian Economic Union (Kyrgyzstan) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (Papua New Guinea).

Latin American VNR countries mostly highlight collaboration on the SDGs through the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (Argentina, Costa Rica, Honduras), including the work of the Statistical Coordination Group for the 2030 Agenda.

5.3 Budget

Feedback on budgeting for the SDGs varies in the reports. Often no specific budget is outlined, however, links to national expenditure are highlighted. In many countries, SDG spending is aligned with or incorporated into the national budget or public spending frameworks.⁹⁸ Some countries have carried out cost analyses to determine financing needs for SDG implementation (Bangladesh, Benin, DR Congo, Georgia, North Macedonia). North Macedonia's report contains an analysis of potential SDG financing from all sources (2008–2017) and potential per capita SDG financing. It also outlines how much official development assistance was spent per SDG.⁹⁹

While some countries underline the importance of SDG budgeting (Austria, Ukraine), there are common budget-related challenges in SDG budget allocation (Moldova, Mozambique), funding gaps (Liberia, Niger, Nepal), SDG resource mobilisation (DR Congo, Nepal) and a lack of financing (Malawi).

Some countries are planning to strengthen SDG budgeting efforts (Benin, FSM, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia), e.g. by including SDG priorities into national budgeting (Georgia, FSM, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Nigeria, Trinidad & Tobago). For instance, Georgia plans to link SDG targets to budgeting and undertake a detailed review of national and sub-national budgets vis-à-vis the SDGs. Benin highlighted the need to finalise budgeting, identify financing gaps and establish a resource mobilisation strategy. Mozambique also underscores the need to strengthen resource mobilisation and plans to establish a planning and budgeting system, including a reform of the 'Official Development Assistance Financing Database' aimed at improving the monitoring of SDG financing.¹⁰⁰

97 Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Ukraine.

98 Benin, Bulgaria, Finland, The Gambia, Kenya, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Zambia.

99 North Macedonia, 'Voluntary National Review 2020, 2020', p. 18.

100 Mozambique, 'Report. Voluntary National Review of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development', 2020, pp. 80–85.

5.4 Legal measures

A number of countries report on new legal or constitutional provisions aimed at regulating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In many cases, these concern reporting on measures of relevance to specific goals and sustainable development objectives.¹⁰¹

Whereas most countries list specific legislation of relevance to the SDGs, some countries introduced comprehensive framework legislation for the 2030 Agenda as a whole (Austria, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ukraine), including the approval of national sustainable development strategies (Bangladesh). In some cases, measures were adopted that support SDG mainstreaming into NDPs (Ecuador, Kenya, Papua New Guinea). Ecuador highlights the adoption of a presidential decree that promotes greater interinstitutional links to foster SDG implementation. The measure has been instrumental in identifying responsibilities and mandates that are aligned to the SDGs and link to national planning, M&E and the development of statistical capacities.¹⁰² In Ukraine, the presidential decree on 'The Sustainable Development Goals for Ukraine up to 2030' was adopted in 2019. The decree aims to use the SDGs as benchmarks for drafting forecast and policy documents and regulatory legal acts to ensure balanced implementation of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The monitoring of the SDGs was also institutionalised by law.¹⁰³

5.5 Leaving no one behind

Apart from a few countries, most of the 2020 VNR countries address the principle of LNOB. Approximately 60% of the 2020 VNR reports included specific sections on the principle of LNOB.¹⁰⁴ Some reports feature chapters on women (Austria, Costa Rica), youth (Austria), refugees (Costa Rica), persons with disabilities (Bulgaria) and indigenous peoples (Finland). Finland's VNR report includes a section about the Sami people written by the Sami Parliament.¹⁰⁵

There are various types of efforts that address the principle of LNOB. While most countries express their commitment to the principle, only a few countries highlight comprehensive approaches to LNOB (Austria, Bangladesh, Georgia, Liberia). In Austria and Georgia, LNOB is a leading cross-cutting national sustainable development priority. A couple of countries have comprehensive government approaches to LNOB (Bangladesh, Liberia) or an action plan for equality (Morocco).

Generally, countries focus on vulnerable groups, however a few highlight the significance of regional disparities in the context of LNOB (Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Nigeria). Kyrgyzstan's comprehensive reporting on LNOB included an analysis of geographical vulnerability.¹⁰⁶ (Box 5.11)

Some countries identify specific vulnerable groups (Bangladesh, The Gambia, Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, North Macedonia, Samoa) and others have conducted an analysis and review (Argentina, Finland, Moldova, North Macedonia); for instance, North Macedonia highlights an LNOB analysis with support from the UN.¹⁰⁷ Measures mainly target the following groups: persons with disabilities,¹⁰⁸ women (Benin, DR Congo, Ecuador, Finland, Malawi, Niger, North Macedonia, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia), indigenous peoples (Finland, Honduras, Panama) and youth (Austria, Finland, Georgia, Kenya, Malawi, Niger), e.g. establishing the 2030 Agenda Youth Group (Finland). Other groups highlighted are refugees/migrants (Austria, Kenya, Niger, North Macedonia), children (Austria, Burundi, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Niger, Panama, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia), internally displaced/stateless people (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Trinidad & Tobago), older persons (Austria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, North Macedonia, Panama, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia), the LGBTIQI community (Ecuador, India, North Macedonia), ethnic minorities (Georgia) and people living in rural areas/farmers (India, North Macedonia).

Ad hoc measures that target the vulnerable range from policies (Costa Rica, DR Congo, The Gambia, Zambia), social protection measures (Benin, Bulgaria, Mozambique, Niger, Panama), projects and

101 Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Burundi, Comoros, DR Congo, Estonia, FSM, The Gambia, Georgia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, North Macedonia, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Ukraine.

102 Secretaría Técnica Planifica Ecuador, 'Examen Nacional Voluntario', 2020, p. 31.

103 Ukraine, 'Voluntary National Review', 2020, p. 9.

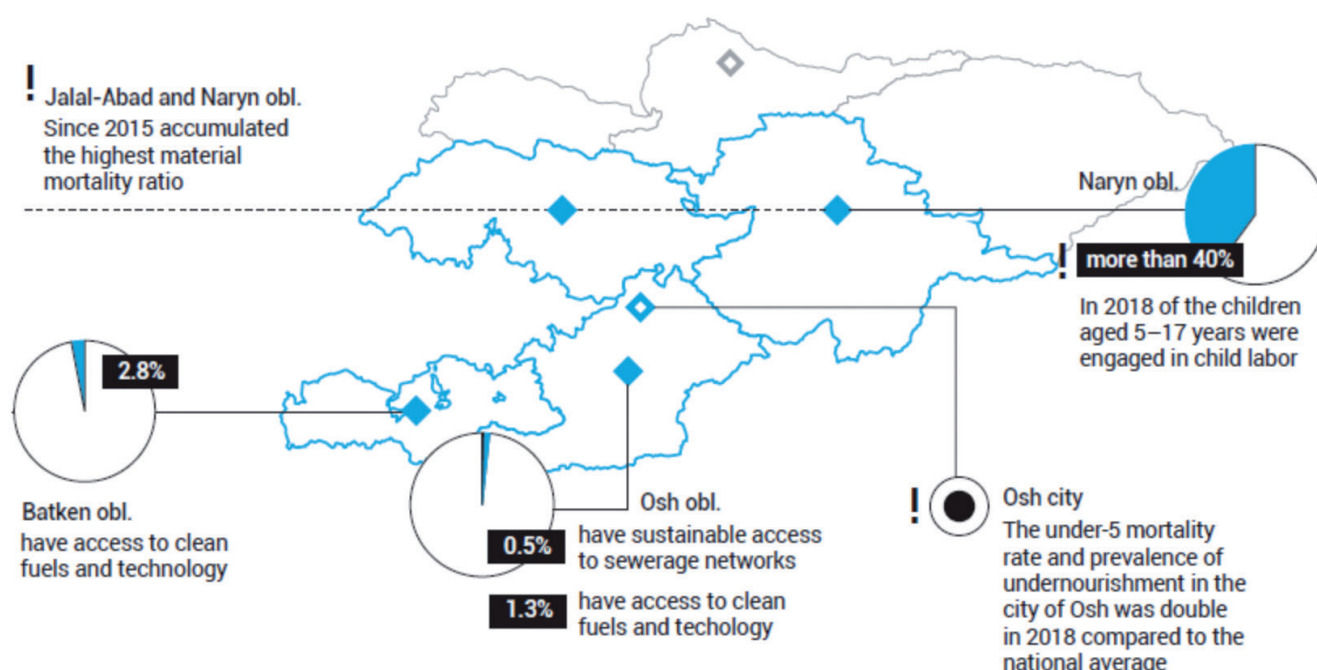
104 Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Bulgaria, Comoros, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Finland, FSM, The Gambia, Georgia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Uganda.

105 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, pp. 86–89.

106 The Kyrgyz Republic, 'Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic', 2020, p. 32.

107 North Macedonia, 'Voluntary National Review', 2020, p. 15.

108 Bangladesh, Burundi, DR Congo, Finland, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago.

BOX 5.11: ANALYSIS OF GEOGRAPHICAL VULNERABILITY – KYRGYZSTAN¹⁰⁹

programmes (Bangladesh, Benin, Morocco, Mozambique), coordination efforts (Solomon Islands), and legal measures adopted (The Gambia, DR Congo, Mozambique, Nepal) to SDG localisation initiatives supporting LNOB (Uganda). In addition, awareness raising (Comoros, Liberia) and consultations among vulnerable groups are highlighted (India, Seychelles, Solomon Islands) as well as a few data-related initiatives (Argentina, Bangladesh, Bulgaria). In 2019, Bulgaria launched the 'Novel Approaches to Generating Data on Hard-to-Reach Populations at Risk of Violation of the Rights' in cooperation with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.¹¹⁰ Bangladesh highlights the local prioritisation of specific indicators for LNOB and specific support to tackle them.¹¹¹

Some countries (Argentina, DR Congo, The Gambia, Samoa) underscore the strengthening of efforts to protect human rights, e.g. by applying a human rights-based approach to sustainable development

(Samoa) or implementing a National Human Rights Action Plan 2017–2020 (Argentina).

A few countries highlight the important role of civil society in the context of LNOB (Austria, Comoros, Finland). In Austria, a 'Dialogue Forum on Leaving no one behind' with civil society has been in place since early 2019. At five workshops held throughout the country, over 400 stakeholders were engaged in discussions on the challenges and requirements involved in mainstreaming the SDGs. Dialogue forums are considered instrumental in promoting stakeholder collaboration and raising awareness of numerous aspects of relevance to LNOB, such as including persons with disabilities, decent work for young people, participation in society by older persons, the fight against poverty and inequality as well as the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Kyrgyz Republic, 'Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic', 2020, p. 32.

¹¹⁰ Bulgaria, 'Voluntary National Review – Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 33.

¹¹¹ Bangladesh, 'Voluntary National Review 2020 – Accelerated action and transformational pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development', 2020, p. 162.

¹¹² Austrian Federal Chancellery, 'Austria and the 2030 Agenda. Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 19.

5.5 Reflections

Progress on mainstreaming the SDGs is critical particularly as action to meet the goals is not yet advancing at the scale required. With only ten years remaining, the need to accelerate the mainstreaming of the SDGs was reflected in some VNRs, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Analysis of the 2020 VNRs indicates that a mix of approaches is applied to mainstream the SDGs. While some initiatives aspire to achieve coherent implementation of the SDGs, e.g. by mainstreaming the SDGs into NDPs, many sustainable development contributions are still reported in the context of sector-based strategies, plans and measures. Although these strategies make important contributions to sustainable development, an analysis of how they interrelate, including their trade-offs, is limited. A few initiatives that aim to build on the interlinkages within the SDGs are applied, e.g. by means of simulation models or other tools that grasp the multidimensional nature of the Agenda, such as the iSDG or 'sustainable development doughnut'. Other initiatives link the 2030 Agenda with international or regional frameworks through integrated planning and long-term strategies.

Progress on SDG localisation is advancing with some countries making headway in mainstreaming the SDGs at local level. Scaling up localisation through effective multilevel governance approaches is critical to accelerating progress on the SDGs. COVID-19 has further uncovered the importance of SDG localisation as LRGs are often at the frontline of responding to the pandemic. It is therefore more pertinent than ever to strengthen enabling environments and SDG localisation initiatives. How best to feed local efforts, including Voluntary Local and Subnational Review results, into the VNR process is still open to debate.

Reporting on legal and budgetary aspects indicates a need for further systematic approaches. Although countries highlight a range of legal measures, most are sector-specific. The SDGs are increasingly integrated into national budgets and some countries have carried out a cost analysis of the goals. However, systematic SDG budgeting is needed and an itemised breakdown of financing for the SDGs from non-government sources, including the private sector. This will help to broaden the means of implementation and pave the way for increased private-sector engagement and innovative financing solutions.

COVID-19 has similarly added urgency to the implementation of the principle of LNOB. The pandemic's severe socio-economic impacts call for an integrated approach to LNOB through multisector initiatives. The importance of the principle is recognised by the 2020 VNR countries although comprehensive approaches to LNOB remain limited. Various LNOB mainstreaming efforts are highlighted, such as policies, programmes and measures that address specific groups, many targeting women and youth. Although a few countries highlight LNOB as a leading cross-cutting sustainable development priority, more robust approaches are needed to step up efforts to address the rising inequalities and the severe impact on specific groups as a result of COVID-19. This calls for a people-centred, inclusive and human rights-based approach that underscores the relevance of the principle of LNOB.

To accelerate progress on SDG mainstreaming, all levels of government need to step up their multidimensional, systemic and integrated approaches. Coherent and comprehensive mainstreaming efforts can be fostered, for example, by developing guidelines and applying tools to build on the SDG synergies, strengthened multilevel governance and SDG localisation, as well as multisector approaches to LNOB.

6.0 Stakeholder engagement

THE 2030 AGENDA CALLS FOR ENGAGING ALL RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS AS A MEANS OF ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. AS RECOGNISED THROUGHOUT THE AGENDA, ESPECIALLY IN SDG 17, INCLUSIVE SDG REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES, PARTICULARLY THROUGH MULTISTAKEHOLDER APPROACHES AND PARTNERSHIPS, ARE ESSENTIAL TO CATALYSE TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE WITHIN AND THROUGHOUT COUNTRIES. THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTISTAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS WAS REITERATED IN THE POLITICAL DECLARATION OF THE 2019 SDG SUMMIT,¹¹³ WHICH RECOGNISES THE NEED TO CREATE 'DURABLE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AT ALL LEVELS, AND WITH ALL RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING CIVIL SOCIETY, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, ACADEMIA AND YOUTH', ENCOURAGING ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO ACCELERATE THEIR ACTION AND EFFORTS.

6.1 Multistakeholder approaches

Nearly all of the 2020 VNR countries have applied a whole-of-society approach¹¹⁴ and engaged various types of non-government stakeholders in their VNR and SDG review and implementation efforts (Box 6.1).

The 2020 VNR reports reveal that multistakeholder approaches are, for the most part, applied in consultative processes and workshops (Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, DR Congo, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Samoa, Slovenia, Ukraine). The COVID-19 pandemic, however, led in some cases to delays and cancellations (Liberia, Solomon Islands) or to consultations moving online,¹¹⁵ occasionally resulting in broader stakeholder engagement depending on digital capacity and access. Other efforts to ensure stakeholder engagement consist of mapping (Argentina), awareness raising (Argentina), and online surveys (Bulgaria, Trinidad & Tobago).

Increasingly, there are reports of frameworks and platforms aimed at strengthening multistakeholder approaches (Argentina, Brunei Darussalam, Costa Rica, Finland, The Gambia, Georgia, Moldova, Peru). These are established for multiple purposes, including to support consultations (Peru), facilitate M&E and data collection (Argentina, Moldova) or to implement the SDGs (Brunei Darussalam, Finland, Georgia). Costa Rica's VNR process was built on the 'National Pact for the Advancement of the SDGs', which is a multistakeholder framework aimed at aligning national priorities with the 2030 Agenda. Guided by a roadmap for stakeholder engagement, the pact ensures the participation of a broad spectrum of representatives.¹¹⁶ The 'Peru 2030' platform facilitates multistakeholder consultations to gather the views on the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda in the country. The platform

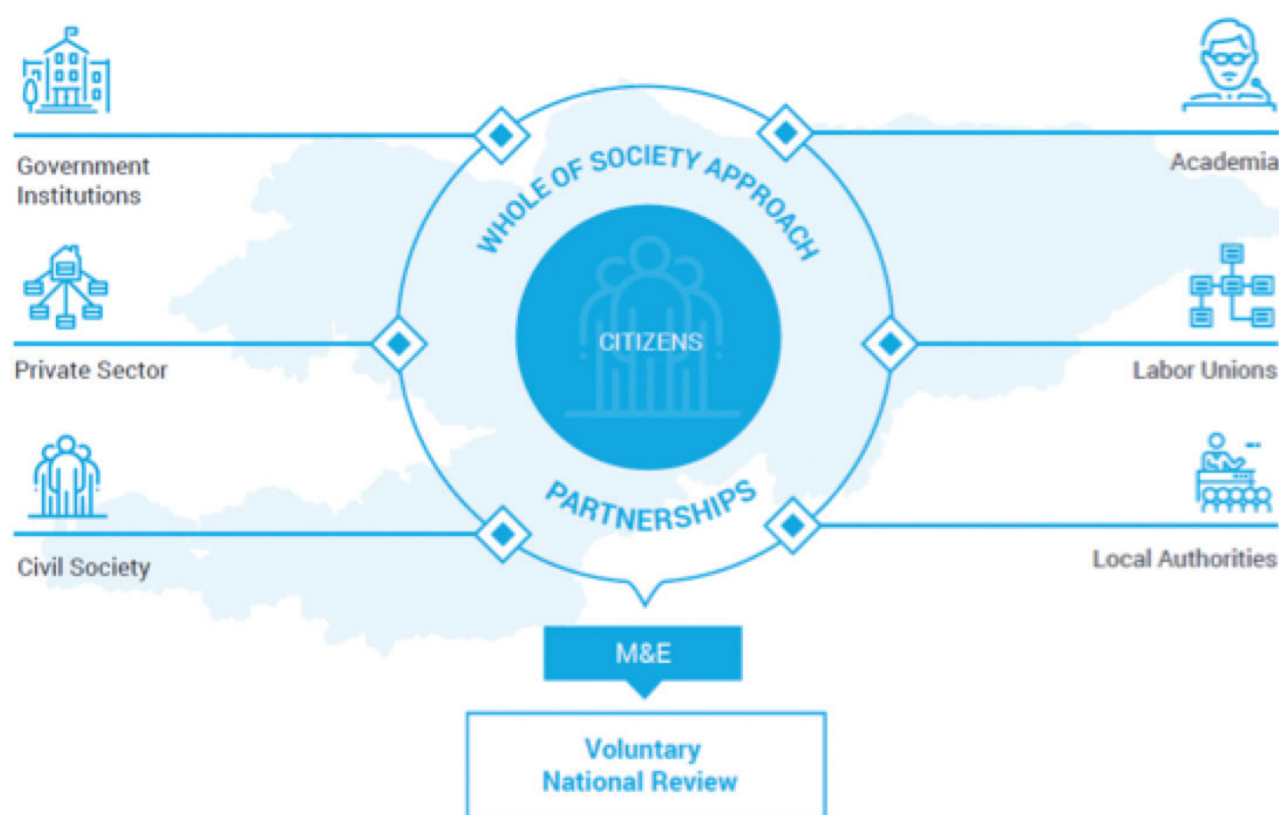
¹¹³ United Nations, 'Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development', A/HLPF/2019/L.1, 2019.

¹¹⁴ Armenia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burundi, Comoros, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, FSM, The Gambia, Georgia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Samoa, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Zambia.

¹¹⁵ Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Comoros, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Estonia, FSM, The Gambia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, North Macedonia, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Zambia.

¹¹⁶ Costa Rica, 'Second Voluntary National Review – Sustainable Development Goals, Costa Rica', 2020, p. 52.

BOX 6.1: 'WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY' APPROACH TO THE VNR PROCESS OF KYRGYZSTAN¹¹⁷



is developed according to the six axes defined by the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2019.¹¹⁸ Finland's 'The Finland we want by 2050 – Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development' is an important framework that facilitates participation. It provides a tool for anyone who wants to participate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with concrete action. As part of the tool, a 'Sustainable Lifestyles –service' enables citizens to pursue a more sustainable lifestyle by calculating their carbon footprint.¹¹⁹

Despite efforts to strengthen multistakeholder engagement, there are several challenges, including

coordinating stakeholders (The Gambia, Slovenia), stakeholder capacities, building a consensus (Mozambique), reaching remote areas (Solomon Islands) and time constraints (Argentina, Kenya, Liberia) – some due to COVID-19.

A number of countries highlight a need to strengthen multistakeholder engagement (Austria, Costa Rica, Honduras, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Slovenia, Uzbekistan). For instance, North Macedonia is planning to establish a multistakeholder platform for all activities and statistical data related to the 2030 Agenda.

¹¹⁷ The Kyrgyz Republic, 'Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic', 2020, p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Perú, 'Informe Nacional: Perú a mayo 2020. La Protección de la Vida en la Emergencia y Después', 2020, Annex, p. 146.

¹¹⁹ Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 95.

6.2 Stakeholder groups

CSOs, the scientific community, the private sector and a number of other stakeholders are engaged in or contribute to the VNR and SDG implementation efforts.

6.2.1 CIVIL SOCIETY

The 2020 VNR reports demonstrate that civil society represents the stakeholder group most frequently involved in VNR and related processes in a number of ways. In addition to CSO representation in SDG institutional mechanisms,¹²⁰ CSOs participate in the review process through consultations,¹²¹ dialogue and interviews (Panama, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago), questionnaires (Estonia, Mozambique, North Macedonia, Panama, Solomon Islands), technical VNR workshops (Burundi, DR Congo, North Macedonia) or in the review and validation of the VNR report (Burundi, Georgia, Liberia, Niger, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Zambia). CSOs in Finland wrote parts of the VNR,¹²² and 'Editorial committees' in CSOs in Austria were also closely involved in the writing of the VNR report.¹²³

The reports mention some specific civil society groups including organisations representing women (Burundi, Liberia, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger), young people,¹²⁴ persons with disabilities,¹²⁵ children (Mozambique), older persons (Seychelles, Slovenia), the LGBTQI community (India, Slovenia) and human rights organisations (Kenya, Moldova), including the Human Rights Ombudsman & Advocate (Kyrgyzstan, Slovenia). Some efforts to engage local CSOs in consultations were reported (Burundi, Mozambique, Slovenia, Uzbekistan).

A number of countries reported initiatives that aim to institutionalise and step up CSO engagement, for instance by means of a civil society development strategy (Moldova), a stakeholder engagement plan

(Zambia), specific CSO working groups (Kyrgyzstan) or platforms to help coordinate CSO engagement (Austria, Benin, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Kenya, Nepal). Examples of the latter are the 'SDGs Kenya Forum' or Benin's 'Framework for civil society consultation', which brings together CSOs in four thematic working groups: i) social: CSOs working on SDG 1–6, ii) economic: CSOs working on SDG 7–11; iii) environmental: CSOs working on SDGs 12–15; and iv: governance: CSOs working on SDG 16. The framework serves as a platform for cooperation and consultation where CSOs share lessons learned and draw up a spotlight report. The aim is to ensure the CSOs are involved in the implementation and M&E of the SDGs.¹²⁶

Increasingly, SDG progress is reviewed by the CSOs themselves in the form of spotlight or shadow reports (Benin, Kenya, Mozambique, Slovenia, Uganda). These are often conducted in parallel with the VNR process and aim to inform the VNR. In some cases, spotlight reports are referenced, or links are included in the VNR (Kenya). In addition to SDG reporting, other CSO contributions which are referenced in the VNRs include awareness-raising efforts (Moldova, Zambia); support in monitoring the SDGs, including CSO reports for data collection (Papua New Guinea); or data validation workshops (Samoa).

Some countries highlight the strengthening of CSOs as a next step (Nepal, Slovenia, Zambia), including strengthening space for CSOs to contribute to SDG-related processes (Nepal), better incorporation of CSO contributions (Slovenia) and capacity building of civil society (Zambia).

6.2.2 PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector is represented in approximately half of the institutional SDG frameworks and mechanisms.¹²⁷ In addition, the private sector features in a wide range of VNR-related processes, such

120 Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Estonia, Finland, The Gambia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Niger, Nigeria, Moldova, Morocco, Russia, Seychelles, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Ukraine.

121 Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Bulgaria, Burundi, Brunei Darussalam, Comoros, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Estonia, FSM, The Gambia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, North Macedonia, Samoa, Seychelles, Slovenia, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

122 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 9.

123 See more on the Editorial committees in the Austrian Federal Chancellery's 'Austria and the 2030 Agenda. Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 13.

124 Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burundi, Costa Rica, The Gambia, Malawi, Moldova, Niger, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Zambia.

125 Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, The Gambia, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Seychelles, Uganda, Uzbekistan.

126 République du Bénin, 'Contribution nationale volontaire à la mise en œuvre des ODD au Forum Politique de Haut Niveau', 2020, pp. 11–12.

127 Armenia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Estonia, The Gambia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Russia, Seychelles, Uganda, Zambia.

BOX 6.2: ANALYSIS OF VNR AND SPOTLIGHT REPORTS¹²⁸

GIZ and the Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network analysed the emerging trend of civil society reports with a view to reporting on SDG 16. By placing government and civil society reporting into perspective, the report listed a number of findings and recommendations to strengthen inclusive reporting on the SDGs:

- Institutionalised approaches to inclusive reporting, including integrating findings from spotlight reports into VNR reports, can be of clear mutual benefit and open up avenues for effective stakeholder contributions.
 - To help coordinate civil society engagement and facilitate constructive dialogue between government and civil society, it is recommended to establish forums or platforms, which can enable civil society representatives to engage regularly with the government on issues pertaining to sustainable development.
 - Multistakeholder reporting processes may be encouraged through dedicated awareness raising, peer exchange and global learning using existing platforms.
 - To improve national and local capacity in order to sustain inclusive reporting as a form of accountability and good governance.
 - Good practices from VNR and spotlight reporting processes are worth disseminating for learning purposes.
-

as consultations¹²⁹ – including local consultations (Burundi) – the launch of the VNR process/technical validation of the VNR (Burundi, DR Congo, The Gambia, Niger, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Slovenia), participation and dialogue (Brunei Darussalam, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Panama, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia), and through questionnaires (Bulgaria, Estonia, Panama, Solomon Islands). In some cases, the VNR report benefited from private-sector contributions (Finland, Peru, Uganda, Ukraine). Bulgaria reported on a study conducted as part of the VNR preparations, which showed that the business sector is largely guided by the SDGs and is motivated to work towards achieving the SDGs.¹³⁰

The role of the private sector is moreover highlighted in the context of SDG implementation (The Gambia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Zambia), awareness raising (Benin), contributions to SDG M&E and data efforts (Comoros, FSM, Samoa), and reporting (Kenya, Honduras, Zambia). In some cases, progress reports prepared by the private sector are highlighted (Kenya, Zambia).

There are several strategic efforts to enhance private-sector engagement, including the mapping of the private sector (India), development of a private-sector platform (Uganda) and the establishment of a private-sector advisory group to advance SDG implementation (Solomon Islands). In Austria,

¹²⁸ 'SDG16 in VNRs and Spotlight Reports', GIZ and the TAP Network, 2020.

¹²⁹ Bangladesh, Benin, Bulgaria, Burundi, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Estonia, India, Kenya, Moldova, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Ukraine.

¹³⁰ Bulgaria, 'Voluntary National Review – Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, pp. 17–18.

the ‘SDG Strategy and SDG Compass’ initiative has assisted companies in implementing the SDGs since 2016. The initiative represents a multistakeholder network that raises awareness about the 2030 Agenda while at the same time giving companies support and guidance on implementing the SDGs.¹³¹

Some countries report a growing interest in engaging with the SDGs in the private sector, for instance by mainstreaming the SDGs into business strategies (Finland, Ukraine). Private-sector engagement has also increased in the context of the UN Global Compact (Argentina, Bulgaria, Finland). Finland highlights that since the first VNR, the number of companies joining the UN Global Compact has increased by approximately 55% and continues to rise.¹³²

Some of the challenges related to private-sector participation include lack of engagement (DR Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria), lack of awareness (Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia) and difficulties associated with fostering public-private partnerships (PPPs) (The Gambia). Some countries highlight a need to step up engagement with the private sector (Honduras, Kenya, Nepal, Seychelles).

6.2.3 ACADEMIA

While academia is represented in a number of SDG institutional mechanisms, most countries engage the scientific community through consultations.¹³³ The academic sector’s engagement in the VNR process was fostered through initial preparation and general participation in the VNR process (India, Papua New Guinea, Slovenia, Zambia), dialogue/interviews (Panama, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago), as well as VNR-related workshops, conferences and debates (Bulgaria, Burundi, Comoros, DR Congo, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Ukraine). In some cases, academia supported the preparation of the report (Zambia) or commented on a draft (Burundi, Georgia, Uzbekistan).

The 2020 VNR reports moreover indicate contributions from the scientific community in the form of awareness raising (Armenia), advice (Costa Rica, Finland), research (Bulgaria, Comoros, Kenya, North Macedonia, Ukraine) or by supporting SDG data collection (Bangladesh, Malawi, Papua New Guinea), M&E and identifying indicators (Slovenia, Ukraine). Some universities have set up special units (Armenia, Benin), or educational programmes and platforms contributing to the SDGs (Estonia, Kyrgyzstan). Argentina and Niger highlight partnerships with universities and Austria points to the creation of a scientific advisory board to enhance structured dialogue with the scientific community.¹³⁴ In Ukraine, the VNR preparation included the ‘Synergy of knowledge, experience and creativity for the sake of the future’ initiative. The initiative aimed to involve students, postgraduates and young scientists and provide an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process, make proposals on new accelerator targets and support the analysis of SDG progress.¹³⁵

6.2.4 OTHER GROUPS

A number of other groups were engaged in addition to civil society, the private sector and the scientific community. In a number of countries, development partners and UN agencies participated in the VNR processes,¹³⁶ including in the initial preparation of the VNR (Papua New Guinea) and in consultations (Benin, DR Congo, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Moldova, Nepal, Samoa, Uganda). Other groups that participated, mainly by engaging in consultations, included trade unions (Armenia, Benin, Bulgaria, Estonia, Niger), faith-based organisations (Costa Rica), think tanks (Bangladesh, Georgia, India, Papua New Guinea) and the media (Moldova, Morocco, Niger, Samoa, Uzbekistan).

131 Republic of Austria, ‘Austria and the 2030 Agenda. Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals’, 2020, p. 27.

132 Finland, ‘Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, 2020, p. 35.

133 Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Estonia, FSM, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Uganda, Ukraine.

134 Austrian Federal Chancellery, ‘Austria and the 2030 Agenda. Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals’, 2020, p. 103.

135 Ukraine, ‘Voluntary National Review’, 2020, pp. 15–16.

136 Benin, Burundi, Comoros, Costa Rica, DR Congo, FSM, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Moldova, Nepal, Niger, Samoa, Uganda, Zambia.

6.3 Partnerships

Partnerships or efforts to enable partnership co-operation are widely acknowledged as a means of contributing to SDG implementation.¹³⁷ Whereas partnerships are for the most part addressed in the context of reporting on Goal 17 and SDG implementation efforts, some countries reference multistakeholder partnerships (Malawi), international partnerships (Morocco, Seychelles, Solomon Islands) and local partnerships in the VNR report (Bulgaria, Nepal, Slovenia). Efforts to foster local partnerships include Bulgaria's 'Business as a force for good' initiative, which is a forum that aims to foster successful local partnerships between businesses and non-profit organisations in order to contribute to the SDGs.¹³⁸ In Slovenia, regional development agencies are tasked with identifying local stakeholders, promoting networking and developing partnership networks between multiple stakeholders.¹³⁹

A number of reports recognise the significance of PPPs (Comoros, Ecuador, Finland, Georgia, Morocco, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago, Ukraine), including the measures adopted to enable PPPs. In Finland, a significant increase in PPPs has been recorded and membership of the UN Global Compact has grown considerably.¹⁴⁰ Legal measures to strengthen PPPs were passed, among others, in Georgia and Morocco. In 2018, the Parliament of Georgia passed a law on public-private partnerships and on a respective PPP agency, which is directly accountable to the Government of Georgia.¹⁴¹ In Morocco, legislation was adopted on PPPs and partnerships are evaluated annually.¹⁴² In Samoa, a 'Public-Private Partnerships Steering Committee' regulates PPPs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a partnership with the CSO 'Women in Business' resulted in the establishment of a 'Maua App', an e-commerce platform developed by a Samoan IT company.¹⁴³

The need to strengthen partnerships was expressed (Nepal, Niger, Ukraine), including at the local level (Nepal). Some countries highlight that partnership development is a challenge (Comoros, Georgia, Nepal).

6.4 Communication and awareness raising

Nearly all of the 2020 VNR countries recognise the importance of communication and awareness-raising efforts, either related to the VNR or on promoting the SDGs in general. However, while many countries highlight ad hoc communication efforts, only a few highlight comprehensive strategic communication efforts, such as the establishment of a communication plan for the VNR (India), or dissemination strategies for the VNR (Costa Rica, Panama, Trinidad & Tobago). India's communication and outreach plan for the VNR consisted of engaging the media, a video to promote the VNR as well as awareness raising and publicity through a social media campaign.¹⁴⁴

In terms of strengthening the knowledge and understanding of the SDGs, countries established information websites and e-platforms (Austria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, The Gambia, Slovenia, Uganda) and ran SDG awareness-raising campaigns (Austria, Brunei Darussalam, Comoros, DR Congo, Finland, Kenya, Moldova, Uganda, Zambia), in some cases targeting specific groups such as young people (Austria, Finland, The Gambia). For instance, in Austria, a musical 'Solve it!' was organised to inform people about the SDGs. Twenty youth ambassadors performed in the musical, which reached more than 5,000 young people.¹⁴⁵ The Gambia's U-Report Platform was developed with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to

137 Comoros, DR Congo, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kenya, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Ukraine.

138 Bulgaria, 'Voluntary National Review – Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 17.

139 Slovenia, 'Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals – Second Voluntary National Review', 2020, p. 10.

140 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, pp. 102 & 35.

141 Georgia, 'Voluntary National Review', 2020, p. 9.

142 Royaume Du Maroc, 'Examen national volontaire de la mise en oeuvre des Objectifs de Développement Durable', 2020, p. 174.

143 Government of Samoa, 'Samoa's Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 139.

144 Government of India, 'India VNR 2020 – Decade of Action, Taking the SDGs from Global to Local', 2020, p. 10.

145 Republic of Austria, 'Austria and the 2030 Agenda. Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, p. 25.

assess young people's understanding of the SDGs.¹⁴⁶ U-Report was also run in Uganda, which reported that 23,324 young people shared their views on SDG implementation through the initiative.¹⁴⁷

In addition, countries highlight consultation (FSM, Morocco, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Solomon Islands), workshops and meetings (Benin, Comoros, DR Congo, Liberia, Niger, Zambia), events (Austria), exhibitions (Comoros), and awards and prizes (Austria, Moldova) as a means of raising awareness.

Increasingly, (social) media, radio and TV are used to promote the SDGs or follow-up efforts (Austria, DR Congo, The Gambia, Finland, India, Liberia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, Uzbekistan). Trinidad & Tobago highlights the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to demonstrate links between transformative projects and climate change as well as updates on the VNR process.¹⁴⁸ Uganda highlights its 'SDG awareness month', which took place in 2019 and consisted of a wide range of awareness-raising activities including a marathon, regional concerts, a high-level panel discussion and media campaigns about the SDGs.¹⁴⁹

SDG awareness raising is conducted at local level in the form of campaigns (Argentina, DR Congo, Finland, India, Liberia) or by translating the SDGs into local languages (Kenya, Liberia). Some countries have reported initiatives to engage citizens directly (DR Congo, Finland, Kenya), e.g. through public debates (DR Congo) or by disseminating information (Kenya). Finland launched an online tool 'Sustainable Lifestyles', which enables citizens to pursue a more sustainable lifestyle.¹⁵⁰ It highlights a short film on the SDGs, info screens on public transport, exhibitions, as well as partnerships with social media influencers as tools to raise awareness.¹⁵¹

Some countries point to SDG training materials and enhancing the understanding of the SDGs through the school curriculum (Argentina, Bangladesh, Finland, North Macedonia, Samoa). For instance, in North Macedonia, the CSO 'Eco Logic' offers Sustainable Development Schools that promote the SDGs among high school students.¹⁵²

Some countries face challenges related to communication and awareness raising (Armenia, DR Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria, Ukraine), e.g. due to lack of coordination (Ukraine) or resources (DR Congo). The need to enhance knowledge is recognised and listed as a next step (Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Moldova) e.g. by establishing an e-platform (Estonia), launching a communication strategy (Bulgaria) or developing a national system for knowledge and analysis (Moldova).

146 The Gambia, 'Voluntary National Review, June 2020. A report on the progress of implementation of SDGs', p. 13.

147 Republic of Uganda, 'Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 3.

148 Government of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, 'Voluntary National Review – Connecting the Dots to the SDGs', 2020, p. 22.

149 Republic of Uganda, 'Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 16.

150 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 30.

151 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 47.

152 North Macedonia, 'Voluntary National Review', 2020, p. 35.

6.5 Reflections

The 'whole-of-society' approach is broadly recognised by the 2020 VNR countries. Most countries practise stakeholder engagement in various VNR-related processes. Although non-governmental stakeholders participate in many of the institutional SDG frameworks, the most common form of stakeholder engagement takes the form of consultations, workshops, meetings and dialogue.

In addressing the roles of major stakeholder groups such as civil society, the private sector and academia, the reports show that CSOs are the dominant stakeholder group. Contributions by the private sector feature in the context of participation in the institutional structure, consultations and VNR-related meetings, however mainly as part of SDG implementation efforts. The scientific community is engaged in a number of capacities, including by providing research, advice and data or as participants in consultations, workshops and conferences. Increasingly, reporting by stakeholder groups feature; for instance, civil society shadow or spotlight reports, private-sector progress reports or Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews. As these reports are often prepared in parallel to the VNR process, they can contribute greatly to the review with feedback, information and data.

While multistakeholder engagement is practised, it is important to avoid engaging stakeholders in silos. To boost participation, institutionalising multistakeholder engagement can help systemic alignment and the scale-up of multistakeholder partnerships. Creating spaces and platforms can support coalitions and multistakeholder partnership collaboration. Stakeholder engagement strategies and plans are needed to ensure meaningful and consistent participation.

Countries report on a wide range of activities that help communicate and raise awareness of the VNR process and SDGs. Many types of campaigns and events are organised, and more and more social media is used, including engaging influencers as a means of reaching the general public. Only a few long-term strategic communication efforts feature among the 2020 VNR countries. COVID-19 has however demonstrated the value of online tools and platforms. National online platforms or 'SDG knowledge hubs' can help disseminate information, organise stakeholder collaboration and ensure direct citizen engagement.

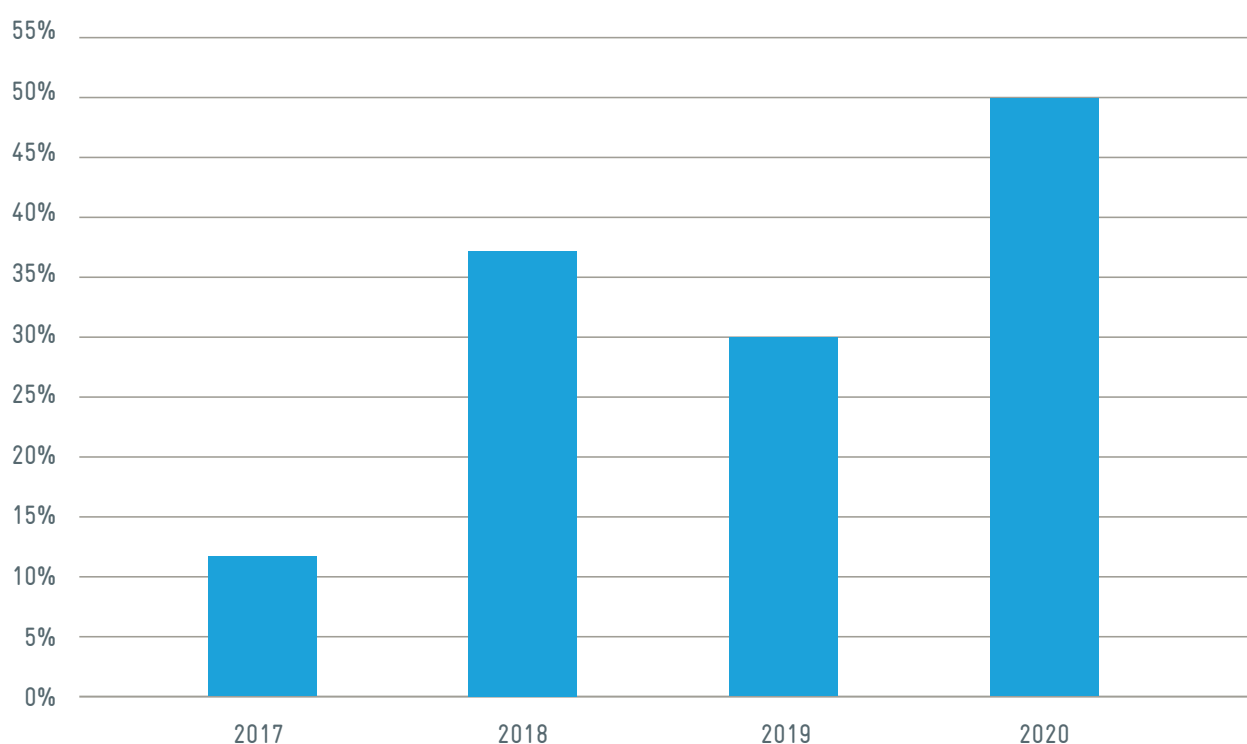
7.0 Statistics and data

ALTHOUGH MANY EFFORTS AND DEVELOPMENTS ARE REPORTED ON SDG STATISTICAL AND DATA-RELATED PROGRESS, SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES REMAIN. PARTICULAR SHORTCOMINGS ARE REPORTED ON THE AVAILABILITY OF DATA, THE QUALITY OF DATA AND DATA DISAGGREGATION. MOREOVER, MANY COUNTRIES HIGHLIGHT THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITIES OF STATISTICAL SYSTEMS, IMPROVE THE COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT OF DATA, AND ESTABLISH LOCAL SDG MONITORING AND DATA STRUCTURES. A NUMBER OF REPORTS FEATURED NEW STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING STATISTICS (BENIN, FSM, THE GAMBIA, INDIA, LIBERIA, MOLDOVA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, SAMOA, SOLOMON ISLANDS).

Approximately half of the 2020 VNR reports include a statistical annex, which is more than in the previous reporting year (Box 7.1). In some cases, a statistical annex is referenced but not featured as part of the report (Comoros, Finland, Georgia, Samoa, Slovenia). The statistical annexes vary in their

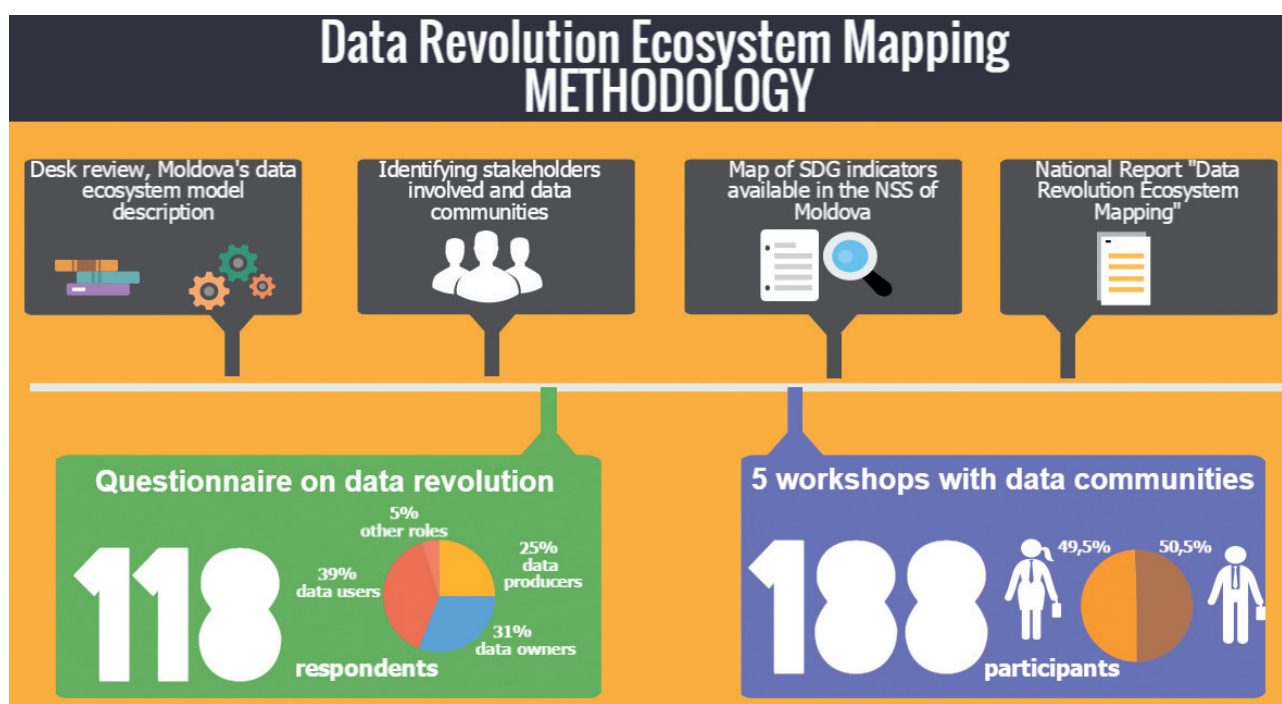
level of detail. Some annexes¹⁵³ are more elaborate and include baselines and other elements, whereas others consist of summaries of indicators per SDG (Bulgaria, Costa Rica, FSM, The Gambia, Kenya, Mozambique, Panama, Papua New Guinea and Trinidad & Tobago).

BOX 7.1: STATISTICAL ANNEXES INCLUDED IN THE VNR REPORTS



Source: Own calculation

BOX 7.2: 'DATA REVOLUTION ECOSYSTEM MAPPING' – MOLDOVA¹⁵⁴



7.1 Indicator frameworks and monitoring platforms

Most countries report on progress made on developing SDG indicator frameworks. Various approaches to identifying indicators were applied, including through stakeholder engagement (Ecuador, Finland, India, Moldova), macroeconomic analysis (Slovenia) or through alignment with the NDP or strategy (Ecuador, Solomon Islands). A 'Data Revolution Ecosystem Mapping Methodology' exercise was carried out in Moldova (Box 7.2) consisting of a desk review, identification of the stakeholders involved in statistical and data 'communities', a mapping of indicators and a report on the mapping. The process was supported by feedback from stakeholders in the form of a questionnaire and workshops.¹⁵⁴

In one case, feedback is provided on the indicators that, in addition to the global and nationally prioritised indicators, feature regional indicators as defined by an EU indicator set (Bulgaria). Some countries reported progress on the development of local indicators (Finland, India).

Some countries have introduced dashboards and platforms to systematically monitor progress on the SDGs (FSM Estonia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda). For instance, Kyrgyzstan's national SDG reporting platform is an essential element of building an effective system for monitoring the achievements of the SDGs. The national statistical service adopted the 'Open SDG platform', which currently hosts data and metadata for 102 global and 57 national SDG indicators, also included in the statistical annex to the VNR. Among the advantages of the platform are the ability to store data in Statistics Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) format, its availability in three languages (English, Russian and Kyrgyz).

154 Republic of Moldova, 'Voluntary National Review. Progress Report 2020', 2020, p. 27.

and a display of indicators.¹⁵⁵ In Estonia, indicators and related information are available on an online platform, which takes the form of a data-driven 'statistics tree' and provides an overview of the state of implementation of the goals according to the main national priorities of the National Sustainable Development Strategy (Box 7.3). Colour-coding indicates whether a specific goal is on target or whether gaps still need to be overcome.¹⁵⁶

A number of countries highlight the need to strengthen the capacity of the statistical system,¹⁵⁷ and the coordination and management of data.¹⁵⁸ A lack of resources for statistics (Comoros, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Trinidad & Tobago) and, in some cases, COVID-19, have affected ongoing data collection efforts (DR Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Samoa). Numerous initiatives have been announced that aim to strengthen data systems,¹⁵⁹ including introducing national strategies to develop statistics,¹⁶⁰ plans to establish a statistical institute (Trinidad & Tobago), finalising or strengthening SDG

monitoring platforms (Armenia, Liberia, Uganda) or adapting the national indicator framework to regional (EU) and global sets of indicators (Bulgaria). Further identification of indicators (Argentina, India, North Macedonia) and awareness-raising initiatives are envisaged e.g. a communication strategy for SDG statistics (Kyrgyzstan).

7.2 Data availability and gap analysis

Data-related complexities remain a significant challenge for many countries, including data gaps (Bangladesh, Burundi, Comoros, FSM, Nepal, Nigeria, Seychelles), insufficient data collection (Niger, Trinidad & Tobago), data availability (Bangladesh, The Gambia, Kenya, Samoa, Seychelles) and the timely provision of adequate data (Benin, The Gambia, Kenya, Moldova).

BOX 7.3: STATISTICS ESTONIA'S TREE OF TRUTH¹⁶¹



155 The Kyrgyz Republic, 'Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic', 2020, p. 140.

156 Republic of Estonia, 'Review of the Implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda in Estonia', 2020, p. 9.

157 DR Congo, Ecuador, FSM, Georgia, Honduras, Kenya, Liberia, Moldova, Panama, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda.

158 Argentina, DR Congo, The Gambia, Honduras, Liberia, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Samoa, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia.

159 Benin, Comoros, Costa Rica, The Gambia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, Uzbekistan, Zambia.

160 Benin, Comoros, Costa Rica, FSM, The Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Zambia.

161 Source: Estonia VNR 2020. Statistics Estonia: Tree of Truth: <https://tamm.stat.ee/?lang=en>

Approximately half of the 2020 VNR countries refer to data gap analysis.¹⁶² In one case, a goal-specific gap analysis was carried out in the context of SDG 16 (Armenia). Some countries specify the gaps and indicate the percentage of indicators for which data is available (Argentina, Burundi, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Papua New Guinea). Similar to previous reporting years, feedback on data availability for the number of indicators is provided in 50% of the reports. In a number of cases, specific percentages are featured to highlight data availability ranging from 30% (Panama, Zambia)¹⁶³ to 80% (Austria). In other cases, the availability of data is featured in the form of the number of selected indicators covered. Little feedback is provided on the quality of the data, however some countries express concern about producing quality data¹⁶⁴ or highlight improving the quality of the data as a future step (Georgia, Honduras, India, Nepal, Solomon Islands).

Although most countries refer to or include feedback on data disaggregation, the limited availability of disaggregated data is still a significant challenge for most of the 2020 VNR countries¹⁶⁵ specifically with regard to gender (India, Nigeria, Zambia) and older persons (Panama). Kyrgyzstan's report provides detailed information on the availability of indicators for disaggregation by location, sex, age, income level, education, ethnicity and disability.¹⁶⁶ The need to enhance the generation of disaggregated data is highlighted (Bulgaria, Georgia, India, Moldova, Zambia), particularly at sub-national level (India), as well as in the context of LNOB (Bangladesh). In this regard, Bangladesh references a joint initiative that has been launched as

a part of the 'SDG Tracker'.¹⁶⁷ The initiative builds on Leonard Cheshire's Disability Data Portal, which provides a snapshot of the data globally available on persons with disabilities in 48 countries. The portal hosts disability data disaggregated for 16 indicators, mostly drawn from the SDGs framework and aims to support the development of a disability-inclusive policy with a view to achieving the LNOB agenda.¹⁶⁸

Georgia launched a 'Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey' (MICS) with support from UNICEF to fill the existing data gaps. The MICS included more than 180 indicators and involved more than 14,000 households, providing regionally representative data, which can be disaggregated by age, sex, urban/rural, internally displaced person status, ethnicity, disability and wealth. The outcomes provided baseline values for many indicators of the nationalised SDGs.¹⁶⁹ Statistics Finland has established an inter-agency network to collect national data on global SDG indicators and has also created a public platform to disseminate the data.¹⁷⁰

A number of countries announced plans to strengthen data collection to monitor the SDGs, including through surveys and a census (Bangladesh, FSM, The Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Nepal, Samoa, Zambia), or a long-term data collection programme (DR Congo). Kyrgyzstan¹⁷¹ is implementing an 'Advanced Data Planning Tool' (ADAPT)¹⁷² to produce SDG statistics efficiently and regularly assess gaps in capacity. Bangladesh is involved in the Data4SDGs initiative, which is a global partnership platform aimed at fostering SDG data-related activities.¹⁷³

162 Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, DR Congo, Ecuador, FSM, The Gambia, Honduras, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Panama, Samoa, Seychelles, Ukraine, Zambia.

163 Of the global indicator framework.

164 Argentina, Comoros, DR Congo, The Gambia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Seychelles, Uganda.

165 Argentina, Armenia, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, The Gambia, Georgia, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Moldova, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Slovenia, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia.

166 The Kyrgyz Republic, 'Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic', 2020, pp. 138-139.

167 'Our World in Data' SDG Tracker is a free open-access resource aimed at measuring progress towards all SDGs. The initiative will be part of a peer-learning process that includes various countries. Peru signed a contract with Bangladesh to implement its own SDG tracker after the successful launch of Bangladesh's SDG tracker and Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Malawi, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Paraguay, Tunisia and Uganda have expressed an interest in doing the same.

168 Bangladesh, 'Voluntary National Review 2020 – Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development', 2020, p. 164.

169 Georgia, 'Voluntary National Review Georgia', 2020, p. 12.

170 Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 91.

171 The Kyrgyz Republic, 'Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic', 2020, p. 140.

172 ADAPT is a cloud-based tool which can be implemented within national statistical systems.

173 Bangladesh, 'Voluntary National Review – Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development', 2020, p. 164.

7.3 Localising statistics and data

A need is recognised to localise SDG monitoring and data collection (Bangladesh, Kenya, Mozambique, Panama, Slovenia, Zambia), however only a handful of countries report ongoing efforts to localise SDG monitoring, data collection and the development of local indicators. Comprehensive approaches are emerging to establishing local monitoring systems or frameworks, for example, in Finland and India. India highlights that monitoring at state level is expected to be based on respective 'State Indicator Frameworks' (SIF). These consist of individual development priorities, data requirements, available infrastructure and resources. In addition, 'District Indicator Frameworks' (DIFs) have been developed at state level. Currently 60% of the states have developed SIFs and 30% DIFs.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, the 'SDG India Index' measures progress and ranks the performance of subnational territories. The index is an aggregate measure, which is amenable to understanding and use by everyone – policymakers, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders. It provides feedback on the progress of the SDGs, along with a comparative assessment of the performance of all the 37 States and Union Territories.¹⁷⁵

Some countries report on the implementation of local data collection (Comoros) and the availability of disaggregated indicators (Kyrgyzstan, Panama). In one case, civil society conducted surveys at local level (Mozambique). A few countries (DR Congo, Zambia) reported challenges in institutional capacities to localise statistics and monitoring.

7.4 Use of non-official data

Little reference was made to the use of non-official data. Only a few countries highlight the use of big data, and citizen-generated data (India, Kenya). For instance, in Kenya the Open County platform collects 'open data' and strengthens citizens' engagement. The platform aims to strengthen results management with the collaboration of local governments¹⁷⁶ and provide an entry point for engaging citizens and receiving feedback. The platform contains various datasets that showcase multiple stakeholders and the state of various sectors in the counties. The data is used by local governments to overcome challenges related to good governance, integrity, transparency and accountability.¹⁷⁷

A number of reports reference data and indexes from international organisations and development partners, e.g. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea) and the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (Liberia, Ukraine).

Some countries highlight the need to address the data gaps by using non-traditional sources (DR Congo, Ecuador, Finland, Kyrgyzstan) and strengthening citizen-generated data (India). Others underscore data collected by CSOs or other stakeholders (Armenia, Austria, Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, Mozambique, Trinidad & Tobago). Trinidad & Tobago built CSO and private-sector capacities to collect SDG-related data and Costa Rica keeps track of the number of companies that publish sustainability reports to obtain data.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ India, 'India VNR 2020 – Decade of Action, Taking the SDGs from Global to Local', 2020, pp. 25–27.

¹⁷⁵ India, 'India VNR 2020 – Decade of Action, Taking the SDGs from Global to Local', 2020, p. 24.

¹⁷⁶ Makueni, Elgeyo Marakwet, Kiambu and West Pokot.

¹⁷⁷ Republic of Kenya, 'Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', 2020, pp. 103–104.

¹⁷⁸ Costa Rica, 'Second Voluntary National Review – Sustainable Development Goals, Costa Rica', 2020, p. 126.

7.5 Reflections

Despite progress made, SDG monitoring and review frameworks still suffer from a number of challenges. While much effort has been made in improving statistics and data, many countries describe a need to standardise methodologies and to strengthen capacities and the coordination and management of data. Gaps in data and the lack of data availability are still considerable barriers and call for stepping up efforts to improve evidence-based SDG implementation and follow-up. COVID-19 has added a further need to overcome these barriers in order to understand, manage and mitigate the multiple impacts of the pandemic. The pandemic is also hampering data collection efforts, especially in low-income countries.

The availability of disaggregated data continues to pose a challenge, affecting compliance with the principle of LNOB. While many efforts to identify vulnerable groups are reported, key data is needed to address the needs of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, data collected at the local level is critical not only in the context of LNOB but to support SDG localisation as means of accelerating progress on the SDGs. While some initiatives to localise SDG monitoring efforts are being implemented, further investment is needed to establish local SDG monitoring frameworks, identify local indicators and facilitate local data collection. In addition to supporting the evaluation and review of national SDG progress, these efforts are needed to enable evidence-based subnational SDG prioritisation and ensure that no one and no territory is left behind.

The VNR reports indicate that progress in supplementing and broadening official statistics with alternative data is still limited. However, building the environment, capacities and partnerships needed takes time and many initiatives may not have reached the point of maturity to be reflected in the VNR. With this in mind, the application of unofficial data sources and new and innovative types of data can help strengthen data availability, and multi-stakeholder approaches to M&E should be considered.

All in all, strengthening statistical capacities and efforts to improve the SDG data challenges are needed to measure progress, develop evidence-based policies and resource allocation, adding accountability and knowledge and an understanding of the SDGs. While some progress has been made since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, statistics and data still fall far short of what is required and called for in a data revolution. There is a clear need for the international community to step up its support for statistics in the countries of the global South.

8.0 Repeated VNR countries

THIS YEAR, 20 COUNTRIES REPORTED TO THE HLPF FOR THE SECOND TIME¹⁷⁹ AND ONE COUNTRY FOR THE THIRD TIME (BENIN). WHEN COMPARING THE COUNTRIES' FIRST VNR REPORTS WITH THEIR SECOND OR THIRD, A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN VOLUME IS OBSERVED, REFLECTING A DEVELOPMENT IN REPORTING AND AN INCREASE IN CONTENT REPORTED. IN A NUMBER OF CASES, THE SAME STRUCTURE WAS APPLIED, HOWEVER THE SECOND OR THIRD REPORT WAS MORE DETAILED,¹⁸⁰ AND THEY ELABORATED MORE ON CERTAIN TOPICS, INCLUDING WITH REGARD TO THE INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM (BANGLADESH), LNOB (ARGENTINA, BANGLADESH, COSTA RICA, NEPAL, NIGER), M&E, STATISTICS, STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES (COSTA RICA), AND LOCALISATION (ARGENTINA). IN SOME CASES, THE SECOND REPORT STRUCTURE IS DIFFERENT FROM THE FIRST (COSTA RICA, ECUADOR, FINLAND, HONDURAS, NIGER, PERU, UGANDA). WHILE SOME SECOND REPORTS ALIGN WITH THE UN GUIDELINES COMPARED TO THEIR FIRST REPORT (FINLAND), OTHERS HAVE MOVED AWAY FROM THE GUIDELINES (GEORGIA). FURTHERMORE, COUNTRIES THAT COVERED A SELECTED NUMBER OF SDGS IN THEIR FIRST REPORT COVERED PROGRESS ON ALL SDGS IN THE SECOND VNR (ARGENTINA, BANGLADESH, PANAMA, UGANDA).

8.1 SDG institutional structures

In most cases, the institutional SDG arrangements that were reported in the first VNR reports remained the same¹⁸¹ with some minor changes, such as the composition and broadening of stakeholder engagement (Armenia, Benin, Kenya), strengthening of coordination (Georgia) or mechanisms that were moved to a different government entity (Ecuador, Finland). For instance, in Finland, the mechanism was transferred to the Prime Minister's office due to the growing importance of the SDGs.¹⁸²

In some cases, the institutional arrangements featured in the second VNR differ from the structures applied in the initial reporting process. For instance, Morocco's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the High-level Planning Commission managed the first VNR process, whereas the 2020 report was drafted

by the 'Committee for the Follow-up and Monitoring of the SDGs', part of the National Commission for Sustainable Development.¹⁸³ Honduras established its institutional structure after the first VNR process and Uganda's 2016 report was coordinated by the National SDG Taskforce and the National Planning Authority and managed a multi-institutional drafting team. The 2020 VNR called for the involvement of all Technical Working Groups to lead on respective areas, under the overall coordination of the National SDG Secretariat. In 2019, the National SDG Taskforce, headed by the Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister, established a multi-institutional Advisory Committee drawn from ministries, departments and agencies, parliament, UN bodies, CSOs and the private sector, to provide oversight to all processes leading to the VNR report.¹⁸⁴

179 Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Honduras, India, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Samoa, Slovenia and Uganda.

180 Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, India, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Panama, Slovenia.

181 Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, India, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Peru, Slovenia.

182 Finland, 'Voluntary National Review – Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 90.

183 Royaume Du Maroc, 'Examen National Volontaire de la mise en oeuvre des Objectifs de Développement Durable', 2020, p. 9.

184 Republic of Uganda, 'Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 2.

8.2 Progress made and lessons learned

Most second-time VNR countries make reference to their first report and, in many cases, the impact from one reporting period to the next is documented, although to varying degrees.¹⁸⁵ Some countries include detailed elaborations on how it capitalised on the experiences made in the earlier VNR reporting period. For instance, Finland's VNR report includes a summary of the key challenges and lessons learned since the first VNR in 2016.¹⁸⁶ Ecuador's VNR features an infographic illustrating the progress made since the first VNR process in 2018 (Box 8.1).¹⁸⁷

Most countries highlight aspects that changed or improvements that were made since the last VNR. Some reports feature specific overviews (Georgia), sections (Nepal) or a review of progress (Honduras). Concrete aspects and improvements reported include the strengthening of participation and stakeholder engagement (Finland, Honduras, Samoa); improved partnerships and coordination (Georgia, Nepal, Uganda), including PPPs (Georgia); mainstreaming the SDGs (Honduras, Morocco), including into the national planning systems (Honduras, Nepal, Peru, Samoa); monitoring frameworks (Honduras, Morocco, Samoa); progress made on the national indicator framework (Argentina, Panama); strengthened data collection (Samoa); localisation and decentralisation (Honduras, Nepal, Niger); enhanced awareness raising (Kenya); financing and resource mobilisation (Morocco, Nepal); as well as capacity building (Kenya). Furthermore, countries highlight the introduction of new reforms and strategic measures (Armenia, Morocco) as well as progress on specific goals (Benin, Kenya). In a few cases, changes of government were reported as challenges to VNR and SDG-related progress (Argentina, Finland).

BOX 8.1: PROGRESS FROM THE 2018 VNR TO THE 2020 VNR – ECUADOR¹⁸⁷

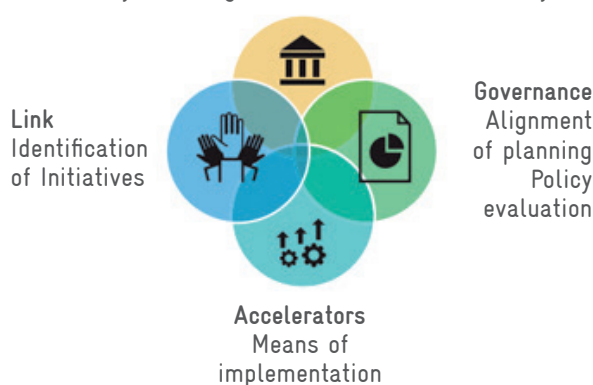
VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2018

Coordination
Technical Planning Secretariat 'Plan Ecuador'
National Institute of Statistics and Census
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility



VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2020

Coordination
Vice-President of the Republic
Technical Planning Secretariat 'Plan Ecuador'
National Institute of Statistics and Census
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility



(unofficial translation from the Spanish original)

¹⁸⁵ Argentina, Armenia, Benin, Costa Rica, Finland, Georgia, Honduras, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Samoa, Uganda.

¹⁸⁶ Finland, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2020, p. 7.

¹⁸⁷ Ecuador, 'Examen Nacional Voluntario Ecuador 2020', 2020, p. 28.

8.3 Reflections

An increasing number of countries reported for the second or third time well into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Analysis of the progress from one VNR to the next reveals that reporting typically increases from one reporting period to the next. More content is provided in the second or third reports, which are usually more substantial. Many second and third VNRs highlight follow-up actions and report on the development of certain review processes since earlier VNRs. A significant difference from previous reporting is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted most of the 2020 VNR processes and added analysis to the reports.

A majority of the SDG institutional frameworks and mechanisms remained the same. Only a few countries reported on minor adjustments made, e.g. due to the growing recognition of the importance of the SDGs. Follow-up actions, experiences and the impact of previous VNR processes feature in many of the 2020 VNR reports. Areas where significant change was documented included the strengthening of stakeholder engagement, improved partnerships, general progress on the SDGs and mainstreaming efforts, and the strengthening of the monitoring framework. In some cases, the change of government was highlighted as a barrier to planned SDG implementation, review and follow-up efforts.

As a central element of the follow-up and review mechanism of the 2030 Agenda, the VNRs are instrumental in supporting the systemic change required to achieve the SDGs. While the reporting of repeated VNR countries indicates a progression in SDG review and implementation measures, systematic approaches to the follow-up from one report to another need strengthening. A structured approach to the reporting from one VNR process to the next can add continuity to the review process. Although some reports highlight aspects that were improved and lessons learned, greater continuity between the reports enables 'cyclical consideration' and an analysis of progress.

Systematic reporting practices can lead to concrete benefits, such as improving the quality of the reports, increasing stakeholder engagement and addressing potential reporting burdens. In response to the 2030 Agenda's core principles to enhance participatory, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches, the engagement of other reporting mechanisms can be considered as a means to step up the inclusion of stakeholder perspectives in the follow-up and review process. Structured approaches from one VNR to the next and integrating other reporting efforts e.g. spotlight reports, Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews or private-sector progress reports may contribute to a more holistic picture of SDG implementation and thereby better support the transformation required to achieve sustainable development.

9.0 Conclusion

FIVE YEARS INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA, 47 COUNTRIES CONDUCTED A VNR PROCESS AND REPORTED TO THE 2020 HLPF CONVENED UNDER THE THEME 'ACCELERATED ACTION AND TRANSFORMATIVE PATHWAYS: REALIZING THE DECADE OF ACTION AND DELIVERY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT'.

To highlight best practices and lessons learned, mobilise knowledge and share expertise on new and emerging issues, P4R's comparative analysis of the 2020 VNR reports focused on the following areas: i) national institutional planning, national coordination and review mechanisms; ii) mainstreaming and policy coherence; iii) stakeholder engagement; iv) statistics and data; and v) repeated VNR countries. Due to the extraordinary circumstances that came with COVID-19, this year's analysis features an extra chapter analysing the impacts of the pandemic on the VNR process and the SDGs reported by countries.

The 2020 VNR reports demonstrate an evolving review process, with a number of countries reporting for the second or third time. Feedback shows an increase in volume and more detailed content on VNR process-related aspects. A significant factor impacting the 2020 VNR review processes and the progress on the SDGs was the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic interfered with review schedules in multiple ways, leading to cancellations, delays and a need to move efforts online. Stakeholder engagement, consultations, workshops and statistical work were especially affected. Moreover, countries expressed concern over the impact COVID-19 was having on undermining the overall SDG progress made, in particular its negative impact on the economy and on the social dimension of sustainable development. In the wake of the crisis, the relevance of the 2030 Agenda is reiterated and the need to scale up progress on the SDGs recognised.

Reporting on the national SDG institutional structures suggests institutional arrangements have matured as many countries build on existing or

SDG structures established and reported in previous VNR reporting. While coordination is still a challenge, most institutional structures reflect a strong commitment to the 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approach engaging relevant government and non-government stakeholders. The broad participation of line ministries emphasises horizontal coordination. However, while LRGs are included in a number of institutional frameworks, strengthened multilevel governance structures are required to improve vertical coherence. The continuous increasing role of parliament and SAIs, particularly in performing SDG-related oversight and assessments, reflects a recognition of the value of accountability and scrutiny to the national SDG implementation and review efforts.

The establishment of M&E structures and routine reporting has expanded compared to previous reporting years. Emerging trends include the establishment of platforms that help to institutionalise SDG M&E and stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, as more and more stakeholder groups report on SDG progress, integrating these reporting efforts into SDG M&E mechanisms should be considered, e.g. incorporating and aligning spotlight reports, Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews or other SDG reporting.

Reporting on legal and budgetary aspects indicates a need for further systematic approaches that can support integrated SDG mainstreaming. Systematic SDG budgeting and specifying financing for the SDGs from non-government sources can help broaden the means of implementation, pave the way for increased private-sector engagement and foster innovative financing solutions.

An analysis of the 2020 VNRs indicates that a mix of approaches is applied to mainstream the SDGs. While some initiatives aspire to achieve coherent implementation of the SDGs, e.g. by mainstreaming the SDGs into NDPs, many sustainable development contributions are still reported in the context of sector-based strategies, plans and measures. To accelerate progress on SDG mainstreaming, multidimensional, systemic and integrated approaches need to be stepped up at all levels of government.

Progress on SDG localisation is advancing with some countries making headway in mainstreaming the SDGs at local level. The number of cities and regions conducting Voluntary Local or Subnational Reviews is also increasing. COVID-19 has further uncovered the significance of SDG localisation as LRGs are often at the frontline of responding to the pandemic. Continued efforts to scale up SDG localisation are therefore more critical than ever.

The pandemic has similarly added urgency to the implementation of the principle of LNOB. Rising inequality and the severe impact on specific groups as a result of COVID-19 call for a people-centred, inclusive and human rights-based approach, underscoring the relevance of the principle of LNOB. While the importance of the principle is recognised and a range of activities are reported among the 2020 VNR countries, more robust multisector approaches to LNOB are needed to step up efforts.

With respect to stakeholder engagement, the 'whole-of-society' approach is broadly recognised by the 2020 VNR countries and most countries engage various stakeholders in VNR-related processes. Although non-governmental stakeholders participate in many of the institutional SDG frameworks, the most common form of stakeholder engagement is practised through consultations, workshops, meetings and dialogue. CSOs are the dominant stakeholder group. Contributions by the private sector feature in the context of participation in the institutional structure, consultations and VNR-related meetings, however mainly as a part of SDG implementation efforts. The scientific community is engaged in a number of capacities; including by providing research, advice and data or as participants in consultations, workshops and conferences. Increasingly, there are reports by stakeholder groups; for instance civil society shadow or

spotlight reports, private-sector progress reports or Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews. As these reports are often prepared alongside the VNR process, they can greatly contribute to the review with feedback, information and data.

Countries report on a wide range of activities that help communicate and raise awareness of the VNR process and SDGs. However only a few long-term strategic communication efforts are practised. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of online tools, national digital platforms or 'SDG knowledge hubs' in helping to disseminate information, organise and broaden stakeholder collaboration and participation, and ensure the engagement of citizens. Long-term stakeholder engagement and communication strategies and plans are needed to support meaningful and consistent stakeholder participation and increase SDG knowledge.

Unfortunately, SDG monitoring and review frameworks still suffer from a number of challenges. While many efforts are reported to strengthen statistics and data, countries report on a need to strengthen capacities, standardise methodologies and strengthen the coordination and management of data. Gaps in data and lack of data, including disaggregated data, are still considerable barriers and call for efforts to be stepped up to improve evidence-based SDG implementation and follow-up. COVID-19 has added a further need to overcome these barriers in order to understand, manage and mitigate the multiple impacts of the pandemic. To enhance data availability and the associated challenges, alternative data must be applied. Furthermore, data collected at the local level is critical not only in the context of LNOB, but to support SDG localisation as a means of accelerating progress on the SDGs. While some initiatives to localise SDG monitoring efforts are implemented, further investment is needed to establish local SDG monitoring frameworks, identify local indicators and facilitate local data collection.

An increasing number of countries reported for the second or third time. Analysis of the progression from one VNR to the next reveals that reporting typically increases from one reporting period to the next. More content is provided in the second or third reports, which are typically longer. Most of the SDG institutional frameworks and mechanisms

remained the same and many second and third VNRs highlight follow-up actions and report on developments in certain review processes from earlier VNRs. Although some reports highlight aspects that were improved and lessons learned, greater continuity between the reports enables 'cyclical consideration' and an analysis of progress. As a central element of the follow-up and review mechanism of the 2030 Agenda, the VNRs are instrumental in supporting the systemic change required to achieve the SDGs

Systematic reporting practices can lead to concrete benefits, such as improving the quality of the reports, ensuring continuity, maintaining momentum between VNRs and increasing stakeholder engagement. In response to the 2030 Agenda's core principles to enhance participatory, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches, engaging other reporting mechanisms may be considered as a way of stepping up the inclusion of stakeholder perspectives in the follow-up and review process. Structured approaches from one VNR to the next and integrating other reporting efforts e.g. spotlight reports, Voluntary Local or Subnational Reviews or private-sector progress reports may contribute to a more holistic picture of SDG implementation and thereby better support the transformation required to achieve sustainable development.

Overall, the analysis of the 2020 VNRs points to a need for more action and transformational progress on the SDGs, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VNRs are an important engine in creating more momentum for countries to accelerate SDG progress, especially if followed up with strong post-VNR processes.

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